JUNK DRAWER

WORKS FROM MY

One more addition to the drawer
In most places and especially in the Midwestern United States where I grew up, it is very common for families to have a cabinet drawer near (or in) their kitchen overflowing with a collection of miscellaneous objects – old keys, loose buttons, forgotten batteries – referred to colloquially as the “junk drawer.” This compilation of works is my junk drawer: an eclectic grouping of text, images, collages, models, and drawings that attempt to rationalize, catalogue, and explain the messiness of my thoughts, or my never-seizing process of researching, analyzing, collaborating, making, testing, and revising my critique of the built world. My efforts, progress, and humble successes would be nothing without the assistance and guidance of my mentors, professors, peers, and family. To them, I owe this drawer of junk.

– B.M.K.
RE: P.S. 64, Learning at 64 Scales
A Civil Postscript for Urban Institutions of Education

The last 40 years of dormancy at the site of P.S. 64 is a testament to the political failures of local government and further, the importance of the school building to the community of the East Village and Tompkins Square Park.

33 Thomas / Re-Wired
The Power of Translucency and the Adaptation of AT&T’s Long Lines Building

First a muddy swamp, next the city’s first major medical institution (ca. 1800), then 17 separate cast-iron and brick warehouses, shops, and lofts (ca. 1894) were all consecutively erased from the site of 33 Thomas Street for the realization of what stands today, a late Modernist sculptural indulgence.

Come to Hudson for the Cranberries
A Guide for the Decommodification of Suburban land, Small-Town Tourism, and Communal Boarding

This project challenges the popularity of weekender Airbnb/hoteling, flexible work-home relocations from New York City, and small-town tourism in Hudson, New York as a means of proposing a new social model for life in the suburbs.

This is a Space-in-Progress
Restructuring Terracotta Processes and Democratic Space

This exhaustive research of the terracotta facade of Liberty Tower (built 1907) in New York’s Financial District resulted in a daring architectural project which questions material extraction, civic space in the city, what it means to build, and much more.

That Floating Cloud above Avery Plaza
This floating cloud was the product of a collaboration amongst students, architects, engineers, and designers to design, build, and program a temporary commencement pavilion on Columbia’s campus in Avery Plaza.

Curriculum Vitae

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Curriculum Vitae
Dispossession reparation

All Roads Lead to Labadi
One of the greatest urban struggles in Accra today is the pervasive struggle for space between a now formalized, post-colonial governmental body and its pre-colonial, native populations. Especially for those historic communities living in Labadi, the Ga peoples, urban ‘dispossession has had a particularly devastating effect on the neighborhood... with some estimating that the community has lost 80 percent of its land to expropriation.” Unfortunately, most of this claimed land has been from the Labadi agricultural hinterlands, meaning the ability of the community to expand at an urban level and engage in agricultural livelihood activities has been greatly compromised by the construction of major nation-building projects, such as the Kotoka International Airport, large estates for visiting diplomats, and the site of the International Trade Fair (ITF).

Constructed between 1962 and 1967, the ITF was a unique project precipitated by the government of Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah aimed at realizing Ghanaian nationhood via an imported model of Modernist architecture, supplied by a joint Yugoslavian-Ghanaian coalition of architects and urban planners. Plans for slum-clearance and a new international fair grounds were eventually developed in the early 1960s in the eastern outskirts of the growing city, in the once agricultural lands of Labadi. Since the 1970s, the site’s importance in the city has fluctuated, but as obsolescence overcame the traditional model of the trade fair, small business owners began to appropriate the voids in between pavilions and the existing infrastructure itself. At 10:00 pm on February 16th, 2020, two bulldozers and armed police officers began demolition of those facilities without official notice to prepare for a masterplan project, funded by the Singaporean real estate investor Stellar Holdings and designed by Adjaye Associates. The Ghanaian government has since admitted its unjust eviction of the small business tenants and even sought to mend their relationship with the chiefs and locals of La for the wrongful dispossession of the land of the ITF with formal financial compensation.

