CONVERSATION WITH CAITLIN BAIADA
M.ARCH I 2018
ON THE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHING PROGRAM
NOVEMBER 8, 2017

PI Can you start by explaining the background of the teaching program?

CB The teaching program grew out of the Building Project as a way to reach out to the community and engage with both adults and children. Our first year, we taught 7th graders at a public school. We had lessons about site, homes, and representation, but realized that we were lacking an overarching lesson theme. The second year, we worked with 4th and 5th graders at a private school. The school provided a lot of physical and planning resources, but I felt like our impact was far less potent at a private school. These kids had a certain degree of privilege and already had exposure to design thinking. Even though a private school wasn't the right fit for us, that year allowed us to test an overarching course theme, which focused on Native American storytelling.

Over the past two years, I've learned to track what works and what doesn't work with different age groups and different schools. This year was more difficult logistically. The students had a shorter attention span and lower level of engagement than last year, and we had much shorter class periods. We started with the idea of democratic space in Athens. The students had already been studying Greek democratic spaces, so we engaged with something that they already knew. We look at specific architectural signifiers within the city—the Agora, the Acropolis, the Theater of Dionysus. We analyzed context, edge, circulation, and scale—trying to be as repetitive as possible with those keywords so that the students could then apply those concepts to an analysis of the New Haven Green. We took a field trip that changed to be more community-oriented in terms of its partnership with Columbus House. But there were critiques about how much group actual family house was really doing, especially when it claims to be affordable—[despite the fact that] everything is donated.

PI Do you feel like having to explain architecture and talk about design in layman's terms to students has helped you and your design process?

CB Absolutely. To have to distill concepts to their essential building blocks and to see how an untrained mind interprets those meanings is really refreshing. Seeing how a student understands something like a plan or section helps me to explain it more clearly next time. It's always a back and forth process. I'm no expert on teaching in any way, but I've come to really enjoy and appreciate it. Being able to empower other students has been gratifying. I know that Deborah started her architectural teaching career with an elementary school class and over time moved to the university level.

PI What is the planning process like? How were you working with the students' teachers?

CB I co-organized with Kate Fisher and Alejandro Duran (both M.Arch I, '19) over the summer. Our primary goal was to work in a public school and give design tools to kids that might not have access to them otherwise. One of these factors was telling us how important it is for inner-city students to design and problem-solve. A lot of their curriculum is very top down and task based. She seemed very happy to just allow the children to be loose and creative. It's invaluable that these students have access to creative thinking. Multiple students have said to me that they're interested in architecture and think that it's cool that we can change the way that we live through physical space.

PI The awareness that being an architect is a job option is often limited to students with more privileged backgrounds and educations. In that sense, this program as an effort to teach kids that architecture is something that they can do.

CB Exactly. I think even some people here in YSoA didn't know that architecture was an option until college. Now the kids at least have some kind of understanding about how they can manipulate variables to impact a space.

PI Or even to give them an awareness of the forces that shape the built environment that they live in.

CB Right that's the essence of it.

PI So when you started this program after Building Project, your intention was to spread community awareness of architecture in the same way that the house did?

CB I think we wanted to start the teaching program because the Building Project was so disconnected from the community that it was in. We wanted to physically get out there in the community and connect with the people that were living there.

PI Instead of being an "other" who had just come in to build this thing.

CB Our whole initiative with community outreach that year was to make ourselves known and not just make a house and leave, but to make a difference on multiple levels within the community. How does a single family home resonate within a larger context? Teaching us was just one of the ways that we tried to explore that. The specific goals within the teaching program were to expose these students to architecture as a possible avenue and to make them more generally aware of their physical environment. The Building Project's goal is also to make the community aware of different kinds of architecture. The teaching program tries to reach out and communicate these goals more clearly, instead of just building something with no dialogue about why we are doing what we are doing. I know that the Building Project last year changed to be more community-oriented in terms of its partnership with Columbus House. But there were critiques about how much group actual family house was really doing, especially when it claims to be affordable—[despite the fact that] everything is donated.

PI Is it important to you in the public schools that are sometimes lacking resources, to always have a theme that relates to an overarching social or political topic, such as Native American history or democratic spaces?

CB I think it's empowering for them to understand, on an idealistic level almost, that architects should dream a little bit and have ambitions to create change for the better. That's not everybody's ambition in architecture but that is the potential visceral power of architecture. They can be optimistic about what architecture could do. We want to engage them enough that they continue to be curious, ask questions, and think "Okay, I have this tool kit, now what can I do with it?"

JOURNEY OF THE CENTURY
ALEJANDRO DURAN
M.ARCH I 2019

In cycling, a century is a ride of at least 100 miles.

A cyclist trains for months before tackling a century, slowly building up their endurance to the point where they can ride the full distance without stopping. A century is, ostensibly, no feat for a novice.

In the summer of 2015, I was not a trained cyclist. In fact, I hadn't owned a road bike for more than two weeks. I had spent those two weeks exploring the San Diego County coastline in 25-mile sprints between my apartment in La Jolla and the coastal towns that dot the shore. College had just ended, and I had no plans. I thought that riding my bike would lead me to some sort of revelation; all my friends were moving away, and I had nothing better to do.

One day I biked past my usual stopping point and wondered, "What would happen if I kept going?" In Southern California the coast curves smoothly and gradually, so from any point on the coast you can track the shoreline until it fades off into a blue mist. Naturally this vista instills a sense of wonder.

So early one morning at 5:00AM, I mounted my bike and headed to my friend Cole's house. I knew he would be awake; today was the day he was driving to Sacramento to start his new job. When he let me in, I began explaining my plan: I wanted to ride to Los Angeles on my bike, a distance of 110 miles. At this point most people would have dismissed me as crazy and wished me good luck. Cole, however, cooked me five eggs and an entire package of bacon (half to eat with the eggs and half for the road). After some talk over coffee, Cole and I hugged goodbye, and I began my journey cycling up the coast through the "June Gloom," a thick marine layer obscuring the Southern California summer sunrise.

