WRITING TO: TEDDY CRUZ AND FONNA FORMAN

Just Architecture or Just architecture?

Two opposing architectural agendas have evolved in the last decades, shaping a debate about the role of architecture in constructing the contemporary city. The first position conceives architecture as a self-referential language, articulating the city as a collection of discrete buildings existing above a neutral, undifferentiated, and speculative platform, shaped by market forces. The latter sees architecture as an infrastructure in which social flows, economic resources, and environmental dynamics are managed coherently to mobilize specific interfaces between private and public interests and contingencies of everyday life.

Our work has always been drawn to this second approach—a more infrastructural and political dimension of architecture—as we become more disappointed with the political neutrality of the field, in the context of a neoliberal political economy and its role in widening the gap not only between wealth and poverty, but also between artistic experimentation and social responsibility.

Is there value to disciplinary autonomy, and is it meaningful to the people you work with and design for?

Our position has always been that the design fields are uniquely positioned to advocate for more experiential dimensions of beauty, based less on visual quality and more on social vibrancy, of encountering and co-existing with others—an aesthetic quality that embraces contradictions and risk and emerges out of inclusiveness. This means engaging actors other than private developers to co-produce the city, imagining other forms of ownership, resource management, and other financial arrangements to assure social and economic inclusion, and implementing other mechanisms of institutional accountability. At the bottom, we need to reclaim the public. The emerging unprecedented urban inequality in the last three decades is all the evidence we need: the "free market" will never assure social and economic justice.

Who are these other actors and how do you engage with them through your work?

Our practice is an unconventional partnership between a political theorist and an architect, investigating "informal" urban dynamics and emergent collective practices—social, moral, economic, political, spatial. Our research has always been motivated by the positive impact of immigrants on the city. Their ingenious adaptation strategies and survival in conditions of scarcity have inspired our urban vision; we believe they generate more inclusive imaginaries of urban development.

The neighborhoods we engage at the US-Mexico border are sites of amazing informal resilience and creativity. But this ingenuity is typically off the radar of formal institutions with power and resources—hidden behind an undifferentiated screen of poverty and criminality and all the biases people associate with these conditions. We believe these informal practices need documentation and translation. The "official city" can learn from these urban processes. Peripheral communities are not passive victims of poverty. They are intensely active urban agents capable of challenging the dominant models of growth that have excluded them and denied their rights to the city. This creative knowledge needs to trickle up and inspire policymakers and planners to rethink their approaches to the city.

What is needed then is a more critical role for design to encroach into fragmented and discriminatory urban policies and economics, new models to facilitate interfaces between the top-down and the bottom-up. We very much see ourselves as curators of knowledge, urban translators, and facilitators of bottom-up intelligence to cultivate new communities of practice. Every project we do is a process of curating participation across sectors, convening the knowledge and resources necessary to conceive, design, fund, permit, build and program an intervention and sustain it in the long term.

Can architecture be used to address social and environmental issues today?

We have always maintained that architects can apply themselves not only to "solving" immediate spatial problems, but also to critically investigating and countering the vectors of power that are creating so much social disparity and injustice across the world. Every site of intervention can be seen as a local manifestation of these broader inequalities and injustices.

From its foundation, our practice has embedded itself in the Tijuana-San Diego border region, as a sort of global laboratory for engaging the central challenges of urbanization today: nationalism and border-building, deepening social and economic inequality, dramatic migration, urban informality, climate change, really every imaginable challenge facing vulnerable people across the globe. In this sense, our work focuses on global conflicts as they manifest in a particular physical territory, as they hit the ground and impact real lives. These conflicts have been the detonator of design in our practice.

Do you have an example you found successful to achieve that?

These commitments over many years have manifested in a project called the UCSD Community Stations, a network of field hubs located in four underserved border neighborhoods, two in San Diego, two in Tijuana, where university researchers and students partner with community organizations on civic, educational and cultural and urban agendas and projects. The Community Stations enable a two-way flow that brings the knowledge of communities into the university to enrich research and education, and brings the knowledge of the university into communities to increase their capacity for political and environmental action. The Community Stations are sites for cultural production, collaborative research, youth mentorship and urban pedagogy. Together we develop urban pedagogies that increase public knowledge, cultivate community agency and capacity, and ultimately advocate for more equitable policies and practices in the city.

How can students and young architects engage with both?

When we encounter students and young architects and designers eager to advance urban justice, we encourage them to engage domains that are absent from the conversation, or peripheral to what we conventionally understand as design. Architects can do more than design buildings and physical systems. They can also design protocols for accessibility in terms of economy, civic participation, advocacy and shared governance. We are advocating for expanded modes of practice, through which architects can imagine tangent spatial procedures, political, and economic structures that can produce new modes of sociability and encounter. We maintain that exposing and altering the exclusionary policies that have produced our current public crises can be the first act in producing a more experimental architecture, and new programmatic, formal, and aesthetic categories that problematize the relationship between the social, the institutional, and the spatial.