This new site strategy seeks to extend this confession by proposing a slow, meticulous, and calculated site re-development project aimed at negotiating civic space and existing infrastructure. By rerouting the highway which cut Labadi from its agricultural land, we critique the masterplanning project. By extending Labadi’s density across that once strong threshold, we question the idea of what it means to be a ‘slum.’ By stitching horizontal voids back together and dedicating 50% of the land to agriculture, we mend a broken community and restore a condition of localized livelihood. By re-purposing the remnants of the ITF as a campus of schools, we seek to address a struggling national and local educational system.
Civil, colonial, and contentious Sites of dispossession, Accra

The Civic, Colonial, and Contentious Sites of dispossession, Accra project is a multidisciplinary research initiative that explores the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on the urban development of Accra, Ghana. The project aims to document and analyze the historical and cultural significance of various sites in Accra that have been shaped by the legacies of colonial rule. These sites, which include both physical structures and intangible cultural practices, serve as symbols of resistance and memory, reflecting the complex power dynamics that have shaped Accra's identity and development.

In the project, researchers employ a range of methodologies, including archival research, oral history interviews, and participatory mapping, to uncover the stories of these sites. The goal is to create a comprehensive database that highlights the interplay between the physical environment and social, economic, and political forces that have influenced the evolution of Accra over time.

The project also engages with local communities, aiming to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the city's cultural heritage. Through public events, workshops, and exhibitions, the project seeks to raise awareness about the significance of these sites and encourage dialogue around issues of heritage conservation and community development.

Key Map

- Civic Sites
- Colonial Sites
- Contentious Sites
- Key Map

Detailed information and further resources can be found on the project's official website, where comprehensive reports and digital resources are available. The project is part of a broader initiative to promote a more inclusive and equitable approach to urban planning and management in Accra, striving to ensure that the voices and perspectives of all citizens are represented in the shaping of the city's future.
How civic is a lake? The most important stake for the lake property owner is their claim on the surface of the water itself, creating a unique metaphorical and physical tension between stakeholders. At the same time that the collective is seeking more and more control of the surface of water, their actual knowledge of it remains superficial. Have you ever seen the bottom of a lake? The water surface becomes a fundamental backdrop for the life of the lake regardless of its imperceivable dimension. Crafts disrupt its crystalline surface to exert their command of its imperceivable boundaries and nondescript ownership while remaining completely oblivious to the real nature of its composition.

This chamber has been conceptualized to a similar effect. Four people are asked to stand around it and insert their hands slowly into its openings with caution of its content. The goal? To completely understand its limits in order to better understand our own.

Crowds gathering at the International Trade Fair Centre, circa 1970.

Masterplan aerial view by Adjaye Associates.

Demolition of over 2,100 small businesses, 10:00 pm on February 16th, 2020.

Round pavilion and access ramp in disrepair, March 2023.

Pavilion A exterior, March 2023.

Interior of round pavilion, March 2023.

Re-route, extend, stitch, and re-purpose.
A centralizing water hole

A covered public space that continuously reinvents itself.
Locally woven textiles and reclaimed Volta timbers suspend lightness.
A campus of schools at the nexus of agriculture and mixed density.
A new intervention of carbonized wood, compressed earth block, and local thatch techniques
Walking through the central market, Tamale

Ibrahim Mahama at Red Clay Studios, Tamale

Re-purposed airplane at Red Clay

Photo by Nicolas Nefiodow

Complete spatial hybridization occur in La, spaces for living and working, the front porch or back alley, and public and private are questioned, compromised, and conflated.

Assistant in the workshop of Serge Attukwei Clottey cutting petroleum-based plastic water jugs
A new programmable roof emerging from the existing ramp and floating above.
Slow, calculated, and meticulous urbanism

A campus of schools, a soccer academy, and a appropriate public space at the nexus of housing, small business, and agriculture.
33 Thomas / Re-Wired
The Power of Translucency and the Adaptation of AT&T’s Long Lines Building

First a muddy swamp, next the city’s first major medical institution (ca. 1800), then 17 separate cast-iron and brick warehouses, shops, and lofts (ca. 1894) were all consecutively erased from the site of 33 Thomas Street for the realization of what stands today, a late Modernist sculptural indulgence. In 1975, John Carl Warnecke & Associates finished construction on their windowless skyscraper at this address in Tribeca and until today, the purity and impenetrability of the AT&T’s Long Lines Building has ubiquitously captivated the general public and art critics alike. While exuding previous language as a firm dedicated to the architectures of Humanism, Warnecke & Associates proclaimed that this building was anything but one conceived for the habitation of the human kind: “This is a skyscraper to be inhabited by machines… As such, the design problem becomes the search for the 20th Century fortress, with spears and arrows replaced by protons and neutrons laying quiet siege to an army of machines within.” The building radically embodied this original design intention by realizing this unfathomable carbon sink, complete with over 24-inch thick exterior walls housing the long lines wires, 1,400 foundation piles reaching bedrock depths beyond 140 feet, and floors engineered over double to triple the average office floor capacity. Bolstered to even support a potential nuclear fallout, 33 Thomas is a monument to keep those privileged within – the machines – safe from the city, without.

