# AN ITCH YOU CAN'T SCRATCH
## INTERVIEW BY JACK MURPHY
## M.ARCH, 2020
## RICE ARCHITECTURE

**How did your educational experience at Rice set up the interests you work on today in your practice? How did you arrive into the work you do today from the academic background of a Masters in Architecture?**

Kimberly Shoemake (who founded the graphic design office Thumb with me) and I had an architecture studio with Mary Ann Ray and Robert Mangurian where they made books, we made books, the whole studio made books. We did this to organize things we found, to make sense of the research we were doing, and to explain things to others. We also liked paper an awful lot. It was like you couldn't do a project at that time, and expect to be taken seriously, without having a book to back it up—the same way that the book acts as an alibi for an architecture practice extended into studio and school culture in general. It was also a time when Sanford Kwinter and Bruce Mau were collaborating on studio and seminar courses, so the discourse around communication was quite sophisticated. Many of the faculty were also committed to book projects: I'm thinking about Albert Pope's *Ladders* as well as Michael Bell's anthology *Slow Space*, both of which were wholly synthetic in form and message. So, as I saw it, one could use the book as a medium to put forward arguments about space, material, culture—kind of like doing architecture without the building. After we graduated Kimberly Shoemake and I were co-directors of publications and exhibitions at Rice and we got to experiment while learning a lot about graphic design. Lars Lerup, our dean at the time, was a great instigator; we really owe our launch into design to his support. After that I decided I wanted my own office and started Thumb in New York. Jessica Young, who had the Rice position after me, joined me there for a few years. Since then, I've mostly run the office with a few collaborators.

**Tell us about your commitment to the book. Why is it still a relevant technology to communicate information in a sequential order? How was the book an "instrument of architectural thinking" during your time at Rice and what was the influence of that pedagogy on your work?**

The book represents a commitment to the assertions of architecture into material form, not altogether unlike the building, but different in crucial ways. Once a book is set in ink and paper, in thousands of copies, ideas may proliferate (i.e. Victor Hugo's ubiquitous "this will kill that" argument). The slowness of the book is part of its strength; its resistance and relative permanence demand that whatever is set into this medium be of consequence. We can admire the movements of magazines, Instagram, exhibitions, websites, etc., for their immediacy, but none of them have the weight of a book.

**Can you share an influential image that was important to you during this point of your education that impacted your thinking?**

That is the spread on pages 482–483 in *S,M,L,XL* — see [2].

**What did you learn from Bruce Mau?**

A few sort of aphoristic things: Type has memory. Graphic design is faster than architecture. Communication is the strategic release of information over time. "A little song, a little dance, a little seltzer in the pants" i.e. sometimes you should just do what feels good. But mostly it was that I got spend time with someone who was a designer who engaged with architecture without doing buildings—that was a model for me.

**Do you believe in disciplinarity? What is the potential of two creative fields colliding together—in this case architecture and graphic design? Haven't they always been joined together?**

I know a few things and you know a few things—we can work together to extend each other's reach. If we both recognize the former, the latter can happen. If not, then not. That said, knowing the influences, precedents, and techniques of architecture makes it possible to use the internal language of architecture in pursuit of formulating a concern. To me, scalar logic is the most crucial aspect of architectural thought. It makes it possible to address different aspects of the design project with the recognition that there may be echoes or implications at another scale. Systems awareness and tectonic/fabrication sensibility can also inform collaborations. A lot of the architects I work with are dead (i.e. Lina Bo Bardi, Paul Rudolph, Gordon Bunshaft, et al.) so the dialogue is as much with the work as it is with the architect; what becomes important is what I can identify as central to the set of ideas that they were working on across the span of their practice. Mark Wigley remarks that all architecture begins and ends as graphic design—it all starts with drawing and ends in a library—which seems pretty inclusive. Drawing matters a lot to our work, as we can't really think without drawing and using it as a means to connect ideas to potential organizations. These drawings are sometimes diagrams or plans or sections; the array of conventional drawings is present in the flow of our work, but not necessarily in its final form.

We can be project with the architects that I work with... To me, scalar logic is the most cru- where something is cial aspect of architectural thought. It or is not, i.e. "Do things makes it possible to address different align? Is spacing consistent?" aspects of the design project with the These are the simple issues of space recognition that there may be echoes or we are concerned with in graphic design.

But I'm interested in voids—that is, vast empty spaces that are somehow places: temporary spaces, pop-up spaces, light spaces, "it's a shame that anything should be built here..."

**Where does inspiration come from?**

An itch you can't scratch.

**What do you look at that most reliably leads to good ideas?**

Stuff on the street. New York simultaneously draws repulses me, so I document those moments when I'm amazed by what is put/left/ejected on the street. I'm inspired by cognitive dissonance. I don't think this leads to good ideas, but it's a sign that I'm processing.

