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"WE ARE WHAT WE PRETEND TO BE, SO WE MUST BE CAREFUL WHAT WE PRETEND TO BE."

Kurt Vonnegut, Mother Night, 1961

Wes Hiatt: Let's start off with what got us talking about getting together in the first place. That was your reading of Eric Peterson's criticism of the US Pavilion in the first issue of Paprika this semester.

Cynthia Davidson: He said the US Pavilion was "misguided." As I recall, somebody pointed this out to me and said, You're going to be really mad. When I read the sentence, I thought, Eh, so what. You know, it's a kid. But then I thought about it later, and precisely because it is a young person who presumably wants to be taken seriously, I was unhappy, because he gave no reason for the dismissal. I like criticism. I like learning from what other people have to say about what we've done in this exhibition-what they find problematic, what they find energizing. To say that it's misguided, what does that mean? There was no explanation. It's just a totally subjective comment. If you thought it was misguided, it's better not to even mention it. There's a lot to be said by omission. When you don't write about something it means it's not worth a second thought. But when you do mention something you have to think about it. So to dismiss anything with one word I think is short sighted of any critic, not just this particular individual. You can't be critical in a single sentence that says, This went down the wrong path. Why did it go down the wrong path? How did he come to that conclusion? I would welcome that critique so that we could discuss it further. The Architectural Imagination will open in Detroit in February, so the more we talk about the issues that could be raised before we get there, the better. So I was disappointed.

I just came back from Birmingham, Alabama. I was invited there because of the imagination in the US Pavilion. Many people thought the work was really exciting-that architects are thinking about the city and not only planners. Architects have something to contribute to discussions about the city, and they ent ways than planners do, and in ways th more imaginative than an urban plan. There are so many issues that need to be

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dress the neighborhood issues. particularly City Hall. For example, it may seem small, but Mayor Mike Duggan has turned the streetlights back on-they'd been turned off when the city couldn't pay its electric bill. leaving

bring to the table with this exhibition.

whole neigh borhoods in the dark. All kinds of important things are happening there. Until Maurice Cox was appointed Planning Director last spring, nobody was really thinking about architecture at City Hall, because it can seem like architecture is only useful when there is something you need to build. But architecture is about much more than just building. Architecture is about ideas. It's about imagining new ways of habitation. It's about so many things that we tried to

Luke Studebaker: Does that attitude account for the scale of the projects in the exhibition? The projects in the US Pavilion seemed to be at a larger scale than most other work in the Biennale. Even if they shared much in common with other exhibitions, they seemed to present a different understanding of where the architect's skillset can be applied.

CD: The city of Detroit is 139 square miles. There's a debate as to whether there are 20 square miles or 40 square miles of empty land within the city limits. Of the 20 sites that our advisory board wanted us to consider, one was 165 acres. But we couldn't work at that scale. It's not an architectural scale. We chose the smaller sites so that the architects could conceivably come up with speculative projects that included program and drawings and models---completely new work---within three months. It was a very compressed time schedule to do all that. We also asked them to do this without a developer, without a client, without a budget—just to represent potential ideas. After talking with people in each community to learn what they were thinking about, everything that the architects produced was large-scale because the sites were large, and because the communities themselves have ambitions. When there are three different ideas for each site, you begin to have a dialogue with the community by demonstrating that there's always more than one solution.

We don't work for the city of Detroit and we have no intention to influence what's going on in Detroit. Our intent was to show the power of the architectural imagination, to show the depth of it, the diversity of it, to represent it through the tools that architecture uses, like drawings and models, and then to see how the community responds. We hope the exhibition gives a lot of people in Detroit access to a language they don't generally speak and then ways to think about how they want to see their city develop. In the context of Venice, an exhibition of this scope was pretty unusual.

WH: At the Biennale a lot of the other pavilions seemed to me to have the ethos of don't let a good crisis go to waste, that the world is in shambles and we're going to use that to our advantage. But, the US Pavilion seemed, hopeful is the wrong word, but ambitious, in that it suggested that architecture can have agency within a crisis mode, and that doesn't have to be just for Detroit. It can be for rural areas or anywhere. Looking back, would you see the US Pavilion as a critique of other national pavilions or of Alejandro Aravena's exhibition in the Central Pavilion?

