The MArch Thesis

The MArch program at MIT culminates in a thesis project. Under the guidance of their thesis advisors MArch students conduct independent research and architectural design over the course of the Thesis Prep and Thesis semesters. Having been launched through an intense and often obsessive consideration of internal disciplinary concerns or, more often through the consideration of architecture’s effects in the contemporary world, or its possible effects in some near future world, each MArch thesis ultimately delimits an area of architectural thinking and practice. By their final presentation most projects strike a specific conversation between these two poles of architectural discourse: disciplinary history on one end and the contemporary world on the other, producing thus a highly varied collection of inquiries, proposals and even genres of project. The primary objective of all MIT MArch thesis projects is to refine and expand the fields of architectural discourse and practice…and to seed, or at a minimum, to test, a possible trajectory both for architecture and for a generation of young architects who with their theses projects cross over into their professional careers as architects.
Hypoxia: A phenomenon that occurs in aquatic environments as dissolved oxygen is reduced in concentration to a point where it becomes detrimental to organisms living in the system. Since the mid 20th century, oceanographers began noting increased instances of dead zones where heavy fertilization became a widespread practice in modern agricultural mass production. These systems typically occur near inhabited coastlines where aquatic life is most concentrated resulting in dwindling fish stocks and increased travel distances to access fertile water decreasing fuel efficiency across the global fishing industry, which consumes approximately 50 billion liters of fuel per year. In addition, recreational activities and tourism have been affected by the resulting odor and discoloration of low oxygen level zones.

The Northern Gulf of Mexico region has seen substantial growth in the average size and severity of its hypoxic zone and is one of the largest systems today. Where, 41% of the contiguous United States drains into the Mississippi basin releasing a tremendous amount of nitrogen and phosphorus into the coastal areas offering a nesting ground for massive algae blooms to occur.

Operative Boundary: A Series of Exaggerated Investigations on the US/Mexico Border

Moe Amaya
Advisor: William O’Brien Jr., Readers: Brandon Clifford, Skylar Tibbits

Power relationships represented by an embodied wall magnify and confirm imperial systems at play. The wall’s vitality maintains a consistent imposition on the natural which equates the physical gesture with an abstract sense of entitlement that is less about protecting a state but more so a way to build symbolic capital. But through this symbolism the physicality becomes imbued with a cultural responsibility at multiple registers; imagism that presents itself as both a mark on the landscape and an anachronistic artifact.

An unceasing quest to identify a nation geographically, socially and economically mounts itself most evidently at the border. On the ground, this domain presses up both metaphorically and physically from the south, while the north retreats to the comfort of its protected suburbs. This trans-border region is the site of a series of collisions, critical junctures, and conflicts between natural and artificial ecologies. The border cities con-dense several issues plaguing contemporary architecture and urbanism and become a ripe platform to research and invent.

Operating somewhere between the earnest public servant and the activist architect: the subversive project configures specifications as informatively objective. Architecture and technology bound to a physical wall where policy operates as an architectural intervention and the immediacy of information transforms the social-techno sphere. More specifically, the method employed for this thesis will more closely examine national policy for Nogales, AZ and describe the elements which make up the current wall while understanding its lineage. Through that lens, the project of documenting and ultimately creating a series of case studies will exaggerate and insult the condition of border.

Image: From Left, Hypoxic experimentation platform attempting to aerate the oxygen depleted waters; Hypoxic research satellite reeling in algae cultivation storage system
Over the past sixty years the American home has more than doubled in size from 1100 to 2600 square feet. Over that same period family size has shrunk by a person, credit card debt has skyrocketed, personal savings have diminished and storage has grown from less than a percentage of residential floor plans to over 11 percent. This means that the average citizen has 140 square feet of storage at his or her disposal.

Simultaneously, one can see the emergence of a new model based on sharing, not a nostalgic hippie version or its socialist counterpart, but one that operates through rental models. In the last ten years we have gone from renting the ephemeral—music, television and videos—to renting staples: cars, bikes and now clothing. If the average person truly uses 20 percent of their possessions 80 percent of the time, one can imagine an architecture that sponsors a sharing of the rarely-used.

If the dream of the huge detached house created sprawl and global financial collapse, what reality might a different dream create? The Buell Center at Columbia University posed this question in the publication that spawned the 2012 Museum of Modern Art show Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream. In that show, the selected teams used the urban project to broadcast their versions of the dream. This thesis seeks to address the dream through architecture; it proposes a re-imagined suburb that allows for and promotes shared objects and spaces between neighbors.

Exquisite Corpses: An Architectural Mystery

Galo Canizares

In 1937, writing about the parallels between mystery fiction and urban dwelling, Walter Benjamin wrote, “In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in the position of having to play detective.” That is to say that anxieties present within the built environment often lead to a series of actions closely related to those undertaken by detectives. Using this as a departure point, this project seeks to reconstitute a discussion of meaning within architecture through the use of narrative, anachronous formal languages, and literary devices. If we are to take the dismissal of postmodern architectural discussions as a given, we can place meaning as an archaic subject matter limited to autonomous formal readings (i.e. dialogues of surface, geometric complexity, etc) and non-existent in the context of large architectural production (i.e. real estate development, efficiency in construction methods, etc). However, revisiting linguistic analogies and a nostalgia for lost artifacts and pairing them alongside contemporary concerns of urban dwelling and architectural agency, we can re-establish culture-centric modes of architectural production (ones not limited to parametric or positivistic attitudes).

