form the refinery in order to be able to process even more heavy crude into complex chemical compounds for fertilization, fuel, asphalt – everything that we associate with development. We move to a cross section showing Canada. The tar sands are the most expansive industrial operation on the planet. They themselves cover a vast area, but that is just the tip of the iceberg. These lines are seismic prospective cuts in the forest that are made in the process of looking for oil. The anthropogenic impact of this is really enormous. What used to be the documentation for environmental protection has moved by the trade agreement between Canada and the European Union into the hands of the oil corporations. We go from having thousands of records of protected areas to a few dozen. This is a situation of disappearance and the museum is really interested in understanding how to document this and warn beforehand. Initially, it was developed with the Territorial Agency and Greenpeace in order to organize their research for their global campaigns. Then, our friend Bruno Latour asked us to transform it into an exhibition.

Paprika:	25:42	I think what is most evident in your work is the incredible amount of data that you have to process to communicate this message.
John:	26:00	The problem with oil is that the moment that you try to understand it, you are immediately confronted with a flood of information and it becomes difficult to grasp. What we're trying to do here is use our language, in this case plans and complex images like earth observation, to bring it forward; because the oil industry really operates far more in the areas that are outside of visibility.

This is just a glimpse of it, only what can be seen. There are the invisible conditions, such as the fact that it's never named explicitly in any climate change agreement. We talk about carbon emissions, not oil. It's this industry that has made the big prosperity of America and has now completely robbed the American space. By American space, I mean not only the ground, but the American operations around the globe; this is the difficult part. It's too much information, so how do we operate as architects by bringing it to the ground, making it accessible.

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Paprika:	29:32	You also mention that architects have a role in managing the relation between space and polity --
John:	29:50	That is what architecture is. Architecture is a relationship between polity and space.
Paprika:	29:54	and specifically you look at these large scale territories.
John:	30:00	Its an architectural territory. A territory is not land, a territory is a system of warning. It's a semantic condition.
Paprika:	30:13	So do you think the role of the architect is to read that condition and communicate it --
John:	30:17	It is to design it, to transform it, to build it. Architects organize and systemically build stable relationships between a form of computation and material organization. The relationship between the materiality in the social structure, political, linguistic, cultural structure is the very business of architecture. Many people misunderstand architecture as buildings - that's not what architecture is. Architecture shapes the relationship between people and things. The problem is that the space depending on oil has become so vast that it's incomprehensible. Therefore the work here is really about how to understand this as an architecture. It's a designed space. There's not one element here that is not design. The oil industry is engineered, the disasters are engineered. What we are trying to indicate in this Architecture Biennial is that the ground is very much shaping the forms of society.
Paprika:	33:00	I guess the question is also how do we reverse that process? How do we take a proper next step.
John:	33:14	For us, it's very straight forward. It is not an issue of an individual choice. It is an institutional choice, an architectural choice, a political decision. Everything is engineering and design, so the problem for architecture in this is not only how to get involved because you are already involved. The Anthropocene is architecture. The question is not adding design but how do you reshape the operating system to modify this.
Paprika:	35:14	Do you find clues when you compile this data and overlap it?
John:	36:08	It's not a ready-made out-of-the-box solution. We have to redesign everything. The problem is that we have an entire profession geared towards this stuff. Every single thing that we do is done wrong. We have to redesign our institutions, our politics, how we operate, what we eat, how we cultivate the ground. The magnitude is so vast that it's self regulated. We are working to keep it alive rather than it serving us. We are interested in this inversion of agency and in investigating what happens when all of this stuff has far more agency than a political choice.
Paprika:	38:17	To stop engaging with this you have to mobilize a much bigger scope of professions and civic operations.
John:	38:36	The problem that is so ingrained in the scale is that it makes you think that it is untouchable – on the contrary, it is so fragile. The oil industry has stretched well beyond its capacity that it's now exposed to so many risks in order to maintain itself.
Paprika:	39:45	How do you distinguish what matter is most urgent?
John:	40:31	We are not interested in urgency. I think that urgency makes us reactive. We're interested in anticipation. Architecture is at its best when it's coming before.
Paprika:	44:02	With oil, there's so much data that it can scare off the audience. Whereas visualizing it like this makes it digestible.
John:	44:19	When you start, you don't really know what you will do, its too much. I think that's part of the work of Territorial Agency, trying to understand that it's a territory that has a capacity to act and so we look at how we could instigate transformation in the semantic relationship between things and political spaces.
Paprika:	48:49	Incredible. Thank you for your time.
John:	48:52	Thank you. I hope that you can use it, it was long.
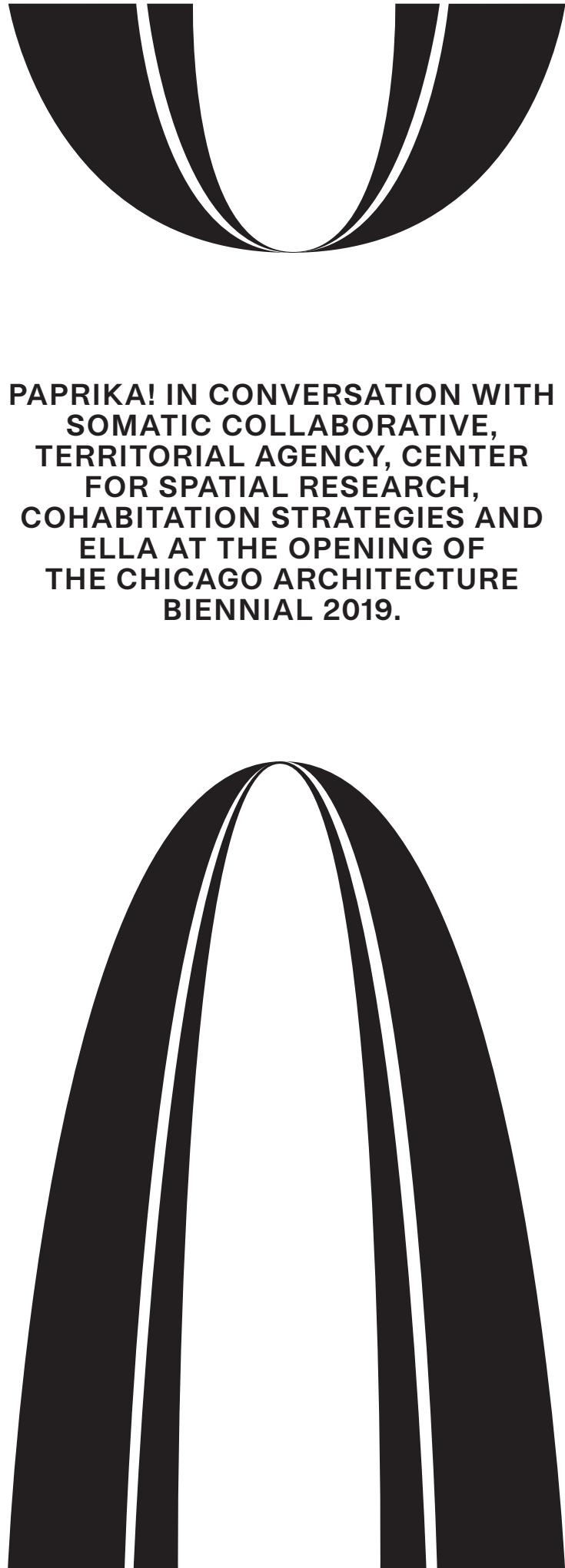
PAPRIKA! IN CONVERSATION WITH SOMATIC COLLABORATIVE, TERRITORIAL AGENCY, CENTER FOR SPATIAL RESEARCH, COHABITATION STRATEGIES AND ELLA AT THE OPENING OF THE CHICAGO ARCHITECTURE BIENNIAL 2019.