CD: We think of *The Architectural Imagination* as ideas for Detroit that also have application in other postindustrial cities. The recent call from Birmingham is an example of that possibility. I don't think our pavilion was a critique of any other pavilion, or of Aravena's theme, because we had to propose our idea to the US Department of State months before Aravena was even named director of the Biennale. When people learned we were focusing on Detroit, they assumed we were following his theme because the city's recent woes are so well known

As for the other pavilions, like Making Heimat, the exhibition about arrival cities for immigrants in the German pavilion, resonated with one of the projects in The Architectural Imagination Zago Architecture—Andrew Zago and Laura Bouwman-proposed to resettle 68,000 Syrian refugees in Detroit over a

The many and varied figures, movements, and phenomena that have come into being or better visibility in recent memory make evident that the politics of identity have become a defining issue of our times. Brexit, Black Lives Matter, Trump, LGBTQ Pride, and the emergent, so-called "Alt-Right" are just some of the many close-to-home instances of this. And while it is necessary to state that these examples stand in no way on the same moral or ethical grounds, they all bring into sharp focus that our identities—indeed, the very facts of our being-are sites of contestation within the contemporary project of democracy.

The editorial assertion of this Paprika is that the project of architecture today must make room for the substantiation of all identities and the competition of ideas while resisting the cultural, economic, and political forces which serve to reject differences or deny equality. This fold seeks to understand how architects necessarily engage with the politics of identity and in doing so follows two parallel paths of inquiry. The first asks how architecture can work in the world to make visible and valid individual and collective identities. The second looks to how our identities as authors within our specific discourse can have an effect on the work itself. As Nader Tehrani points out during our conversation, this sets up a dialectic between the disciplinary and the autobiographical—a useful framework to inform our own specialized faculties. If the charge of the architect is to give form to the built environment around us, and if we are all indeed what we pretend, persist, submit, contend, or otherwise profess to be, then our discipline ought to be damn careful about what we pretend to be.

five-year period. Their exhibit includes a letter they wrote to President Obama about their concept. So, like Austria and Germany, the US Pavilion also addressed political issues. There are over 250 objects in the exhibition, and a lot of text to explain that these aren't Cinderella castles; these are real ideas for a real place. Even if they look overly ambitious to some people, even if they look like too much architecture to other people, they are all underpinned with programmatic ideas.

A(n) Office proposed to relocate a community in Detroit that's being displaced by the new bridge from Canada that's about to be built. In order to accommodate new customs facilities for all the trucks that come across that bridge, the city will dislocate 900 residents of a relatively stable neighborhood. So Mitch [McEwen] and Marcelo [López-Dinardi] proposed to relocate those people in the Mexicantown neighborhood by building housing, and associating it with a program for cleaning the air. Their project, called *Promised Land Air*, proposes to improve the air quality in the neighborhood, which is right next to a huge rail yard that kicks up all kinds of dust and diesel smoke. To the east of the site is a very prosperous immigrant neighborhood.

So there were projects you would associate with Aravena's call, but not evervone associated the kinds of forms the architects produced with these programs, which is interesting. What is it we expect? There was an op-ed piece in the New York Times this fall about the opening of the African American Museum of History and Culture in Washington in which Ron Christie, a White House staffer in the Bush administration, recalled George Bush signing the museum into law in 2003. Christie remarked on the administration's goal to overcome the "soft bigotry of low expectations" often associated with minorities. When I hear critiques about the projects in the Biennale-they're too big, they look like developer projects, they're too expensive. that's i community needs—that little phrase starts an itch. Is it possible that many of addressed in Detroit, and many, many people are working on the ground to ad-us have been laboring under a soft bigotry—something so soft we don't even

realize it—of low expectations. meaning certain communities would never use or don't warrant things that look on the surface to be so extravagant? That's a really interesting thing to think about.

Wes Hiatt: You've often referred to the Occupy Wall Street movement's role free—but that is not necessarily the natural order of things, and we should be in foregrounding the problem of public space in American popular and political discourse, noting with some pride that New Haven had the longest running Occupy camp in the country. How is the term "public" defined in this context and how has your work on John Dewey informed your interest in, and position on, Occupy and other, similar movements active today?

Surry Schlabs: Well, one very important aspect of public life that was set in stark relief by Occupy was the fact that very little of what we consider public space in this country actually qualifies as public at all by any reasonable metric. Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, for instance, where Occupy made its initial stand, is not a park in the traditional sense, but a privately administered open space, owned and maintained by a private company. Zuccotti Park is hardly unique in this respect, however, and considering the gradual disappearance of the country's truly public spaces—places for people to assemble, not just to exercise their constitutional right to protest, but to participate in the construction of common meaning, and community, through real engagement with other people-it should come as no surprise that movements like Black Lives Matter have recently taken to highways to stage their protests. In a lot of respects, highways—the bigger the better—are some of the last real public spaces left in this country. They are-despite their effective inaccessibility, despite the essential danger in occupying highways as pedestrians—particularly well suited as places of encounter between individuals (and ideas) who might otherwise have nothing in common.