By embracing the fictional dimension of an architectural project, and exploring the limits of that fiction, Exquisite Corpses determines a more specific understanding of narrative architecture, one that does not dismiss or marginalize the subject matter but augments it. A fictional narrative suggests that contemporary discussions of meaning in architecture must be taken to certain limits in order to promote agitations, explore morals, and even mediate anxieties—much in the same way detective mysteries operate. While previous attempts at promoting these themes rely largely on architecture ad extremum (read: paper architecture, utopia) this project operates at the scale of the detective mystery or the parable. It sets up an allegorical framework that situates Exquisite Corpses within the lineage of real projects with heavy theoretical underpinnings (Tschumi’s La Villette, Rossi’s urban plazas), but also accepts the dismissive value of fiction. Ultimately, it seeks to revisit a spectral dialogue excluded from most contemporary architectural production, and suggest a probable methodology around which to have discussions of collective memory, meaning, signification, and public identity.
Democratic Collage: Crowd-Sourcing through Game Play

Joshua Choi
Advisor: Takehiko Nagakura, Readers: Cristina Parreño Alonso, Skylar Tibbits

This thesis presents a system that uses games. It allows people to participate in the process of designing an architectural space. The site for the design project of this experimental methodology is a courtyard on MIT campus.

The games are initially prepared by the architect through sampling various objects, materials, lighting, and figures from different media such as photogrammetric models around the building site and other relevant 3D-modeling/animation contents. The goal of this design system is to collage those components into a final architectural form through a democratic process.

The games are distributed to students, faculty and staff who will be the users of the space being designed. Through playing these games, they provide preference about the architectural program and various design decisions regarding formal composition, details, and finishes. This crowd-sourcing occurs both implicitly and explicitly while the game is being played, and the collected feed-back informs the architect about design development.

This thesis questions the role of the architects in a democratic process of design: Are we the designer of the space, or creator of a system that controls the design process?

Democratic Collage: Crowd-Sourcing through Game Play
Joshua Choi
Advisor: Takehiko Nagakura, Readers: Cristina Parreño Alonso, Skylar Tibbits

Political consolidation has been a primary force behind the development of transnational laws. This course dates back to the hegemonic expansion of the Roman Empire (100 BCE–500 CE) where *ius gentium* (Law of Peoples) was applied to both Roman citizens and non-citizens. The paradigm culminates, through various historical iterations, with the current condition of International Law, developing out of the interest of a State-based Europe: the United Nations.

This thesis recognizes a paradigm shift away from the current state of International Law towards a new Global Law; a rethinking of the institution of International Law, the nature of crimes committed under it and the protagonists involved. In what ways might this Global civic architecture be expressed?

Under Global Law, political consolidation becomes secondary to economic, technological and cultural phenomena where both State and Non-State actors operate on a transnational scale, a new set of protagonists including corporations, interest groups and individuals not necessarily associated with governments. New crimes within Global Law include: crimes against nature or shared natural resources, crimes against labor, crimes pertaining to uncoordinated attempts at geo-engineering, the development of harmful synthetic biology and nanotechnology, the use of drones, crimes in cyber or even outer-space.

The thesis proposes that the future of a global civic architecture, rather than being singular and absolute, must allow for a multiplicity of scenarios defined by an uncertain composition of complex relationships between a variety of actors and crimes committed. Is the architecture centralized and networked, or distributed and atomized? Is global representation aesthetic or organizational? Even, how might the image of the Court be distributed across media?
It’s time to blow-up the one-size-fits-all housing strategy currently employed in the United States, exchanging it for a temporal housing model that grows, shrinks, loses, wins, yields, nets, and evolves with the user, a model of housing that promotes occupant-driven incremental change throughout its lifetime.

This thesis proposes a prefabricated housing architecture that delivers configurational flexibility through a strategic union between industrial manufacturing and the burgeoning DIY culture of personal fabrication tooling. The combination of mass produced standard components and locally produced custom parts, via personal digital fabrication tooling, generates a personal housing protocol with true flexibility.

"The ultimate objective of this trend will be accomplished only when all the reasonable wishes of the individual for his home can be fulfilled without sacrificing the economic advantages of mass production..." —Walter Gropius

With a prefabrication strategy that leverages computation and access to digital fabrication tools, housing can be redefined as a flexible, component-based personal protocol. Mechanical Engineering, 1/2 Architecture this joint thesis proposes a wooden housing tower, made by robots, controlled by the Internet, and operated by the occupants.

Prefabricating Housing...Again: Timber Tower
A Flexible Production Method for Reconfigurable Housing
James Coleman, Thesis will be completed Spring 2014
Advisors: Dan Frey, Sheila Kennedy, Readers: Jose Garcia, Neri Oxman

Textiles have always played a critical role in the spaces we inhabit, but they are often directly in opposition to what we consider to be "architecture." Architecture is permanent, grounded and fixed; textiles are temporary, flexible and portable. It is precisely those qualities of variation that allow us to directly modulate our surroundings, which is something we have long relied on textiles to do—not only as clothing, but also very much so in architectural contexts. Even the most iconic of modern architecture with its great expanses of glass and even greater claims of eliminating boundaries is nearly always accompanied by a curtain. Often it is conveniently tucked away for the iconic photographs, but is certainly present and absolutely necessary. In the realm of architectural textiles, curtains in particular go beyond the decorative. They are an essential element to the functionality of the architecture. Curtains have the ability to mediate light, sound, temperature, create spatial boundaries, and allow for direct and tactile interactivity—a pretty impressive set of qualities that you would have to bend over backwards to get from a more rigid system.

Soft Boundaries
Daniela Covarrubias
Advisor: Joel Lamere, Readers: Azra Akšamija, Takehiko Nagakura

In taking on the curtain as an architectural element equal to any of the other elements architects are more comfortable designing with, my goal is to employ the functionality and flexibility of textiles along with the actual language of curtains and expand it to design boundaries that can mediate between programs, but with their embedded variability, emphasize choice in the control of our environment. My intention is to allow for self determination in a way that can generate unexpected encounters, new types of hybrid functions, and ultimately, produce the constraints that will dictate the design of what needs to be more strictly rigid in order to support the curtains.