INTRO

Looming highrises distract our eyes from ground to sky as we make our way down Randolph Street. Through the forest of glass and steel, the Chicago Cultural Center appears. As we enter past Doric columns and mahogany doors into the mosaic encrusted interiors of the neoclassical limestone Chicago landmark – the main venue for this year's architecture biennial – complete spatial specificity evaporates and condenses at once into a heavy cloud of information, signaling the coming of "an architectural storm."

The Chicago Architecture Biennial 2019 sets out to uncover a multiplicity of neglected narratives in contemporary society through more or less local examples ranging from themes such as the contested urbanities of original settler colonialism in Chicago to the environmental impact of natural resource extraction throughout the Americas.

We regard the notion of the 'walk and talk' as a productive medium for conversation and storytelling as well as an informal setting for exchange of knowledge and opinion. Through a series of conversations, we cover the spatial and temporal realities of a diverse selection of this year's biennial contributions as we stroll through their spaces.

In our conversation with Miguel Robles-Duran we are taken through the conception of Urban Front, the self-proclaimed "McKinsey of the left." In conversation with Felipe Correa and Devin Dobrowolski from Somatic Collaborative, we encounter the anthropocenic landscapes of natural resource extraction in South America and their socio-urban interdependencies. Insight on the production of a graphic identity for this year's biennial is provided by founding partners of ELLA in a conversation about interdisciplinary work and contemporary image culture. Laura Kurgan, director of the Center for Spatial Research, takes us through the origins and instrumentalization of the term Homophily in today's social media, whilst John Palmesino from Territorial Agency advocates for the end of oil extraction, presenting its spatial intricacies in the 'Museum of Oil.'

The biennial presents a peak into a critical contemporary spatial practice which questions, expands, and breaks disciplinary boundaries. While considerations of the agency of architecture and its role in society is not historically unfamiliar.

HOMOPHILY: CENTER FOR SPATIAL RESEARCH

Wednesday, September 18th 2019, 12:00 pm
Chicago Cultural Center
3rd Floor

Paprika! in conversation with Laura Kurgan
Homophily: The Urban History of an Algorithm, 2019
Installation Description: LED light displays driven by an algorithm, explanatory graphics and data visualizations on digital wallpaper, documents from Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton's archives

Paprika: 00:11 We were thinking that we could talk about the project you are displaying here and afterwards hear a bit about your work with Center for Spatial Research. How does that sound?

Laura: 00:43 Yeah, sure, sure. Okay, great.

Paprika: 00:52 You decide where we start.

Laura: 01:19 The best place to start is on the outside. In the context of the biennial we have done this exhibit consisting of five two-sided walls. On the outside it's displaying the algorithm that we discuss on the inside. As you can see the display starts with two-colored lights randomly organized on all five panels. By an algorithmically driven program based on the concept of the show - which is called Homophily - you notice that the lights are moving to where they feel comfortable, which is surrounded by lights with the same color. It turns out that by the time the lights stop moving they are segregated into groups of the same color. So it's an extraction. It's a pattern. What we do on the inside of the exhibit is to unpack the algorithm. It's kind of like lifting the hood off of the black box. Not completely because we don't fully understand the complicated math that drives these things in places like social networks. But we're doing it in a very conceptual, simpler, abstracted way because it's the concept which is really important in this context.
Lets go inside. We expose the origin of the term Homophily which was first found in a paper published by two sociologists in 1954, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton. They were studying a biracial housing project in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in which the residents would decide to divide into white residents and black residents living in different buildings. Lazarsfeld and Merton did a survey and to define the term Homophily they only used two out of 19 questions that they asked the residents: "Do you think white and colored people should live together in housing projects?" and "On the whole, do you think that colored and white people in the village get along pretty well? Yes or no?" So there were 487 people living in this housing project. It turned out that the black population were all liberal and they all thought it was a good idea, which is not surprising, but the white population had a much more varied response. Based on the white population, they counted what's called "over-selection" to define the term Homophily. So it's kind of an irony of history that these were questions that were asked by the sociologist and then it became a naturalized concept on social media much later. This section is a very important part of it, as it shows how the black population was ignored.
We look into the first questions that the sociologists asked. They would try to ask: "Who are your three closest friends?" That very much prefigures Facebook and other social media, so we kind of moved right forward into Facebook where we are asked to choose our 500 closest friends. The question is, when we do that are we 'doing the homophily'? Do birds of a feather flock together and does similarity breed connection? Which means: do you only become friends with people who you share the same values with? Say if you had in your network a 67% tolerance for being friends with people who are unlike you, then the Facebook-algorithm-switch will send you recommendations and advertising that would most probably stay integrated, right? If your friends are mostly like you, which means that you have a much lower tolerance for friends who are unlike you, the Facebook algorithm exacerbates segregation, which is for the most part what happens, which is why you get all this polarization and filter bubbles.
We look at the two original publications of the term. There is an unpublished version and a published version and the unpublished version asks much more institutional questions and doesn't come down on such a precise methodology. But the way that the term gets picked up by computer science is by quoting this paper. So we looked at all the citations to see when this term gets picked up, and you can see how it happens massively when social media becomes big in 2005 to 2010 and most often in computer science and sociology which we visualized over here with a diagram called a "concordance". It takes all the thousands of citations and shows you the context of the word. We have an online version of this, where you can click on a link to the actual paper. Lastly, we go into what became the inspiration for the outside walls. This is Thomas Schelling. He is an economist who studied dynamic models of segregation and in particular white flight out of the heart of the cities. He played a game with his students with pennies where they had to move them around and this is really how it became a model, a model of Homophily, and where it was applied first. Afterwards, [the model was] also applied in urban space but then moved to social networks where it's most intensely deployed now.