Today, we have entered a crisis of materials, carbon, and equity – cementing a world in which indulgent forms of architecture for the sake of high art is each moment inversely proportional to the growing tons of carbon dioxide expelled into our atmosphere. We have entered an era in which the literal and figurative gravity of our material and conceptual decisions as architects have become ever more important to the future of our own very existence. 33 Thomas / Re-wired imagines the calculable and carbon-conscious execution of the seemingly impossible: plugging affordable housing and a robust social infrastructure program into 33 oversized floors of a windowless office building in one of the city’s most financially privileged neighborhoods. The first act was simple – questioning “Why can’t doing less be doing more?” – we have rotated alternating pre-cast facade panels to the north and south between alternating public programs on every floor, we have imagined the continuous vertical negotiation of program, light, and space. New mixed public and private vertical circulation cores cling to the east and west faces of the building’s structure, while a light, tensile, and operable ETFE skin is draped over the building’s new form to provide vertical circulation cores for perimeter units. Then, by sandwiching affordable housing units to the north and south between alternating public programs on every floor, we have imagined the continuous vertical negotiation of program, light, and space. New mixed public and private vertical circulation cores cling to the east and west faces of the building’s structure, while a light, tensile, and operable ETFE skin is draped over the building’s new form to provide essential climatic performance and render the building a ghost of its former self. New layers of material transparency at every level of adaptation radically invert the building from solid granite sculpture to habitable, translucent monolith.
Look Inside the Windowless New York Skyscraper Linked to the NSA

Previously unseen photographs offer a glimpse inside an iconic AT&T building in Manhattan tied to a top-secret NSA spy program.
WE COULD PAVE WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK WITH 19,000 PRE-CAST CONCRETE PANELS!

A 24-FOOT TALL WALL OF TERRACOTTA AROUND CENTRAL PARK!

I HOPE YOU AIN'T AFRAID OF HEIGHTS... THE GRANITE SLABS FROM 33 THOMAS CAN STACK UP 1,000 FEET TALL!

ENOUGH CABLE TO WRAP AROUND MANHATTAN 7.5 TIMES!
Exposed structure and translucent skins
The symbolic towers of a predecessor
45

Upper level Multi-purpose spaces, both occupied and empty, can be utilized for large community banquets, musical recitals, sporting events, etc.

Oversized circulation spaces between residential units and inner social infrastructure serve as essential buffer spaces between public and private programs.

Multi-purpose space on upper levels can be utilized for large community banquets, musical recitals, sporting events, etc.

ETFE skin lifts up at the base to emphasize its difference from existing structure and provide backdrop for public plazas surrounding the open ground floor.

New roof garden with public pool reclaims important elevated space for general accommodation.

New vertical circulation cores on the east and west elevations are attached to the existing structure like armatures, allowing the new floor plates to remain as open and flexible as possible.

Transparent, operable skin manufactured from thin single-layer ETFE typically used for greenhouses recalls monolithic massing of existing structure and provides essential thermal and weather performance.

Units adjacent to large social infrastructural spaces can be utilized as auxiliary spaces such as public restrooms, changing rooms, etc.