Cyclists usually wear a lot of special gear. Clip shoes allow cyclists to clip their feet onto the pedals. Padded spandex shorts prevent posterior irritation. Tight-fitting (Spandex??) jerseys ensure high aerodynamic performance and thermal comfort. That morning I was wearing some old desert boots, a pair of pink beach shorts and a baggy Pink Floyd T-shirt.

The first thirty miles were a breeze, familiar territory filled with foggy beaches and surfing towns. At Camp Pendleton, the friendly Marine guard advised me how to make it to Orange County. "Don't stop and stare at anything or we'll have to arrest you," he joked. At this point I was a little winded but not shaken. The bare chaparral of the Marine base seemed to extend forever. I passed a column of tanks on the road and the gunners waved hello. Finally, I encountered some other cyclists. Right then and there I blew a tire. I hadn't packed a tube, but they gave me a spare without hesitation. They even helped me adjust my seat. "Your legs need to be able to extend fully," they advised, "otherwise you'll get wicked cramps."

Around San Juan Capistrano, U.S. Highway 1 ("The One") gets very narrow, with no shoulder for cyclists. It's a little harrowing. As focused as I was on not getting hit, I missed a turn and had to climb a tremendously steep hill around Laguna Beach. I felt my bike wanting to pivot and do a backflip over my rear wheel. I almost didn't make it. My legs were wobbly Jello sixty miles in. As I crested the hill I saw something wonderful: an uninterrupted, sunny view of the coast all the way north with a long decline to rest my legs.

Mile 90. At Long Beach, I was really done. The sun was setting, and I had eaten all of my bacon. I started up the L.A. River, a long ride with more scrawny tributaries out there are a lot of tributary canals. I biked past Compton, Lynwood, and South-Central when finally, in the distance, I saw the gleaming towers of downtown. Every mile now felt like its own century. Finally I came off the river, stopped at Philippe's across the street from Union Station on Alameda, and devoured an exquisite French Dipped sandwich.

One year later, I moved to New Haven, which is roughly 100 miles from New York by bike. Within a week of moving here I mounted up and rode to New York. This time I had Spandex shorts, a nice helmet, and a cool water bottle—I still have to get those fancy shoes. I made sure to pack twice as much bacon this time.

I try to do this ride at least once a year, but I wonder what my next century will be.

Somewhere in the world, it's waiting to be ridden.

DIFFERENTIATE ARCHITECTURE, DON'T DIVERSIFY IT
MARTIN MAN
M.ARCH I 2019

Earlier this month, Dean Berke updated students on the ongoing process of YSoA's strategic planning. Presenting the general agenda set for the school in the coming years, she highlighted diversity as a prime focus. But forthcoming efforts to bring in diverse faculty and students must also be coupled with a critical assessment of the idea of architecture itself as it stands for this school.

That does not mean posing specific questions surrounding the status of renderings as representation or craft, for example, but requires interrogating the fundamental Eurocentrism of the conception of architecture which underlies globalized (globaltitionized, as Jacques Derrida coined) contemporary architectural design.

This is not merely a call to 'expand the canon' to include non-Western buildings and architects. When we address the issue of inclusion and exclusion from the architectural 'canon,' non-Western architectural traditions are inevitably labelled as 'Chinese Architecture,' 'Japanese Architecture,' or 'Islamic Architecture,' etc. without acknowledgment that 'Architecture,' without any modifier, is de facto taken to be the specific constructed intellectual lineage traced from Vitruvius to Brunelleschi to High Modernists like Mies van der Rohe.

Simply 'making room' for non-Western buildings in the existing discourse belies the operation of their inscription into the Euro-American tradition of interpreting built space as Architecture, and thus attempts to translate what may in fact be incommensurable spatial conceptions into one framework. Furthering inclusion within the model of 'cultural diversity' emerges from Enlightenment logics which presume the ability to categorize and compare different cultures of building and space within the same (Western, universalist) frame of reference to Architecture.

An analogous motion would be to subsume Buddhist metaphysics under Kant's a priori structures, something for which the latter is not equipped, and if attempted, does no justice to the former. Indeed, applying words such as 'metaphysics' or 'philosophy' to a Buddhist 'worldview' is already using concepts originating in a European context foreign to Buddhism.

In his 1988 essay 'The Commitment to Theory,' postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha introduces the idea of 'cultural difference,' in contrast to 'cultural diversity.' Bhabha notes how the rhetoric of diversity leads to an obfuscation of incommensurable differences and problems of comparability between cultures.

Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural 'contents' and customs, held in a time-frame of relativism; it gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of...totalized cultures that live...safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity.[1]
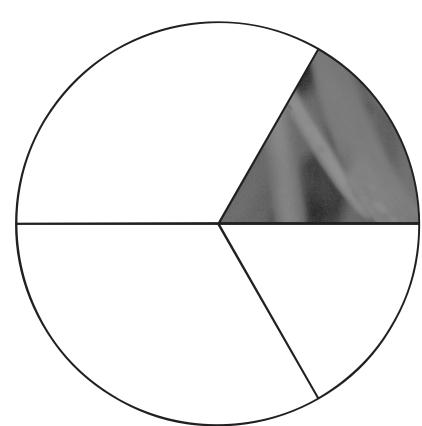
An acknowledgement of cultural difference, however, leaves room for certain impossibilities of comparison or smooth translation. Bhabha draws focus to the process of enunciation of culture—which perhaps can be expanded to include its performance through architecture. Cultural identification is reconstituted anew at each enunciation, freeing it from 'the homogenising effects of cultural symbols and icons' which may essentialize cultures as pre-given, static, and bounded entities.[2]

Thus, we should reframe our attitudes toward what constitutes 'Architecture' from the view of cultural difference, allowing architectural and spatial conceptions to contest and collide, without being subsumed into the dominant Western frame of interpretation.

On a practical level, failing to do this means confronting the fact that a more varied student body will still be presented with Euro-American architecture as what 'officially' constitutes Architecture. Meanwhile, architectural conceptions and histories relevant to their own community or background remain set aside as special interests in elective seminars, if not completely erased from institutional acknowledgement and legitimation.