Paprika: 11:18 Your discussion of Homophily makes me think of the notion of The Smooth City coined by Rene Boer in a recent article in *Volume Magazine*. He describes a tendency in urban development in

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I mean they are not very fond of large private investment so they have a lot of progressive policies that I personally support. LA FIDA has an expansion plan that the concession wants if the lease gets extended. They're asking the government for 280 million euros to expand and renovate the site for their hundred year anniversary. The total 2019 budget in Barcelona for housing is 140 million euros. This means that the money is there and the municipality is willing to consider our proposal instead of LA FIDAs. We are convinced therefore that Urban Front is the most relevant. We have stopped investing all our time on grassroots groups and are now trying to work with top-down approach again, but a specific top-down approach in which our clients are progressive governments.

Paprika: 20:22 You refer to Urban Front as a McKinsey of the left and as a multidisciplinary consultancy firm entering in a public private partnership with local authorities to advise on city planning strategies. How is your public private partnership model in this way different from conventional public private enterprises? Are you working non-profit?

Miguel: 20:50 No, no, it's still for profit. McKinsey and the other big players extract millions. If CohStra gets $20,000 we're happy and if McKinsey gets 2 million it's nothing because their annual revenue is 40 billion. Just to put it in perspective. Anyways, if we can get just 1% of their market we will be able to function very well. We will charge the same as them so if Barcelona will pay McKinsey 1 million dollars, we will charge 1 million dollars. The difference is that our organization will take the surplus and put it in a foundation. The foundation will support grassroots groups to develop strategies and so forth. And we just get decent salaries, we don't need to be millionaires. The model of the organization functions as a redistributive device. Taking the millions that the city has destined for the big consultancies and put it at the service of communities at last.

Paprika: 21:59 Is Urban Front primarily made up of architects and urbanists? What other disciplines are involved?

Miguel: 22:10 No, no, I hate architects. I used to be one. I don't like them and for whatever reason we ended up today in the architecture biennial, but normally we are working in other spaces and with geography, anthropology, sociology and economy. I personally have the viewpoint that the architect or the figure of the architect still comes all the way from the Renaissance from Alberti, and I always go back to these books by Alberti because he teaches what architecture should be. According to Alberti the architect should be at the service of the Lords. And this is basically what it has been. And for me, the architect will continue to exist because capitalism needs money. Architecture has been one of the best promotions for developers. So the architect is really an instrument of marketing, an instrument of empowering an elite. I don't see that the architect as a relevant figure today. Actually, number one in our Manifesto or number two. I think. It rotates. Number two (following the projector in the installation) says that it is our goal to blur disciplinary silos. And we feel that the contemporary world needs a totally different conception outside of disciplinary structures.

Paprika: 24:14 You talk about breaking disciplinary silos. How do you you think of your own practice with CohStra and now Urban Front as related, or unrelated, to what can possibly still be classified as the architectural profession?

Miguel: 24:22 We consider architecture made irrelevant. I see this and believe me, I know that, I've been a professor for 20 years today not in architecture school, thankfully, we just don't need it. Right now, the problems of the world are much more urgent than to hire an architect. If we look at the whole biennial that we are standing in for example, it's a different kind of architect that is promoted, right? There is basically not a single proposal of built architecture. Of course there's the typical idiots that follow Aldo Rossi in Europe, like Pier Vittorio Aureli who is just like architecture, architecture, and architecture. It's like a parallel practice has been born over the years. It's just not really architecture. In our practice we have – let me show you our map again – people from South America, North America, and Europe trained as political scientists, artists, anthropologists, geographers, lawyers, planners, and architects. So it's a very transdisciplinary team. That's what we are aiming to achieve. The city cannot be dealt with in single disciplinary silos. So why continue to emphasize disciplines, it just doesn't make sense. We don't think that the schools make sense because they continue to emphasize disciplines. It happens because this is what makes capital function. You hire an architect that does exactly what is expected, but if you want to hire someone to really think about solving the problems of the world then you need a very different kind of structure. And so, Urban Front is also trying to create this new structure and a new form of practice which is more relevant today.

Paprika: 30:44 You mention the Urban Front as a new form of practice. And now, as you've talked about the flaw of creating just one discipline, do you see a new form of education then coming out?

Miguel: 30:56 Yes, absolutely. And we have friends that are working on that now. I personally have directed a graduate program in the new school in New York city and this program does exactly what I'm talking about. We have a very interesting set of students that come from very different disciplinary backgrounds. Most of them have some left radical thinking in their mind. They will have worked with grassroots. So we attract that crowd. We don't attract the Harvard crowd. I mean, although I get calls from Harvard to talk or whatever. It's very limited, right? (the change in education) There is David. Do you want to meet him? These are some students from Yale architecture magazine.