Church Street

Elevator Core

Collective Stair

Urban Plaza

Community Room Entry

1

2

3

4

5

Collective Stair

1

2

3

4

5

Community Room Entry

Collective Stair

Church Street

South Elevation

Cross Section

No. 035 | 33 Thomas / Re-Wired
The public pool on the roof
The continuous negotiation of program, light, and space.
His bedroom, here

Operability

Her apartment, here
Collective void space
Productive –Urbia
A Model for Regenerative Housing and Urban Production

Block 2398, between E 151 & E 152 ST, Bronx, NY
Academic Project, Unbuilt
Fall 2021, CORE III
Instructor: Esteban de Backer
Team: Blake Kem + Min Soo Jeon

From the turn of the 20th century until the eve of the Great Depression, the Bronx welcomed a six-fold population boom. Jewish, Germans, Irish, French, Polish, and Italian immigrants escaped the perils of dense Manhattan to seek better opportunities and the simple pleasures of an idealized rural Arcadia. Although, New York City’s unrelenting growth quickly consumed these rural visions of the Bronx. The seminal social, geographical, economic, and physical history of the Bronx’s urban history, like the late 1970s era of vacancies, demolitions, and fires, are displayed today across its varied urban landscape. Historical chapters are demarcated by varying scales of urban space: tall slender housing projects in the park with desolate intermediate spaces are followed by tight, street-facing homes and mixed-use affordable apartment buildings. This new urban housing model synthesizes these many urban realities into one, centering agricultural production at the heart of the way we live to address the ancestral past of these immigrants and re-situate underutilized urban space as a productive asset. Furthermore, this model of urban production and affordable housing seeks to undo the spatial, social, and historical inequities of the contemporary Bronx, proposing alternative solutions for joblessness, food accessibility, and affordable housing and eroding the city’s reliance on its hinterlands as the sole producer of its sustenance (an important conclusion of Rem Koolhaas and Samir Bantal’s exhibition, Countryside, The Future).

The architectural solution addresses these concerns by situating production at the center of the model of the way urbanites live. In addition to the large urban farm occupying the inner void of the block, community-centered programs in large, flexible storefronts at the street level act as producers of a safe, social, and urban neighborhood. The units floating above are each supported by a productive service wall, allowing universal access to water, electricity, and mechanical along its entire length from corridor to living spaces to façade, where a system of hanging planters shade the interior spaces and provide optimal space for planting. The terrace of the podium, with its integrated service slab, acts as the culminating spatial facilitator between public and private with ample space provided for a market, celebration space, playground, and much more. The intermediate space between each vertical layer of the urban realm and the existing buildings at large are stitched together by simple pre-tensioned concrete slabs, providing a basic, open framework for a highly efficient, yet flexible mix of targeted housing units.
Antecedents of food production on site

Mishka Henner, “Centerfire Feedyard”, Feedlots, 2012-2013


South Bronx Community Garden, adjacent to site

Countryside, the Future (2020)

Diagrammed diversity of the collective farm
“An ‘irreparable rift’ (rupture) emerged in the metabolic interaction between humans and the earth, one that was only intensified by large-scale agriculture, long-distance trade, massive urban growth, and large and growing synthetic inputs (chemical fertilizers) into the soil. **The pursuit of profit sacrificed reinvestment in the land, causing the degradation of nature through depleting the soil of necessary nutrients and despoiling cities with the accumulation of waste as pollution.** The metabolic rift was deepened and extended with time, as capitalism systematically violated the basic conditions of sustainability on an increasingly large scale (both internally and externally), through soil intensification and global transportation of nutrients, food, and fiber.

To make matters worse, the ongoing development of capitalism continues to intensify the rift in agriculture and creates rifts in other realms of the society-nature relationship... food production has increased through expanding agricultural production to less fertile land – depleting the nutrients in these areas – and through the incorporation of large quantities of oil used in the synthesis of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, contributing to the carbon rift.”
Rational aggregation of diverse units into an efficiently ordered bar program.
An active front elevation facing the street
Infrastructural service spaces connecting street and inner block

A productive, affordable unit

A productive podium for exchange and culture
A productive, urban farm embedded in the city block.
Suspended solid, interconnected voids
RE: P.S. 64, Learning at 64 Scales
A Civil Postscript for Urban Institutions of Education

At the same time that P.S. 64 is physically resembles other schools built in New York City at the turn of the century, the building has been “formally” vacant since 1977 when the public school closed its doors due to economic turmoil and budget cuts. Since then, the property has changed owners, sold at auction, and been occupied by various groups, eventually becoming the Charas/El Bohio Cultural Center in the late 1990s and later, an informal shelter for many homeless individuals. The last 40 years of dormancy is a testament to the political failures of the local government and further, the importance of the building to the community of the East Village/Tompkins Square Park. In a similar vein, the basic spatial design of the classroom and the school has remain unchallenged in the United States for over a century. Institutions of education around the country, even after decades of spatial explorations like the “open-classroom” phase of the 1970s, continue to propagate the long-held spatial model of regularly arranged 20 to 30 person classrooms designed for the traditional pedagogical model of didactic instruction. Students are generally passive listeners and neither the content nor the knowledge of the teacher are questioned. This homogeneous model has and continues to underestimate the neurodiversity of the modern child and more specificity, the racial diversity of a neighborhood like New York’s East Village.