**Can you share an image of work in progress that you're fond of?**

See [3], [4], [5], [8], [9].

**How do you start a project and begin the movement from information to visualization/organization/design? Do you have a process you rely on?**

I usually like to think about format first, i.e. how big a thing is. This conditions the design quite a lot. After that, maybe what paper(s) might be used —sometimes a paper combination might begin to indicate a structural logic to the book due to manufacturing constraints. We really prefer projects that have more limited budgets where we can commission the production; this means we need to think about limits and how we might push/pull them.

**Can you share a couple alluring images you've seen recently?**

See [1], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15].

**Everything is so sharp these days. What's the value of blur, ambiguity, or low-resolution work in our HD world?**

The lower the resolution, the faster and further it can go.

Turnbull. In interviews Stauffacher makes it sound more like an improvisational performance, as her work was responsive to the architecture and the site. She said, "I just went from one wall to another." Maybe it comes down to the freedom of cooperation (I like to note the importance of this word as much for its prefix as for its root). It comes back around to collaboration, which at its best promotes a mutuality of action, with common goals arrived at via multiple vectors. In a well-functioning collaboration one can still detect the autonomy of each actor. Maybe it's a bit like the Black Mountain performance experiments that Cunningham/Cage/Rauschenberg/Fuller did—everything all at once, where the viewer has to decide what to look at, in what order they can, to whatever effect they find. Maybe that makes it more open for everyone.

**Your clients are regularly schools of architecture, architects, or architecture offices. How do you still participate in architectural culture? How do you understand—and how might you describe—the extra-architectural apparatus that allows architecture itself to exist?**

I held the Books and Architecture seminar at Yale School of Architecture from 2008 to 2018, which is probably the single most sustained engagement. We might do that class again, but right now we're running a new thing, Graphic Inquiry, which works back and forth between screen and print, using material culture research as a driver. The work is trying to find a way to get past the fly-through video towards a more meaningful engagement between the moving image and architectural thinking. Directional temporal experience seems to offer a lot in terms of image, but what we're really most interested in is text-image combination that acts in a descriptive manner. I engage with architecture schools on an ongoing basis. We got the chance to design and roll out an entire identity program at University of Minnesota with program head Marc Swackhamer over the last few years, which was really propulsive. We developed a low-profile identity to keep everything consonant and then created several publications lines, producing about eight to 10 books in the last two years. I tend to engage more with schools than practice. We just completed a project for UMinn with Dream the Combine to represent their MoMA PS1 project in a book format, which was a real pleasure.
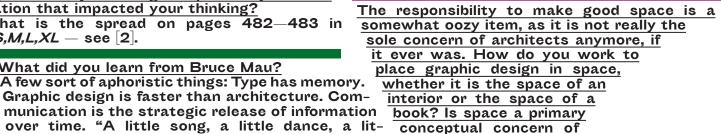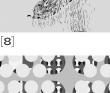
**Can you share an image you like that complicates the relationship of text and image?**

Nothing beats Bruce Mau's poster for Rice, c. 1997: "The blurring of our boundaries suggests the shape of a new terrain" — see [7].

**One goal of graphic design is clear communication. How do you see your role as helping architects to communicate their work into the world? Is this challenging? If so, why?**

I'm still waiting for a chance to take up some of the threads that were left dangling by *S,M,L,XL*. The book's open figure, full of detritus as much as gems, (stim and dross?) suggests contingency and complication as something to be sought. In most of the monographs I see today everybody is working so hard to find a position on or to defend territory that the projects end up seeming disconnected from the world. That seems like a weak position for architecture. Look at Keith Haring's Radiant Baby—it kind of says it all. —see [10].

**What comes after *S,M,L,XL* in your view?**

I don't know, but if you open the process of making a book up to contingency, to suspending boundaries at least temporarily, I'm pretty sure something would happen.

**The responsibility to make good space is a somewhat oozy item, as it is not really the sole concern of architects anymore, if it ever was. How do you work to place graphic design in space, whether it is the space of an interior or the space of a book? Is space a primary conceptual concern of your work?**

Luke Bulman is a graphic designer who operates Office of Luke Bulman in New York. He received an M.Arch from Rice University before serving as its Director of Publications and Exhibitions together with Kimberly Shoemake. As a lecturer at Yale School of Architecture, he taught Books and Architecture for a decade and is currently teaching a course called Graphic Inquiry.

Bulman works in the overlap between architecture and graphic design; he designs books about architecture, posters, and identities. Many important publications of the twenty-first century were "book directed" by him. But, "most of all," he writes on his website, his design practice is "dedicated to finding ways to link subjects with objects." Via email, Bulman graciously answered my questions about his career, the shared space of architecture and graphic design, and his creative processes. If you're looking to make the next *S,M,L,XL*, please hire him.