Regarding Dewey, specifically, I've always been taken with his definition of democracy, which he equates more or less with community, and where he entral I actually think that this building, Rudolph Hall, and the current student body's phasizes the importance of face-to-face interaction between people in space as the heart of the democratic project. For Dewey, the public can only come has been opened up, becoming a void, which is in and of itself a really powerful into being through this sort of face-to-face contact between individuals; there's a physical, spatial proximity required in order to give the public form. Without that closeness, without a certain degree of intimacy, there is only distance and formlessness. In The Public and its Problems-a book I've returned to again and again over the last few years, regarding not only the structure and function of American democracy, but also the crisis in the humanities, and the aesthetic qualities of community—Dewey describes the public as being brought about "through the lasting, extensive and serious consequences of associated activity." It is, necessarily, an active phenomenon. What's more, for Dewey, the scope and the function of the state are something to be critically and experimentally determined over and over again; and while he may have had a great deal of faith in the institutions of American democracy, he did not equate them of view, of form—is a good example of what we might call democratic archiwith democracy, as such. These institutions may have served the purposes and demands of democracy at a certain point in time, but for Dewey, they were something that could, and should, be constantly interrogated. And that can only happen in the public square, such as it is. It can only happen between people

WH: And one could say that, with the emergence of Twitter and Facebook, social media is actually eliminating the public sphere, making it even more challenging to convince people that the physical space of engagement is necessarv.

SS: I think that's a really important point. As early as the 1920s, Dewey had its relationship to the public. How do you believe we reconcile the need for already identified one of the essential challenges posed by technological in- a high level of discourse with a need for more accessible ideas? novation in communication to the continuation of the democratic project. In his day, radio and telephone had granted humanity a previously unprecedented capacity for long-distance communication, and were heralded, like so many forms of social media today, as the harbingers of a new, and newly energized, form of democratic engagement. Dewey, however, saw telephone and radio not only as tools of connection, but as devices of separation and distance, too. Despite our access to these tools-to the telephone, to radio, to Facebook and Twitter-despite our tendency to understand these tools as being more or less congruous with democratic engagement, the meaning and aspirations consistent with the ideals of democracy too often fail to be communicated at all. As a supplement to other, more tangible forms of enaggement, these technologies have proven themselves to be quite valuable. But their potential for good is left unrealized if we allow them to replace the public square as a physical space, a real place of encounter.

WH: We often use convenient binary pairings of words when talking about at Yale-whose broader community, we must remember, includes thousands how architecture relates to its greater urban context, and how it affects the of faculty, staff, and students engaged in a variety of activities, both academic organization of people in space. Two pairs, in particular, seem especially ger- and not-may be relatively homogeneous in some ways, like general level mane to this conversation: public/private, and individual/collective. Is there of education, in just about every other way, we-the members of the broada difference, in your mind, between notions of the "public," as we've been er Yale-New Haven community-represent a greater diversity of individuals, discussing it here, and that of the "collective?" How does the individual factor into this discussion and, beyond that, the notion of identity?

SS: So. whereas Dewey defines the public in the context of democracy and community in terms of encounter between distinct individuals (and ideas) in real time and space, thereby *implying* the importance of difference. as such. for someone like

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Dewey's-the notion of individual differentiation is absolutely essential to the construction of the public. For Dewey, the individual must always be considered in the context of a community, the notion of the atomic individual being more or less a convenient fiction. It may have proven useful-primarily in the realm of intellectual inquiry-to conceive of the individual as an autonomous subject, but for him, that premise is false, and potentially even dangerous, as it refuses to see the world as it actually is: a diffuse environment of interconnected and interdependent individuals, whose identities are neither static nor innate, and which come into being only when set in relation to a community.

For Dewey, then, the loss of communal activity and actual, experiential engagement with other people leads to social and political stasis, the sort with which I'd venture to say we're all pretty familiar. Arendt, however, while not as fierce or explicit in her denial of individual autonomy as Dewey, pushes things a bit further, and views the closing of the public square as resulting not just in stasis or stagnation, but in tyranny and totalitarianism. And that's because, for her, humanity is by its very nature plural, the constant exchange of ideas between a broad range of essentially different others being an assurance of our common, worldly reality. Which is to say that Arendt-whose book, The Human Condition, comprises her most well-known meditation on the topic-defines the term 'public' in broad and remarkably generous terms. Though she stops short of collapsing the distinction between public and private entirely, as Dewey tried to do, the two realms remain, in her thinking, mutually and inextricably dependent on one another. The "public," in Arendt's view, signifies nothing less than "the world itself." It is, she says, the "world of things... between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it: the world, like every in-between. relates and separates men at the same time." So where Dewey may have rejected the notion of a modern subject, set over and against the world, in favor of a distinctly Darwinian organism, embedded and engaged in a host of biological, social, and political processes, Arendt explicitly acknowledges the importance of the individual to her world view. At the same time, however, she insists that by focusing exclusivery on individual difference-without acknowledging the necessity of a common world—the result is inevitably a sort of tyranny, whether it be social, cultural, political, or all of the above.