Simply bringing more voices to the table won't guarantee that the agenda changes, or that they won't be subsumed by the existing conversation. Ultimately, it is disingenuous to invite 'diversity' without efforts to fundamentally de-center Euro-American architecture from our education and move to a model based on recognizing difference.

[1] Bhabha, Homi K., 'The Commitment to Theory,' New Formations 5 (1988): 18.

[2] Ibid., 19.

CONVERSATION WITH AMICA DALL (AD) & JOE HALLIGAN (JH) FROM ASSEMBLE
NOVEMBER 3, 2017

PI When you start a project with a new community, like the Granby project, how do you make the residents and community groups feel that a project is possible? How do you make them feel like they're investing their time and labor into something that will come to fruition and have an impact?

AD I think that it's really bad when we already have an idea and just sort of parachute into a place. That happened in Glasgow because we were working with kids who weren't in a position to vocalize, let alone act on their own needs. In the case of Granby, the community already had a set of ambitions when we moved in.

JH You should talk about New Addington maybe?

AD That one is complicated because the local authority set the brief, which had a social and a physical ambition. A lot of projects that come out of that kind of commissioning are geared towards creating the appearance of the public life of a square—concerned with the impression of activity. In order to do a project like that well, we knew that we had to understand it longer-term. We needed to answer real needs and to respond critically to the space. New Addington was a place that had been marginalized for a long time. We went into the office of the community group and turned the brief upside down. Instead of just delivering a renovated square, we spent a portion of the budget doing things in the square—building different things and putting on events. It was kind of chaos; we weren't really sure what we were doing. We had to learn a lot about how the space was really being used. We used to do something like illegally pedestrianize the street to enable a pop-up market. We were not out there all night long, stopping cars from driving down the street and then an emergency vehicle or something needed to get through. You learn in an immediate way that you've done something wrong. You learn about a public space in a really acute way.

There is this idea that public realm architecture can really transform a place, and obviously it can't. There's only so much you can do with a planter and some resurfacing. There's a funny dance between physical infrastructure and culture. This project put us in a position to think about what design can and can't do, but without necessarily being defeatist about it. This methodology—held up as a model by commissioners—is probably something we wouldn't do again, but we learned a tremendous amount.

JH Assemble has a distinct identity, despite working with so many collaborators. If someone recognizes an Assemble project, what are they seeing? Are they seeing the product of your policies? Are they recognizing a particular methodology? Or do the eighteen of you just have a similar aesthetic? Where does your identity come from and would it change if, say, twenty new people joined?

AD It's very interesting when people talk about consistency across our work, because if you put two different people from the collective on a project, then you get a really different project. We frequently disagree about approach. The only thing that is consistent is that people are always able to do what they want and develop their own interests. But people do go to the same people with particular tasks. If you want something cool, there's someone in the office [who's] good at that. If you are making furniture, you go to James, who has a particular way of thinking about structure, and those things ricochet.

PI Do you feel like you have expertise in-house?

JH I think now, maybe not at the beginning, we have some expertise. There are some really good designers, marketers, theorists, etc. That comes with time. We always used to say that we were amateurs. We used to call our group talks Amateur Hour. There are people who kind of know stuff.

AD That's a misunderstanding though. The celebration of the amateur is about deprofessionalization. It's not about shittiness, but about doing things primarily because you want to do them. Not doing things to fulfill aims that are not your own. The first couple of projects taught us to think in a particular way because we had to approach things with a certain amount of exasperated resourcefulness. When that turned into formal commissions, we had amazing teachers [who] pushed us and helped validate us.

PI Is part of your ambition to scale Assemble? Or present it as a model that other people could replicate? Do you want to encourage this type of structure or collaboration elsewhere?

AD It would be nice if people were comfortable with the work they produced, and were happy doing it, but we don't mean to suggest that our model is the model to be replicated.

It would be good if more architects were more actively involved in making decisions. At the moment, in the UK at least, architecture is very disempowered to make a change. In an urban project, architects come to the table so late, you only get to decide whether something is blue or red, and even that probably gets decided by planning. We'd like to see more architecture firms operating in a way where they can set up their own projects—deciding what they want to do and finding funding to do it.

AD Architects are working in an industry that concerns how our shared land works. You should be able to have more responsibility for the impact that you have and take more control over where you put your effort and what that effort perpetuates. There's nothing particularly special about our set of individuals. There's just structure that enables us to think about what we are doing and produce things that have an impact. It's not anything unusual—it's just what happens when people think for themselves about what they are doing, and have a structure within which their thoughts can be explored. I think a lot of people are doing work that they don't fundamentally back, and are deeply rooted in structures of employment. Our particular model works for us, but the important thing is that we are able to change it and do it collectively. That's what we would want other people to be able to do. Not to be given a model, but to have a model that they are able to define.

JH Sometimes, in the way that our projects happen, there is not enough critique of design. I worry that when you're the person setting the brief, you're incapable of also being the person to design it. So I wonder if Assemble should go about setting more briefs and employing other architects to do the designs so that there can be more critique to get the right design.

PI Do you feel that you can speak openly among the other collaborators? How good are you at saying, "This isn't good"?

AD Too good actually. Sometimes it's like, "Back off," actually! This isn't school; this is a real project, help me out.

JH I think when people crit more, they get better at design. But the worst thing to say to someone is, "That's not very good." When someone shows you something you have to tell them what's good, question what's not good, and suggest something better.

AD Identify the assumptions that the design makes.

JH The worst thing to say is something that you haven't really thought about, after only looking at something for two minutes.

AD People are getting better. Learning how to critique is as important as learning how to design.

JH We are all the same firm, so it's not a competition. When the projects get to a sticking point, they get handed around, which is healthy.

AD When it doesn't move around, you get bad stuff.