**What are the differences in constraints that make architecture and graphic design uniquely challenging?**

The constraints are so vast for architecture; graphic design by comparison is a free-for-all. Each situation has its own advantages. While a graphic design office can have commissions at the highest level within a very short time, architects (for the most part) have to spend years gaining the trust of the individuals and institutions that support their work. The flip side is architects tend to have quite long careers, while finding a graphic designer over 50 is a rarity.

**How would you describe the area where architecture and graphic design overlap today? What do you like to work on in this realm? Why is it exciting?**

There should be more overlap in how a graphic program might be deployed in architectural spaces, but in my experience this type of commission is very rare. Other than graphic identity and websites, there really isn't that much overlap.

**What might a more fused, oozy union of architecture and graphic design look like?**

Having a graphic designer in an architecture studio that was not there to do proposals and marketing, but rather was there to contribute to the development of wayfinding, legibility, color, typography would be an interesting thing to consider. It's really worthwhile to look at the super-graphics that Barbara Stauffacher developed at Sea Ranch —incredibly rich integrations of type, space, and color—its work that has association with Lawrence Halprin, Charles Moore, and Bill

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## THE OOZ MANIFESTO
### Tayyaba Anwar, M.Arch II, 2019, YSoA

The Ooz, or the Ooze, or the Ooziness of a space, must never be understood as a stationary circumstance: It is a condition that emerges and re-emerges only through active engagement of a space. As an aggregation of the events, recollections, and ideologies that allow for a space to be constituted at any given time, the Ooz describes the manner in which this presentness is revealed, and, simultaneously, the method that this peculiar presentness uses to transform itself—the Ooz is a description and an action, respectively. A space that reeks of Ooziness exists in its transitional nature; it is never the same twice. It is the constant dialogue between the inhabitant and space, occurring in the territory between compliance and defiance. Without these notions, the Ooz makes an empty space, one of neither submission nor revolution. The Ooz cannot exist within indifference.

Further, it is vital to understand that the Ooz is not latent or provisional: It is a real Thing, and like all things comes with undercurrents that exist beyond its physicality. It demands a break from the mundane and defies the existing rituals of a space, instead spurring newer modes of occupation and connection as the blanket of reality folds in upon itself. The Ooz is always a beginning in its own right; its becoming is a developmental process, one that is only characterized by its absolute unpredictability. It could be said that it is the capriciousness of its Form—or of form in general—that defines the Ooz on its own terms.

Additionally, the Ooz provokes a response: It incites a dialogue and is a part of an ongoing riposte. It also exists temporally, in that the Ooz is the indistinct interval after the end of an event but before its understanding, a durational gap which otherwise goes without acknowledgement, as it is typically understood to have occurred within a bounded time period. Such a condition of heterochrony within a no-man's time zone gives the Ooz significance, as it becomes an event that refuses to be bound by a single instance. Instead, it is driven by and carried on through its repercussions, through myth and memory, extant only until one becomes fully cognizant of its existence—at which point, it slimily morphs into something else. While the physical remnants of an event have the potential to eventually fade away, the Ooz's lingering disposition is a crucial aspect of its condition.

So, would the Ooz, once deciphered, allow for an understanding about space that enables us to make sense of new unexpected things? In seeing the Ooz for what it is, does everything become less oozy when seen through our distracted gaze? When does the Ooz sell out? Is there a possibility that the Ooz can be formally analyzed so that it becomes a reliable method of understanding space? Or does it only exist when order does not exist, and therefore disappears the second awareness sets in? Is it possible that the Ooz gets out of control in these types of looped inquisitions because it transforms the moment attention is applied to it? How is it so evasive and evanescent and still so ubiquitous? What kind of Borgesian condition is this, such that the longer you study it, the less you know about it? What is the Ooz, anyway?

## QUICK TRIPS THROUGH THE MULTIVERSE
### NICOLE DOAN
### M.ARCH II, 2019, YSoA

I have visited John Portman's Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles three times: once to eat fast-food pasta, once to ride up and down elevators in the four towers, and once to drink champagne in the revolving rooftop restaurant. Downtown Los Angeles' skyline is weak, at best, and the most exciting building can barely be perceived along its smoggy horizon. The only way to observe it and its introverted, mirrored glory from the outside is while in traffic along the 110 Freeway. If you're lucky enough to find one of the hidden entrances to Portman's Bonaventure Hotel, you're in for a treat—and I don't mean pasta or champagne. Beyond the cold, reflective, machine-like facade lies a reality separate from the one before our eyes.

