What is this?
Well, that’s a good question. I suppose it’s an architectural portfolio.
Something to document my academic projects.
Something to promote myself and my ideas.
Hopefully something that’ll land me a job.
Who knows, something that may even land me a built project or two someday.

This is where I used to include my take on the architect’s personal statement. My manifesto. How I believed in an architecture where form follows fun. Where I embrace the thoughtfully wacky and whimsical. Where somehow in some universe I thought that this would create a better and brighter future for all of us.

But forget about that. I’m not here to speak superfluously about what my architectural interests are and how I aspire to change the world through design. What student of architecture doesn’t? Although maybe I’m actually not detailing what my interests are and what the theme of this portfolio is because I can’t exactly pinpoint what it is anymore. Not to build too much on the trope of the architect who believes that each of their projects is unique and contain no aesthetic or conceptual similarities, but I guess this portfolio is meant to be an honest and somewhat raw view into how my architectural process works.


Welcome to my cabinet of curiosities.
What makes a housing project an interesting environment to inhabit? What's stopping a building from being explored the way a city's streets can be explored? Where visitors and local residents alike can endlessly wander through the winding corridors. Stoop City is a housing project in the Bronx that attempts to create an environment full of wonder and excitement in its public realm. An environment that draws you in with its own unique flavors, smells, and noises. Its 4 standardized module types each with distinct circulatory routes combine in near-infinite configurations to create a variety of unique stoop-like conditions. This abstraction of the stoop throughout the circulation of the building allows the corridors to act as social engagement spaces.

Spaces to enjoy a slice of pizza. Spaces to enjoy the music of a local artist. Spaces to play a game of chess. Spaces to meet new people. Spaces to explore...
Acoustic analysis of the sidewalk conductions prevalent throughout the Melrose neighborhood of the Bronx (left page). Followed by a series of vignettes illustrating how the conditions necessary for such spaces of informal social interaction have been replicated in Stoop City via a network of winding and weaving corridors.
The cork-clad CLT shear walls of the 2-storey modules create complete acoustic segregation between units, allowing for a great diversity of work/live/study living scenarios next to one another.
An urbanism fostered from a community reliant on a natural, carbon sequestering material?

Sargatopia is a coastal Caribbean community deeply tied to Sargassum, a macro-algae that has grown uncontrollably in the Atlantic Ocean over the past decade. It is sourced before it reaches the Puerto Rican shores, after which it is processed to create raw material for construction blocks. The blocks offer low embodied carbon along with opportunities to experiment with load-bearing masonry construction. After agreeing upon a localized building and ethical framework, members are given the freedom to build on their own, resulting in a ground-up, iterative approach that can explore new ways of living in an eco-based urbanism.

Semester: Fall
Year: 2022
Class: Studio V
Program: Urbanism Model & Material Prototype
Studio Critic: David Benjamin
Partner: Haseeb Amjad
Sargatopia is an architectural experiment. Where builders design. Where designers build. Where people come together over their aim to create and live in a low-carbon way.
The central totem mythologizes the ethical and construction framework for the community. A code of laws: those instructing how to live, and those instructing how to build.
From this central totem and surrounding workshop, the community will gradually grow beyond. Nico will build an affordable housing complex of sarga-brick. Sammy will build a rammed-earth style chapel. Alex and Gina will attempt to 3-d print a house.

Some will succeed. Others will fail and get washed away by the salty tide.

As such is the story of life on the Sargatopian shores of Puerto Rico.
This is not an adaptive re-use of a suburban big box store into a residential building. It’s an inquiry into how and why we value what we value. Is there a future possible where we embrace big box stores for their architectural heritage and value? Not just in a surface level way that fetishizes their cool 90’s graphics and vibes, but in a way that uses and actually builds upon their organizational logical and architecture itself? Living in off-the-shelf housing under the drop ceiling of a big old box store. It would be a wild time.
My apologies for an inconveniently long paper. As the old adage goes: I didn’t have time to write a short paper, so I wrote a long one.

From the Durst Collection

Appendix

From Evening World, 1894.
My apologies for an inconveniently long paper. As the old adage goes: I didn’t have time to write a short paper, so I wrote a long one.