Paprika: 42:29 Hi David, very nice to meet you. We just did an interview with Miguel about your projects with Urban Front, very exciting. The interview will be published within the coming weeks.

David: 42:30 Pleasure, nice to meet you.

Miguel: 42:30 Alright thanks, take care.

Paprika: 42:30 Thank you so much for your time Miguel. Enjoy the Biennial!

MUSEUM OF OIL: TERRITORIAL AGENCY

Tuesday, September 17th 2019
12:00 pm
Chicago Cultural Center
4th Floor

Paprika! in conversation with John Palmesino
Museum of Oil — The American Rooms, 2019
Mixed-media installation

Paprika: 02:17 Is there a specific way to approach the project?

John: 03:32 No, it's democratic. You can enter from wherever. We've produced some new work for what we call the American Rooms of the Museum of Oil, in particular we are looking at the long cross section that spans from the Gulf of Mexico all the way to the north slope of Alaska. It is a section that cuts through what used to be the internal seaway of America – a stretch of water that cut what is now North America in two – and along that stretch of water you have all the major oil fields.
Via earth observation technologies we detect what we call the engineered catastrophe of the Gulf of Mexico. What you have here is a multi-composite set of satellite data that detect the monstrosity of the transformation due to oil. The most obvious one is the area that was directly covered by surface oil during the BP disaster of Deepwater Horizon. What is marked is also the areas of pipelines and platform extractions spanning the entire continental shelf along the grid which is an American architectural device of subdivision. The grid, in this case, is of extraction licenses. The interesting thing for us here is that there is no solution of continuity between the land and the sea of the infrastructure of oil. Extraction is everywhere.
The most famous element is the canal of the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico which was built by the Army Corps engineers and before they even finished it, it was collapsing. When Katrina landed in Louisiana, the storm surge was pushed along the canal all the way into New Orleans. Areas that will be submerged from sea level rise are presented, and they occupy all the zones of the petrochemical industry which is at high risk of complete annihilation. This is an area where we start seeing land disappearing faster and faster because of the oil industry, and at the same time water is rising because of the conditions in the atmosphere.
For us it is one of the images that epitomise the Museum of Oil. The difficulty is that we understand how complicated it is to leave oil in the ground. It is obvious that it is an environmental catastrophe but the real difficulty of the Museum of Oil is to show that oil is such a nasty form of energy in particular; it is a nasty form of power. It is political and economic power that is destabilising societies, cities, ecologies and economies. We have to keep oil in the ground because of the impeding sea level rise and global warming but also because it is destabilising the economy which is usually part of the discussion. We are dealing here with BP who is one of the major sponsors of the biennial which goes to show how the oil industry is occupying cultural spaces, supporting culture. The museum also highlights how the oil industry is creating structures of access. If you are in the oil industry, you have access to everything, but from the outside, it is difficult to get into that negotiating space. So these panels highlight the difficult conditions and spatial organisations. We see that what you need to change to keep oil in the ground, is the entire construct.
Over here, we have Houston, the fastest growing city in the US, and in the last 30 years everything was built in areas that are going to be flooded. The last hurricane is a demonstration that it is just placed in the wrong place. If we built so much without thinking, now that we know, we can build better. We invited (11:02) Emma Clinton to present her work. Through her photography she documents the BP catastrophe in the visual essay called "Monster: A Feud of Fire and Ice." She is arguing that not only was Deepwater Horizon the largest environmental catastrophe in American history, but it was also the largest cover up of an environmental catastrophe in American history. So oil becomes a ghost, creating invisibility. The panels are very large but they are tilting towards you in order to avoid any resemblance of the sublime, and there is no possibility of disentanglement. You are completely drawn to it, seeming fragile as if it can fall down.

Paprika: 12:39 Hopefully they won't.

John: 12:43 Hopefully! Moving over to Texas at the border with New Mexico we look at the shale boom. Each one of these white dots is a shale pack, what they indicate is the drive to extract by hydraulic fracturing. It has pushed the entire supply chain into a position of high risk for the economy for the simple reason of the reserve replacement ratio. This indicates that once you have a pad that is about to be depleted, you need to show your investors that you will still be able to produce oil. Fracking is exposing America to a huge amount of financial risk. The break even price of the operations is so low. For instance, two days ago, the price of oil went up in one day by 19% and we have diagrams that show fields that will be bankrupt if there's a change in oil prices by $6. You can imagine that all the money that has been put into this is at risk of default, raising the risk of having a major financial collapse after 2000. The low interest rates have managed to mobilize too much capital into these operations and now it's becoming the most geo-politically risky business.
Here we look at another condition of BP in the Southern part of the metropolitan area of Chicago, a place called Whiting. BP Whiting is their largest refinery. We have invited Iwan Ban to share his photographic essay on a small community which was built in 1917 called Marktown. The entire area was initially a development by Standard Oil, however, they've recently had to trans-