ARCHITECTURE AND ABOLITION

Ben Derlan, Merrell Hambleton

Following the murder of George Floyd, a group of artists, activists, designers, and organizers collectivized under the moniker Design as Protest and quickly assembled a list of nine "Design Justice Demands." Among them was a striking call: to "cease support of the carceral state through the design of prisons, jails, and police stations."[1] The suggestion that a refusal to design something—refusing to give an idea physical and spatial form—might support the abolition of that thing demonstrates the power that we currently place on architecture and design thinking. But what power do architects truly have to make or unmake the criminal justice system?

Proposals to challenge the carceral state by refusing to build new prisons go back decades. In 1976, activists published a booklet titled "Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists" which included among its three main goals a moratorium on all new prison buildings. In 2014, the San Francisco-based Architects/Designers/Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR) filed a petition with the American Institute of Architects (AIA) calling on the organization to censure member architects who design solitary-confinement cells and death chambers. The AIA finally adopted the demand in 2020.[2] And yet prison construction continues apace. A quick scan of articles tagged under "prison construction" by The Marshall Project[3] reveals numerous prisons slated for new construction in Los Angeles, Alabama, Kansas, Nebraska. The rise of for-profit prisons has contributed to this spate of new building.

The field has, sometimes cautiously, supported alternatives. In 2017, Frank Gehry led a studio at the Yale School of Architecture which asked students to propose projects that would "house three hundred men convicted of serious, primarily violent offenses, serving sentences between five

and 15 years" (a standard that imagined the US was in step with incarceration rates in other developed nations). For abolitionists like CUNY Graduate Center geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore, simply reducing prison populations is incompatible with abolition: "Instead of asking whether anyone should be locked up or go free, why don't we think about why we solve problems by repeating the kind of behavior that brought us the problem in the first place?"[4]

By 2019, in collaboration with the same nonprofit partner, Impact Justice, Yale hosted a studio re-examining the criminal justice system altogether, this time through the lens of restorative justice. Restorative justice, which involves the direct interaction of victim and offender, is an inherently spatial practice: "the circle"—a simple ring of chairs—is the central site of encounter, of healing, of sentencing. And yet the "circle process" is often carried out, in the words of Justin Carbonella, Coordinator at the Middletown Youth Services Bureau and participant in Yale's 2019 studio, "in spaces designed for other purposes"—schools, church basements, conference rooms.[5] Just as the refusal to design prisons might, eventually, mean the end of prisons, opting to envision dedicated spaces for restorative justice might help us institutionalize the practice—first through potent imaginaries and eventually in built form.

Might restorative justice offer an alternative model for architecture in return? The Centre for Justice and Reconciliation, one practitioner of the process, offers this framework: "If restorative justice were a building, it would have four corner posts: 1) Inclusion of all parties, 2) Encountering the other side, 3) Making amends for the harm, 4) Reintegration of the parties into their communities."[6] What would an architecture of inclusion, encounter, and healing look like? It requires refusal, yes. But also the active disruption of the systems that feed the carceral state.
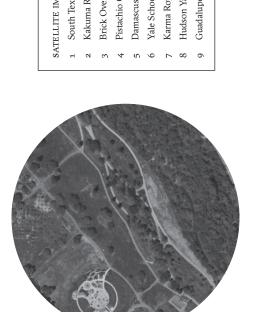
Alongside Design as Protest's call to end the design of prisons and police stations was a demand to end "all efforts to implement defensible space and Crime Prevention

Through Environmental Design (CPTED) tactics." CPTED—exemplified by "defensive" tactics like spikes to deter sleeping and sitting, trimming tree canopies to support site lines and surveillance, and aggressive use of light and sound—is known to disproportionately criminalize people of color. Their continued use, like that of prisons, is justified by the perception that they offer more "safety." Many state powers still see CPTED practices, as they do prisons, as effective and indispensable. In fact, numerous national crime prevention groups offer online certification courses for designers. A restorative justice framework might offer a new approach to shared spaces—one emphasizing coexistence over criminalization.

The Bay Area nonprofit public policy organization SPUR undertook a project in 2019 to understand the current conditions and challenges of San José's Guadalupe River Park. By far the most-cited concern of surveyed park-goers was the presence of unhoused people in the park. In step with rising housing costs, the city's population experiencing homelessness had risen from 1,747 in 2017 to 6,097 in 2019. 38% of this group live in public spaces, and like homelessness nationwide, are disproportionately people of color.[7] Rather than propose common CPTED interventions like removing park benches and public restrooms, SPUR embarked on a process rooted in research and dialogue with all park users. They also cited numerous case studies: a shared public "living room" in Seattle designed to foster encounter and empathy between housed and unhoused park-goers; in Copenhagen, a park designed with zoned lighting to accommodate those who might need to sleep there overnight; in Atlanta, a social worker hired by Woodruff Park to support positive interactions between housed and unhoused populations.