WH: Specific architectural practices and projects come to mind in their intention of offering the possibility of public interaction: Hertzberger's schools, van Evck's orphanage, Rossi's school at Broni, and Koolhaas' Seattle Library to name a few. Do you think it's worthwhile—or even possible—to try to judge the successes and failures of these projects in these terms?

SS: I think we can lay out whatever terms we want to judge the successes and failures of these projects. If you're strictly concerned with the form of architecture, absent any social content or mutually constructed meaning, you can judge these projects in one way. If your concern is architecture's relationship to a broader array of social, political, and cultural processes or relationships, you can judge them a different way. I think it would be a mistake, however, to assume that by framing architecture—by defining the purview of the architect—in truly and reliably appear." terms of form, you necessarily preclude a more social-scientific understanding of the way architecture functions in the world at large, once it enters built environment. What's significant about the examples you cite here, in any case, is Works Cited 1 Arendt, Hannah, The Human Condition, University of Chicago Press that they are all public institutions. More than that, they are all examples of civic architecture. That is, they are symbolic representations of collective identity, (Chicago: 1998 [1958]) 2 Dewey, John, The Public and Its Problems, Ohio purpose, or endeavor. The school, being a place of education, has a certain University Press (Athens: 1988 [1927]) 3 Giamatti, A. Bartlett, "A Liberal publicly-oriented purpose. School buildings-not always, but at their best-Education and the New Coercion," A Free and Ordered Space: The Real World of the University, W.W. Norton & Co. (New York: 1990 [1981]) are manifestations or realizations of that purpose, which we have in common. Buildings like libraries, likewise, are realizations of a certain type of community and its values. We all assume that modern cities should have libraries-that knowledge in the form of books and media should be accessible to all, and Surry Schlabs is a PhD student at the Yale School of Architecture.

CYNTHIA DAVIDSON LS: To me, that also has to do with taking risks. Having low expectations would mean not taking the risk to make a proposal that presents a new possibility for how to address a given issue, even if that proposal draws criticism or even falls short

of its own goals CD: Architecture has to be able to take risks. But I also don't think that architecture solves problems. The Renaissance Center is a perfect example. It was built to, quote-unquote, solve a problem: to get people to come back to Downtown Detroit after the race riots, when everybody was afraid to inhabit Downtown. And yet it was a citadel. It was a fortification. It separated populations. It persisted in segregating black and white. While it was like a

stakeholder, saving downtown will survive, it also was not the most politic of buildings. In addressing one problem, it created others. I think, though, that we learn from that. Monica and I never asked the architects to solve a problem. We asked them to use their imagination. We asked them to imagine a program that the community might benefit from and then to create a form. I think a lot of the architects looked around and said. There's a need for jobs here. There's a need for workplaces here. There's a need for housing. In fact, because the city has had to tear down so many abandoned single- and two-family houses, there's not enough housing that's ready to be moved into. You can buy a house that needs a lot of work for not very much money, but it's going to cost a lot of money to rehabilitate it and get it back online. These are some of the problems facing the people who live there. We didn't go to Detroit and say, Look, we've got this exhibition of ideas for you, pick one. That was never our intention. Ours was only to start conversations and help people understand the vast range at which architecture can work.

WH: As a last question, let's talk about the value of criticism. We started off talking about how, as young people, perhaps we need to sharpen our skills in writing as a form of critique. What do you think the value of criticism is to students?

CD: A good critic will draw your attention to different ways of looking at something. A critic doesn't just pick up any old thing-building, project, book, film—and write about it. There's a lot of commercial and cultural production that goes on that's never written about because it doesn't raise any flags and doesn't challenge how you think. Maybe that hamburger you just ate was good because you were hungry, but it's not worth writing about. Or that film was good because you needed to take your mind off your work and it made you laugh. That doesn't mean some critic is going to say, This raises some guestions about how we think about things. A student, however, should always be asking questions. And this is why you could say that criticism is important for students in particular, because a student's job is the work of learning. My philosophy of life is to learn something new every day. That's what makes getting up interesting and worthwhile. I like what I do because I learn from everyone who sends us articles, calls, or sends emails saying, What about this? Have you thought about that

Architecture is in the business, I believe, of making things a little bit better, even if it creates as many problems as it tries to address. To constantly be thinking about how things might be a little bit better makes architecture the most optimistic profession in the world. When you build, you're building for the future. It's always about projecting into the future in some way, for unknown future occupants, for unknown future activity. I think criticism also helps us to look forward in new ways and with new thinking. And it helps you question whether as architects you're making the right choices in your own work.