RE: P.S. 64, a new school for Pre-K through 8th graders, considers most earnestly the generative powers of difference and diversity. It deeply questions the traditional distinctions we find in modern institutions of education including the power struggles between teacher and pupil, classroom and corridor, school and its surroundings. The architectural solution acknowledges the local memory of the existing load-bearing masonry shell by constructing programmable cross-laminated timber (CLT) volumes within, around, and through the existing shell. The interior volumes, along with a inclined circulatory path, are arranged like an intricate three-dimensional puzzle to realize diverse spatial relationships and continuously question the defined boundaries of the traditional school, upending the traditional distinction between class and corridor and the power struggles that come along with. Now, students are welcome to learn, play, and teach in the irregular spaces created as a result of the programmed volumes, the absence of building and the buffer between corridor and classroom being the most radical and constructive space for the contemporary school and neurodiverse child. The volumes are clarified from the street by new, transparent window frames and rely on new concrete frames for structural support and façade stabilization. With new urban plaza designs along 9th and 10th streets, with more programmable volumes emerging from the depths of the neighborhood theatre in the basement, the project becomes a statement on questioning the modern school in, out, and around the void of this highly-treasured West Village artifact.
Who has walked these steps?, 2021
Ball park after a rain, 2021
Today from the street, 2021
El Barrio occupation, 1977
New developer plans, 2006
El Bohio occupation, 1977
School assembly, 1915
Finishing touches on a new school, 1906
C.B.J Snyder, 1900
Development, 1920
Spatial matrix at 64 scales

Spatial hierarchy of plan and section

A spatial prototype

Dry-stacked, suspended blocks
Corridor vs. class, back
The corridor is also a classroom
The mask
Revealing the insides
Naked blocks
Corridor vs. class, front
A unique sectional experience
A tectonic solution
Suspended solid, interconnected voids
Come to Hudson for the Cranberries
A Guide for the Decommodification of Suburban land, Small-Town Tourism, and Communal Boarding

Multiple Sites, Hudson, NY
Academic Project, Unbuilt
Spring 2022, ADV IV
Instructor: Alessandro Orsini

The array of vacant infrastructure, persistent historical homes, and unproductive ecological assets in the urban core of Hudson, New York provide a clear lens to understand the city’s historical transformation from productive mercantile waterfront to small town tourist destination. Once the harbinger of an elite class of whalers, an underground red light district, and the region’s most affluent housing stock, Hudson fell victim to the most destructive eras of mid-century suburban sprawl and later, urban renewal. Promoted by its picturesque views of the river, relative distance from major urban centers in New York state, and strong culture of antiquing, the city today has seen a complete population resurgence since the strongest waves of the recent pandemic. A new commons of communal work and boarding seeks to undo decades of suburban commodification and modern tourism-fueled gentrification by providing universal access to shelter (through boarding), food (through sustainable land cultivation), education (through ecological stewardship), and work (through craft workshops) to re-situate the productive, suburban human within a process of revival, habitation, and engagement. As a result, this long-term model of intervention seeks to promote decommodified forms of land tenure, cooperation, and care, demoting the disengaged, homogeneous, and gentrified culture of small town tourism.