One can imagine further interventions: public spaces for safe drug use, free storage lockers for the unhoused, anti-surveillance zones in parks. The nine Design Justice Demands begin with refusal—"divest," "discontinue," "cease"—but eventually move toward action—"reimagine," "advocate," "center." The architecture of abolition must first refuse, then reimagine and radically intervene.

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9

JUST ARCHITECTURE

JUST ARCHITECTURE implies an attempt to define the scope of architecture: just what is architecture, exactly? Implicit in the title is a twofold answer. On the one hand, it is an independent discipline, operating on its own terms of form, theory, representation, and typology. Just Architecture—that's all. On the other hand, it is a dependent one, inexorably tied to broader issues of politics, social context, and environmental justice. An architecture that recognizes such ties aims to be just, ethical, truthful.

By collapsing these multiple meanings into one phrase, we aimed to distance our driving question from what is typically seen as a dichotomy. What if there is no dichotomy between "form" and "politics"? What if it's all just architecture?

Hannah Mayer Baydoun deconstructs this dichotomy and suggests that design justice interventions occur between, not within, disciplinary silos. The "unconventional partnership" of Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman is one model; the pair advocates for a practice that takes on global conflicts through their manifestation at the urban and architectural scale. Dominiq Oti looks with new eyes at this "in-betweenness" within urban landscapes, considering ideas of reciprocity, care, and maintenance. Ben Derlan and Merrell Hambleton speculate on how such values of care might be applied to the architecture of abolition, beginning with the refusal to design prisons and culminating in radical activism.

Turning towards architectural education, Mohamad Hafez and Alex Kim challenge the assumptions that undergird architectural pedagogy; Hafez pushes back against exploitative practices that have their roots in academia, while Kim urges us to reconsider what's "real" about the "real world" outside of it. Meanwhile, Esther Da Costa Meyer urges us to "keep one foot in the academy"—in her opinion, students do effect real change from within the university.

As current students and future practitioners, we are contending with the scope, definition, and motivation of our architectural work. These authors challenge us to question the limits of architecture and to dismantle disciplinary silos in favor of radical reciprocity.

It might seem speculative. But don't worry, it's just architecture.

IN CONVERSATION: ESTHER DA COSTA MEYER

Esther da Costa Meyer is a visiting professor at YSOA teaching ARCH 3297: From Shigeru Ban to IKEA: Designing Refugee Camps this Spring

From the point of view of the Anthropocene, architecture cannot be an independent discipline. In rich nations, high-carbon lifestyles, which include the building sector, are one of the drivers of greenhouse gas emissions. Long after a building has been destroyed, the emissions released to build, maintain, and demolish it, will remain in the atmosphere and affect the earth system as a whole. Carbon knows no national boundaries. Wealthy nations produce the greatest amounts of greenhouse gas emissions, and while the effects are felt everywhere, poor nations with a minimal carbon footprint and fewer resources are having to shoulder a disproportionate amount of the consequences. Which is to say that climate change reenacts forms of colonialism by engendering major inequalities across the globe.

There is also a causal relationship between the Anthropocene and refugee camps, the other topic I work on. As the planet continues to warm, the growing number of migrants now includes a rapidly escalating group of climate refugees, a term that has yet to be acknowledged by international law. The forms of globalization taken by late capitalism, or neoliberalism, are producing new peripheries. Wealthy nations of the world refuse to absorb vast populations displaced by war, hunger, or drought, preferring to keep them at arms' length in camps, detention centers, prisons. Excluded from the social compact, migrants do not have access to the social goods we take for granted nor to human rights in general. They exemplify the biopolitical power over life wielded by rich nations which manage them from a distance.

Nor can architectural History/Theory be said to be independent when in most places the discipline is still largely dominated by Western paradigms, Western examples, and Western scholarship. Several institutions, our own included, have made commendable efforts to add to the curriculum so that it reflects this broader geocultural reach. Furthermore, History/Theory need not be only retrospective. It can and should also deal with those contemporary issues in which architecture is deeply involved such as the Anthropocene, refugee camps, detention camps, slums, and all enclaves of exception. A pluralist History/Theory should also aim at greater activism. We need to face the challenge posed by neocolonial forms of climate injustice imposed around the world-wide problems allows us to harness the experience of our diverse student body and their concern for social and environmental equality.