From the Durst Collection

I. INTRODUCTION

Sitting at the foot of Wall Street and Broadway in the Financial District of New York’s lower Manhattan lies the historic Trinity Church. To the passerby and tourist, the sight of this brown sandstone chapel might appear an out-of-place object. Some might even perceive it to be a relic from a bygone era: an era when church steeples dominated colonial New York’s skyline as both the tallest structures and highest goods to be served amongst the citizens. One cannot help but notice how its glory and splendor are now overshadowed by the glass modernist skyscrapers, who, with their corporate capitalist tenants, have come to represent the new America that has evolved from the small colony in which Trinity was first founded. The curiosity in this posturing lies in the fact that Trinity Parish is actually a corporate giant in its own right, owning most of its wealth in real estate development.

While one could understandably make the case for a faith-based organization getting involved in residential development as a way to serve the public good, it must be noted that the real estate that Trinity Church owes most of its wealth to is not residential, but commercial. And so it is here that one can ask: how and why did Trinity Church become a major commercial landlord in New York City? The answer to this question is simultaneously simple yet obscure, obvious yet a complex result of a half century’s worth of politics, economics, development, and theology. Simply put, Trinity made the move to commercial real estate development because it was lucrative. However, more obscurely, it was the result of wily decision-making to redeem their image after 50 years of public scrutiny. Through investigating everything from Trinity’s deep and storied history, to their era as a slumlord, to the theological arguments framing the Episcopalian worldview on the role of the church at the time, the underlying causes driving Trinity’s transformation into a commercial real estate giant and one of the wealthiest churches in world will be examined.

II. HISTORY OF TRINITY PARISH

In order to understand how Trinity became a commercial real estate landlord, one must first understand how Trinity became a real estate landlord to begin with, and to understand this necessitates one to understand the very history of Trinity Church right since its founding. The story begins in 1697; 71 years after the Dutch bought Manhattan from the Manates indigenous tribe in 1626 to establish a fur trading post on the southern tip.

After switching hands between the Dutch and British several times, Nieuw Amsterdam was now New York: a diverse and religiously tolerant town of about 5000 inhabitants. However after the ‘Glorious Revolution’ caused religious upheaval in Europe, leading to the Protestant William of Orange and Mary II coming to power in place of the Roman Catholic James II, religious tensions began to shift in the New World. These newly appointed European monarchs appointed Colonial History Williams to the new governor of New York, who realized the

From the Durst Collection

1 From Merson and David T. "Trinity: A Church, a Parish, a People" (New York, NY: Cross River Press, 1996.), 15.
2 Ibid. 30
3 Ibid.
4 Real
establish a strong Anglican presence in the colony, ordering him to ensure “that God Almighty be devoutly and duly served throughout the town;” i.e., building the church. The Act of Settlement provided that “a new church shall be built in every town that shall grow into a town of more than 1,000 people.” After the parson was accepted by Harvard University, the church would replace the former structure. The new church was designed in the Gothic Revival style and became the cornerstone of the town’s civic life. The church was later expanded and renovated several times, and today it stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of the early settlers.

III. RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

(Originally Trinity only gained land rights as a result of the King’s grants, which was obtained in the name of King William III. However, a portion of the land was later sold to private developers.) Trinity’s land was sold to several private developers, who subsequently developed the land for residential and commercial use. This practice continued throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and Trinity continued to develop the surrounding area, including the construction of Trinity Church and the adjacent Trinity Church Annex.

Trinity’s venture into luxury residential development proved to be successful for quite some time, but the inherent conflicts between religious and commercial interests began to surface. Trinity’s relationship with the surrounding community was complex, and the church had to carefully balance its responsibilities as a religious institution with its role as a developer of real estate.

IV. THEOLOGICAL DEBATES

While the church was primarily concerned with the development of the surrounding area, it also had to navigate the theological debates of the time. The church was at the center of a schism that formed in the New York Episcopal Province, and Trinity was at the forefront of this controversy. The church was torn between the views of Dr. Dix and Dr. Rainsford, two prominent theologians of the time.

Dr. Dix and his theological contemporaries believed that the church should focus on the spiritual needs of the poor, and that the often dire conditions that the poor lived in could be attributed to their immorality and lack of faith. Dr. Dix and many of his theological contemporaries disagreed with Dr. Rainsford, who believed that the church should focus on the material needs of the poor, and that the poor were not truly the cause of their own suffering.