Paprika:	09:14	The whole project has a variety of mediums as in the digital website, the catalog, the wayfinding and so on—you need to take all of those into consideration making sure the graphic identity is malleable. Where do you start?
River:	09:45	Honestly, we think about a lot of those things from the get-go, which can freak the client out sometimes. As we're in the sketch mode very early on, we're trying to imagine how it might play out on the website or in the publication and that can start to look finished in a way that worries people initially. However, we like to think about all those things and the potential for all those applications. Where you start really just depends on the project. For this, the catalog needed to be dealt with first. We knew that there would be this potential for it to shift and change and respond.
Stephen:	10:07	With other exhibitions we've designed for, we usually start with the catalog. When you design a catalog you're creating a new system, and you're also thinking of ways to pace things out over space and about the spatial relationships. You can solve a lot of problems with the volume of the book.
River:	11:07	Another component of the identity system are the textures. Once you arrive to the biennial the color plays a very celebratory role. The textures however, were shots we took around the city of Chicago, and we wanted to work that in somehow. The multiple palettes be it color, texture, or shapes play various roles depending on the application. I think it was great to work with curators that were not interested in us stamping a logo on everything. I forgot to mention the link to the way the building is embellished with all the tiles.
Stephen:	11:53	There is this really nice synchronicity that happens with the context.
Paprika:	12:40	In such an ornamented building as well. It stands out with it's simple, crisp lines and I think it's very successful.
Paprika:	13:50	It is interesting to discuss how the building starts to communicate. Perhaps there's a tendency that the architect seeks inspiration in graphic design and other forms of communication such as the written word; we need to consider how do these disciplines come together in a mutual effort to communicate.
Stephen:	14:45	There are a lot of similarities in these professions. We both teach typography and communication design classes and we find architecture as a perfect parallel. The ideas of working with a grid system, negative space, rhythm, proportion, scale, spatial hierarchies. It is fundamental.
River:	15:22	I think a lot of architects want to do their own graphic design because they think, "well I can design a building and there is so much complexity in that so I can surely design a layout" and that's not always the case. I would love architects to bring in graphic designers earlier on in the process. When something is coming into formation, we should already be talking about identity and communication in relation to the building itself. I don't think it's ever too early to start these conversations.
Paprika:	16:06	I completely agree. Especially in exhibitions such as biennials. It comes down to communication.
Paprika:	16:54	There is another demand for architecture to communicate its contents as the building itself has a different speed of interaction.
River:	17:26	It's important to bring in multiple perspectives on any project.
Paprika:	18:17	What other projects do you have coming up?
River:	19:29	We are designing a couple of catalogues for group shows at the Hammer and working on an identity for a small museum in East LA.
Paprika:	20:41	Sounds exciting. Thank you so much, it was lovely speaking to you. Do you have any recommendations for what to see in Chicago?
River:	21:40	Thank you, it was really fun. It sounds touristy, but one of my favorite things I did was the architecture river tour. If you have time, you should do it.

URBAN FRONT: COHABITATION STRATEGIES

Wednesday, September 18th 2019
10:00 am
Chicago Cultural Center
1st Floor

Paprika! in conversation with
Miguel Robles-Duran

Urban Front: Auditing Illegal Red Carpets
in Barcelona's Fira Montjuïc, 2019
Custom electronics, documentary film

Paprika: 00:48   Can you tell us about the project in front of us and why you have chosen to display this project here at the biennial?

Miguel: 00:55   I guess to be able to talk about this specific project, we have to talk about Urban Front. The idea of Urban Front occurred while David and I were conducting research in Ecuador three years ago. I have experience working with national governments and municipalities, and therefore I have always had this attraction to work directly on that. Previously most of the work of Cohabitation Strategies has been concerned with grassroots communities. We started Cohabitation Strategies about 11 years ago, and when we started out we were not so well received in the sense that the general consensus of spatial practice was Rem Koolhaas. Everybody wanted to be like Rem Koolhaas. However, when we started the project we wanted to work with grassroots groups to support a certain empowerment and their ideas. We have developed close to 17 projects with CohStra, but the last three years have been a bit traumatic since we have realised that not a lot of the things that the organistions dream about, and not a lot of the things that we thought we were supporting are actually happening. Actually in several of the projects that we worked on, things got worse. So over the course of 10 years we have grown very frustrated. Our frustration culminated in the project of Urban Front, which emerged when David and I decided to say yes to an invitation from the government of Rafael Correa in Ecuador to set up a research centre for them. We worked there for some time and realised how we were able to influence certain policies quite a lot. We started to look into who was really influencing the top down decisions and found out that most top down decisions were influenced by large multinational consultancies such as McKinsey, Deloitte and PwC. Governments hire them for advice as neoliberalism has destroyed the research capacities of governments. Prior to neoliberalism, governments had their own internal research units. Ultimately this experience sparked the idea of creating a "McKinsey of the left", this completely hyper ambitious multi global consultancy.

Our first commission with Urban Front is in Barcelona. About 60 grassroots groups are involved as well as various dependencies of the government. We are trying to support them with an international consultancy expertise where we look at the flows of capital that go from public money to public private partnerships to private pockets. The structure of a public private partnership is really just another structure to plunder public goods. Specifically in the case with this site which is a very contested site in Barcelona. The site hosts a very famous fair that started as 1929 Barcelona International Exposition on new forms of electricity. It started as an incredibly corrupt thing. At that time the site was a bit empty, so the mayor expropriated this piece of land and decided to create an international exhibition about electricity while he owned a TV company himself. Even today the city has not paid the debt of the 1929 exhibition.

As time went by Barcelona became one of the big neoliberal corporate cities with the Olympics and the Forum, and, coinciding with this, the site started to be rebuilt in the 80s. It now hosts a congress complex called LA FIDA Barcelona which is amongst the three finest sites for expos and congresses in Europe: expos for many kinds of products, but most often expos on real estate in which companies like Blackstone participate while it is still municipal owned land. Municipal land should serve the public and there is a concession of a public private partnership company on the land which dates back from 1929 and expires in 2025. So a large group in Barcelona is trying to push the current government to not renew the concession and to convert this piece of land back into a public good.

So the piece in itself [the exhibition installation] is a didactic diagram, an interactive installation where you have to really spend 15 minutes. We were thinking of making it faster, but this is a very important thing. Whoever wants to actually read it will read it. The exhibition has two sections. The first section, starting from the world map (upside down) is the section that describes the high-end capitalist enterprises. You start by following the numbers and then it starts telling the story of the site. It also tells about the public private partnerships that are part of all of this. Section two discusses the conditions in the neighborhood. It starts to point out to alternative ideas for the site and finally reveals a proposal. Our proposal is basically using all of the land on the site to create a very dense urban fabric with open public spaces that weaves in the neighborhoods that surround it, providing much needed housing and public space within the city of Barcelona.