Cynthia Davidson is the editor in chief of Log and co-curator of The Architectural Imagination, the 2016 U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale

Nader Tehrani: Yes, it is certainly one of our responsibilities to make room for competing ideas, and tolerance is at the root of this principle. However, when tolerance allows certain voices at the table whose main argument is to established and we all continue the work to maintain it. I wonder what effect exclude others from the dialogue, then that becomes our defining predicament.

For this reason, some of these "competing ideas" cannot actually have equal standing because, by definition, they are exclusionary: their main cause is to alienate others and challenging their right to exist altogether. So when we talk about the possibility of an open environment where multiple platforms may coexist, it should mean that conflicting philosophies can actually come into constructing identity, effectively adopting forms, iconographies and even plan tangency without harming each other at their foundations. The basis of this types as representational means. His Saltworks project is polemical in materiis to enable debate, discursive practices that yield conversation, and even alizing this stance.

The rhetoric of the recent campaign trail, which is now forming the cornerstones of the incoming administration's policy, is one of the historical moments where the Boston Redevelopment Authority to essentialize its colonial era. flattening the dignity—and rights—of citizens in their diversity is being challenged at a history to effectively build an idea about identity that is monolithic, totalizing and fundamental level. Women, people of Mexican origin, the LGBT community, Muslims, African Americans and a range of 'others' have been identified as of the urban landscape in Boston is the result of this type of identity constructargets to marginalize. Nicolas Kristof's "A Confession of Liberal Intolerance" in tion, barring the production of knowledge, the research of new ideas, and the the New York Times of May 7th, 2016 makes a poignant case for the necessity of left-leaning intellectuals to enable the voices of the right within the academic context, but the argument also falls short of the challenges we face today, post This speaks to the notion I was discussing earlier: the difference between the elections, when the hegemony of the three branches of government can effectively silence diversity altogether through alleged legal means.

WH: One way of understanding how we may start to engage with this problem is for all of us, as thinkers and makers, to critically reflect on our own identities. You yourself have a varied and cosmopolitan background with roots in Iran, but an upbringing in half a dozen countries. Do you believe this has had an effect on your work?

NT: I am not certain that I have self-conscience y channeled my 'identity' as a significant factor of my work. However, as you know one can never suppress the unconscious, so even if one doesn't set out to do an "Iranian Architecture" there may be certain traits that emerge unconsciously that betray you. In this sense, I am sure that my experiences in South Africa, Pakistan, Italy, England among other places have also helped to form a consciousness that constructs **NT:** Well, I certainly recognize the importance of cultural differences and the identity in a more polyphonic way. Having said that, let's also distinguish between the disciplinary and the autobiographical. There are rules, tropes, and do with our subjectivity as individuals—somehow, they operate independent of that. To that end, we can speak about both and see if there are moments of tangency.

common language, I found my early years of schooling quite challenging—simply because I didn't have a stable foundation from which to emerge. This, in part, explains how visuality became a kind of substitute for literacy. Because of the heterogeneity of my background, I needed some alternative medium through which I could eventually come to grips with the guestion of ideas, and their ture—first through images, then through formal abstraction, and later in relation to words again

Having said that, my academic profile invariably has a lot to do with how I engage with the discipline today. Rodolfo Machado was at the helm during to read, translate and project an idea that impacts our notion of identity. my years at RISD, and I am very much indebted to the unique academic envi ronment he enabled while I was there. At a moment in the '80s when the Gay Pride movement was at its height, he provoked questions that were open, challenging and liberating-both culturally and architecturally. Maybe I was not that conscious of its openness at the time, because we took our context for granted to some degree; we thought that is was 'natural' somehow, but he was careful to pose questions that would make us question the very order of things, whether social or spatial. In this sense, he had a subtle way of insinuating the architectural in every aspect of the political events of the time, without making them explicit.

Academically, the question of identity was formulated around the problems of representation. In theoretical terms, the translation of Saussure's linguistic terms, the structure of the sign, the semiotics of Barthes, and Derrida's notion of 'differance' all contributed to the predicaments of the production out other ideas about de-familiarization and estrangement. As such, iden- architecture itself. tity was constructed not so much in static terms, but rather as a dynamic epending on context, audience and temporal positioning. Thus, identity, as contract of the languages through which it was transmitted.