Image: This example primarily attempts to produce something which can modulate acoustical qualities, but by producing a system of translucent layers, one can also achieve something compressible (so it can be put away when not in use) and something that both allows light and reduces visibility.
The office has for decades been touted as a model of flexibility, the super-generic shell facilitating the ultra-customized fit out. However, as technology fuels a de-territorialization of the workplace and employees take to the streets, the definition of flexibility must be rewritten architecturally beyond furniture systems, organizational methodologies or leasable space to encompass, and even prioritize, the potential of productive geographies over a singular workplace. Accelerated by the burgeoning sharing economy, increased telecommuting and pervasive wifi, these new working territories extend to public and private institutions alike, challenging our present concepts of ownership and demanding a re-interpretation of the office typologically. This thesis sets out to take on that challenge, and re-imagine the office through the lens of the hotel, mapping the broader attributes of our contemporary working culture onto the hospitality industries highly calibrated temporal management system in a bid to displace the outmoded workplace with a new typological model, the WorkHotel. As a typological synthesis, the project speculates on how productive overlaps between the two types reveal new opportunities for optimization through architectural strategies, while at the same time questioning our prevailing cultural distinctions between productivity and relaxation, work and play, and the inherent spatial manifestations that these concepts create.

Image: At the entry to the WorkHotel a board depicts the status, availability, and cost of renting spaces on different time schedules.

Infra-Scaping for WASH

Rudy Dieudonne
Advisor: James Wescoat, Readers: Reinhard Goethert, J. Phillip Thompson

Over the past decade, many of the world’s most active Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) have shifted their focus to resolving a series of related issues that are threatening the lives of inhabitants within developing countries around the world. Research shows that poor Water and Sanitation Hygiene (WASH), are the leading causes of death among women and children of a certain age group, as well as the cause of abnormal development within young adults and children of all ages.

After a United Nations Summit which took place at the end of the year 2000, goals were set by many of these NGO’s to resolve this problem by 2015. Although these NGO’s have initiated a series of projects in order to reach their target goal, as of now they have only addressed this problem by constructing dispersed wells and Latrines within rural areas of various developing countries. As a result of this approach, after 6-8 months of poor maintenance these interventions become inoperable, leaving the public’s health in far greater danger than it originally was, prior to the intervention.

I argue that in order for WASH related designs to become sustainable and continue to serve its community for many years, this problem must be addressed jointly through architecture and landscaping, or a new term known as infra-scaping. Through infra-scaping my thesis proposes to develop a prototypical model, for a multipurpose landscape that can be used during the day as an outdoor educational facility, and serve the WASH related needs of the community in the evening by supporting a public bath house.

Although the creation of a flexible landscape through infra-scaping cannot solely eliminate death and disease brought on by poor WASH related practices, this flexible landscape can help to increase the life expectancy of woman and children within developing countries.

Image: The relationships between the formation of the landscape and the architecture which sits within it.
Laborlandschaft: Redesigning the Industrial Laboratory Module

Alexander Farley  
Advisor: Andrew Scott, Readers: Mark Jarzombek, Christoph Reinhart

This thesis proposes to redesign the industrial pharmaceutical laboratory typology by rethinking the composition of the laboratory module; the smallest functional sub-unit of the laboratory type. The design for this thesis applies contemporary corporate counter-culture spatial organizational ideas onto the laboratory module. Central to these concepts is an architecture that is user-oriented and environmentally sensitive rather than managerially-oriented. The spatial organization seeks to flatten the managerial hierarchy by eliminating explicit office spaces. The laboratory is instead spatially divided according to affinity for behaviors and activities rather than strict programmatic designations.

The laboratory module was initially conceived during World War II as a spatial system to accommodate inter-disciplinary research and development teams in an industrial laboratory setting. However, the spatial design of the module has become deterministically dictated by managerial control systems and calibrated by infrastructural service, rather than serving the environmental and social needs of the researchers. Contemporary laboratory architecture requires the same shift away from spaces organized for clerical work to fluid and open fields that have occurred in corporate architecture.

However, architectural design cannot control occupant’s behaviors, but it can endorse a specific networked culture through the configuration of spaces. The use of common flexible spaces endorses and encourages social interaction. Likewise the form and figure of the laboratory establishes an environmental tone by allowing the research spaces to sit within an open field. This open field aspect allows for maximum daylighting and greater levels of visual and social interaction. Through a “plug and play” service infrastructure, the lab benches and fume hoods can behave more as setting and furniture rather than rigid spatial datums. Additionally, this spaces also provides for reconfigurability and easy upgradeability. By seeking to move away from standard laboratory spatial solutions and conventions the design takes the position that a laboratory field condition encourages new modes of scientific interaction and production. This laboratory functions as much as an intellectual play ground as it does a functional research laboratory.

Image: Looking south over the Boston Seaport

Entrepreneurial Tech-Ed: Using Technology to Fuel Income Generation Education in Rural Ghana

Breanna Faye  
Advisor: Jan Wampler, Readers: Cherie Abbanat, Amy Smith, James Wescoat

Modern day Africa is booming. Not only is the continent the fastest growing market for mobile phone technology, but it is home to more than half of the twenty fastest growing economies in the world. Of the leading African economies, Ghana is at the forefront in economic and technological development with economic growth at 14.3 percent in 2011, one of the strongest-grossing economies in the world.

Despite the economic growth, development is limited to the southern region near the capital city of Accra, causing severe urban migration of impoverished rural Ghanaians seeking employment opportunities. Hope City, a $10 billion project currently breaking ground near Accra, contributes to this centralized economic approach that causes southern migration and prevents nationally distributed development, especially concerning employment and education. Education enrollment rates across Ghana are drastically low, with senior secondary school enrollment as low as 11 percent in select regions.