Paprika: 17:18   You mentioned earlier that you work with developing alternative economic models and surely there has to be an economic incentive for the city to transition from hosting mega events with large profits to developing residential neighbourhoods. How have you worked to convince the city of the benefits of your social project?

Miguel: 18:12   Yes, you can convince if the local authorities are willing and the authorities in Barcelona are very progressive.

which cities are scripted with "targeted" functions and users. That process creates smooth, frictionless, and segregated urban environments of homogeneity. Do you think that your study of Homophily – departing from an urban condition which is traced in social media – also points back to the creation of specific spatial conditions today?

Laura: 12:08   It's funny because I'm in an architecture biennial, so everybody is asking that question, and I don't think it's the right question. I think that what is on social networks has a huge effect on physical space, but it's not a direct relationship. Smart Cities, they are deploying algorithms. So smart city logic tries to make these calculable cities and it's the same logic but it's not about physical space; it's still about this overlap between the digital and the physical. It is in a way dumbing it down when you start trying to talk about it in terms of physical space and how we develop cities and such. We have tried to dumb down the algorithm because there's no way we can replicate it exactly. It's not a metaphor, actually. It is an extraction from physical space into network space. So that's what we're trying to show. A type of influence of architecture on network space. And then we're going to move from here to "Weak Ties" and "Nearest Neighbor". We've been collaborating with Wendy Chun who is a theorist. She's doing a big project on digital democracy and our bigger project is on spatial inequality. Here we are bringing these two things together and will do a lot more work together on this topic.

Paprika: 15:08   Throughout time, more and more of what we do in physical space we are now doing in digital space, such as communication and leisure, everything is in digital space. So the fact that you see this transformation from physical to digital very much speaks about our society today, and how we are more or less living in the digital. Do you have a preference of interest in digital over physical space?

Laura: 15:51   Oh no, not at all. No. I think they are just so linked. Yeah. I don't think one space takes a priority over the other anymore. So that's why when architects ask "what does it mean for physical space?" That's the wrong question. It's about how they intersect each other. The intersection makes you think anew about both. You have to think about both to solve the problem.

Paprika: 16:24   Can you speak a bit about the work of the Center for Spatial Research that you are directing at Columbia University?

Laura: 16:35   We are doing mapping and data visualization but we don't take any of those terms for granted. We always question the power and the governing structures that are behind every map, whether it's the census, traffic control, or the politics of what brought them into being. A map nowadays might as well be called a data visualization because we are doing digital maps which are drawn with datasets. Our job as spatial experts, being in an architecture school, is to demap and unclutter some of the presumptions that might rule those things. This is Jia, she is a postdoc in the Center for Spatial Research right now and she has been part of the team. Particularly with these concordance diagrams and visualizations. If you have any questions on the visualisations specifically you can ask her. These are two students from Yale School of Architecture who are doing an interview for the school magazine.

Paprika: 18:00   Hi Jia, nice to meet you. May I ask a technical question on how this concordance diagram was generated?

Jia: 18:04   It is generated by doing a word search and then aligning the result with the word that we searched for which is in the center. It is an existing idea used for reading texts and in fact the origin of the word concordance comes from Biblical studies.

Paprika: 19:26   Thank you so much.

Laura: 19:29   Thank you. It was lovely meeting you. Say hi to Keller from me next time you see her.

Paprika: 19:30   We will! Bye, see you at the opening party!

BEYOND THE CITY: SOMATIC COLLABORATIVE

Wednesday, September 18th 2019
3:00 pm
Chicago Cultural Center
4th Floor

Paprika! In conversation with Felipe Correa and Devin Dobrowolski
Beyond the City: The South American Hinterland in the Soils of the 21st Century, 2019, Mixed media installation

Paprika: 08:34   Can you tell us a bit about the project in front of us?

Felipe: 08:49   Very briefly, the project examines the larger processes and economies of resource extraction in South America and the models of urbanism that they have engendered throughout the 20th century. It's a historical overview of the most important designed cities and large urban projects that have emerged as a form of civic aspiration fueled by resource extraction. We start with the city of Belo Horizonte in Brazil, which is the first capital built from scratch in Brazil. Brazil has an incredible tradition of building capitals as a way to shape the Brazilian citizen. This started when Brazil gained independence and became a united states of Brazil. Belo Horizonte is a capital built in the state of Minas Gerais and built as a way to represent the money that was coming out of gold at the time. In many ways it was gold extraction that fueled this capital. Our exhibition shows the city on one side and it's larger interlinked context on the other. It also shows the way that the related natural resource is distributed in a more contemporary manner throughout the entire continent. Ah, this is Jonah who is also part of the team. I am actually describing his drawings right now.

Paprika: 10:37   Hi Jonah, nice to meet you.

Felipe: 10:37   Jonah is doing his M.Arch at Princeton right now. They are from Yale, from Paprika!

Jonah: 10:44   Oh cool!

Felipe: 10:47   Didn't a group of people from Paprika! come to our office? No, that's from Perspecta maybe. We were sharing a space with them. Paprika! is the student magazine, completely independent right? It's related to the carpet.

Paprika: 11:19   Yes that's us. Haha.

Felipe: 11:19   Anyway, we show the resource in relationship to major mobility corridors, its connection to ports and ports in relation to global markets. Making the argument that these cities and the other urbanisms that have emerged are part of a larger transnational network. We look at nitrate and copper too. Primarily the way that nitrate fueled a process of urbanisation that created a constellation of cities in the Atacama desert, establishing a clear relationship between the Andean oasis that provides water, the nitrate cities, and the port cities that export into the global market. Water was brought down, for habitation, but also for extraction. Nitrate was extracted, taken into "switch-point-cities" and then out into the ports. This is one of the most incredible examples, which is the city of Maria Elena in Chile. It's a company town financed by the Guggenheims. It is now becoming its own independent city because once artificial nitrate was invented all of the offices went bankrupt and then the infrastructure got replaced to extract copper. We look at oil and the distribution of oil throughout the continent. We focus on one particular project, the city of Judibana, which is a public private partnership developed by the government of Venezuela and designed by SOM. An open city paid for by the Rockefellers with Standard Oil but actually commissioned as a project that would be open to the market. You didn't necessarily have to be part of the company town to be able to live in this city. Over time, once the oil industry died, a good infrastructure was left behind and allowed for a fairly successful city to emerge. It is fascinating to see the imagery with which SOM constructed that city which is emulating the suburbs of the 1940s and 1950s. Ciudad Guayana is a city built in the 1960s by the government of Venezuela and here Harvard and MIT were hired as consultants through the joint Center for Urban Studies. Originally meant to be the third major designed city after Brasilia and Chandigarh, very early on they realized that it was very different to build a capital that houses administrative bureaucracies like Brazilia versus one that was primarily housing migrant workers. As a result, the larger plan was implemented, but the city never gained the density that it was supposed to gain. As a framework to organize informal settlements, it became very successful though. This was also a city that was designed to diversify the industry of Venezuela from oil which had created a very wealthy Northern part of the country and a very poor southern part. So the plan was a much larger territorial plan that involved turning the floodplain of the river into an agricultural asset. In this way the plan went way beyond the city, and here we begin to see the contemporary distribution of iron ore, where it's being exported and how Ciudad Guayana fits within the larger infrastructure of iron.

Devin: 15:50   One of the things that's very powerful about the mapping that we do is to tie these kinds of processes to larger global activities in business, and it's no coincidence that we're looking at these top 10 exports now. We try to spatialize this to communicate that the infrastructure and investment that's going into the continent right now is coming from many places including China and is meant to feed these kinds of global markets that are really changing the organization and the flow of capital.

Felipe: 17:18   The last resource is water. It becomes an interesting one because of two larger industries that have emerged from water; hydro-

electric power and agriculture. In terms of hydroelectric power, we started by looking at the town of Vila Piloto. A temporary town built to exist for two years while constructing the Jupiá Dam. The Jupiá Dam is the first Dam in a network of dams modeled after the Tennessee Valley Authority, a major WPA(Work Progress Administration)project which was an initiative to move on from the great depression to investment in infrastructure. In this case, it was a bet on creating a national electric grid in a country that at the time thought it did not have oil deposits. Right now, Brazil has discovered incredible amounts of oil in the Amazon, but at the time this was a way to guarantee continuous flow of electricity that would fuel what became the city of Sao Paulo. So in many ways, Sao Paulo is actually fueled by this sort of a steady source of energy that comes from this larger hydroelectric network. We look at the issue of water at a territorial scale, but primarily looking at water as the main source that consumes water, especially caused by the de facto policy from China to buy intensive water-consuming agricultural products such as soy, broccoli, oranges and a lot of citruses simply because China doesn't have the capacity to grow those crops due to lack of water. So when you actually see some agricultural products being exported, it is primarily water that's being carried in the container which is broccoli. That's what the five case studies address.

Jonah: 19:47   I think one of the things that is interesting to think about is that hydroelectricity is back in South America in a very real way right now. The distribution of small dams shows very different contemporary development patterns from the preeminence of large dams in the 1970s and I think, at the same time, by overlaying that with this map of agricultural products allowed us to start thinking about the ways that different agricultural economies are shaping different parts of the continent, affecting deforestation and also, you know, "powering" the world. For example, 50% of soy products in the world are produced in Argentina.

Devin: 20:42   And by the way, only like 10 or 8% of soy products go to human food. The rest is animal food and other types of synthetic lubricants and fuel sources.

Felipe: 20:59   This is a model of South America, which they've managed,very eloquently, to put it upside down. Not a political statement. There was supposed to be a projection on top, but that didn't happen. So we're still waiting for an iPad that shows a video that animates all the different layers and expands the number of resources to really show what is the impact in terms of mobility, infrastructure, urban areas, and port activity within the continent today. I think the last component we can talk about, and Devin, you should speak about this, is the collage, what I call the Image Atlas but Devin might have a better name for it.

Devin: 22:15   It is a kind of Atlas of extracts from our research. We investigated actual figures of the gross product that is being produced and exported to the world and wanted to spatially define the exhibition but also to have another way of interpreting this data at a different scale to complement the maps of global networks with what these resources actually look like in a kind of raw and semi-finished and finished state. The transparency of the curtain screen is not meant to be a complete analogy, but I do think it works nicely that you can kind of look through and see the products in their various forms and bridge the scale between the mapping, the cartographic project, and the architectural project.

Felipe: 24:19   And then we bring it down to this scale also to give it a more domestic reading, because at the end of the day we're engaging these products on a regular basis. And that's not explicitly explained in the text, but that's the point.

Paprika: 24:51   You seem to analyse these spaces and territories of resource extraction through a narrative in which architecture is the main protagonist. Do you think your research feeds back into a design process?

Felipe: 25:32   That's a great question. I think one way to ask that question is to say, well, if all of these projects that we see here were developed under a developmentalist government regime, some of them are public, private, some of them are completely public, but they're all sponsored by national governments. Now the time of national sponsored government politics is gone. So where is the space for design? What are we as architects? Who are we? If we were buddies with the president we used to get a city to design. What do we get now? How does the agency of architecture act now? And I think for me the answer to that has to do with a shift of focus from the national state to small and intermediate scale municipalities. I actually think it's no longer about building new cities. It's about upgrading existing cities. We cannot just look at resource extraction purely from the vantage point of economic development. And in many ways I think of course as architects, as designers, we are not going to provide an alternative economic model, but we can actually help guide economic resources into physical areas that are of importance. And for me, those areas have to do with small and intermediate scale cities and the way that we upgrade social and physical infrastructures of those cities. Also, if you take a completely a step back from spatialisation, then maybe it's no longer relevant to architecture. I would see certain issues that are important within the practice today, emerging. Issues that you don't see in the projects from the 1940 and 1950s, 1960s. All of these projects say the same thing that Devin was saying before: this is urbanism done through architecture. It doesn't mean that architecture can not be doing this, but what it means is that these are all projects built in one shot, right? There's: this is the vision, this is what a lot of projects look like - build it. And that was great from the developmentalist era and it produced incredible projects, but I think today one - we can no longer do that or it is very difficult to do and two - I think that there's an emergence of techniques that we have learned from the discipline of landscape architecture that I think have become much more mainstream. How you actually deal with landscape is something that could be heavily criticized in many of these precedents from the 1950s. How do you actually guide projects of this scale in relation to environmental stewardship? So these are elements that allow designers to engage with projects that might be less singular but equally effective in terms of the scale of which they are addressed. It's not going to be one project that solves everything and it may be eight or nine or ten smaller projects that make up a larger whole.