NT: In the context of The Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture, where certain

and faculty of all ranks feel the comfort and responsibility of participation with

the ability to transform it's culture. So the political project of empowerment has

been a great part of my initial work at the school. I don't know if this gets at the

of participation is the first step before we even talk about space, form, or mate-

Having said this, the shaping of culture at Cooper Union has very much been

on my mind, and I would cite my years following RISD at the Architectural Asso-

ciation, under Alvin Boyarsky, as equally influential in thinking about the nature

of an institution. His ability to transform two row-houses into a hot-bed of debate

tly determined WH: Does the by fivethirtyeight Rodolfo Machado played to be the Amerin shaping the ican city most culture of RISD demographically similar to during your time the country as a there resonate with how you're working as Dear at the Coope Union today and

WH: But-and I agree with that previously at MIT? with one reser-Do you consciouvation, and it is

Indeed.NewHa-

ven was recen-

whole.

Hannah Arendt-whose work I've previously brought into dialogue with going back to the idea of withdrawal. I know that the vast majority of my class, while from many different places, will be injected into the New York system, the Boston system, the Los Angeles system, and that's in contrast to what used to happen in schools like ours: students would go back. J. Irwin Miller went back to Columbus, Indiana. Stanley Tigerman went back to Chicago.

very wary of taking it for granted. I happen to think that in some of Hertzberg-

er's schools-especially the earlier projects-there's a certain generosity of

abstract form, acknowledging both human scale and action, which invites and

even incentivizes a whole range of activities. Those activities, while hardly pre-

scribed as such, tend to be communal. Likewise, in Van Eyck's orphanage, one

sees a formal emphasis not on individuated program spaces, but on a network

of pathways, conceived to encourage certain types of encounter and engage-

ment. There is a generous attitude at play here regarding the development and

disposition of spaces in common and, likewise, a clear and assertive formal

sensibility. But I don't think these buildings are significant strictly because of

their formal innovation. They are significant precisely because they position

WH: It's interesting that you point out that they are all public institutions. Each

of these buildings does a lot of the work to enable people within them, perhaps,

to do more work, to resist tyranny. And that gets to Arendt's point, right? She

goes further and says that we have to come together at the table or in the build-

ing as individuals and do the work. In these projects, the form-I wouldn't say

that it overcomes the institutions-but perhaps supplements them and makes

the institution accessible through the architecture. It's still form that's doing the

SS: I think that's a very good point. I don't think it's enough just to provide

space where bodies can congregate. There has to be an invitation to, or ac

commodation of, a certain type of active, even unpredictable, engagement

use of it provide an apt example. Today, and for a long time, the fourth floor pit

idea: a communal, if typically empty space, to which everybody on the fourth

and fifth floors has more or less the same formal relationship. Yet its being

a space for all does not preclude the individual, or group of individuals, from

seizing it for a particular use, whether or not that use is common to everyone.

So in the ongoing badminton tournament, we see an example of students mak-

ing that space their own through a type of communal occupation and friendly, competitive engagement. In architecture school, we often hear talk of how us-

ers "activate spaces." an expression I really dislike. I don't think the badmintor

games staged in the pit "activate" that space. Rather, I think they exemplify the realization of school community through the pursuit of common purpose, no

matter how modest; in which sense this building-in its generosity of space,

tecture; of architecture that, while not being prescriptive of use or value, can

become the site of open-ended, even unexpected, communal engagement;

a place where common meaning can be constructed, and ever re-constructed.

WH: I would like to move the conversation outside our own walls and into the

world to touch on what I think is another important issue here: the accessibility

of ideas. In the academy we discuss things at a level different than what the

majority of the world would understand, which is of course necessary for a spe-

cific, informed, and nuanced discourse. However, this discourse may appear

disingenuous and lofty, especially when we're speaking about architecture and

SS: I don't think these two ideas-the notion of a high-level intellectual dis-

course and the application of ideas in the public sphere-are, or should be,

mutually exclusive. In part, the question comes down to how we construct the

communities of which we are part. The problem here-as always with universi-

ties, and especially with universities like Yale-is how this institution conceives

In the wake of the election, I've heard from friends, family, and plenty of strang-

ers outside of the Northeast that think we simply don't understand America-

that we're in a "bubble." The withdrawal of intellectual discourse and scholarly

activity into a highly-disciplined, self-referential, and often self-congratulatory

environment has certainly contributed to this vision of places like Yale as bub-

bles. But I still take issue with this characterization. The notion of a bubble, to

me, implies homogeneity and exclusion. And while the community of students

a greater diversity of identities, than any of those places heralded by many

on the political right as the 'real' America. And we are no less American for it.

its relationship to the community at large

form relative to dynamic and socially constructed meaning.

work of enabling.

SS: Yes and Paul Rudolph went back down South for a bit.

WH: Exactly. So while I agree that the characterization of the Northeast as a bubble is unfair. I do think that on our side of the table, again, we have to do the work and not withdraw: for the possibility of our architectural ideas to become accessible at all, we have to be at the table.