This thesis investigates how decentralization of development occurs through merging small-scale technology hubs into the rural West African fabric by integrating with the secondary school system. This model redefines the structure of education in Ghana by establishing a programmatic fusion to create a relationship between education and entrepreneurship. Encouraging a decentralized approach to regional development through a system of satellite tech hubs linked to secondary school campuses, the design formulate an architectural strategy that creates a platform for funding Ghanaian education.

By re-envisioning the senior secondary school as a technology and innovation research campus, the thesis becomes a site for testing new programmatic relationships within an educational environment. This includes the combination of programs such as classrooms with testing labs, a technology center that accommodates vocational training for students and community members, and an income generating agricultural production system in order to create a self-sustaining, entrepreneurial education system and technology-centered secondary school. This Tech-Ed design prototype will act as an advocate for reform through designing the liaison between the proposed multi-billion dollar tech hubs and the destitute Ghanaian educational system.

Image: The proposed Hope City juxtaposed next to the neglected Dega Senior Secondary School of Ghana’s failing education system; the thesis addresses how to create a liaison between the two dichotomous systems.
Since the global media exposure of its air quality in 2008, Beijing has strived to improve its air quality. However, these preventive measures have not extensively altered the intensity of the smog-filled sky. This phenomena have generated an opportunity to redefine the position of architecture within the context of slow catastrophe, i.e. the corrupted air particles. In instead of appearing to be physically and mentally defective, this form of threat occurs in the form of environment, which is produced steadily yet experienced unconsciously.

With the current average of 660,000 people dying in China, and approximately $17,000,000 spent annually on cleaning up its air, Beijing cannot afford to rely on its public health policies and its air tax anymore. In its current destructive rate, the particles will force the government to, eventually, undertake physical interventions at urban scale, i.e. provisions of a series of air shelters as nodes of refuge that have to provide both protection and recovery of the citizen's health.

This thesis will, therefore, serve as a platform for questioning and investigating the relationship between architecture and the polluted environments through the discussions of the historical, theoretical, and political aspects of air. Looking at human as its subject, this thesis looks into the survival scenarios that Beijing government will implement as its civilian air defense strategy. One hypothesis can be taken that these interventions will also be coupled with the existing network of Beijing's underground network, including the subway stations, to mutually serve as defensive urban infrastructure.

In the end, what these territorial air remedy strategies might suggest is the role of architecture as an agent in producing environment where the human limit is slowly altered in the process of slowing down the consequences of a slow catastrophe.

Image: Walking through the dirty air chamber.

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Play-house: A Chinese Urban Drama in Seven Acts
Feifei Feng
Advisor: Yung Ho Chang, Readers: Nader Tehrani, Gediminas Urbonas

This thesis seeks to engage the public by intervening in existing housing blocks and dramatizing the everyday life, in order to establish new social and spatial relationships. The research involved understanding housing types, as well as deconstructing theater types and mapping the theatrical relationships onto the existing neighborhoods in order to stimulate the contemporary context. A series of theatrical follies are deployed to liberate the residence and the theatre from their respective institutional forms, blurring the boundaries between private and public, actors and spectators, life and art. On a different level, these follies can be seen as a political commentary on the current society of China. Besides their functional usages, they are the ruptures or frictions against the conformity, conventional or convinced. By performing the state of being using these theatrical tools, we can reevaluate our living environment, regenerate awareness and reactive our desire and dreams.

Image: Children’s maze theatre inserted into a five story slab building

Even Slower: The Great Smog of Beijing
Erioseto Hendranata
Advisor: J. Meejin Yoon, Readers: Andrew Ferentinos, Mihoe Mazereeuw

Since the global media exposure of its air quality in 2008, Beijing has strived to improve its air quality. However, these preventive measures have not extensively altered the intensity of the smog-filled sky. This phenomena have generated an opportunity to redefine the position of architecture within the context of slow catastrophe, i.e. the corrupted air particles. In instead of appearing to be physically and mentally defective, this form of threat occurs in the form of environment, which is produced steadily yet experienced unconsciously.

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Image: Walking through the dirty air chamber.
Interestingly enough, buildings in modern society are typically not designed to be deconstructed (according to Bradley Guy). The way architects have been operating for years have been focused on growth and prosperity. This is because we believe that long-lasting life is a virtue and at times economically more cost-effective. However, the result is that many buildings actually fail to fulfill the initial intent of the architects. Building components' life span varies to a great extent and so some parts inevitably become obsolete earlier than other components.

In order to resolve the problem of partial obsolescence, Japanese metabolism have come up with plug-in unit type architecture in the 1900s. However, the initial cost of fabricating these customized unit types were so expensive that it could not supersede normalized standard of building construction. In the modern era, with the rising concern for environmental impact and awareness for excessive cost of construction, many architects have attempted to reuse, recycle, and relocate buildings and material components.

This thesis pushes the attempt to alleviate building obsolescence to a further, unprecedented, level. The project mandates building's life expectancy, purporting each step of construction; occupation to demolition to precisely align with the way architect has designed it from the first place. In other words, my thesis designs building for death as opposed to perpetuity.

The project is situated in the Santiago Island of Galapagos, Ecuador where mitigation for human encroachment on its natural habitat is at stake. Hence, the thesis carries out by designing a salt-cured seasonal family residence, which will gradually be demolished and disappear back into the nature within a one-year life cycle.

Image: The use of natural elements allows the building to have a unique form each time it is built.

My thesis tends to seek a new architectural typology of cemetery to rebuild a relationship between the dead and the living in contemporary cities in China. The relationship between cemetery and urban life is always changing. Starting from 18th Century, the cultural movement of Enlightenment proposed to reform society using reason. It challenge ideas and thinking grounded in tradition and faith through the scientific method, as a result, cemeteries were banished from core of cities. Modernism intensify this isolation, by creating physical boundary to further separate cemetery from contemporary daily life to achieve a clean and efficient social structure. This thesis is inspired from the slogan from Parisians - No Cemetery No City when Haussmann banished all the churchyard from the core of Paris in order to ask the question that what's the new relationship between our daily life and ancestors.

I am specifically interested in the context of China. China has a population of 1.3 billion and all will be somehow burial sooner or later. Moreover, the funeral ceremony and ritual activities is actually within our daily life. Take a closer look at the core of city, The usage of lands is evaluated by its direct potential to boost the whole economic system. As a result, urban public spaces such as plaza, parks and etc are neglected to be developed since its latent contribution to the urban modernization. There is an urgency where the commercialization and public demand are conflicting. On one hand the on-going market of funeral industry and highly demanded client base insure a profitable realm. On the other hand, the nature of cemetery indeed is a public space where people could mourning their loss, celebrate life and escape from the mundane life. This thesis propose new top down approach to build a future new relationship to bring cemetery into our city to complete public space and bring this public amenity into our daily life.
Here lies a ghetto. One of many. It sits next to what used to be the border with Palestine, an arbitrary line that was ignored almost since its inception. Slowly, methodically, the territory was restricted. One day, all that was left was within the confines of the wall, a small island inside the sea of Israel.

This ghetto, it is called Qalqilya. This is the story of its creation.

First, came trees; millions of them planted to erase and to rebuild. Soon after, pledges were made, but many were incompatible. Those whose lands were being given away fought back. And so there was war. Wars were fought until the results were absolute. Now one side controlled everything. They built a wall to protect their gains.

But the wall was a mistake. It could not prevent an attack, and once breached it was useless. One of their generals imagined another kind of defense, dispersed throughout the landscape. His name was Ariel.

Under his command, military and civilian outposts were strategically placed across the landscape. Ariel planned to inhabit the entire region. Settlements were built to house the new frontiersmen. They stood like sentinels over the landscape. Roads followed. Each road divided in order to connect. Checkpoints provided access from one side of the road to the other. As a result, territorial islands developed. Qalqilya was one of them.

Violence erupted again. As a last resort the winners decided to build a wall. A wall to separate them from their prisoners. But more importantly, to separate their prisoners from each other and from their lands. Qalqilya was the first to be completely surrounded and fully formed as a ghetto.

Hassan, Sami, and Suhad were three of its many inhabitants. Cut off from the world and the lands that they helped create, they turned inwards to imagine possible alternatives.
There are a total of more than 9,700 convenient stores in Taiwan. In Taipei there is one convenient store every 400 meters and more than 50 percent of its population go to 7-Eleven at least once a day: this is a culture of convenience.

This thesis aims to explore the possibility of optimizing the notion of convenience, in its provision of amenity and services, to facilitate innovations at the individual level while fostering a culture of do-it-together as a collaborative knowledge-based community. Unlike US where innovators can make and prototype in their own garages, people in Taipei do not have a physical space to prototype without paying the high cost of renting an office or workspace, not even mentioning the lack of equipment and facilities.

Throughout its thirty-four year history in Taiwan, 7-Eleven has served as the paradigmatic convenient store and constantly innovates through its services and products to address the daily needs of its customers. This thesis will demonstrate that 7-Eleven is ready to take on a greater challenge, a challenge that aims to serve the individual with all the amenities and services needed to become an entrepreneurial innovator by refashioning itself into a new identity—the 24x7. The newly rebranded 24x7 will not only transform the physical space, but also prototype new architectural typologies which emerge from the synergy of conventional 7-Eleven strategies and innovative programs.

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The 24x7 adopts the current distributed model of 7-Eleven and provides three typologies—24x7.Workshop, 24x7.FabLab and 24x7.Marketplace—to the public. These three typologies will be propagated throughout Taipei and searchable by a mobile app called Where is my 24x7?.
Protestants today seem to approach public worship with one or the other of two quite different attitudes. Many Protestants understand worship as primarily a matter of feelings; others see worship as basically work done in God’s service. While there are gloriously designed churches emphasizing value of sacredness and its symbolism, there are also practical and temperate churches valuing people rather than the place. Whether the latter development of secular church forms were developed out of liturgical sincerity or as the result of Capitalism due to economic competition, it is most prevalent form of Protestant churches today.

On my site near Flushing, NY, with its high density of Korean immigrant settlements, who mostly serve on ethnic commercial and service businesses, many informal churches have begun to emerge. This phenomenon along the main artery of Korea Town in Flushing is so predominant that there are multiple churches per every single block of city fabric on Northern Boulevard. One cannot distinguish a church from a commercial store were it not for a signboard indicating its name. Liturgical principle of religious space is completely ignored with invention of commercial churches.

The term megachurch generally refers to any Protestant congregation church with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2,000 or more in its worship services. With its high density of churches in Flushing, NY, average total attendance of weekly Korean Protestant worship easily exceeds 10,000.

My thesis is about the invention of a typology for a new megachurch. Rather than a giant space occupied by a single congregation, it is an infrastructure for agglomerations of religious spaces that can expand and contract based on demand. Acknowledging abnormal high density of religious needs around the Korean immigrant community and the importance of service industry, a new mutant typology of sacred and secular spaces in coexistence is proposed. Simply put, it is a shopping mall of churches offering their religious services in competition, which mirrors the exact situation of Flushing today.