Paprika: 31:09   Can you speak a bit about your interpretation of the Biennial theme …And Other Such Stories? and your contribution within the grander scheme of the biennial? As well as the biennial as a medium or platform for architecture.

Felipe: 31:17   Of course, I think that biennials are incredibly powerful places and spaces. Not only to bring larger audiences to the discipline of architecture, but also for the discipline to use those spaces as a space of self reflection. We can also as architects learn a lot when we come together. Architecture by definition is a collective project, and in many cases the best projects are those that emerge out of a culture of respectful debate at the center. I think one interesting thing about this Biennial is that there's an incredible diversity of approaches and one might agree more with some than with others. But what's important is that it's not just one, there's an instrumental and disciplinary diversity that shows the richness of architecture when it engages the built environment.

Paprika: 33:26   Lastly, let's hear about your practice Somatic Collaborative and the work that you do as a collaborative.

Devin: 33:43   The important thing about the practice is right now that it by nature works on many scales. The work that we've produced thus far kind of ranges, large scale, looks at global networks. It has many examples of the kind of research that, you know, asks questions: how did the city achieve this form, why does it look the way it does today? Can we use that to tell a story in a much more interesting way using the training and also down to the scale of furniture– which we have engaged with as well– and design at the human scale, which I think we can forget about and even the way that we have designed this exhibition to think about the way that people would move through it.

Felipe: 35:03   Yeah the only thing that I would add to that is that, in many ways, one thing that's extremely important for us is to be able to address larger societal concerns without abandoning an aesthetic project. And I think that that negotiation between an aesthetic project that might be of interest to us and placing that at the confluence of larger societal interest is crucial to our work. That's something that we all share. It's something that we're very committed to, that we as architects cannot abandon an aesthetic project, when we are confronted with some larger social pressures.

Paprika: 39:36   Thank you so much.

Felipe: 39:37   Great to talk to you guys. Say hi to Anthony. You might see him before I do.

Wednesday, September 18th 2019
5:00 pm
Chicago Cultural Center
1st Floor Lobby

Paprika! in conversation with
River Jukes-Hudson and Stephen Serrato
ELLA are the designers for the
2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial.

River: 00:00   So you're doing walkthroughs today?
Paprika: 00:04   Yes, we've walked and talked with the contributors around their work. With you we can decide more freely.
River: 00:18   We brought a catalogue so we can flip through it. We can also see a big scale of the graphic identity on the wall panels.
Paprika: 00:29   We'll just be recording everything and then we will transcribe the interview.
River: 00:35   You'll make us sound smarter.
Paprika: 00:38   Yes, including ourselves.
River: 00:38   The system of the graphic identity involves the logo type, the color palette and the textures that are applied at different densities depending on the surface and context. This is the framework—these blocks with unique corners. We wanted an identity that had some amount of potential for adaptation, reconfiguration, shift and motion. Each unit is unique because of how the corners are styled and when they come together these irregular negative spaces are made.
Paprika: 01:48   Did you approach it from a thematic view, considering the theme of the biennial?
River: 02:00   The curators gave us general guidelines, since when we came into the project, they were still formulating their statement. It was driven by research and they had these different focuses, but there wasn't ever going to be just one central theme. They needed an identity that spoke to all the core curatorial themes that they worked from, and throughout the catalogue they included their research material. Process was part of this documentation. The color palette came from the Jane Addams Nationalities Hull-House map. Therefore the color palette became rooted in the research. So it's a system that's meant to lend structure but can also come apart.
Paprika: 03:54   How do you normally work in your design practice taking on a project like this?
River: 04:04   We do a lot of art catalogs. This was kind of a big leap.
Paprika: 04:09   Into architecture?
River: 04:11   The scale of this project, the number of moving parts, and people involved was challenging. We work very closely with curators and the artists themselves.
Stephen: 04:40   We're always responding to the curatorial mission or an artist's intention; we do our best to tap into that. Finding connections with their methodology or even formal categorization and so on. We've been very fortunate to collaborate with other parties too. PRODUCTORA handled the exhibition design.
River: 05:24   We were able to hire GrayBits, an amazing design team to do the website and we handed the identity over to them and they did a wonderful job bringing it to life. We worked with Michael Savona who managed wayfinding in the exhibition. Grilli Type let us use a beta version of GT Flexa, it's really beautifully designed and that was exciting and very generous. We worked with Matt Eller on motion.
Paprika: 05:36   How was the experience different working with an architectural narrative versus an art narrative?
Stephen: 06:05   Well the thing about this exhibition in particular is the focus on socially driven aspects and that resonates with us. We are interested in inclusion, in diversity. We share the same language with the artists and curators we work with. Those are the things we are looking for.
River: 06:43   It seemed atypical of an architecture biennial. In that way, they were interested in pushing back against what was expected of them, similarly to art. I didn't find there to be a noticeable difference.
Paprika: 06:55   This one does have something different to it compared to previous years. It has a lot of information that it wants to convey rather than spatial pieces. Especially for this biennial, communication and collaboration with those who know how to communicate graphically seems as if it's been very important.
Stephen: 07:07   I'm happy that it resonates. At the very beginning of the conversation you have to ask, how do you speak to the public? How do you make the didactics and the language you use accessible?
River: 08:06   And wanting the catalog to be a resource that people can use in their own research. That was a priority.
Stephen: 08:47   It does make sense in retrospect the title "…and other such stories" implies reading.