SS: Yes, that's right. We have to be. I think that for much of our time here at this school, we are lucky to find ourselves at the table, both literally and figuratively, with a whole range of others. The testing, and continuous retesting, of ideas in the context of difference and disagreement lie at the heart of a liberal education, and exemplify the manner in which values in a truly pluralistic community come into being. Absent any sort of thorough public and civic engagement with people who really disagree with us-absent the real proximity inherent in Dewey's vision of democracy—whatever value there is in sitting around a table, be it literal or metaphorical, is potentially wasted.

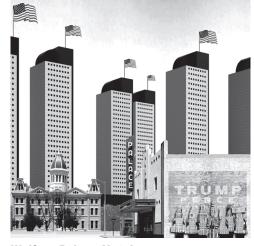
I'll conclude with a quote from Bartlett Giamatti, former President of Yale, that I think makes a very Arendtian point. It's taken from his address, in 1981, to that year's incoming freshman class, in the wake of Ronald Reagan's inauguration and the rise and energization of the so-called "moral majority." In that speech. Giamatti spoke of pluralism, which he associated with the values of both the University and American democracy more broadly. "Pluralism is not relativism," he says. "It does not mean the denial of absolutes or absence of standards." Of course, these are things that, still today, the political right accuses universities and campus communities of being: without principles and thoroughly relativist. "It signals", rather, "the recognition that people of different ethnic groups and races and adherents of various religious and political and personal beliefs have a right to coexist as equals under the law..." This much, I think, many people often take for granted, as today, more so than ever-at least in American politics and culture-those of us on the left have found it increasingly necessary not just to recognize, but to celebrate, the varieties of difference inherent in our society. But Giamatti doesn't stop there. Recognizing difference, he insists, is not enough. Freedom isn't a state, in this view, but an act, and those of us living in a free, democratic society have an "obligation to forge the freedoms we enjoy into a coherent, civilized, and vigilant whole." Here, Giamatti speaks not just to the identity of the individual, but to the necessity of constructing an identity in common; of asserting not just individual, private rights, but those shared rights which only truly come into being in public. In that sense, he echoes Arendt's assertion, in The Human Condition, that "only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality

Rvan Connolly Wes Hiatt Jonathan Riek We cannot afford to relinquish the agency of our craft to those who would use it for self-serving political gain. With the results of the recent presidential election. the issues facing our society and its primary institutions, architecture among them, were brought into shocking clarity. As these differences are laid bare, our identity as architects deserves scrutiny.

TRIPTYCH FOR MARFA

and construct a culture that takes them on?

riality, then this was my first act.



Welfare Palace Hotel I heard on Twitter he's going to put an end to welfare queens.

with the architect's engagement with the politics of identity and attempting to I am not sure I can achieve changes through the same means, but I have also position this as an urgent project in our times: today movements on all sides of been focused on opening up the doors of Cooper Union to other voices, to a the aisle are asserting who, what, where, and how they have their being. Do younger generation, and to ideological disagreements as a positive—and nec-

> WH: I very much agree that this must be the first step, and within the context of an education-and in particular an architectural education and studio culturethe necessity of equal representation is evident. But once that equal arena is this has on our making as we move the discussion toward form, space, and the possibility of architecture itself substantiating individual and collective identities.

> NT: The notion of identity, in architectural terms, has been used and abused in different ways throughout history. To name one of the more salient, the Architecture Parlante of Ledoux was explicit in the role that architecture may play in

> At the same time, in Boston, we have seen the way in which ideas about decorum, appropriateness and identity have been coopted by agencies such as without friction. Much of the way in which 'brick' is dictated in the reformulation testing out of intellectual projects within the context of the city.

> autobiographical and the disciplinary. All the work we do in the office positions itself with respect to the responsibilities it owes to its city, the advancement of spatial and organizational ideas, to material invention, and to what architecture can do through its own terms. The auto-biography of my background and education simply have nothing to do with the disciplinary traits that have their own instrumentality.

> **WH:** What got me interested in what you're calling the autobiographical was studying Stanley Tigerman and encountering how insistent he and others that write about him are about his Americanness. But if it's true that there's no oneto-one correspondence—if the culture one is associated with does not bear on the work-then don't we lose something in our reading of someone like Stanley's work?

way in which they can define a person's contributions to the field. Maybe nothing can be more American than Learning From Las Vegas, and yet we must functions within the language of architecture that have absolutely nothing to come to terms with the idea that its authors, Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, come from varying backgrounds and cultural denominations. My point was simply to overcome the tendency to essentialize identity as a form of ownership, entitlement and authority.