To emphasize the current relationship between the sacred and secular in city fabric, the current condition/situation is reversed in paradox. The most secular program of commercial activity is circumscribed within the most sacred symbol of crucifix, while the sacred religious space becomes a show window symbolizing its commercialized characteristic of modern churches.
The advent of air travel has produced a building typology completely new to the 20th century. The planning of space for airports to serve these vehicles of war, business, and pleasure required large plots of land that were, for the most part, planned for functionality without much flexibility, rendering most as isolated, autonomous instances in the urban context. Whether it’s two miles from Boston Logan to its city center or twenty-five for Denver International, airports are bound by highways and secure perimeters that create spatial barriers to its context.

However, the airport affects more than just its immediate physical boundaries. Ecosystems of wildlife have been displaced due to the dangers they pose to airplane during taking off and landing. Vertical zoning laws have limited the heights of nearby neighborhoods. The invisible (virtual) effects of the airport to its surroundings brings up the question of their potential symbiotic relationship.

The city’s investment in the resources required to produce these massive infrastructural nodes must be thought of in a way that can handle change in usage whether it increases (the current trend sees a steady rise in air travel at Boston Logan) or declines.

This thesis looks at rethinking the role of airport infrastructure in the urban context—extending the possibilities of the threshold between the public edge of the city and the secure site of the airfield—physically and virtually. It strives to set the airport up as a flexible piece of infrastructure for the city that foresees the potential of re-appropriation if obsolescence occurs as new means of travel or economic depression emerge.

Furthermore, the idea of air travel is inherently cinematic. The range of emotions experienced in one space (the airport) speaks to the different narratives of its users. As shown through the mise-en-scene in Jacques Tati’s Playtime and footage of Dziga Vertov’s Man with a Movie Camera, the contemporary city is a place of a multitude of intersecting narratives. The act of traveling—moving, airplanes, automobiles, ferries, trains, and people—produces different frames of viewing at different speeds and moments of stasis, creating unique narrative structures that speak to a particular time and culture.

Image: Relationships between machine, infrastructure, and city

Form Follows Flow

Juney Lee
Advisor: Nader Tehrani, Readers: Paul Kassabian, John Ochsendorf

The skyscraper is a by-product of 19th century American industrialism, spirit, and disaster. The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 was a catastrophe that necessitated dense and rapid reconstruction, both of which the high-rise provided. The accidental discovery of this new typology forever changed the contemporary urban habitat.

Demand required density, which produced profit. Relentless pursuit of maximum mass and profit in 20th century New York City transformed the skyscraper into shameless public display of cash cows for the elitist few of the capitalist society. Enslaved by its financial incentives, the promise it once held was negated by repetitive banality.

Today, starchitects are desperately prolonging the life of a typology that has not been invested with new thinking or ambition since its inception. The intensification of density it initially delivered has been replaced by carefully-spaced isolation to maximize its visual superiority. Skylines of emerging civilizations have become test sites for celebrity architects to impose their brands which are more interested in its personal agenda than greater good.

By 2050, 70 percent of the world’s population will be living in urban areas. In 2012 alone, sixty-six buildings taller than 200 meters were constructed worldwide. In an age when explosive growth is not imminent, but inevitable, the developing societies continue to adopt the skyscraper as the symbol of its modernity. Skyscraper is a critical architectural specimen that will not only symbolize that growth, but also accommodate and sustain it.

The typology was born out of necessity, pushed to the limits through its financial objectives, and is now polluted with the vanity of celebrity architecture. In order to resurrect its urban significance, the century-old methods of envisioning and designing skyscrapers need to be challenged. The typology must be re-imagined in its totality through the fundamental understanding and re-investigation of the flow of elements that make the skyscraper possible.

Image: The Lure of the City, Hugh Ferriss; 1929

(BOS) > (AIR)

Kevin Young Lee
Advisor: Nader Tehrani, Reader: Takehiko Nagakura

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Image: Relationships between machine, infrastructure, and city
The commercialization of architecture, and the persistence of rapidly changing technology has forced architecture to respond to budget rather than time. How would architecture change if we reversed that relationship?

Buildings that we think of as permanent—the Colosseum, the Hagia Sophia, the Parthenon, etc.—have always been aligned with a resource that was perceived as permanent. Early societies perceived their body politic, religion, entertainment and so on as being permanent. The monumentalization of resources within architecture led to the building becoming just as important as the resource allowing the buildings to persist even after the resource was gone. Current trends in technology and consumerism have removed this perceived permanence from our society, there are very few things that persist through time. The architecture of this thesis is aligned with nuclear waste. Nuclear energy is essential to meet projected energy needs and mitigate climate change concerns. Currently the US plans on shipping all of its nuclear waste to a remote site in Nevada, but this thesis calls for storing the waste on site and using it as a resource to heat a public bath.

Image: Conceptual view from the bath to an inundated Back Bay
Masterbuilders proposes a new type of architectural design methodology through the design and fabrication of a small building. At its core, it challenges the separation between architects and builders described first by Leon Alberti, and later codified professionally by Sir John Soane.

Alberti believed that architects should not take part in the building process, but rather described a clear point at which design work ended, and building began. To transfer design information to builders, he developed a system of two dimensional scaled drawings that evolved to the construction sets used by makers today. In the 18th century, Soane further cemented the split between design and building through the professionalization of the discipline via regulated building contracts. Designing and making became separated pedagogically and in practice.

More recently, there has been an erosion to this formula prompted by a renewed interest in making as an act in which designers actively participate: craft.

Image: Robotic fabrication utilized both as production method and design tool.

Yarditecture: New Walls for Trench Town

Chris Malcolm
Advisor: Miho Mazereeuw, Readers: Reinhard Goethert, Christopher Whyms-Stone

“The yard”—the typical housing typology of low-income downtown, Jamaica where multiple households are contained within a surrounding wall. This thesis envelops itself in Trench Town, Jamaica, the epicenter of what is known internationally as Jamaican culture, and to reinterpret the “yard” as a viable solution for sustainable urban growth. The housing type stems from historical times of slavery, where the 1744 Act of Jamaica was created in as a means to control slaves within large regions. This dictated that a seven-foot wall was required to be built around 6’-9” shanties, leaving one entrance point as the sole access to inside the perimeter. This was intended to be a method of control, but instead became a way of cultural concealment from owners.