Principally, the architectural solutions holistically address the transience phenomenon in Hudson by creating a new “labor house” program, a synthesis of the boarding house and artist housing types, and configuring scaffolds amongst existing commercial structures, domestic homes, and vacant land to address the uncompromising popularity of weekender Airbnb/hoteling, flexible work-home relocations from New York City, and Hudson’s unmitigated economic reliance on small-town tourism. The labor house promotes new interactions amongst daily, monthly, and long-term guests, encouraging diverse forms of suburban living and unlocking the under-appreciated ecological resources of Hudson as productive assets of a new suburban commons. Six tool kits at varying sizes, scales, and levels of intervention were developed as a universal guide for Hudson’s decommodification. At their core, each scaffolding intervention seeks to dissolve the hierarchies of the traditional suburban spatial layout by radically relegating private space, providing universal access to an open-air central hall, promoting communal living spaces, and offering cooperative space for work. The “frame” logic explored differently in each toolkit intervention seeks to define a flexible model for user appropriation while preserving a consistent design aesthetic. The flexibility of the labor house typology itself is designed to react to future fluctuations in Hudson’s patterns of settlement and work, engendering a long-term counteraction against the proprietary logic of suburban land, returning it to a basic, inalienable right of the commons.
Fomented once again by Rem Koolhaas and Samir Bantal’s exhibition, Countryside, The Future, and further reinvigorated by the side effects of the pandemic, the romantic views of the hinterlands still prevail today in the mind and hearts of all urbanites. The Countryside exhibit was most successful at reminding urban dwellers that the countryside, since its turn to industrialization, has been conceived of as a supportive and productive appendage to the city. Leo Marx historicizes this idea quite clearly in the literature of America’s most famous writers like Hawthorne, Whitman, Twain, and Hemingway in The Machine in the Garden. He writes, “The soft veil of nostalgia that hangs over our urbanized landscape is largely a vestige of the once dominant image of an undefiled, green republic, a quiet land of forest, villages, and farms dedicated to the pursuit of happiness.”

The beginnings of an industrialized rurality is described best by Dolores Hayden in Building Suburbia (2004). She chronicles the beginning of the nineteenth-century as setting the stage for a massive urban exodus and the romantic views of the hinterlands, as diametrically opposed to the life of the city. Propagated by popular early texts like Andrew Jackson Downing’s Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening (1841) and Catharine and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s The American Woman’s Home (1869), the hinterlands were a physical and moral escape from the perils, uncleanliness, and congestion of the city, providing pure air, access to gardens, meadows for children to play, lanes for women to walk safely, and trees for summer shade. The complete commodification of suburban land developed later when the advent of novel modes of transportation (omnibus, horsecars, steamboats, and steam locomotives) shortened the commuting distances of domestic families seeking both refuge in the suburbs and work in the city. As Downing explains, the commodification of land and the moral benefits of owning a ‘significant’ home were deeply intertwined: “a good house (and by this I mean a fitting, tasteful, and significant dwelling) is a powerful means of civilization.”

The powerful means of the original suburbs was rooted in the idea of a triple dream: house, land, and community - the criteria for the development of the earliest suburban communities, called ‘picturesque enclaves.’ Whereas Downing and Beecher had naively imagined the future borderlands as large, expansive rural estates, the quick popularization of rural life incentivized early land speculators to conceive of the earliest suburban developments, dedicating substantial space to harmonious association and cooperation: “These were entire new communities with curving roads that followed irregular local topography. Houses were sited amid heavy planting adjacent to shared parks and other common spaces so that they appeared to be wrapped in greenery.” However, profit-driven land exploitation, a housing crisis, government incentivized programs of the pre-war and inter-war periods, and post-war economic boom culminated in a homogeneous model of suburban domestic settlement, optimized by the iconic suburban model of Levittown in 1947.

Hudson’s strategic position at the crossroads of major urban centers, especially its seclusion from New York City, has allowed it recently to develop into a haven for tourists, bolstered by a strong tradition of antique shopping on its popular ‘main street’ with an array of instragammable bars, restaurants, hotels, and picturesque river views. Even more recently, the global pandemic influenced another, quite different, wave of transients to populate the city with many seeking short-term and long-term stays in the ‘safe, open, and clean’ rural hinterlands of the Hudson Valley. Especially Columbia County, the home of Hudson, saw a dramatic 824% increase in relocations from New York City in 2020.
The boarding model

An shared urbanism of boarding houses
Re-imagining existing infrastructure

- 3 Broad Street, Adaptive Re-Use
- 329 Allen Street, Single-Family Addition
- 35-37 Allen Street, New Build
- Partition Street, Attached Dwelling Unit
Harvesting the cranberries
This is a Space-in-Progress
Restructuring Terracotta Processes and Democratic Space

Liberty Tower, 55 Liberty St, New York, NY
Academic Project, Unbuilt
Fall 2020, CORE I
Instructor: Lindsey Wikstrom