JH You always search for complexity. I think that's what makes interesting architecture. That happens through having lots of people critique it and having it pass through a lot of hands.
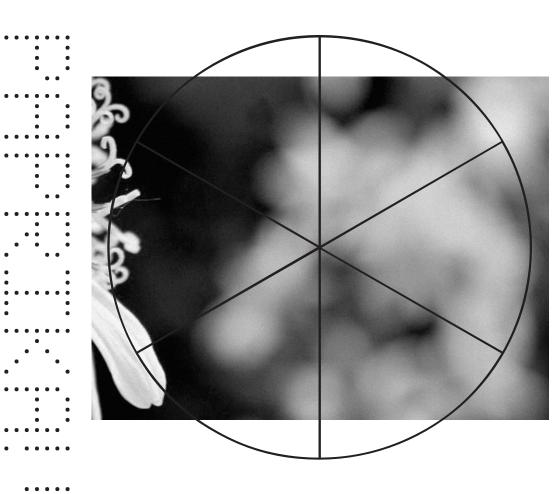
AD You make a decision that someone can't intuit anymore, but it's still there in your project. So there are those layers of intention.

JH You always have to look for friction. If something is too simple, it's boring.

AD When something isn't perfectly resolved, there is room for it to exist in the world. When it's totally resolved, you have total command over the form and the meaning of the design. When there are lots of competing ideas and it's porous, it can interact with the world in different ways and exceed what any one person might have imagined it to be. When a practice works well, all of these aspects are automatically generated.

EMPLOYABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE
KEEFER DUNN
ON BEHALF OF THE ARCHITECTURE LOBBY

Keefer is an architect, adjunct professor at IIT, and a national organizer for the Architecture Lobby.

The student contemplating how to move forward and make a living in the profession has an almost impossible task. In the corporate spheres, stable employment and working on projects of massive consequence come at the cost of enduring the lip service paid to the "power of design" while acritically serving clients. Small offices are often thought of as a healthy alternative to the rote work implied by a corporate firm but are stricken with their own afflictions. Catering to the wealthy is one of the few ways to keep a small office afloat, the other alternative being a precarious existence in cultural spheres where prestige challenges money as the most valuable form of currency. In academia, financial uncertainty, a hyperinflated belief in the power of discourse and technology to effect change, and a head-in-the-sand imperative to maintain autonomy, all thwart a valuable readiness to ask the hard questions of architecture. Even most architectural activism, what is now being termed "social architecture," fails to produce effective and active critiques as it focuses on alternate modes of practice that, although righteous and intriguing, end up perennially relegated to the scale of the local. For many young architects trying to pick and choose a path (or trying to walk many at once in an effort to balance the pros and cons), the experience is architecture as eye exam—rapid succession of different lenses followed by an unanswerable "better, or worse?"

Professional practice courses have by and large left this awful paradigm unexamined and unchecked, focusing instead on making students employable by equipping them with knowledge about the "the way things work" in the "real world." In a run-of-the-mill professional practice course the way we work now is treated as gospel from on high rather than a historical construction that has weight but is ultimately mutable. It's a gospel students are eager to take in given a justifiable concern for getting a job so they can pay for health insurance, student debts, and rent. Employability, the idea that one must always be striving to be employable regard-

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less of their actual status as a worker, has locked architecture in a death spiral. Firms put pressure on schools to train students in navigating a business paradigm that is unsustainable and ill-suited to the 21st century. Schools must ensure there are graduating employable students to keep a steady flow of recruits (the pressure to be employable begins well before one is a working age and job placement statistics are an important recruiting tool). Students must accept the reality or risk the kiss of death of becoming unemployable. The entire profession is put into a prisoner's dilemma where the possibility of firms, schools, students, and workers coming together to change a negative status quo to the benefit of all carries too much risk for any individual party; the result is that everyone loses because everyone must subscribe to an outmoded and unhealthy way of doing things.

Fortunately, many are now looking for ways out of this log jam, including the Architecture Lobby. Given the scope of the problems, our approach is by necessity varied. This has led us to organize into what is in effect a hybridized mutual-aid society, activist formation, research collective, professional advocacy group, and proto-union. On the professional practice education front we have followed the lead of Lobby board member Phil Bernstein, who teaches a forward thinking professional practice course at Yale. We now have several Lobby members who are teaching courses themselves and/or liaising with like-minded teachers. To this point, collaboration has primarily taken place through resource sharing and more general conversations about how to do things differently.

Those conversations have yielded a belief that professional practice could and should be just as lively a place for experimentation and critical inquiry as a studio or a history and theory course. We believe that the academy should take practice and politics seriously without simply indoctrinating students into the neoliberal workforce or ignoring its hegemony. In other words, we see an opportunity to use the relative autonomy of the university as testing ground for questioning convention rather than reinforcing it. We want to equip students with the skills and theoretical heuristics to engage with the dominant modes and forces of architectural production while maintaining critical faculties and distance. When such a distance is combined with activist organizing what you get is the agency and power to make the changes that are desperately needed.

CONVERSATION WITH PHILLIP BERNSTEIN, FAIA AND LECTURER AT YSOA
NOVEMBER 14, 2017

PI: Can you speak more about your response to Aaron Betsky's recent article in the Journal of the AIA ("'Architect' Goes to Jail, World Shrugs")? Betsky says that as a fake architect, Paul Newman created work that was "neither better nor worse than what some architects produce on a daily basis" and that licensing entities are the real problem.[1]

PB: There's a circular firing squad that architects always form around licensure. "It's a really bad thing." "It's exclusionary." "We don't need it." "It's expensive." "How come I have to take that exam?" My argument, as I argued in my response to Aaron Betsky, is that if you get your way and anyone can call themselves an architect, then there would be no architects, because in systems of delivery there are all kinds of good reasons to involve an architect, but the main reason clients do so today is because they are legally required to do so. If clients didn't have to build buildings around safety codes, they wouldn't do that either. In a world where lots of knowledge work will soon be auto-mated, what is the purpose of architects beyond guaranteeing the public's health, safety, and welfare?

Ultimately, a lot of the work of architecture, especially the technical parts, will be auto-mated—so there will be a large existential discussion about the profession in general, and the conversation becomes about our value. If we believe there really is something there that's important, then we need to go to bat and argue that the public's safety and welfare is a broader concept than just safety, and you need architects to protect it.

I think people are barking up the wrong tree trying to get the AIA to change their Code of Ethics. That would be a PR victory of no value whatsoever. Because the architects who design prisons don't give a shit about the AIA. What we should be doing is changing the definition of public health, safety, wellness. Imprisoning people in solitary confinement for 50 days in a row violates their human rights. And architecture should be about protecting people's human rights, by law! Not because of some ethical canon that certain architects choose to abide by.