In every country there are architects who try to help alleviate the situation, and we have examples in our own School. But in every country there are also architects who are complicit: not only the small numbers who design detention centers for migrants or for-profit prisons aimed at mass incarceration, but those far larger contingents that prefer to close their eyes to the discipline's collusion and implication in what Derek Gregory calls "the colonial present."

editors: How might our professional/technical classes engage similar issues of activism? Should the curriculum be more integrated?

esther: That would be ideal: building more bridges across different tracks. However transdisciplinary we may be in our individual approaches, we will still be stuck in silos if we don't reach out beyond our fiefs, never bursting out of history/theory or studio. That is why this year I made a special effort to branch out and ask colleagues from different tracks and disciplines to come speak to my seminar [From Shigeru Ban to IKEA: Designing with Refugees]. I wanted a stronger connection to studio, that is, with practice.

editors: How can the architect establish accountability as we advance in our careers?

esther: I've always admired the way M.Arch students collaborate with one another in studio. In the Humanities, the work mode is more individualistic. But even in my field, I realize that old friendships dating back to my

university days only grow in importance. I hope you can remain in touch with your close peers from YSOA. You will, of course, find other voices to trust, make a wider web of connections. But the ideas and ideals that you shared with your peers at YSOA, the trust you built up among yourselves will make these groups a crucial critical mass with whom to discuss difficult issues as the years pass, including accountability.

editors: When we get into the professional world and our work/practice could potentially be problematic and we have to make compromises, what do we do?

esther: Very few people can avoid compromise or attain zero-level complicity when it comes to injustice. If we just look at the labels of the clothes we are wearing, our cell phones and computers, we realize the extent to which they are premised on unjust, underpaid labor practices. I think that a compromise is admissible when it will permit you to achieve at least some of your goals. You haven't lost your moral compass if it will benefit others, even if not to the extent you would have liked. You try to win at least a part of the fight.

It is easy to lose hope. But we have to remember that while neoliberalism colonizes much of our daily life it doesn't colonize everything. The goal of our readings is to find out how to design projects and spaces that cannot be colonized. Forensic Architecture is doing just that, using the toolkits and knowhow gleaned from architecture's engagement with advanced technology. They can't win every fight, but they have blazed an incredibly important path for the rest of us to follow.

If I can add one more thing, I do hope that many of you will keep a foot in the academy. It is inspiring to see your enthusiasm and your quest for social justice. We need our best voices in the university, teaching others to realize their goals and how to avoid the usual pitfalls faced by all professions. Teaching is a form of hope. We want our students to be better than we are, that is the only justification for teaching.
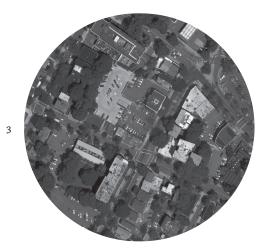

URBAN RECIPROCITIES

Dominiq Oti

There's a man, a shopkeeper. He owns a local delicatessen in Brooklyn. At the beginning of the day, he sweeps the sidewalk outside his shop. Each customer that enters is entrusted with this space. A mutual respect. An exchange. The shopkeeper's responsibility is not only for the shop's interior world but for the sidewalk—a site of reciprocity in the city. The day ends, and he sweeps again.

This relationship is common, and exchanges between citizens in the city happen all the time. Yet it's important to explore the boundaries of this reciprocity. There are imbalances in urban relationships; not every space is designed for the inclusion of all citizens. When privately owned public space exists, sometimes these spaces are not offered to everyone. However, we can still have unexpected moments of generosity and serendipity. Urbanity that forms our everyday life overrides the built space that forms our interrelated experiences. By looking closely at reciprocity, we can dismantle the typical binary relationships in urban space; the shopkeeper and the customer are not opposites, but engaged together in the construction of an interior and exterior world. In theatre, it could be seen as a flip between actor and spectator.

The narrative of the shopkeeper is not unique to a street in Brooklyn; these narratives are embedded in all of our urban environments. Perhaps that act of reciprocity manifests itself in simply maintaining our waste—a public good that allows us to be aware of what we use in our domestic lives and how that is discarded in the outside world. Perhaps it is revealed as public art that's displayed in the city without being defaced. As citizens of the world, we agree to unspoken rules. In New Haven, there is a new mural addition downtown on the side of Brick Oven Pizza. It is a depiction of Muhammad Ali made local—cultural iconography can be appreciated in a variety of ways. Memory comes into play. Can we uphold or promote ordinary experiences when we construct our spaces? Becoming stewards of our local environment is an act of promotion. If we do the best we can to look after our spaces, indirectly we take care of our citizens too. Stewardship need not be seen as a noble act but a common one. The generations after us need to bear witness to what has come before them and build upon compounded effects. The common ground on which we pace leaves traces that mutate our urban space.