The first time I went to the Bonaventure Hotel, I met my friend, Franco, during his lunch break to catch up on post-college life and to make my pilgrimage to Portman's infamous building. The sun smiled down on us during the warm June day as we sauntered across the pedestrian skybridge to the gaping orifice which serves as the hotel's entrance. A pang of confusion hit me as we broke through the threshold, as I was unsure as to why we entered the building through such a nondescript hole in the otherwise windowless concrete podium. According to Franco, the skybridge was the best way to enter. It wasn't until after my second trip to the hotel that I realized how right he was as I experienced the dullness of the added ground floor entrance on Flower Street.

Bathing in ignorance from my then lacking knowledge of the building, the astounding sight of the interior punched me in the face. I hadn't bothered to Google images of the interior prior to my visit, but its unique cylindrical shape and exterior elevator pods were enough to entice me to make my own excursion. A concrete playground with spiraling paths, ellipsoidal balconies, and, of course, moving glass elevators was revealed as we ventured deeper. A cross between a sci-fi machine and a mall in the early 1990s, the Bonaventure Hotel struck me as both alien and familiar. While the glass elevator shafts and seemingly infinite layers of winding circulation were no-thing like anything I'd ever seen, its warm lighting and pol-ished brown tiles reminded me of a mall near my grandma's old apartment in San Jose. It was as though someone had infused my childhood memories with Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.

Franco sensed my astonishment and excitedly led me around the spiraling ramps and stairs that hugged the massive concrete columns. Tacky stores and restaurants flanked the periphery of the circular space. Franco insisted on trying a particular pasta restaurant, and blue "street signs" tried their best to help us find what we were looking for. For at least 15 minutes, we meandered around a few different circulation cores (they were numbered to help orient people) and ran up and down the twisting staircases until finally we spotted the restaurant. I think it was called Angry Chef Grill—or something funny like that. If it didn't have a silly name, I would have been more disappointed by the choice of cheap materials and the fact that we had to order at the counter. In the back of the small restaurant, an out-of-place door took us outside to the elevated roof deck, where other office workers basked in the warm Los Angeles sunshine.

As soon as I slipped through the door, I was teleported back to the same reality that I currently face at the moment in which I type this sentence. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Frederic Jameson wishes the hotel "ought not to have entrances at all, since the entryway is always the seam that links the building to the rest of the city that surrounds it." Somehow Portman's Bonaventure Hotel transports its visitors to a different place and a different time in a seemingly different universe. The building turns its back on the city, not only by refusing to partake in the Los Angeles skyline, but also by its introverted expres-sion through materiality and fantastical interior landscape. This escapist piece of architecture completely dissociates from the rest of the Bunker Hill area and confronts the visitor with scattered lounges, retail, bars, and restaurants—forcing him or her to indulge, even if it is only mediocre pasta.

Eventually, the server emerged from the building with our lunch skillfully balanced on his forearm. With the sun shining down on us, I twirled the fettucine around my fork and could not help but wonder if this pasta truly came from the reality in which I am currently living, or, in fact, the world contained just beyond the threshold of the Out-of-Place Door.

## IMAGES OUT OF FOCUS
### MAI OKIMOTO
### M.ARCH, 2022
### RICE ARCHITECTURE

Blurring usually results in a loss of detail. In the series Architecture, photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto captures well-known Modernist architectures out of focus. His subjects, whether they are the whole Seagram Building or a portion of the Guggenheim Museum, float fuzzily within the frame. They have no clear edges, something commonly associated with the physicality and durability of buildings. They are blurry, but by capturing them from an angle such that the sky is the primary background, Sugimoto's photographs retain the buildings' key characteristics, making them recognizable at a glance. Have the buildings been stripped down to their core essence? Has thereduction of information yielded clarity? With these acts the sky is the only part of the environment that Sugimoto retains; the context is cropped out of the image's frame. In achieving what may be clarity, the building has been reduced to an isolated object in a partial environment. The blurring makes it recognizable asan object on a more or less blank canvas, not as a building that stands on a site.

Blurring usually results in a loss of detail, but we look for additional details within the blur. The photograph here, inspired by Sugimoto's Architecture series, was taken from the second level of James Turrell's Skyspace on the Rice University campus by narrowing the camera's depth of field. Like Sugimoto's subjects, the Skyspace is an iconic structure, and could be easily recognizable if captured out of focus against the Houston sky. However in this photo-graph, another building, Ricardo Bofill's Shepherd School of Music's Alice Pratt Brown Hall, domi-nates the background of the image. With-out a blank canvas like Sugimoto's images, the Skyspace cannot be simplified to an object, cannot be isolated from its context, and cannot be recognized at a glance. The edges of the Skyspace merge with the hall, the two structures blend into one, and the sky, appearing in patches, is absorbed into the structures. As viewers, we try to make sense of the relation-ships between the Skyspace and its sur-roundings, to read the fuzzy and ambiguous patches of light and dark. We look for details that were overlooked pre-blurring, and we seek new information out of a blurred image where details have been reduced. There is no need to crop the environment, no need for a blank canvas to appreciate the blur.