Licensure is about declaring a minimal competency standard, but the reason you got to the table in the first place is to ensure the public's health, safety and welfare. So the question is, can there be a more expansive responsibility, legally? This intersects with another interest of mine. I think in today's computational world, it's possible to predict outcomes which you couldn't predict before. Instead of saying, "This is going to be a really great building..." you can say, "This building will be delivered on budget, on schedule." "It's not going to leak." "It's going to meet energy requirements." You can say, "It will increase the amount of time that doctors can spend with patients" or "It will increase the contact time between teachers and students." Being able to say that architecture is able to get specific, measurable things done (like improving health or education) is where the real value lies. The other dimension of the argument, though, is that licensure is not some extramural thing over which we have no control. Who runs NCARB? A bunch of architects!

PI: But certainly quantifying a more cohesive standard for good design is not an easy task...

PB: It's a multi-dimensional problem. One dimension is legally expanding the definition of the public's health, safety, and welfare to something broader than just fire and earthquake protection, then changing the nature of training and experience to include those things. Then, changing the nature of practice to actually demonstrate the value of your new definition. This whole idea of measuring things and demonstrating that things are actually going to happen is a big difference from how architects currently practice.

PI: What do you say to architects who claim that a BIM-centric workflow is limiting to design, or that it encourages a certain cookie-cutter approach to design?

PB: In the interest of full disclosure, I was the executive at Autodesk responsible for Revit and the creation of BIM as terminology. We made a commitment to build this weapon that architects could use to have more leverage in the design and construction process. When you hear from some in academia that it might limit their design process, I have to ask what about when parallel rulers were invented? Tools are just tools. You use them as you see fit. I was reading an argument recently that Modernism and its orthogonality was a function of the orthogonal tools of projection available at the time. What privileges that set of representational tools over another? The tool may absolutely have short-comings, but to suggest that it constrains the freedom of the designer is really a limiting way of thinking. It suggests that you can't use Rhino, a triangle, and Revit at the same time... and ultimately architects who are not very talented are going to be constrained by tools, and architects who are talented are not.

PI: But what about the mono-culture of certain software? While every designer may have their own set of drafting tools, there are few alternatives to a tool like Revit (and certainly no equivalent open source software). Isn't there something worrying that the default parameters of a piece of software are being used by 80% of architects in America?

PB: I don't disagree with you, but I read a study from Stanford years ago that 80% of the inputs to all buildings are exactly identical. There has to be a logical progression in a profession like ours that has no agreed upon logic structures. I used to argue that Revit is not a piece of software but an epistemology. If you accept an epistemological view of how a building goes together and the advantages of using a certain tool, than you have to accept the disadvantages as well.

It's also not an end state. New software is being developed at a very rapid pace. It's an incredibly powerful weapon to use to advance a design agenda, but instead, everyone is obsessed with the fact that they can't make a window exactly the shape that they want.

PI: How will software and automation change what gets taught in an architectural education? Will technological advancements lower the bar to contributing design ideas?

PB: A recent book I read on the machine learning phenomenon talked about this idea that technology de-skills people, that eventually there's no one around who knows how to sew a shoe or thread the thread in a loom. But there's a difference between de-skilling and not understanding what weaving is about. We teach you Structures so you can understand the structural dynamics of buildings, not so you can learn to be a structural engineer. I think it's important to explore the specifics of each technological innovation, rather than trying to generalize about the profession and the effect of technology in the large.

PI: So what is the path forward for architects interested in thinking more about the nature of qualification?

PB: I just wrote an essay for an *Architectural Digest* issue that explores the degrees of freedom available to architects to explore a variety of issues. All the other essays explored what it means to make "good" architecture, but none of them address what our role is as architects in the systems that produce any architecture at all, whether it's licensure or the supply chain. As if somehow "good" architecture or the ability to make "good" architecture exists independently from these things?

It's completely reliant on these processes. Either you understand and manipulate the system, or the system manipulates you—and I think licensure falls under that category. And it's not the design thinkers of the world who get involved in the nitty-gritty process of thinking about licensure today. Those same folks may be more interested in systems of delivery—the role of the architect relative to the contractor and other players like fabricators—since those constraints more directly affect buildings. But, they are all part of the same context that we need to engage in, direct, and control.

UNQUALIFIED HOOSIER SEEKS SAME
CAITLIN QUA
INDIANA UNIVERSITY
MAAA 2019

I am starting to think that preaching conscious unqualification might be the hill I die on. I spent four years of my undergrad digging into art history and gender theory—and I lived every day looking people in the eyes and willing them to make me utter the phrase "hegemonic masculinity," or make me explain why everything they thought about Gauguin was wrong. I was tripping over myself to be pretentious. Funny how that usually accomplishes the opposite.

In an evolution of self that I believe tipped toward the positive, I became sick of the show. I wanted to tell people about art without sounding like, for lack of a better word, an affected jerk. So I began consciously shifting the way I spoke and taught about art.

After dropping the act, walls opened up to me. Well, more realistically, I found myself stumbling, minimally prepared, into these new worlds. A good way to start being unqualified is to accept a job, one that you never applied for, via email from someone you've never met. Thus, I began to lead hands-on, collaborative art workshops in an elementary school in rural Indiana.

We looked at art my students recognized—Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Munch's *The Scream*. This was art they knew, and I started with these examples because I wanted them to feel like experts, like they were qualified to talk about art. But the real learning and exploration occurred when we looked at unfamiliar artists.

"Raise your hand if you have heard of Romare Bearden," I would say at the beginning of class. "No!" was shouted in response. "Does he have a beard?" would be the next question from the class, typically met with laughter. But once we flipped to Bearden's *The Block*, everyone was enraptured. They were confused together: "Why are angels breaking through that building?!" They thought about medium: "Why do you think he made that eye an actual picture—why didn't he make it himself?" And they asked me to zoom in on certain parts of the 18-foot painting as if I was merely manning the computer during their doctoral thesis presentations.