Historically, the space of the urban realm has been viewed as a flat plane, inherently reinforcing the stratified hierarchies of the Financial District’s business culture. The project began by seeking to re-frame our interpretation of the city as a three-dimensional, connected circuitry. The point of departure was an extensive analysis of the 1907 Gothic high-rise Liberty Tower and specifically, its white terracotta cladding facade. A thoughtful critique of historical and contemporary terracotta material processes was precipitated by material origin research, focusing on terracotta as a material embedded in its form through the tediousness of its craft, grossly oversimplified by the plague of industrial, reproducible production. Similar issues precipitated a questioning of the ethics of modern building culture, specifically the way in which architecture can be seen as endless accumulations of material on a singular site over time. This perspective repositioned existing materials as wonderful opportunities for reuse, theoretically becoming explicit in the form of an architecture.

In this architectural solution dedicated to material reorganization, a framework for regenerative design and material processes was conceptualized that recognizes and designs for the transformation of terracotta in three stages. First, residential vacancies due to the pandemic are identified in the tower and returned to the urban realm as basic resources of the commons. Terracotta is then collectively removed from the building’s exterior, rotated and stacked on the building’s interior, conceptualizing a much more expressive, ephemeral, and improvised poche on the building’s interior. The last stage, on the building’s exterior, adapts a structural form with reinforced concrete support to most honestly and clearly describe the ability of terracotta to be molded and casted into a sculptural form. The program for the building becomes a holistic response to the pandemic, a phenomenon that has only further alienated our society into the virtual realm. This Center for Civil Discourse, its construction and ownership formulated by three local debate and discourse organizations, reinforces and incentivizes the human love for informal interactions, providing space for public debates, lectures, meetings, and much more. At every corner, the project reinforces the hallmarks of the commons, material re-use, and carbon-neutral design embedding it in the craft of design, molding, and assembly, eloquently expressed in this ephemeral state of architecture.
The predecessor to Woolworth

Gargoyles from Perth Amboy, New Jersey

Gordon Matta-Clark, Bronx Floor: Threshold, 1972

Urs Fischer, You, 2007

Robert Smithson, Non-site: Line of Wreckage, 1968

The firing process

Vertical banks of carbon

A modern supplier

Recognize that the foundation on which you stand was constructed by another
“Symptomatic of the disassociation between the choice of a design solution and its material reality, this detachment ensures a retreat from the responsibilities of the real world. Yet the inexorable association between architecture and its geologic genesis is plain to see as the materiality of the built world relies on extraction. It is highly necessary to politicize details and components in order to connect them to contemporary forms of resource extraction and appropriation, as well as, ultimately, to rethink the production of our infrastructure, our cities, our homes, and our lives.”

Excerpt from “The Devil is in the Details: Who is that the Earth belongs to?” (2021) Charlotte Malterre-Barthes
Who built it? Who will build it?

Where were these materials harvested? Was it sustainable?

Can we reshape economies by selecting more equitable and sustainable materials?

Is there a natural relation between a product and its constructor?

Can an architecture of self-construction and improvisation promote equity?

Could a disastrous event like a pandemic be utilized to reclaim private space for public benefit?

What if our public spaces were arranged more three-dimensional, like a networked circuitry?
A guide for deconstruction and reinvention

An interior of informality, debate, and the unexpected

A public facade of movement, circulation, and exchange
117_SIP_117
Origins of the discursive loop at Aristotle's Lyceum
The School of Athens (1509–1511) by Raphael

117_SIP_118
A Section of woven planes

117_SIP_119
Detail 1

117_SIP_120
Detail 2

117_SIP_121
Terracotta becoming poche space

117_SIP_122
Terracotta becoming structure
Robert Smithson, *Nonsite (Essen Soil and Mirrors)*, 1969
Robert Smithson, Gravel Mirrors with Cracks and Dust, 1968