Given that I did not grow up with a monolithic background, a single history, or One of the most important traits of the architect is his or her ability to translate cultural terms into formal, spatial and material terms. In part, this is due to the fact that as architects, we are always foreigners to the very contexts in which we are placed, even when those contexts are close to our culture. In this sense despite Tigerman's knowledge and experience in the United States, it would require someone like Rem Koolhaas to conceive of an interpretation that is translation into substance. Architecture ended up being that medium, and in unleashed by Delirious New York to get to a reading to which an American many ways I could say I started reading with more depth through architec- author would have no access. That is the ultimate act of translation. We have seen this with Engels in Manchester, Durrell in Alexandria and Banham in Los Angeles. For this reason, whether in design practices or in interpreting a city, I maintain that one's place of origin has a limited ability to impact our range as interlocutors of representation. It is ultimately the author's intellectual capacity

> WH: In what ways then would you say your office's work engages with these issues of identity?

NT: I suppose we address questions of identity in a variety of ways. First, our work as a body does not define itself in terms of a single authorship; there is no style or brand as such, and our predisposition to work with varied morphologies, materials and spatial constructs produces circumstances that defy the singularity of identity. At the same time, since much of our work has emerged as a result of material experimentation, a challenge to the means and methods of construction and an engagement with the construction industry, much is its identity is also owed to the focus on construction systems, detailing, and material agency as the basis for its presence in the field. For this reason, much of the work is propelled by our invention of systems—or logics—that can subof meaning in ideological terms. In architectural projects, problems of type sequently be appropriated by others to make other pieces of architecture. As and character were pitted in relation to each other as a foundation to tease such, the identity of the work is in its systems, not necessarily the work of

terrain, where form and meaning could gain agency to release associations By extension, our appreciation of the cultural differences that drive 🐙 rent archi tectures has also produced work that absorbs local identities as part of its modu a theoretical terrain, was constructed, as much as it was rooted in the social operandi. And yet, even that does not explain the contribution of the work, because the work is certainly not exclusively defined by a reactive relation to culture, con-

> **THE AUTHOR AND THE DISCIPLINE: A CONVERSATION WITH NADER TEHRANI**

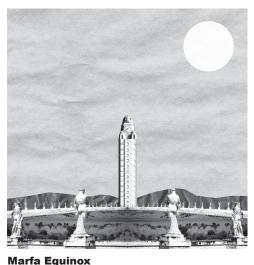
> > the years; instead it taps into the spatial, material and ritualistic aspects of human activities that gain currency in projecting identity through practices.

hierarchies were deeply rooted and cultivated, much of my first year of work Having said all this. I think discussions of identity are complex and problemat has been dedicated to creating a more inclusive environment where students ic. Coming to terms with the identity that Cooper Union has accrued over the years, has been challenging for me, if only because so many have tried to claim its history and culture as a foundation for their individual intellectual projectseffectively essentializing it for their own purposes. Few have yet to imagine that question of identity in the way you're asking, but if representation in the arena its history as a "school of thought" has had the necessary frictions that defy any monolithic reading, and as such it remains a productive and fecund platform from which to project new experiments. As such, its identity is open to the next generation's experiments, and certainly not limited by a reading of its history. Many have yet to become comfortable about their own agency in making this history happen.

was, in great part, the result of his understanding about how the lectures, ex- **Nader Tehrani** is Dean of the Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture at the hibitions and publications could produce a larger footprint than the pedagogy Cooper Union and a principal at NADAAA.

Are architects agents in the generation of capital ideology of Manifest Destiny. A typical small town. or shepherds towards a more open and equal the arrival of Donald Judd portended an explosive society? What is the identity of architecture in a growth of the city as an arts and cultural destination, drawing coastal elites to its private airport ally and demographically homogeneous and het- and veil of authenticity. Economically and socialerogeneous, educated and uneducated, rich and ly divided, local Marfans witness their hometown relegated to Potemkin village. The courthouse. church, and city jail, once indicators of civic order and American virtue are now the empty sieves of a

voided architectural and cultural project. Through the extreme lens of this small town, the condition of our divided country becomes 19th Century as a ran road watering stop, an oasis apparent. We propose three panels of appropriatcreated ex nihilo in the middle of the desert for ed types to call attention to these conditions.



If I don't make my 6:00 Soulcycle, who will I take to the saloon?



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Beach. Serving Sunday brunch 10-3.

nually during the week following Art Basel Miami

society divided into cities and rural areas, cultur-

poor? What is the role of architects as profession-

to face the expectations and challenges of a so-

passing trains, an outpost of the American spatial

We demand Architects have the courage

Marfa, Texas began its existence in the late

als and citizens?

ciety divided





identity plays a sly inject the schools in which you work with an awareness of present issues wider role, because it escapes the reductive iconographic bias it has gained over

text and commu-

nity; quite the op-

posite, its driven

by an idea about

projection, and

an understand-

ing that any work

is somehow an

imposition that is

motivated, much

like a transla-

tion. Under such

circumstances.