I saw engagement and analysis from 8-year-olds that I didn't experience in classes full of 21-year-old art majors. It made me question the nature of expertise and qualification. Through an earnest, curiosity-driven approach, these elementary students took far more away from Bearden's work than the undergraduate classes participated in because they weren't shackled to the idea of looking at art "the right way." Instead of saying that Bearden experimented with mixed media in rich and innovative ways, they said, "Well, my dad gets a newspaper at home so I could make this too." Instead of saying that Bearden placed aspects of African-American cultural history into the context of universal themes, they said, "I've been to New York and I recognize that street for real, also it looks like my grandma's street where she lives because of the colors!"

I see a real inferiority complex in Indiana. The presumption is that we are culturally behind—that our art will never be great art. It holds us back and, for better or for worse, keeps us humble. That day in class, however, I witnessed my students let loose from the equally unqualified Hoosier mindset, as they discovered that they could understand art, talk about art, and possibly even make art.

"Could we get your opinion about this piece of architecture?"
"I have no opinion on architecture."

ON VILLA SAVOYE: ★★★☆☆
"It doesn't look right for a family, but maybe Justin Bieber would live there." "It looks great for parties. It needs a swimming pool."

ON VANNA VENTURI HOUSE: ★★☆☆☆
"It looks pragmatic and conservative, like it can be assembled quickly to house people. It's ugly, but how important is aesthetic when people need housing?" "At first I thought I saw a cross on top. I thought it was a church."

ON HOLLYHOCK HOUSE: ★★★★☆
"Terrible lawn. The grass needs more nitrates."

AN UNQUALIFIED URBANISM
DAVID SCHAENGOLD
M.ARCH I 2020

Writing about slum urbanism, even if celebratory, tends to emphasize the fractured, chaotic nature of the physical environment of slums, as if they were mere splinters of the ordered whole of modern life. I suggest instead that the slums possess a distinct autonomous order in contrast to the splintered quality of life in ordinary formal settlements. It is not the order that constitutes a slum, because a slum is by definition a human settlement within the metropolis that has repelled, whether by accident or deliberate effort, the governmental practices that collectively generate an official place. But within the space created by this purely negative definition (the absence of full governmental modernity), one finds a distinct and positive quality, unrelated to the slum's negative character as a zone of exception. In characterizing this autonomous order, a slum is warranted, not only to avoid the obvious risk of romanticizing the objectively not-so-great living conditions within many (though not all) slums, but for the more significant reason that the life of the slum is characterized by a set of logics—political, cultural, religious, etc—that are structurally different from the logic that governs the lives of those who live in the formal sector. The political and cultural logics that order life in the slums belong to what a social critic might call "human life as such," unassimilated into the very different logic of modern globalized society, which offers administration in place of politics and a culture industry in place of a culture.

(It may need to be stated that slum life, at least in the Indian slums that I have visited in and around Mumbai/Bombay, is quite unlike what might be imagined by those who are unfamiliar with this form of urbanism: the quality of construction is sometimes quite high; in some slums most residences have electricity, poached with varying degrees of skill from the utility lines that pass nearby; some have quasi-professional police forces; most above a certain size have some system of self-government; some are full of shops selling all manner of daily necessities and pleasures; in almost all, the alleys are full of gossip and play. In short, the slums that I have visited are generally what Professor Garvin might call "mixed-use districts with a vibrant street life"—all of this simply takes place outside the purview of the formal state apparatus.)

I will offer an illustration: I was once spending the day following an inspector from the state of Maharashtra. The slum was to be cleared by the state's redevelopment bureaucracy, and its residents compensated in kind for the destruction of the dwellings, businesses, etc., that they had constructed or bought over time. In Maharashtra this in-kind compensation usually comes in the form of a flat in a poorly located and poorly built high-rise, and so the inhabitants are generally unenthusiastic about the process (though this depends on the particular character of the slum—some are so physically dangerous to live in that their inhabitants welcome the chance to be compensated for moving, even to a worse location). The compensation is offered on a pro-rata basis; that is, if you have a large house in the slum, you will get a proportionally large flat in the high-rise. Here the state runs into trouble, because the slums are illegible to it. The state has no cadastral map of the slum, no deeds on file, not even a list of who the property owners might be. In the face of this illegibility, the slum must be subjected to a formal survey—it must cease to be a slum, in one sense—before it can cease to exist as a physical construction.

And so, clad in the uniform attire of his office, cloaked with the full territorial power of the sovereign state, clipboard in hand, with me close beside him, the state inspector enters the slum as the embodiment of this surveying process. His function is to implement the algorithm by which, in its immense but finite subtlety, the government of Maharashtra will decide what each property in the slum is worth. And it is at this point in the process that the slum makes clear that it is not passive prime matter to which the state's procedures may give form. In the absence of the habitual docility before the state that we think of as the ordinary condition of human life, in the slums an altogether different habit prevails. One might call this habit "politics."

Politics is unfamiliar enough to those of us who live in the formal sector that it is worth describing what it looked like in this case, which was the collective, in-person appearance of nearly all the residents of the slum. Unwilling to accept the allotment per the state's algorithm, the slum residents followed the state inspector during his entire traverse of the slum, not to lobby him on their own behalf, as if in a state of nature, so to speak, but to hash out with one another what the just allotment should be. In the end, the inspector was forced by what one might (reductively) call the moral force of collective decision-making to disregard his algorithm and accept the residents' collective judgment as the legitimating process by which to compensate its residents.

It is not resistance, exactly, that is offered to the state inspector in this story. It is the autonomy of the residents' own political lives—which has nothing to do with the state—rather than hostility, that makes the slum-dwellers effective in removing the compensation process from the sphere of the sovereign's claimed legitimacy. (Antithesis, one might say, only advances the dialectic of state and capital; only an oblique movement can stall it.) No one in a slum is officially qualified to build, to police, to govern, and yet building and governing go on. And, in the space left over by the absence of "qualification," so does human life.

EMAIL Q+A WITH LATERAL OFFICE
LOLA SHEPPARD (LS)
MASON WHITE (MW)

PI: Do you feel that the value and expertise of architects are changing or should change?