Third Floor Plan
Stage 2: The column/shape

Photos by Jacob Kackley
Stage 1, The wall model

Photos by Jacob Kackley
That Floating Cloud above Avery Plaza

Columbia University, New York, NY
Academic Project, Built
Spring 2021, The Outside Project
Instructors: Laurie Hawkinson, Galia Solomonoff
Team: Zina Berrada, Sylvester Black, Eleanor Birle, Jiyong Chun, Marie Christine Dimitri, Yonah Elorza, Anays Gonzalez Sanchez, Laurie Hawkinson, Lin Hou, Nanjia Jiang, Joshua Jordan, Cecile Kim, Kim Langat, Kassandra Lee, Alex Mann, Cherry Xinyi Qu, Astrid Sardinas, Galia Solomonoff, Vera Montare Savory, Tristan Schendel, Lauren Scott, Kaeli Alika Streeter, Mark Taylor, Taylor Urbshott, Xindi Wang, Eunjin Yoo, Elle Zelnoun

In the Spring of 2021, this seminar course led by Laurie Hawkinson and Galia Solomonoff, was a collaborative initiative amongst students, licensed architects, engineers, and designers to design, build, and program a temporary commencement pavilion in the campus plaza bordered by St. Paul’s Chapel (south), Avery (west), Fayerweather (east), and Schermerhorn (north) Halls. The process for the realization of the project began with research of pavilion precedents and progressed into design development, feasibility studies, structural and mechanical consulting, fabricator coordination, project management, budget management, and final construction.

During the day, the inflatable acted as a floating white canvas, a back-drop to the events of graduation. At night, its presence was morphed by its internally strung LED strips, instantaneously altering this atmospheric cloud into a color-changing, omnipresent glowing back-drop for dance, loud music, and late-night parties. A wood stud-framed platform below the inflatable was constructed to enhance the pavilion’s presence in the plaza and construct a flat service for the pavilion’s diverse programs. A feature rain chain diverts water that accumulates on the inflatable’s roof, routing it underneath the platform and away from users standing above. A series of social distancing circles, colored in three different arrangements are routed into the plywood surface of the platform to accommodate and reference the three major programs: causal meetings, outdoor seminars, and formal lectures. A stand and large screen were built from wood and welded steel to ensure the use of the platform for virtual events related to university and school commencement. Three, mobile live-edge cedar benches blend into the base of the pavilion and help contrast with the artificial PVC-coated fabric of the pavilion’s floating inflatable. My major contributions to the project included design development during the competition phase, furniture design and construction, steel beam erection in Avery and Fayerweather Halls, and hoisting of the inflatable.
Float

Laurie and I say hello

Material tests

Steel erection

Live edge

Platform

Under the cloud

Arrival day

Event day
Blake Matthew Kem

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EDUCATION

Columbia University New York, NY 2020 - 2023
GSAPP, Master of Architecture

Miami University Oxford, OH 2016 - 2020
Bachelor of Arts in Architecture
Bachelor of Arts in Spanish
Summa Cum Laude
GPAs: 3.99/4.00

WORK EXPERIENCE

Office for Metropolitan Architecture New York, NY May 2022 - Sept. 2022
Architectural Intern

Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates New York, NY June 2018 - Aug. 2021
Architectural Intern
Collaborated on mixed-use architectural projects in Boston, San Francisco, and New York City
Generated numerous design studies collaborating directly with lead designers and principals
Met directly with clients and industry consultants to inform design process
Prepared schematic design packages for city and client approval
Drafted architectural models synthesizing 3D printing and hand modeling techniques

Kelty Tappy Design, Inc. Fort Wayne, IN August 2015 - Feb. 2018
Architectural Intern
Met with clients in schematic design phase
Developed first-phase marketing drawings
Researched and analyzed international building codes and local zoning laws
Created final draft construction documents for state approval and construction bidding

EXTRACURRICULAR

Graduate Studio Teaching Mentor Spring 2022, Fall 2023, Spring 2023
Makerspace Monitor Spring 2021 - Spring 2022
“New Conceptions”, Symposium Panelist January 2021
Vesper Fiction, Graphic Designer and Editor 2020
Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Fall 2019

AWARDS + ACHIEVEMENTS

Architecture Top of Class, Department of Architecture + Interior Design Spring 2020
Miami University Outstanding Seniors Medallion Recipient Spring 2020
Department of Energy Solar Decathlon Attached Housing Division, Undergraduate First Place Spring 2019
Howard E. Greenman Scholarship, Award for Academic Excellence 2017, 2018, 2019

STUDY ABROAD

Miami in Spain Cijâo, Spain Summer 2015
Indiana University Honors Study Abroad Program Lasa, Spain Summer 2017