Throughout the 19th century, the church was at the center of theological debates, and the conflict between Dr. Dix and Dr. Rainsford continued to simmer. The church had to navigate these debates while also focusing on the development of the surrounding area.
VI. SCRUTINY CONDITIONS

Shifting All Over Here, Trinity's tenement holdings were once again pressed to the point concerning Trinity's buildings, in particular, taking into account housing conditions in Trinity at all as well as on a daily basis. The Board of Health claimed that the corporation of Trinity was owned and operated by 5000 lots, worth $70 million, without paying any taxes, as well as owning brothels and saloons. The New York Times reported that: "The wealthiest..." and as America became more interested with how the other half lived. The Index's article caused so much public outcry that Trinity was forced to respond, thus "The wealthiest..."

As a part of this, the Tenement House Committee was formed in 1894, which was headed by Richard Watson Gilder, described as a "zealous housing reformer" with a "deeply rooted sense of moral obligation". The investigation by the Tenement House Committee that stemmed formal primary on the other hand produced and (fig. lady of the first of six papers on rent seeking and land values that they thought would come to a close soon. This investigation was concerned that they were not only to rental controversies but low income tenants on such properties and although they allowed it to be symptomatic to their cause, they refused to lower rents as the "corporation is driven to making its tenants pay". [35] But after those instances, the 1893 senate testimony and 1878 landlord petition - along with the various other media grumblings directed at them were largely dismissed by Trinity as populist fodder not worthy of addressing. However what they did achieve is they lit a fire of scrutiny in the debate surrounding housing conditions of NYC in the late 19th century. [36]

The legal case was advanced and as the corporation of Trinity chose to flat out deny the claims, getting into vehement disagreements with Richard Gilder, the operational Tenement House Committee head. What, indeed did the... And in yet other instances, Trinity claimed the already mentioned position of Dr. Dix that the problem was not systemic (as Rev. Rainsford suggested), but rather the root of the problems was the problem with the "rootless" one who was once "outside the market" and only "concerned" when the conditions became "blighted, and unfit to live in." Trinity's inspector would say they are clean and adequate and continue his daily routine throughout the tenements. [45]

VI. DENIAL OF NEGLECT

Despite allegations coming from different sources of this point, Trinity, ultimately denied the claims and would either disavow the accusations or push the blame onto others, in some instances; Trinity (at least the corporation of Trinity) chose to say that the blame for the claims, being as public as the charges of Richard Gilder, the operational Tenement House Committee head. What Edward did would declare the Rector of Hildig, Fifty, and said in to Trinity, in Trinity's inspection would it be clean and adequate and continue his daily business. In other instances, Trinity would say that the middlemen landlords would actually become angry when they tried to fix the conditions that arose because the landlords had neglected the building conditions, and so they claimed that it was more legitimate to approach them first towards their tenants. [46] And yet other instances, Trinity claimed the already mentioned position of Dr. Dix that the problem was not systemic (as Rev. Rainsford suggested), but rather the root of the problems was the problem with the "rootless" one who was once "outside the market" and only "concerned" when the conditions became "blighted, and unfit to live in." Trinity's inspector would say they are clean and adequate and continue his daily routine throughout the tenements. [45]

VIII. NEW LEADERSHIP & ‘REFORM

The combination of campaign, investigation, and lawsuits against the Church coincided with new leadership at the Trinity vestry to finally produce the impetus needed to change this approach to tenement housing and real estate. At the turn of the century, the Tenement House Law of 1901 was passed, alongside allegations that the ...enactment of the "super-public obligation" and that the illegalities of water to these tenants was not only for the benefits of the tenants, but it was also for the greater good as a whole when it comes to disease..."
IX. COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

However a few things were not mentioned in Trinity’s rebranding and returns; the first of which is that the financial findings in the report by the Tenement Housing Committee only applied to a small selection of their holdings. Disastrous only nonexistent housing directly under Trinity’s supervision, not including the approximately 300 tenant houses on Trinity plots that were still leased to middleman landlords. The vast majority of these tenements, which were located in the Hudson Square area, were in deplorable condition. It did not make sense to improve these tenements as the middleman landlords had no incentive to fix them up and invest in property which would eventually revert to Trinity as the lease ran up. Elizabeth Mensch shows that Trinity then did acquire these buildings on the property they already owned, they would simply demolish them and replace them with high-yield commercial buildings.