LS: We have been interested in expanding the agency of architecture by, among other things, redefining at what point the architect might get involved in the design process. Typically, architects are brought in once site, program, and budget have been established. However, an overlooked bit of architecture is synthetic thinking—looking at spatial, cultural, social, and economic questions simultaneously. We see architects as possessing the skills of detectives. We see design as a mode of speculative research in the early phases of the project, when the architect can look at social and cultural context, site, logistics and other questions. This allows the opportunity to identify synergies and over-looked possibilities. In this role, the architect might help shape the brief and conception of the project, instead of simply giving form to it.

MW: The question and value of expertise are difficult, in part because Architecture is slow, both as a discipline and as a practice. There is more of a viscous, reactive change that is always taking place, rather than the fits and bursts that might be found in other creative disciplines. But there are advantages to slowness.

I would say that we are suspicious of expertise, or any claims to expertise. We think a more productive identity for the architect is to be an expert generalist—someone whose expertise is where spatial practice impacts or is impacted by external factors. Here I am thinking of probably the most influential diagram of disciplinary meanderings: Charles Jencks' diagram "Evolutionary Tree of the Year 2000."[2] Produced in 1971, it documents historical shifts as well as speculates (up to the year 2000) possible areas of interest for architects and shows the fluid connections between eras and external influences. Jencks revisited it in 2000 to reflect on its predictive accuracy.

PI: What makes you feel that architects are qualified to address ecological, social or political problems?

MW: It's interesting that these issues—ecology, society, and politics—are sometimes placed outside of architecture, as though you can remove them and just have architecture by itself. But, I don't think you can. There is no architecture by itself. What would it do? Whether an architect likes it or not, their project is participating, even if involuntarily, in an argument about contemporary issues. In some instances, even non-participation in a particular issue is a subtle positional argument. Architects must be semi-qualified for many things that they will not necessarily be experts at, since many of these things come embedded in the outcome of designs. Having an awareness of a design's impact on society, environment, economy, politics, is what distinguishes an architecture more accepting of its inevitable influence.

LS: We like Isaiah Berlin's metaphor of the hedgehog and the fox, taken from the Greeks. Berlin offers the contrasting characters; Colin Rowe later brought it into Architecture, in this way: the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. Architects cannot pretend to be ecologists or sociologists or politicians, but they can engage and learn from these disciplines in order to expand the agency of architecture, urbanism, and landscape. Recently, we have begun using and embracing the notion of being 'undisciplined." It's a playful acknowledgement of a critique that one may level at another. This kind of practice is not anti-disciplinary, nor necessarily multi-disciplinary. Instead, it accepts that questions may be provoked outside the discipline, although the methods of response remain within the discipline. Looking outside of a discipline is not to avoid its particularities, but rather to expand and clarify the questions and ultimately the agency that it can or does have.

PI: Have you been in situations where you feel unqualified taking on a particular problem? In those situations, how have you engaged other experts to support you?

MW: I like the anecdote of Cedric Price declining a complicated commission for a house from a couple by instead suggesting that they needed a marriage counselor, not an architect. How refreshing to decline work for human reasons. But, yes, we have been in similar situations very recently, and in fact, are often trying to put ourselves in this situation. I am thinking of a design-research project on e-waste we conducted recently titled "States of Disassembly," which took us to some very dark corners of contemporary life—our denial of our own electronic waste/consumption impact. We were consulting the United Nations reports on this and had a few conversations with a Dutch chemist who specializes in sustainable development and statistics and a German political economist.[3] I was interesting to try to find a common language to understand each other. They were perplexed by why an architect would be looking at this—and that skepticism helped us to clarify our intent. In terms of the drawings to reflect on the research, we decided to draw at three scales: the Earth, the territory, and the machine. Although atypical architectural scales, they were necessary to communicate the findings.

LS: In terms of how we work, we rely on in-house, in-depth research as a first point of entry into disciplines outside of our own. This provides a means of gathering information and knowledge before formulating questions about a given subject. However, depending on the length and scope of the project, we often consult or collaborate with others. In expanding the questions architects might grapple with, it's also crucial to recognize the limits of disciplinary knowledge. There are always limits.

PI: Do you see your work in a trajectory of an overall evolution of the practice of architecture, or as a mode of practice that exists alongside traditional practice?

MW: I am open to either interpretation, although we try not to think about this too much. I think we exercise a mode of practice that might not fit for someone else, and that is fine. We don't see our success as being about how many we can convert to this mode. Though our practice model might not make the most business sense, it seeks to provoke and ask questions about the boundary of disciplines. This can be risky, but a worthwhile risk, we hope.

LS: In 2015, I was one of the organizers, with David Ruy, of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture Annual meeting titled "The Expanding Periphery and the Migrating Center," which was asking many of these questions about the contemporary state of practice. We hoped to use the annual conference of educators to highlight the anxieties surrounding architecture being compromised by external forces. One observation that the conference brought to the fore is that it's not clear that there is a "traditional practice" anymore. Practice seems to be moving to a shifting and ever-expanding periphery with several niches. This is both natural and healthy to the survival instincts of a practice.

PI: In your opinion, when does building become infrastructure and when does infrastructure become landscape?

MW: It is an interesting question of taxonomy. However, looking for distinct categorical lines within any sub-genre can be frustrating. While there might be dictionary-defining representations of infrastructure and landscape, these increasingly exist only in theory. In fact, qualities of both have to be relevant today, because landscapes have to perform (like infrastructures), and infrastructures often need to masquerade (as landscapes).

LS: This is a tricky question—to define and distinguish that line would be ambiguous. However, I think we see infrastructure operating at a more territorial scale—it implies an organization with certain systematic logics. Buildings and landscapes operate within the scale of a singular site, although they often are tangled within infrastructure—literal and territorial—which makes [infrastructure] relevant to understanding their impacts and influences beyond the specific, bound site. Rosalind Krauss asked similar questions for sculpture in the 1970s with her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," by introducing, through a Klein diagram, more hybrid kinds of sculptural outcomes, such as axiomatic structures, site constructions, and marked sites.[5] These are also sculptures, but with maybe non-traditional understandings, and this opens an "expanded" possibility for the production of sculpture. In thinking analogously for architecture, there may be expanded outcomes with similar new categorical claims, such as productive surfaces, civic conduits, or spatial containers.