As a yard, Trench Town has undergone several transformations between a formal and informal social/spatial construct, but all the while retaining the yard typology of a surrounding wall. During violence on the streets in the 70s, the government yards’ concrete walls have been broken in certain points, allowing a new internalized circulation, and creating a fluid labyrinthine field of not only living, but also a menagerie of working, and recreational spaces within the confines of the walls.

Instead of restricting access, the walls of the Jamaican yard acts as a membrane, a negotiator between yards. Thus, this thesis seeks to provide a new intervention for the two blocks of Trench Town that were destroyed in the 70s, in the forms of infrastructural walls as the essential framework for autonomous informal growth. Instead of traditional holistic social housing plans or site-and-services upgrading, this thesis seeks to provide the in-between—providing walls which enable urban growth via different typologies of walls and their relations to one another. In this way, new density, spatial intent, and overall better living conditions can be informed by providing the minimal resolution of autonomous urban structure—the quintessential wall, to be manipulated and expanded by the needs of the inhabitant.

Image: Likkle more den
How many of us actually know what we are eating? Our relationship with food is one of consumption. We see food, we eat food. Our current food life cycle model delivers meals directly to our plates with little or no oversight. Food has become an autonomous product; its connections to and relationships with the land & people are hidden, many times intentionally.

Education is key to successfully addressing all the problems that our current food / farm model is producing. While much can be learned from textbooks a physical connection to the land, people and animals that provide our meals is more mutually beneficial. There is reciprocity between one’s actions and their effects that simply cannot be achieved by only reading or watching. Complete immersion makes connections more immediate and relatable at a human scale.

Move the farm to the suburban environment where there is more ample land. Design the farm as a school where students come to learn and build physical bonds to the land and animals that feed them. The school will be designed as a dormitory cooperative where students live and share the responsibilities of caring for themselves and those they live with, including the animals that live alongside. Programs will focus around the full life cycle of livestock and how they contribute to our various needs. From basic living and feeding needs to producing and harvesting. The school will also take the food stuffs and bring them to market to understand how the global economy functions and its relations. There will also be culinary and manufacturing facilities to bridge the role of raw goods with their final consumables. Advance studies will include biofuel harvesting. Life cycle ecology will be emphasized throughout all aspects of all programs.

Image: Devens, MA; Site Mapping, Green Space and Tree Scape

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Cow-Op: Living and Learning from Our Food

Richard Ong
Advisor: Rafi Segal, Readers: Ana Milijački, Nader Tehrani

("...People grow powerfully attached to that kind of life, when they get the chance to live it. It allows you to concentrate your attention on the real work, which means everything that is done to stay alive, or make things, or satisfy one's curiosity, or play. That is utopia, especially for primitives and scientists, which is to say everybody. So a scientific research station is actually a little model of prehistoric utopia, carved out of international money economy by clever primates who want to live well." —Kim Stanley Robinson, The Martians

Utopias have historically been perceived as instruments of societal change, while prior manifestations have normally been attributed to emerging cultural conditions or evolving ethical views, however one of the most pertinent agendas relevant to our field would be the rapidly shifting state of our environment.

Human environmental impact is frequently looked at a local or regional scale, with large international protocol, remaining largely ineffective and mired through process. The summation of this altered climate includes effects like rising surface and atmospheric temperatures, rising sea levels, ozone depletion, and reduced cloud formation. And nowhere are these environmental consequences more seen than in Antarctica.

 Claimed as a global commons, Antarctica is ungoverned, yet under the international protection and afforded the combined preservatory efforts of these bodies of power. Despite our concerted efforts, its current deterioration is due directly to an individual and universal, detrimental contribution.

This thesis aims to generate an awareness and visibility to the oscillating physical and atmospheric ephemera of this continent, while using the internal and external extremae of a research installation as a performative bridge between architecture and environment. Through granting a variety of sensorial experiences, this station will help instill strong desires to change decision making processes of individuals and other political bodies, while raising questions of personal and institutional responsibility.

Image: A catalog of existing and proposed Antarctic research facilities from participating nations of the Antarctic Treaty System
Defense is in a state of obsolescence. The metrics of risk have changed from threat of military invasion to that of weather. Infrastructure is in a state of transition. The Maritime Administration’s National Defense Reserve Fleet (NDRF) has dwindled from 2,700 in 1946 to only 140 in 2013. Now, along with closure of over 350 military installations and their subsequent infrastructures in the continental US, the 140 remaining sealift merchant vessels are deemed obsolete, no longer needed for global defense operations. This cycle of infrastructural obsolescence offers an opportunity to realign coastal sites of maritime service and production to serve within regional seaport operations to mitigate the inevitable threat of a catastrophic seismic and/or flood event. Waterfront development must now be coupled with appropriate metrics of defense and redundancy to project long term phasing for the future occupation of the post-industrial estuary.

This thesis proposes a strategic redevelopment of obsolete maritime infrastructures that programs a regional sealift defense program for the urban edge of San Francisco Bay.

It realigns one of three remaining sites of the NDRF to serve in a region where there is a 63 percent chance that an earthquake with magnitude of 6.7 or greater with occur in the next 30 years resulting in the loss of water, power, and shelter for more than 27,000 buildings and 60,000 people. The project proposes reprogramming the remaining NRDF merchant vessels as floating water, power, and food utilities and the staging of strategic coastal infrastructures to produce an entirely ship powered waterfront, beyond the grid. These proposed hybrid landscapes—leisure and emergency—work together as a strategic urban model for phasing resilient seaports in highly vulnerable coastal regions, inverting the “hard,” land-borne conduit infrastructures of power and water in favor of multiplied and thus redundant “soft” distributed waterborne infrastructures to deliver power, water, and food in order to deploy an emergency urbanism.