## FOOD
### NATALIE BROTON
### M.ARCH, 2021, YSoA

It seems strange that food is not considered art in the way that architecture, painting, and sculpture are. Food, just like art, is a reflection of culture, of time, and of interaction. Despite the fact that it is necessary for survival, there is something to be said about the rituals that revolve around it. For example, people typically choose to sit down and enjoy this time with others, and they choose to prepare meals according to texture, taste, and temperature. Perhaps what is most unique about food is that it is ephemeral and fleeting—it only lasts a few moments, yet it is ritually experienced every day.

It is only recently that thoughts about food have begun to be cataloged as a kind of "food theory," which inevitably has drawn attention to the relationships between other art forms such as sculpture, painting, composing, and architecture.

For the last decade and a half, architects have studied, read, collected, and formulated thoughts about the way food relates to architecture and what can be learned about the disciplines in tandem. Architects and educators Paulette Singley and Jamie Horwitz were of the first to collect essays explicitly about the relationship between the two, which spurred the publishing in a 2004 book titled *Eating Architecture*. This book illustrated a relationship that is becoming increasingly discussed in academia. Gastronomy has become a major topic in studios at the GSD, where chefs have been invited to lecture on the topic. Food was the theme for a spring/summer 2015 issue of *Log 34*, highlighting its relationship with architecture. Sci-Arc published a video on the collaboration between Chef Jordan Kahn and Eric Owen Moss.

Food and architecture are the most primal necessities of life. The once distinct boundaries are finally blurring.

## BLURRED BOUNDARIES
### PRIYANKA SHETH
### M.ARCH II 2019, YSoA

While the decades following the second World War were marked by student rebellions, workers movements, and anti-war demon-strations in the West, a different process of identity-building was taking place in newly independent countries. The Republic of India was formed in 1947, marking the end of British rule in the Indian subcontinent. A region with a complex social, cultural, and polit-ical history, the Indian subcontinent was an amalgamation of prin-cely states before it was consolidated as a colony. Independent India is a secular, democratic nation with a society still rooted to centuries of tradition. As India grappled with the challenges of forging its own identity, new institutions were being built across the burgeoning nation.

In 1950, the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, invited Le Corbusier to design Chandigarh, signaling India's embrace of modernity. Balkrishna Doshi, a young Indian architect working in Corbusier's atelier in Paris, accom-panied him. Beyond Chandigarh, Corbusier's association with India extended to Ahmedabad, where he was commissioned to build private residences and public institutions. Doshi arrived in Ahmedabad to supervise Corbusier's projects and made the city his permanent home, where he established his own practice in 1955. As he moved ahead in his own career, Doshi's interpre-tation of modernism became more nuanced as he developed a unique archi-tectural vocabulary that was relevant to the context within which he was working. His interpretation of modernism did not arise from an outright negation of history. Traces of building traditions of Ahmedabad and other parts of India made their way to his rich repository of inspiration. This assimilated approach shaped his practice and his role as an academician. In 1962, Doshi started the School of Architecture (now known at CEPT University).

Doshi studied at the J.J School of Architecture in Bombay, the first school in India to introduce architecture as a professional discipline in 1913. Initially, the school focused on the Beaux Arts tradition and steered towards a Modernist attitude in the 1930s. Since its inception, the school was largely under the leadership of British architects. Before independence, it was uncommon for Indian students to take up architecture, and those who did were primarily trained as draftsmen to execute the designs of British architects. As the founder and architect of the School of Architecture in Ahmedabad, Doshi was tasked with setting up an institution to train the future generation of independent India's architects. The establishment of the school marked a new phase in architectural education in India. Challenging the norms, experimentation and a pluralistic approach were ingrained in the pedagogical model. From the beginning, the School admitted women, and many became leading practitioners that inspired generations of women seeking to pursue architecture in a male-dominated field.

Doshi recognized the need to create the right built environment for the school where students were to spend a period of five (and sometimes six) years of education. He adopted the concept of an 'open campus,' freely accessible to painters, sculptors, writers and musicians, who intermingled with the enrolled architecture students. The intrinsic quality that led to the openness in space making was through the blurring of boundaries, which became the defining aspect of the school's architecture.

In many ways, the campus functions like a micro-cosm of an Indian city. For example, the transition from closed to open spaces on campus takes place through various kinds of thresholds that draw inspiration from the myriad ways in which open, semi-open and closed spaces come together in the "Walled City" of Ahmedabad. Typically closed private inner spaces in the "Walled City" are often adjacent to a veranda surrounding a courtyard; the courtyard then meets a semi-open porch which faces the open street. Similarly, the closed spaces of the School's studios are buffered from open spaces by unprogrammed semi-open spaces.