LS: The diagram "Evolutionary Tree of the Year 2000" is found in Charles Jencks, Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods (1971), and then later appears updated in a July 200 issue of Architectural Review.

[4] Baldé, C.P., Wang, F., Kuehr, R., Huisman, J. (2015), "The global e-waste monitor – 2014," United Nations University, IAS – SCYCLE, Bonn, Germany.

[5] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," October, vol. 8, (Spring 1979).

THE UNCREDENTIALED IN SILICON VALLEY
SETH THOMPSON
M.ARCH I 2020

In unpacking the mythology of Silicon Valley—fertile land of startups, software, and standing desks—the most enduring archetype seems to be that of the college-dropout self-taught hacker. In certain circles, an active profile on the coding platform GitHub can carry more weight than a degree from a prestigious university. It's easy to think that deemphasizing the value of traditional credentials might expand access to the technology workforce for people from more diverse backgrounds. But, despite Silicon Valley's supposed focus on pure meritocracy (or perhaps because of it), the industry remains predominantly white and male.

A recent study conducted by not-for-profit Ascend Foundation found that Black and Latinx representation in Silicon Valley has declined over the past decade.[1] Although Asians are more likely to be employed by tech companies, the study found that they are least likely to be promoted to managerial and leadership positions. Meanwhile, according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, women hold 23% of technical roles in Silicon Valley—and according to a report by law firm Fenwick & West LLP, only 11% of executive positions.[2,3] Although companies such as Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Amazon claim to devote substantial resources to leveling the playing field, it's clear that systemic cultural and structural barriers remain, from misogynistic and inhospitable work environments to bias in hiring processes.

The paradox of seeking raw talent and ending up with a homogeneous community runs even deeper—to the very ethos of the hacker culture that pervades Silicon Valley. To be a hacker is to be not just a good programmer, but one with specific personality traits: usually a sense of irreverence and a fierce sense of independence. Traditionally, hackers pride themselves on their ability to wield total control over computers and the networks and platforms they comprise. This ideology runs counter to a host of government intrusions—from patents and copyrights to financial and workplace regulations—and relies on championing certain American ideals, especially free speech and freedom from surveillance. In this sense, the prototypical hacker is one who holds libertarian political views and a stubborn belief that anyone with coding chops and enough ambition can succeed in life. Unfortunately, such a narrow and reductive conception of success fails to accommodate technologists who don't fit the preconceived hacker stereotype, face structural discrimination and bias despite their programming ability, or lack interest in labelling themselves hackers in the first place.

The danger of confusing the noble set of ideals in the technology industry is most apparent in the school of thought held by Paul Graham, founder of Y Combinator, the most prestigious Silicon Valley startup accelerator with a portfolio of startups now worth a combined $80 billion. Graham has a history of espousing dangerous generalizations about what has made previous startup founders successful, including statements that startup founders should be under 32, that strong foreign accents are "a really bad indication," and that women who haven't been coding since age 10 can't "look at the world through hacker eyes and start [e.g.] Facebook."[4,5,6] But one need look no further than a 2013 *New York Times* interview with Graham about Y Combinator's influence to understand why Silicon Valley is so homogenous despite claiming to be exclusively merit-based:

"I can be tricked by anyone who looks like Mark Zuckerberg. There was a guy once who we funded who was terrible. I said: 'How could he be bad? He looks like Zuckerberg!'"[7]

Indeed, the makeup of Silicon Valley turns out to be much less a reflection of raw talent and indifference to credentials, and much more a reflection of who venture capitalists feel comfortable throwing their weight behind and which stereotypes the investment community perpetuates as "predictors" of future success.

To the extent that Silicon Valley continues to champion uncredentialed access to the technical workforce, its focus should be on merit-based employment practices, yes, but also on dismantling the ways in which systems of power from seed funding to hackathon competitions support biases, prop up structural racism and sexism, and perpetuate exclusionary ideals about the nature of the true hacker. Ultimately, ensuring a diverse, welcoming community with equal employment opportunities for all will require a willingness to learn more about the plight of the disempowered, an uphill battle in combating workplace discrimination, and comprehensive reform of hiring and promotion practices—all tasks which require expertise, education, and thoughtfulness far beyond the supposed minimal set of self-taught programming skills needed to succeed in Silicon Valley.

[1] Levin, Sam. "Black and Latino representation in Silicon Valley has declined, study shows." The Guardian. October 03, 2017. Accessed November 28, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/03/silicon-valley-diversity-black-latino-women-decline-study.

[2] "Diversity in High Tech." U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Accessed November 28, 2017. https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/reports/hightech/.

[3] "Gender Diversity in Silicon Valley." Fenwick & West LLP. 2014. Accessed November 28, 2017. https://www.fenwick.com/FenwickDocuments/Gender_Diversity_2014.pdf.

[4] Rich, Nathaniel. "Y Combinator, Silicon Valley's Start-Up Machine." The New York Times. May 02, 2013. Accessed November 28, 2017. https://nyti.ms/10jyqlg.

[5] Lapowsky, Issie. "Paul Graham on Building Companies for Fast Growth." Inc.com. Accessed November 28, 2017. https://www.inc.com/magazine/201309/issie-lapowsky/how-paul-graham-became-successful.html.

[6] Newcomb, Eric P. "YC's Paul Graham: THE Complete Interview." The Information. Accessed November 28, 2017. https://www.theinformation.com/YC-s-Paul-Graham-The-Complete-Interview.

[7] Rich.

We students of architecture devote the majority of our time, energy, and money to the pursuit of qualification. What, in the end, makes us particularly qualified? A degree? A *Yale* degree? A license? And what then? Qualified to do what? At what value? In this Fold, we explore how those who are deemed qualified construct and defend pedagogies of education and profession, while those who are determined unqualified subvert traditional modes of practice. In an era of institutional distrust and broad uncertainty about the role and value of the contemporary architect, we ask, what are the boundaries— of practice, of architecture, of expertise?

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