A freeway interchange plays a much more significant role in a city than simply permitting the movement of automobiles from one direction to another. As they carve their way through urban centers, interchanges divide communities from one another and create lasting boundaries between neighborhoods. However, in their wake, they create an entirely new set of spaces, nestled in the concrete framework that gives these structures their identity. This thesis reappropriates these spaces, and posits their role in urban mending.

The configuration of interchanges creates extraordinary moments of volumetric opportunity. The spaces are serendipitous by-products caught in between the composition of ramps, overpasses, and underpasses; designed not for human occupation, but rather for vehicular expediency. The radius and the tilt of the turning road, the slope of ramps, and the height at which the overpasses take are all pre-prescribed to mediate traffic. The abundance of existing structure and available space makes interchanges a prime candidate for architectural intervention. Their soaring heights create the framework for an entirely new type of occupation; connecting the ground plane and pulling it up into the air. These previously unreachable places form a new understanding of movement, speed, and perception.

The thesis is situated at the Interstate 93-US Route 1 interchange immediately northwest of the Leonard P. Zakim Bridge in Boston, MA. It seeks to function as a research prototype for infrastructural adaptation around the world.

The thesis reappropriates these spaces, and posits their role in urban mending.
The Green Line or hydro corridors of Toronto are sprawling lengths of continuous, mostly vacant land with the primary purpose of transmitting electricity. They are unusual terrain: both physically sparse but culturally intense. Stippled with electrical towers, planned in acres of mowed grass, they hold the promise of light, energy and power. Within a 125 mile radius of downtown Toronto, there is approximately 8,145 acres of land passing through wide range of neighborhood and fabrics yet have very little to offer beyond the transmission of electricity. The stigma of living next to high voltage power lines due to the aging infrastructure and health hazards associated with the hydro towers resulted in lack of development along these corridors.

This thesis investigates opportunities created by reclaiming one of these public corridors which is currently an underutilized urban void. The decision to bury the high voltage power lines underground creates a space for economic and social opportunities. The new programs promote potentials for social and economic growth and come together in a unique narrow and linear site condition. As an urban strategy that brings together domestic culture with infrastructure and manufacturing, this project can create a radical and innovative urban fabric. By introducing a new underground transportation line and densifying area around the stops, the new urban fabric could be organized as sequence of urban centers while promoting the preservation of the remaining green corridor.

The opportunistic corridor will be a series of high density to low density spaces coupled with manufacturing hubs that ultimately add cultural and real-estate value to the surrounding neighborhoods. Consequently, the most profane aspect of the city, being close to toxicity could be transformed into the most desirable neighborhoods.

Memorial as Field: Problematizing Cape Town’s Post Apartheid Void

Karina Silvester
Advisor: Azra Akšamija, Readers: Mark Jarzombek, Ana Miljački

Apartheid cut and divided South African society on the basis of race and ethnicity, segmenting the nation spatially, politically, and economically. Numerous legislative changes implemented by the National Party sustained apartheid for 46 years. During this time, systems of categorization divided the country from an African majority into a plurality of ethnic minorities. Physical artifacts and spatially restrictive legislation became devices for differentiation and separation. Forced removals physically destroyed complete districts ultimately displacing 3.5 million people from their homes.

In Cape Town, District Six suffered a similar fate where 60,000 people were forcibly removed to the barren Cape Flats in 1960. This destruction of place resulted in the production of an urban void. The district-wide eviction created a vast change from a densely inhabited urban fabric to an open grassy field leaving a visible scar in the urban landscape. Today, debates continue about how to appropriately use this charged urban space.

This thesis investigates how contemporary architecture can address and perform in a transformative way for locations of ongoing spatial manifestations of trauma caused by racial segregation. This project aims to use design to serve both the contextual needs of the local urban fabric and the political and individual memories intrinsically linked to a site. This urban intervention rejects the idea of a memorial as a monumental object and creates, as an alternative, a palimpsest of experiences, stories, memories, and moments to be cultivated, preserved, and re-inscribed in the production of a large-scale memorial fabric. This project proposes an urban memorial that engages with the living city through the creation of mnemonic cues. Horizontal integration with the daily life of the district creates a pixilated memorial encoded and re-inscribed with spaces for memory.
Kyle Altman
Dead Zone: Inhabiting the Hypoxic System

Moe Amaya
Operative Boundary: A Series of Exaggerated Investigations on the US/Mexico Border

Kyle Barker
Store House: Unpacking the American Dream

Galo Canizares
Exquisite Corpses: An Architectural Mystery

Joshua Choi
Democratic Collage: Crowdsourcing through Game Play

Kyle Coburn
World Court

James Coleman
Prefabricated Housing

Daniela Covarrubias
Soft Boundaries

Alexander M. Dixon
WorkHotel: A Typological Exploration of Productive Geographies

Rudy Dieudonne
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Erioseto Hendranata
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SunMin (May) Hwang
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Bumjim Kim
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Chia Chieh (Jessica) Lee
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Daeho Lee
Counteractive Progress

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New Megachurch: Coexistence of Sacred and Secular

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Edrie Ortega
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Nick W. Polansky
Inhabiting the Cycles of Maritime Obsolescence: Redirecting the National Defense Reserve Fleet

Kamyar Rahimi
The Opportunistic Green: Building on Toronto's Utility Corridor

Karina Silvester
Memorial as Field: Problematizing Cape Town's Post-Apartheid Void