The scenarios posed are romanticized to some degree. But, I assure you, they are commonly overlooked. To bring the ongoing reciprocity between urban dwellers and the city itself to the fore is necessary. There is an acute need for maintenance in architecture. The spaces we as architects build are more than their physical manifestation; they are reflexive, always responding to the surrounding conditions. This is nothing new, but it deserves to be seen with new

eyes. We must repeat that process. Revisiting paths that we all take, re-addressing things that we all see is different than the first time. When we embrace time and haptic experiences, our accumulation of shared collective understandings brings us to new grounds. With another lens, we can see that we ourselves are reflected on the street on which we live. Through reciprocity, care and maintenance, stewardship becomes the model for how we operate and design in our urban space. We begin to see ourselves in a new way.

IN CONVERSATION: MOHAMAD HAFEZ

Mohamad Hafez is a Syrian-American artist and architect based in New Haven. Hafez's art imbues a subtle hopefulness through its deliberate incorporation of verses from the Holy Quran. At the core of Hafez's work, the verses offer a contrast between the pessimistic reality of destruction and the optimistic hope for a bright future.

mohamad: Who reads this publication?
editors: Students, at best.
mohamad: If they find time, that is. To me, your time at Yale is becoming irrelevant.

editors: How so? What's something that art allows you to do but architecture doesn't?

mohamad: It's never about architecture and art—I don't have "art work" and "architectural work". All of this is my work, they're intertwined. Many architects have lost that understanding that architecture is also art, philosophy, anthropology, activism. We've watered-down the

profession with aesthetics. Every once in a while we go do something, feed an African or Syrian kid, I would call that activism of building a nice tent. But I'm disappointed with the status quo.

I walked away at the highest point of my game. I was 27 and finishing a 60-storey skyscraper in Houston, managing people twice my age. And I realized that we are brutal to each other. We push students to pull all-nighters in school—that life model I've seen with freshmen in college all the way to somebody who's worked for ten years. And as a result, we lose track of society, we are not part of the community. Our focus is primarily stone and mortar and aesthetics.

Look around you, in the built environment—95% of the new buildings will tell you the status quo. What are we manifesting? This is why I left and started working on my own architecture that combines the art and the community.

editors: What is missing in our current discipline?

mohamad: It's an educational flaw for many decades. We pushed students to love and dine at their desks instead of out there in the society. If you have zero interest in other disciplines, you will just not have it [good work]. So you need to make a conscious effort in school. You can talk about activism all you want, but remember that half a block away outside the school, you can do a lot more for the communities there. And your collateral damage is so low in comparison to these barges by getting your feet wet in so many things. If one way doesn't work out, you can try the other. We are at a bit of a disadvantage as architects, because we are valued at a lower rate.

editors: Yes, many people have been driven to take on unpaid internships.

mohamad: That's the other thing, look at this cafe, now I run my own business. We spend three weeks training people, because there's a learning curve to make Syrian baklavas and specialty coffee. I pay every single minute for the three weeks of training. Some people are shocked about that, and that just tells you the status quo. When we accept unpaid internships, that in itself is a rotten habit. And then consider a horrible economy, a pandemic, and people who are willing to take this job for half the salary. The companies have the upper hand. The system also has you put your time in for many years, and then you will make money when you become a partner. They hook you by giving you incessant deadlines. Deadline this week, another deadline next week. They use this trick to make you run and jump faster. But it won't work anymore.

editors: It's challenging for a student who is put at a disadvantage from day one. To make a living and pay off the debt, we may have to work for that corporate firm. What can we do?

mohamad: I think you [students] are so bright and so connected. The first thing is to know that there's a problem. You want to go somewhere, but your financial situation and your life brings you onto this tanker, and it's going deep into the ocean. There's nothing wrong with entering the corporate world so you can pay your student loans, but ask yourself: how much time is it going to take me to jump off onto my float that goes in the right direction? I'm giving myself X years. If I hit my target, great. If I don't, I recalibrate. But it's important to remind myself: I don't believe in it, I'm looking to jump. If jumping was that easy, everybody would. I, too, struggled to jump off for 10 years, it was not until my art allowed me to jump. I had my art practice going in parallel for 15 years in secret, and then I came out to the world with a big body of work. I know that's not the situation for everybody, so you have to find your safety net.

editors: Can that ever be architecture? Are the problems with our discipline inherent to architecture as a practice, or is it to exploitative economic practices in general?

mohamad: I believe wholeheartedly in the power of architecture and beauty. Look around this coffee shop (Instagram:@pistachionhv). I touched every single wall and ceiling in this shop. This brick wall was behind three different walls, and we had to chisel it by hand to bring the original brick. So I completely believe in the power of design. There doesn't always have to be social activism to it. I'm using my talent as a designer to make money? No, that's not bad. We should make money.

But architecture shouldn't be a silo. The architects I know are not part of their society. Their practice is fully separate from their existence as human beings. I think this is driven by the exploitative economy. In a capitalist society, the world is not up to the architect—it's usually the billionaire, the hedge fund, or the lawyers who call the shots. They don't give a flying falafel about anything that increases the cost per square foot. So over decades of this relationship between owner, developer and architect, the system has beaten the architect.

editors: So how do we prepare ourselves?

mohamad: One thing architectural education doesn't teach you is how to be a good businessman. How can you be an entrepreneur? Run your own business? From the day you start at a corporate firm, know that you're starting your own businesses too. You're growing because it takes time to grow a baby. That baby is that little escape boat, that you're going to jump off the barge. Just remember your belief.

When I got published… my architectural circle barely acknowledged it. It makes you question your moves, and that, is a very scary feeling. So moments like this highlight that what you're doing is scary. You're trusting your

intuition. You're moving against the majority of architects and the American society to do that. And it is suicidal if it's not well-engineered. But once you take your own path, you'll meet so many amazing people when you take your own path. Go meet real people, real caliber. Many people are low key, but they're amazing. People are doing phenomenal stuff on their own.

So it's not an easy fix, but I see individual solutions. I see you guys working together, finding like-minded souls. As we know, once you graduate, everybody's in different worlds, right? But now's the time to have that pact. It takes two or three like-minded people to do something together, to build that escape boat. I was blessed to have my art, so what is the boat you're building? Magazine, journal, art, anything.

Mohamad's work can be viewed at www.mohamadhafez.com.

II: Contending with Form and Politics

The editors' prompt picks up on the ambiguity about whether or not the discipline of architecture will decisively acknowledge the inextricable link between 'form' and 'politics' or continue to skirt the issue. Ignoring the politics of social issues or environmental justice does not free you from the influence of your context and time. The freedom to ignore certain issues and foreground others is a privilege, and, in the end, is still a political position and stance. Being unaware is also a sign of the times. It indicates that situated discourse is either non-existent or ill-equipped to critically address the 'politics' of the time or place, but the lack of discourse does not negate what has/is occurred/ing. The conversations today surrounding the #MeToo movement, for example, do not mean that sexual abuse and harassment did not happen in previous decades.

Engaging with architecture on a purely formal level requires the mental gymnastics of temporarily disregarding its context and, by proxy, its politics. This practice is useful in honing skills specific to our discipline; for instance, taking Peter Eisenman's Formal Analysis courses as foundational to critiquing and understanding 'form'. The formal projects studied in the course, however, still remain byproducts of our physical world, laden with context and political meaning. In this way, the act of studying 'form' prompts a lens we take on and off to zero in, but does not negate a form's politics. Dan-el Padilla Peralta's work at Princeton and critique on "classics" is relevant here in understanding 'form' as inseparable from 'politics'.[a]

III: The Disciplinary Limits of Professional Structures

In Leijia Hanrahan's article *All Design is Political, Not All Politics is Design*, she argues there are limits to the political efficacy of architects and architecture. This conclusion comes from responding to Jess Myers' article *How More Security Makes Women and Queer People Feel Less Safe* in which Myers places the architect smack in the middle of conversations about security, safety, and policing as they relate to spatial design. While Hanrahan's argument that there can and

should be limits to the situations in which architects insert themselves is convincing, an acknowledgment of the expertise of other professionals and community organizations does not preclude cross-disciplinary work that approaches social issues, such as policing, in the context of space with those same professionals.

Beyond gaps in cross-disciplinary knowledge and workflows, there are certainly areas in which our political engagement as a profession can go from complacency—

which is still political—to active participation. As architectural workers, we do not have complete control over all the political or 'pre-desk' aspects of our work. Additionally, professional constraints on affordable housing design, zoning regulations, flows of capital, developers, building code, and policy, yet have little to do with making or understanding these directives. Clients come to us with concerns of value, property damage, and profit, but we have limited leverage to critique, challenge, or reject harmful design approaches and remain employed on said projects. Refusal alone is not the answer. If the discipline of architecture took a more active role in 'pre-desk' work, our command of the inextricable link between 'form' and 'politics' would render us agile in responding to social and environmental concerns, and our only form of action would not be refusal. The profession needs to go beyond its current role as a service industry—e.g. rethinking the legal relationship between architects and clients—and work towards the organization of an actively engaged collection of interdisciplinary workers whose responsibility to the built environment is reinforced by the agency with which we are able to steward it.

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2   Rachel Poser, "He Wants to Save Classics from Whiteness. Can the Field Survive?" The New York Times Magazine, February 2, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/02/magazine/classics-greece-rome-whiteness.html.

COMMANDING THE INEXTRICABLE LINK BETWEEN 'FORM' AND 'POLITICS'

Hannah Mayer Baydoun

I: Deconstructing the False Dichotomy

The premise put forth by the editors demonstrates the flaw of operating within an alleged dichotomy. A world in which the dichotomy between 'form' and 'politics' endures implies that there are architectural forms existing outside the reach of politics. While the word 'politics' can be widely interpreted and encompasses many things—for example social issues, political party affiliation, economics, the system of capitalism—and our collective understanding of systems of governance does change over time, I would argue there is no such example. Architects engage with 'form' and 'politics', cognizant or not. Politics manifest through form, and form manifests politics.

An alleged dichotomy might exist in select minds or circles of thought—e.g. Patrick Schumacher's 2014 Facebook post about the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale (Winston 2014)[1]—however, in actuality, a formal outcome cannot be fully manifested devoid of politics because architectural projects—be they paper architecture or built projects—are 'of a context' and 'of a time'. To be a thing in the world is to be 'of a context', and to be 'of a context' is to be in tension, collusion, conflict, harmony, etc. with the politics of one's situation. They are inextricably linked. In this way, an apolitical stance can be interpreted as a reaction to a political situation, and thus enacts a politics. In other words, there is no material dichotomy. As architects, we have a responsibility to the built environment, but we need the agency to act. Our education, institutions, and professional associations need to teach us how to engage with the politics of our discipline and support us in doing so.
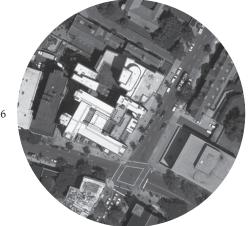

IV: Disciplinary Revolution

Our education teaches us very little about the systems architecture operates within, and more importantly, how we can effectively engage with them. Additionally, professional structures lack codified avenues for critique. Should we engage? This question ignites a moral battle about responsibility. Can we engage? This question depends on the agency of individuals and collectives in the context of our educational institutions and professional associations. As architects we have a responsibility to the built environment, but we need the agency to fulfill those responsibilities. Where does this agency come from and who would do the work of deciding?

Kate Wagner suggests in her Letter to a Young Architect that agency will be created through collective critical intervention across scales, from the individual to the institution. There are already examples of what this might look like. Dark Matter University is a democratic network, straddling current and future systems of education, practice, and discourse. Colloqate is a multidisciplinary architecture and design justice platform which created the Design Justice Platform and a set of actions called Design as Protest. These examples start to suggest how structural change and collective organising can command 'form' and 'politics'. Fighting against siloed directives impacting the built environment, codifying channels for critique and change, and empowering workers can recreate the discipline. These practices should not be independent occurrences within current strictures, but rather how architecture is being practiced on the whole.

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1   Anna Winston, "Architecture is not art' says Patrick Schumacher in Venice Architecture Biennale rant," Dezeen, March 18, 2014. https://www.dezeen.com/2014/03/18/architecture-not-art-patrik-schumacher-venice-architecturebiennale-rant/.

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FROM REAL ESTATE TO POSSIBLE ESTATES: BEYOND THE BASS FELLOWS

Alex Kim

First impressions are always challenging to overcome, and despite my best efforts, the memory of the first lecture I attended as a graduate student at Yale School of Architecture is pretty much seared into the back of my retina. For the inaugural lecture of the Fall 2019 semester, British developer John Spence delivered a marketing pitch for his hotel and resort enterprise, Karma Royal Group. In a slideshow where every page seemed to be covered in glitter and gold dust, we were fed twenty minutes of sweeping drone shots of extravagant luxury resorts on idyllic Balinese beaches while Spence waxed lyrical with vacant business-forward banalities. You had to see it to believe it—the whole spectacle was frankly <u>unreal</u>.

I do not mean to talk at Spence's presence as some outsider—this was indeed a lecture about architecture. To deny it as such is to ignore the corporate-capital systems through which much of our built environment is produced. Still, I left that night fearing what this opening event might bode for my time at Yale Architecture—what this lecture represented of the school's ideological limits.[1] Much to my confoundment, I learned that the reason Spence was speaking as part of the year's speaker circuit was that he was the Distinguished Edward P. Bass Fellow of Fall 2019, and as part of this role, he would be teaching an advanced design studio at Yale that term. What did it mean for Spence's belief system—that is, the ideology of

the Bass Fellows' studio—to have been offered to us the first lecture of that year, this annual homecoming event by which the year's tone is set?

Announced in 2004 under former dean Robert A. M. Stern, the Edward P. Bass Fellowship is intended to "bring distinguished private and public-sector clients to the [Yale] School of Architecture on a regular basis to give students insight into the 'real-world' development process and the architect's role on a development team."[2] As it turns out, as wildly extravagant as Spence's enterprise is, he is by no means the exception to the rule of the Bass Studio. The inaugural fellow in 2005 was billionaire Gerald Hines; in 2008, Charles L. Atwood, then vice chairman of hotel group Harrah's Entertainment; in 2010, Katherine Farley, senior managing director at megadeveloper Tishman Speyer; and more recently, in 2018, Michael Samuelian, former Vice President of Related Companies, the development firm behind my favorite playground of the ultra-rich, Hudson Yards.

When the Bass Fellowship declares itself the baptismal font of "real-world" methodologies of development, it disguises realism—an ideological posturing—as the real material ontology of architectural practice. As Nico Dock and Pascal Gielen write in their introduction to their edited volume, Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the Real:

[Ideologies] are... aesthetics of the real. They claim to be the only real truth and through this claim those belief systems give form to society as 'real...' They are make-believe and as such they function as self-fulfing prophecies. Ideologies are performances of reality in name of what is real.[3]

Inherent in declaring something as "real-world" is an implicit statement that lays claim to the real. So what models of development are declared real by the Bass Fellowship? Is designing neocolonial villas for sunburnt millionaires our reality? What does the inclusion or exclusion of particular development vehicles do to our understanding of the limits of possibility?

That is to ask, what are the components of an architect's education that are intended to prepare them for this so-called real, and how does that realism confine the architect's capacity to reexamine their role in the built environment? As the executive entourage of visiting fellows suggests, a typical Bass studio engages with private client-based—or, at best, public-private partnership—development models. Our "professional practice" courses—at Yale called "Architectural Practice & Management"—teach existing standards of labor as given constants rather than a variable disciplinary territory worth critical examination and speculative reinvention. Before we even make it out of the institution, capitalism and bureaucracy are dropped over our heads like a bucket of ice-cold water, quickly dousing our dreams of being just architects, and reminding us that, in the "real world," we're just architects—all in time for us to wade into the alphabet soup of initials-based architecture firms.

For a discipline that largely concerns itself with the projective question, "What if?" through the design of things, we seem to spend very little time in academia interrogating the organizational design of our own profession. What if Gather New Haven (formerly New Haven Land Trust) or Sogorea Te' Land Trust were the 2021 Bass Fellow? What if the Building Project developed sustained proposals for alternative programs beyond giver-to-receiver models of housing? What if, as Gabrielle Printz has proposed,[4] "Architectural Practice & Management" was taught as a theory course where the nature of practice was reevaluated, rather than a box to be checked for NAAB and NCARB as our well-meaning administrators shuffle us out the door, diploma in hand?

These reimaginations are already underway in the world—organizations like the NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative and Homebaked Anfield approach urban commercial programming and development through a cooperative land trust. These models guarantee a directly democratic participation of community stakeholders in development decisions and, bit by bit, can buy back the urban environment and reinvest its social currency into the local community. Community-based development presents a completely distinct ideological framework from that of the profit-focused private client or top-down public authority, and as a result, the architect's design work within their contractual relationship to, and even their language and values by which they communicate with community development groups must be rethought.

Crucial to making a new social reality possible is believing that it is possible. This is evinced by a Palestinian collective land ownership model called *al masha*:

The Arabic term *al masha* refers to communal land equally distributed among farmers. Masha could only exist if people decided to cultivate the land together. The moment they stop cultivating it, they lose its possession. It is possession through a common use.[5]

The commons of *al masha* exists only in continual practice—it is the collective *belief* in the system itself that makes the system's existence possible and protects through ritual its participants' claim to land and survival. Courses like the Bass Fellowship studio and "Architectural Practice & Management" that prepare architects for professional *practice* could be the sites where such beliefs are cultivated. It would be challenging work fraught with unknowns, but it is in these unknowns that we find possibility. Re-

hearsal in academia is necessary, not only to practice these distinct roles, but also to enable our sensibility of these possibilities' realism. The "what ifs" of the academy offer a space in which to reimagine and rehearse what is possible, and by rehearsing what is possible, we might define for ourselves what is real.

SOURCES

1   To be fair, Spence was not the only speaker that evening. He was invited as part of a joint lecture and discussion between him and Janet Marie Smith moderated by Ann Marie Gardner. Frankly—though her lecture did forgo the gold dust—as a stadium developer, Smith is not ideologically miles apart from Spence.

2   "Bass Fellowship Established at Yale School of Architecture," Yale News, December 21, 2004, https://news.yale.edu/2004/12/21/bass-fellowship-established-yale-school-architecture.

3   Nico Dockx and Pascal Gielen, eds., "Introduction: Ideology & Aesthetics of the Real," in Commonism: A New Aesthetics of the Real (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018), 54.

4   Printz referred to this proposal in an unpublished syllabus prepared for Joan Ockman's Fall 2020 seminar, "Approaches to Contemporary Theory," but has written on alternative pedagogical frameworks for theorizing practice elsewhere. Gabrielle Printz, "Before & Beyond: Re-articulating Practice in the Academy," in Beyond Patronage: Reconsidering Models of Practice, edited by Martha Bohm, Joyce Hwang, and Gabrielle Printz (New York: Actar Publishers, 2015), 200.

5   Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, "Fourteen Concepts," Permanent Temporariness, edited by Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti (Stockholm: Art and Theory Press, 2018), i.