Life on campus is lived as much on the outside as it is on the inside of the buildings. The land-scape, whose prominent features are the forest, the lawns and the open ground, is master-fully integrated into the fabric of the campus. The dense forested area on the northernmost edge acts as a buffer between the campus and the noisy streets. This forest slowly gets less dense and melts into rolling lawns. These lawns are composed of two mounds or hills separated by a valley which were made by displaced soil during construction and have become one of the prized assets of the school. In the evening, hordes of students lounge on these lawns after a long day of classes. At the heart of the campus is a large open space with soft, unpaved ground where the annual dance festival takes place. On other days it is a football field, a volleyball court and the site of a carnival during the school's cultural festival. The texture of this ground changes from the dry sand in the summer to the soft mud in the monsoon.

The school building is sandwiched between the lawns and the open ground. It is an exposed brick and concrete building following an L-shaped configuration with parallel masonry walls spanned by deep concrete beams. The studio spaces are made by interlocking single and double volumes and each studio is filled with natural light from the large clerestory windows to the north and is shaded from the harsh light of the south by deep balconies. The architectural expression of the build-ing reflects Doshi's modernist sensibilities and is devoid of any iconography, ornament or symbols. "Indianness" is not a mere stylistic device but it lies in his acknowl-edgement of ephemerality, spontaneous and uncal-culated usage patterns, and the seamless transition from indoors to the outdoors. The architecture of the School embraces frugality and simplicity but derives its richness from meaning. Over the years, layers of meaning have been added to these spaces by the generations of students who have left their mark in tangible and intangible ways. In return, this school has left an indelible mark in each student's mem-ory, contributing to their growth during their journey as aspiring architects.

## SITE SPECIFIC
### SEBASTIAN LOPEZ
### M.ARCH, 2022, RICE ARCHITECTURE

The folds of this sheet articulate accumulations of thought.
Neighboring thoughts across a fold reveal gradations of intent.
The end of the sheet is not the end of the thought.
Edges and folds mediate between scales of organization.
The sheet exists within a field.
Accumulations of thought self-organize within the field.
The discipline reproduces itself ad nauseam.

## PLANS OF RESISTANCE: GORDON MATTA-CLARK'S FAKE ESTATES
### KOHEN HUDSON
### M.ARCH, 2021
### RICE ARCHITECTURE

The premature passing of an artist signals a loss of intellectual potential but also the rousing of speculative projection within the art world. When Gordon Matta-Clark (GMC) succumbed to pancreatic cancer in 1978 at the early age of 39, he had made the seven building cuts that form the core of his influ-ence in the arts and architecture, but his eventual stature was to be confirmed.

As an example, the files for Fake Estates, a project in which GMC purchased 13 micro-parcels in Queens, New York, collectedtheir attendant documents and tax receipts, and photographed the lots, idled in a closet for nearly 18 years. It became the role of the curator, historian, and viewing subject to narrativize Fake Estates upon its posthumous publicization at the 1992 IVAM exhibit in Valencia, assembled by his widow, the writer and filmmaker Jane Crawford.[1]

Matta-Clark's leftover spaces, as with his very process of land-accumulation, are often positioned as commentary upon systems of land use, valuation, and speculation. The land economics approach—while smaller than two square feet, high-light inconsistencies within an omnipresent, continuous land-use structure that comprise the framework of capitalism. In an effort to maximize the bureaucratic management and subdivision of space, the system undermines its own totalizing logic. Some residual spaces were not worth optimizing and therefore became invisible as the mechanics of the city, in its insatiable hunger for real estate (versus land), grew outwards and upwards. The tiny lots manifest as ruptures within the capitalist Gesamtkunstwerk. Perhaps more telling is that the city reacquired the lots in lieu of col-lecting taxes after GMC's death. Though unserviceable, the parcels remained privileged for their fiscal status: land is capital, no matter the size.

GMC was trained as an architect at Cornell. He participated in—and doggedly protested—the many practices and channels of architectural production, including a 'visceral' installation at the Institute forArchitecture and Urban Studies[2]. Perhaps best known for his volumetric interventions in which he cut, erased, and displaced built matter, Fake Estates specifically activates a no-less significant—for some the primary—architectural instrument: the plan. In working architecturally, GMC made ideas simultaneously in two-dimensional drawings and three-dimensional space. His real estate documents employ a series of notational systems, namely those conventions pertaining to plani-metric projection, which delimit spatial boundaries and serve as a means of information exchange. Within real estate practice, the plan manifests as both the expression and document of capital; it is legal and speculative at the same time. In Fake Estates, GMC instrumentalizes the plan for its resistive potential: it as-serts a border and legitimizes the space within, at once participating in the process of spatial subdivision while destabilizing the apparatus of land spec-ulation. In other words, GMC's tiny lots resist the production of capital as they thwart its total spatial conquest. His plans, and the spaces they represent, are interstices within the economic ooze of the city.

While O+B's philosophy of 'sense-making' does make sense, it arrives with a number of deeply proble-matic caveats. Some of these are embedded in the principles themselves that are revealed to be a conservative understanding of what a building could be and how to make one. For example, they proclaim that buildings should be "conceptually" made out of one material—a requirement that is increasingly difficult in today's constructive assemblies and energetic requirements. O+B advocate that a building must strive for oneness, a quality that comes from beginning with a conceptual whole, rather than a preceding nothingness to which various parts are added. In many corners of their book they support their argument by stating that because we live in a "fully polyvalent and non-referential world," buildings must do X or be Y. And, given our concern in this publication with the contemporary ooziness of consciousness, it is this claim—that we live in a non-referential world—that deserves the most scrutiny.

O+B situate their work on non-referential architecture as the latest in a series of architectural ideas, snapping a chalk line from Eisenman and Tschumi to Herzog & de Meuron and Zumthor and then to Koolhaas. We have, they argue, left behind both the modern and postmodern project, and now exist in a world where "people want to confront the complexities of life in a non-ideological way that does not embrace significance referentially"[1]. Because larger systems of ideology and consensus have been dismantled, and because ours is a "world without fixed values and rules"[2], it is incumbent upon a building to make meaning according to its own generative and consistent internal principles, rather than relying on the unstable, flickering values of contemporary society.

But do we live in a non-referential world? Surely political and religious solidarity have disintegrated, leaving many of us apolitical and atheistic, but that's nothing new. Taking a wide, panning look across the cultural landscape, it seems that our world is not a lamentable vacuum of shared ref-erence but, instead, a churning world of links, influences, confluences, overlaps, confu-sions, and imitations—it pulses more wildly than ever before. It's not that there is no fixity of meaning, but instead that meaning is all around us, swirling in its conversions between understandings; everyone must sort through it individually. Actually, we live in a hyper-referential world, and this too contributes to its non-ideological feeling. No longer yoked together by past dogmas, we are able to exist as individuals who assemble personal understandings of the world, as motley as they might be, and make the

## HYPER-REFERENTIAL ARCHITECTURE
### JACK MURPHY
### M.ARCH, 2020
### RICE ARCHITECTURE

"We live in a non-referential world" declares the first sentence of the introduction of a thin book bound in cloth the color of ice. Titled *Non-Referential Architecture*, it was ide-ated by Valerio Olgiati, renowned Swiss architect, and written by Markus Breitschmid, a Swiss architect who teaches at Virginia Tech (O+B, in this text). Within its 125 pages of clear and direct prose, it lays out a method for making non-referential architecture—architecture that does not refer to elements outside itself for meaning—in a distinctly non-oozy manner.

In a series of introductory chapters, O+B outline their position as it relates to the history of architecture; they introduce seven principles of non-referential architecture: Experience of Space, Oneness, Newness, Construction, Contradiction, Order, and Sensemaking; and they close with a final chapter about Authorship, in which they make a case for the neces-sity of single "author-architects" who conceive and make buildings.

The central argument of the book is that contemporary buildings should generate their meaning without the use of extra-architectural devices such as historical or social signifiers, and that they do this through having an idea that is "form-generative" and "sense-making," in their words. O+B articulate this claim cogently; if anyone is curious about the means through which Olgiati creates architecture, this book is a useful primer.

### ON THE GROUND

Wednesday 4/3
"You don't have to use a typeface to do bling. A successful typeface has a level of invisibility."
—Luke Bulman on the expressiveness of Futura's first design iteration

"How can you be an architect who never builds anything? Doesn't that make you a failure? If I never got any writing published, I would just be some guy with a notepad!"—Mark Oppenheimer on architecture and journalism

Thursday 4/4
"Why white paint?" David Bruce asked. "Painting it white makes it look like architecture," Sou Fujimoto replied.

"When in doubt, skew things," Lars Lerup mused during his farewell lecture at Rice Architecture.

"If you can't do OOO in Revit then your shit sucks."—Armaan Shah on trends in theory and design computation

Friday 4/5
John Hejduk was kind of like Chewbacca... Lerup going full Star Wars in conversation with Aaron Betsky.

Also, another choice piece of ocular advice from Lerup: "When in doubt, go out and look."

Saturday 4/6
A tired Richard ushered symposium guests into Hastings Hall to listen to speakers discuss death in post-disaster spaces within Japan. "I'm here on a Saturday; of course I'm tired."

"Honestly, if a cult were interesting enough I would join it for the friends."
@overheard__anderson

Monday 4/8
The school's badminton court was temporarily transformed into the fourth floor pit for Building Project final reviews. Congratulations Team C!

"Enjoy it! What's the point if you're not having fun?" Frida Escobedo and Heather Rowell encouraging their ARCH 602 option studio at the start of Charrette Week.

"You're born with only so many good design ideas. It's best not to load them all up in one project. Save one for a rainy day."—John Casbarian during a crit for his Architecture for Non-Architects course.

"Nozzle colliding with print, please remove—that cantilever is redonkulous." [Archstudent] mailing list message about a failed print on Ultimaker 2.

Tuesday 4/9
Turner Brooks guffawed at Miguel Sanchez-Enkerlin in his formal Career Fair attire. "I remember we used to dress up like this in the '80s."

linkages that we deem requisite for our own ends. In such a world, the idea that buildings require their own meaning still holds, as the task of signification is still an important one, but it can be reached using the oppo-site worldview.

O+B seem to profoundly misread contemporary culture; our current state is not about the failures of resistive islands but instead potential of the rising sea. We exist within the para-digm of neoliberal individualism, but we have the potential to be more connected and united than we ever have been. In not acknowl-edging the ooze of living today, their founding arguments grow stale; they age quickly and poorly. This, of course, doesn't even begin to account for the effects of media and economy that tie us more closely together. Consider that somewhere our online activity and purchases are linked together in some secret algorithm of advertising and credit scores; this is surely a type of referentiality that plagues contemporary living. Plus, if Olgiati truly believed in non-referentiality, would he use hashtags on Instagram to promote his work?

Throughout, the argument is made with a rigorous discipline that verges on meanness. It is clear that O+B are interested in de-scribing a practice that works at the highest levels of creativity and exclusivity: "A result of the postmodern ethical compass is to make believe that a group of mediocre people can become good if they work as a team"[3]. Additionally, O+B focus on the experience of space as a universal quality for non-refer-ential architecture, but they overlook the actuality that experience itself is embodied and therefore subject to the specificities of fleshy consciousness. Space, arguably, is perceived differently in a female body than in a male body, a tall body instead of a short body, a black body instead of a white body, an old brain instead of a young brain. This is not to support determinism in spatial experience based on identity, but to simply point out that experiences of space are embodied and are therefore subject to the conditions of the perceiver.

Non-referential architecture is a project of autonomy that seeks to further enshrine the architect with certain totalizing responsibilities, rather than acknowledging the vast energetic flows into and out of the discipline. The philosophy is elegantly ignorant on the variety of issues at work in the discipline that seek to make it more equitable and sustainable, satu-rating the tome with an air of privilege, as if written at sunset after a couple bottles of fine Alentejo wine in the courtyard of Olgiati's Villa Além. An architect who would opt to jettison these impor-tant conversations in the name of further entrenching the discipline's historic and enduring expertise seems like someone who might be insecure about the discipline's future oozy existence.

Architecture is unavoidably embedded within society and derives some portion of its meaning from this condition. Thankfully, there seems to be enough meaning to go around for both this and the non-ideological argu-ments of O+B to be worth-while. The discipline's enmeshed condition is a strength, not a weakness, a feature, not a bug of architecture's operating system. If architec-ture is a spark delivered unto the wooden sticks of construction, then the act's societal context is its hearth. If constructed well, it will pull and the resulting fire will last the night. If not, then its pretentious smoke will fill the room, despite one's best efforts. In all of their muscular declarations, O+B seem to forget that life itself is a particu-larly oozy affair, and that its oscillations over time change what space means and how we, at first as individuals and then collectively, con-struct its meaning. The maddening frustration of our current predicament is that there is so much of that frustration, that you can slice it up to serve nearly every viewpoint. Simultaneously the world is worse than it's ever been (in terms of wealth inequality or carbon emissions) and better than ever (in terms of life expectancy or individual freedom). Life is "bad but better," always.

O+B make strong claims about how to make architecture, but they land without joy. In making architecture, surely not "anything goes," but a more tolerable position about how architecture holds meaning for each of us carries with it the possibility of a diver-sity of ways in which space is significant and excellence can be achieved. In the fluxing flow of our oozy predicament, this basic declaration of expert plurality, of a cornucopia of potential meaning, seems an important one to stand by. Without it, the rest is slime.

1—Olgiati, Valerio, and Markus Breitschmid, Non-Referential Architecture. Basel: Simonett & Baer, 2018, 21.
2—Ibid, 22.
3—Ibid, 117—8.

1—de Monchaux, Nicholas. "The Death and Life of Gordon Matta-Clark," *AA Files 74* (2017): 183—199.
2—Richard, Frances, "Spacism," *Places Journal*, March 2019. Accessed 06 Apr 2019. https://doi org/10.22269/190305