What remains even more intriguing however is the way in which Trinity used their commercial real estate power to change that had seemed from existing tenements. In the telling of Trinity’s history, Charles Thory Bridgeman makes the poignant point that the Trinity Parish borrowed $2 million on bonds to fix up derelict tenement buildings right before they invited Dinwiddie and the Tenement House Committee to do their survey and work 130. Immediately afterwards, the Trinity vestry's new policy was an aggressive one to vigorously develop commercial real estate, creating significantly better housing conditions and helping to redeem Trinity’s tarnished reputation, rebadging them as a ‘benevolent landlord’.

In the ensuing report from the Tenement House Committee - mostly the work of the secretary for the committee, Walter Spardel, seems to hint at this when he refused to consider converting any of the buildings to commercial lots draw in millions of dollars, making the Parish one of the richest in the world.

X. AFTERWORD

The complex part of Trinity Church’s commercial real estate history warrants many other stories that could be told in addition to those already mentioned, but that would turn this essay from a research paper into a research novel (which I fear is already happening). One could ponder what Trinity would have looked like if it stayed in the residential market and made a strategic effort to contribute to the greater public welfare of New York. Perhaps they actually did contribute to the public good in a meaningful way and role. Ruminating in too critical of them, recent anthropologists, such as James C. Scott, are revealing how the temporary housing to newcomers were actually actually relatively effective bottom-up solutions for helping newcomers get settled. It is these perhaps elusive successes that were necessary for cities like New York to grow into the diverse metropolises they now are. Alas, there are evidently many different lights in which one could read the fabled Trinity Church. Maybe a good way to conclude is to return to the physical manifestation of the Parish at the foot of Wall Street. Next time one visits by Trinity Church, let it be known that although it was in urban blocks and poorest perhaps greater than any of its contemporaries that stood next to it. An institution that has stood the test of time, operating one of the wealthiest churches in the world and largest commercial real estate empires in New York.
Appendix

From Evening World, 1894.

From Evening World, 1894.


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RuinScape

Semester: Spring
Year: 2021
Class: Techniques of the Ultrareal
Type: Visualization & Storytelling
Advisors: Joe Brennan & Phillip Crupi
Teammates: Novak Djogo, Ethan Davis, Karan Matta
He encounters a monolith. A mysterious formation rising from the endless golden dunes. The weary traveler approaches the strange structure.
Too late...

his senses cry out in warning. The being that calls this monolith home has awoken. It is hungry. It stretches its thorny limbs for the first time in centuries. The traveler looks for the last time at the light of the alien sun.

Epilogue

The traveler survived, found love, and saved the orphanage. They all lived happily ever after.
If I were to write an essay on living, it would probably revolve around my childhood. Where I grew up, who I grew up with, what I did, and what I didn't do. You see, I grew up on a big old farm in rural Canada. A veal farm with barns and laneways, fields and a forest. Central to this was a big old farmhouse. A classic southern Ontario red brick farmhouse. And I suppose it's a good thing that it was big, because it had to house my 5 brothers and I. My family was big, as was the 52 acre farm we called home. And I suppose this was also a good thing as apart from us and our farm, there wasn't exactly a whole lot around us. To the outsider, we were surrounded by a whole lot of (seeming) nothingness. There were no restaurants or schools in what you could call my neighborhood (my little slice of a Jeffersonian grid block), only a tiny store and park, and a handful of other homes. I couldn't walk to school, or even walk to hang out with my friends. In this sense, it could be argued that it is an inefficient neighborhood - poorly planned, non-walkable, and low access to the necessities of life. A bad rating on the human livability scale.

However the endless fields and forests that surrounded my home were hardly empty. No, these were places full of opportunities. And what these places and spaces of ered that a perfectly designed community could never offer was access to the unknown. A chance to explore and wander, and through that: a way to feed my curiosity. There were no art studios nearby that my parents could enroll me in classes with to expand my creativity, but there were forests and farmland and abandoned farmsteads that I was given free range to discover. And that is exactly what I did. I'd spend countless hours climbing through the timber rafters of an old bank barn long abandoned. The architecture of my childhood. I would race my bike and later dirtbike through long dirt trails and meandering laneways, always trying to see how far from home they could take me. The pond that froze every winter of ered a great space for the locals to informally gather over a game of hockey. A winter tradition around these parts, border line even ritual. And when the leaves began to fall, I'd search the woods for the tallest tree to climb to give me the best vantage point of the place I called home.

That's how I lived.

And I don't think I'd change a thing.

At the start of my final semester of grad school, my studio professor asked me to write an essay on living. This is what I wrote: