FRIDAY APRIL 19 2019
9.00am  Chase Kea  aging in place community
9.45am  Yang Gao  edible living
10.30am  Jianxiao Ge  sociopolis
11.15am  Nikhita Bhagwat  healing and learning
12.00pm  Chi Zhang  hutong plugin
1.45pm  Samson Liu  spacy language
2.30pm  Deepanshi Sheth  Un-shuttered soho
3.15pm  Sai Prateek Narayan  water marks
4.00pm  Veronica Wang  synanthropolis
4.45pm  Kelly Li  water imperatives

SATURDAY APRIL 20 2019
10.00am  Matthew Radican  rebuilding
10.45am  Sujan Shrestha  [neighborhood] guthi
11.30am  Henry Yoon  hannara
12.15am  Zain Islam-Hashmi  dirt forms
1.00pm  Rebecca Lefkowitz  ex libris all
2.30pm  Emily Melillo  abject space
3.15pm  Alvin Wong  flushing: small-mega
4.00pm  Aditi Thota  refugee agora
4.45pm  Hannah Martinez  east to islands
5.30pm  Kerrian France  landmarks
thesis/IP projects

studio coordinator Mary-Lou Arscott

The student who chooses the engagement with a thesis (one year) or an IP independent project (one semester) is by necessity on an uncharted journey, sometimes to a place of extreme discomfort and sometimes to discoveries of new thinking or new work flows. The Thesis/IP studio demands a research methodology that allows for collaboration with experts both within the realm of architecture and across multiple fields. All of the students exhibited here in metathesis 2019 have taken the first seed of a question, worked around the ideas and developed a way of designing and thinking which explores the critical content of a construct. Together, as a studio the propositions have been shared, debated and developed. This is not a single player game, as many faculty, students and associates have been involved in an intense collective conversation. The propositions within the presented works might contain a framework for analysis, as in Kelly Li’s IP project water imperatives, or as in Kerrian France’s IP project landmarks of cultural identity. Alternatively the project could be an almost abstract investigation into a new form of space making as in Samson’s thesis spacy language or a documentary film mapping racist spatial control across history as in Hannah Martinez’s film from east to islands. Henry Yoon has taken a war zone as a speculative design platform in his thesis hannara and Matthew Radican has responded to contradictions arising from institutional violence in his IP project rebuilding in destruction. Nihkita Bhagwat has followed a design approach to envision a challenge to the status quo in Haiti with her MArch IP project healing and learning. The exploration of the theoretical concept of the abject as a response to unoccupiable space is explored in the installation and models by Emily Melillo in her IP project abject space. Lastly we have all enjoyed the dust underfoot as we have watched the making of a material methodology in Zain Islam Hashmi’s thesis dirt forms. These are all brave projects with serious implications for our future.

special thanks to all who have contributed to the committee advising without which the conversations could not have been so rich and the work would not have found such depth and rigor; Noah Tetrault, Paul Eiss, Lauren Herckis, Lola Ben-Alon, Emanuela Graña, Matthew Zywica, Eddy Man Kim, Valentina Vavarsi, Christine Mondor, Jeff Hinkleman, Kai Gutschow, Francesca Torello.

special thanks to all who have contributed to the success of this exhibition; Margaret Cox, Jordan Frey, Alex Young, the Miller ICA install team, Elizabeth Chodos, Bob Kollar, Brian Staley, Bob Armitage, Susan Finger.

commoning the city

studio coordinators Jonathan Kline + Stefan Gruber

Commoning the City allows students to engage in a critical shared exploration of bottom-up urban transformation. Students spend a semester exploring theories of commoning, international case studies and thesis propositions with Stefan Gruber, followed by a semester of individual project development with Jonathan Kline. The eleven exhibited projects in metathesis 2019 interrogate how new processes of commoning might create more equitable and sustainable futures in ten cities around the world. Understood as distinct from public as well as private spaces, spaces of commoning emerge in the contemporary metropolis as sites in which self-managed rules and forms of use contribute in resisting, and producing creative alternatives beyond contemporary forms of domination (such as class, gender or race). Spaces here are understood not only as shared resources or assets, but also as the production of new social relations and new forms of life in-common.

The projects explore commoning in highly diverse ways. Propositions for creating new structures for democratic community control and collectivized local economies appear in Jianxiao Ge’s sociopolis, Rebecca Lefkowitz’s ex libris all, and Sujan Shrestha’s [neighborhood] guthi. Diverse existing urban infrastructures are reconceptualized as new social and ecological mixers in Sai Prateek Narayan’s water marks, Deepanshi Sheth’s un-shuttered soho, and Veronica Wang’s synanthropolis. New forms of living and working together are proposed in Chase Kea’s aging in place community, Yang Gao’s edible living, and Chi Zhang’s hutong plugin. Finally, Alvin Wong’s flushing: small-mega and Aditi Thota’s refugee agora both explore how cities can welcome immigrants and preserve diverse cultures and identities. Together the projects offer glimpses of how we might begin to collectively renegotiate our increasingly inequitable and ecologically destructive capitalist system.

The studio is part of a larger School of Architecture collaboration with ARCH+ and IFA to document and imagine alternative futures through the creation of An Atlas of Commoning, which will be exhibited at the Miller ICA from June 29th-Sept 22nd 2019. A special thanks to the Master of Urban Design faculty who have supported the group; Valentina Vavasis, Hal Hayes, Steve Quick, Don Carter, Kristen Kurland, Stefani Danes, Diane Shaw.
As the elderly population continues to increase around the nation, there is a growing need to provide accessible and affordable housing and care to residents. In Pittsburgh, market forces and financial stress have forced many older residents to consider alternative means of living. I believe that cooperative housing and community land trusts together provide a strong financial and social structure to enable elderly residents to age in their communities.
Mass production distanced people away from their food, leading to climate changes and over-consumption. Growing global population and diminishing arable land call to rethink food production. The once casted farmland now began to sprawl along urban centers. However, agriculture often runs countercyclical to the growth of cities. Detroit implemented many policies such as the potato patches in the 1890s and the “Farm-A-Lot” program to encourage individual food production to get through times of hardships. Inevitably, long periods of depopulating Detroit since the 1950s led to the municipal decisions to centralize infrastructure to avoid bankruptcy. Citizens suffered from the occasional power outage and water breaks. Many markets began to close, and many people lost their access to fresh food. As a result, individuals began to reclaim the vacant lots for agriculture uses.

Shared ownership in the form of a cooperative, barring the top-down system, allows for the residents to invest in a community around urban farming in Detroit. Edible Living encourages diversity within its members through flexible rent payments with capital value or sheer labor. An affluent family who enjoys the proximity to their food could potentially account for a portion of the need for one impoverished individual to work and live within the community. Edible Living offers horticulture training programs as well as full-time opportunities for people who are looking for a pleasant living environment. With the demand for horticulture professionals, the environment at Edible Living could encourage more generations to pursue the career.

Large scale global food giants often triumph small scale producers in terms of quantity and price. However, Edible Living connects all of the urban agriculture agents so that competition between local producers is at its minimum through product diversification. Therefore, with the overall trend to buy local and reduce global food mileage, small scale productions could potentially compete at the local market. Harvested crops are shared amongst the members with the excess going to external sources and sold at the community market on site. Through established relationships between Edible Living and external organizations/community supported agriculture programs, Edible Living establishes a sustained demand for their products. By building on the culture around food production, people will appreciate their food and arrange smart decision around choosing their food.
How to transform the top-down, government-dominated public housing system to practice a more democratic and high-quality housing justice in Taipei?

The price to income ratio and rent to income ratio are the basic affordability measure for housing. If we single out some of the world’s famous cities, we can easily find that China’s big cities are ranked in the top in both lists, which means that the pressure on housing for young people in China may be the largest in the world. Real estate has become a popular investment in the context of China’s inflation instead of a place for home. The growing number of “mortgage slaves” has further pushed up the housing price in China.

The right to live is a basic human right, but in China, people have to struggle for it.

In Taipei, the city with the most serious housing problem in Taiwan, public housing policy has been treated as the most important way to practice housing justice. By looking into the existing mechanism of agencies as well as the actors involved, I identified five major problems in the current top-down, government-dominated public housing system:

1. Not enough public engagement in the early and middle stage.
2. Citizens don’t have the chance to communicate with Designers directly.
3. Under the current management system, the relationship between new residents, property management company, and the urban development department is tense.
4. No special agency is responsible for the public housing issue.
5. Lack of social groups’ participation.

I participated in the seminar with the Mayor of Taipei and got feedback from the Department of Urban Development. According to them, there are only 44 public meetings behind 42 public housing projects in Taipei. Rather than saying that these are public meetings, they are more like a government briefing on the community.

In response to the problems above, I propose two new organizations, the housing cooperative founded by the City government, and a self-governing resident’s committee and reimagine the system workflow to provide a realistic and more democratic public housing mechanism. As the core of the new public housing planning and management system, the Housing Cooperative will be a non-profit organization founded by the city government at the beginning. Although it’s a city-owned organization, it should work independently to reduce the state power in the process and will be responsible for its own profits and losses. In addition to this, public meetings will become an important platform to invite different stakeholders, including the government, future tenants and local neighborhoods, designers and potential partners to communicate and negotiate together.

In addition to the organizational principles, I also explore the spatial principles and programs could be applied to the public housing community, basing on the lessons learned from Bolo’bolo and the commoning case studies done last semester. By combining two different layout principles of the Co-op housing projects in Zurich, a new physical form is proposed as the massing strategy, making each neighborhood has their own common space while creating open space in-between to serve the surrounding neighborhoods. Several spatial rules and programs are also raised to guide the architects in future development.
One of the main aims of the ‘teaching hospital’ is also to make sure that it provides good education to the students- an education that will encourage them to stay back in Haiti and improve medicine, rather than move to another country to be able to practice better, with better pay and job security. This means not only better infrastructure within the hospital, but also higher quality of education with the right resources to be able to have practical knowledge rather than textbook-learning, which is often the case in Haitian medical schools.

But how do you integrate these students with the normal goings-on of a hospital, without them hindering the various tasks of the hospital staff? Learning by practice is an integral part of medical school, but can a healing environment for the ill also act as a learning environment for the young? The reason behind the integration of these seemingly independent fields is also to set a precedent for more such institutions. Over time, this institution aims to become a mutually-educative process, where the students learn the need for better medicine in a country like Haiti, and in return can propose to educate the patients, or at least those visiting these patients on a regular basis, how to practice a healthier lifestyle. The first step in improving the medical education system is to integrate practical learning with theory, and a hospital provides the best platform for said practice.

Mere observation in a hospital can help one know that the cause for illnesses amongst Haitians is also due to their lifestyle choices. Haiti has the highest rates of infant, under-five and maternal mortality in the Western Hemisphere. 2% of the people are living with HIV, which in turn also leads to children being born HIV +ve. High numbers of children die before the age of 5 due to malnutrition, a lot of them because of their ignorance about the certain NGOs that specifically cater to child nutrition and health. It is a known fact that the right kind of nutrition is also vital in the recovery of a patient, yet many patients are known to have family members take care of them in hospitals instead of nurses to avoid extra costs. These visitors most often tend to secure food from nearby street vendors to avoid the extra travel-food that is fried, food that is prepared in unhygienic facilities- which can easily harm the recovery process of the patient. They do not realize that in doing, they are also inadvertently prolonging the hospital stay, which will also add to their expenditure.

How then, can one carry out a process that can help the students simultaneously teach and learn? Can a mere hospital building reach its arm far out towards community medicine? Integrating a learning environment with a healing environment might also give the medical students a greater incentive to stay back and help their nation grow. Simple steps within the household can greatly add to the community’s growth. Is it possible that a hospital can accommodate spaces that can help carry out these tasks of educating its visitors about the importance of safe practices before, during and after healing?

Part of the designer’s role includes creating a cohesive built environment that efficiently transitions between a healing and educational space in a way that makes it seem more welcoming than imposing.
Beijing hutong courtyard is a typical Chinese historic residential morphology, which usually manifests as one courtyard in the middle and four houses surrounded. Siheyuan (courtyard housing) was originally single-family housing type when they are built in Beijing as a general pattern in Yuan Dynasty. During the war in 20th century, many house owners sold their houses and moved out of hutong. Some Beijing courtyards starts to become multi-family housing. The socialist transformation in 50s required the house owners to declare their property, and government reclaim the ownerless or “illegal” property as public-owned. In 60s and 70s government announced that any individual who owns more than one whole courtyard or 250m² housing should be “socialized” and donate their property to government. Starts from now single-family households gradually disappeared, and Siheyuan become Dazayuan (mussy and crowded courtyard). In 1980s government start to return the “socialized housing property” back to the previous owners, but the government still kept the lease contracts to make sure the tenants moved in these years won’t be homeless. Up to now the property of courtyard houses has seen a change from private to public, then to partially private. The demographic and ownership became complicated.

The household type of Beijing hutong courtyard has seen a transformation from single family to multi-family in the last century due to historical reasons. The courtyard outdoor space has transformed from private property of one family to common property for all the households. With the shrink of average living area, some households build their own additional buildings on the courtyard as kitchens or storerooms, which is illegally occupancy of common property. Changing demographics of floating population have destabilized the negotiation of common courtyard spaces and make the illegal occupancy issue worse. The site is a residential hutong inside the second ring of Beijing. According to the historical building preservation law, this neighborhood won’t be demolished for new development in at least 20 years. So how to improve the living condition of the residents who live here becomes a question we need to ask.

The hypothesis is forming a new community-based organization, which ideally composed of representatives from government, community committee, urban designers, long-term residents and short-term renters to negotiate with the households about the courtyard illegal construction issue. The goal is to demolish the attached buildings and reclaim the illegally occupied courtyard space. The organization will be founded by Housing Management Department and Historical Preservation Department of the government, and resort to plugin boxes which create new shared facilities, including bathroom, kitchen and laundry, in collectively owned courtyards. Through this way multiple privately built facilities are changed to one common facility construction, natural sunlight condition is improved, more outdoor space is liberated. This organizational and spatial model can be reflected back to the government as a mechanism and can be broadcasted to other hutongs in Beijing.
Though literature continues to create and inspire magnificent spaces, language doesn’t seem to play as an important role in architecture design.

At the beginning of the thesis, I thought this was because unlike other fields of science, a lot of architecture terminologies (theories) are not only obscure but also not universally/objectively defined, causing problems for people to communicate and design with them. And I thought that this plethora of subjective terminologies, was because there were no easy ways to do control variable experiments in architecture. Architectures are hard to build in general, and built examples usually feature interfaced and complicated overflow of information. Therefore, I was interested in VR as I thought a virtual environment could adjust its different factors in real time, thus good for surveys and experiments. However, before I fully dived into making one complicated parametric system, I decided to start with case studies and interviews to investigate how people use language when talking about spaces. In the process, I started to realize how fluid and fickle language truly was, and I wouldn’t want to define a word with averaged-out parameters.

Therefore, I chose to look at this problem from another end, with a generative approach and a computational design perspective. Instead of “decoding” terminologies, I decided to “encode” a small set of words. For a single interior space, by defining a set of basic word input and its operations, all other language input could be mapped onto this personally-defined set of operations by Natural Language Processing techniques. The hope for the system is that the basic set could be highly personalized and subjective, but the mapping of all language stays somewhat logical and consistent, thus creating a system for spatial design based on language input.

That entire process, not the exhibition program, is my proposal to partially answer the thesis question. As proof of concept, the program is behaving based on my own definition of the basic set. Ideally, everyone would be able to define a basic set and the system will behave very differently. Right now, the mapping from other words outside of the basic set is somewhat crude. I envision that the mapping process to be drastically improved with machine learning in the future.

Since the prototype is set in VR, I explored some interactive and unusual spatial conditions, though it’s not the main focus of the thesis. For example, the walls could cave in and point at the user while he/she is moving around in the space, or the space could flip inside out on itself.
In May 2015, House of Cards & Curiosities, closed after 20 years in business. It was a store in West Village that sold things like small animal skeletons, stuffed piranhas and tiny ceramic skulls, nevertheless it did good business. Its closing left four shuttered storefronts on just one block at that time. The fate of the House of Cards & Curiosities is just one example of something odd that’s happening in some of New York’s richest and best-known neighborhoods—a surge in closings and shuttered shops.

Walking through parts of Manhattan feels like occupying two worlds at the same time. In a theoretical universe, one is standing in the nation’s capital of business, commerce, and culture. In the physical universe, the stores are closed, the lights are off, and the windows are plastered with for-lease signs. Long stretches of famous thoroughfares—like Bleecker Street in the West Village and Broadway Street in SoHo—are filled with vacant storefronts. Separate surveys by Douglas Elliman, a real-estate company, and Morgan Stanley determined that at least 20 percent of Manhattan’s street retail is vacant or about to become vacant.

Rising property values are considered a sign of reliable measure of progress. But everything can go too far, and at some point high property values may begin to destroy local economic and social activity. Vacancy on a street, in a neighborhood result in a loss of activity, they affect human presence and foot traffic that affect other businesses in a negative way. The ‘SoHo Effect’ is one that has occurred not only in New York City but across America. SoHo has been a victim of its own success in the past with the transition from being an artists’ haven to an upscale shopping and tourist attraction.

Jane Jacobs wrote about the anonymity of big cities, lively public spaces create opportunity for social contact without commitment. Share a smile, pay for someone’s coffee, and flip someone off. You will never see them again. These anonymous collisions could seem trivial, but they are not. They promote healthy social contact among strangers, they reinforce civility and empathy; people help each other out. And this gets lost when a street loses its shot at developing these connections. Vacant storefronts are not just about filling out empty spaces but also about using these spaces to create program diversity through temporary and productive uses that would help create a thriving neighborhood- one that is not dotted with only Starbucks.

An alternate scenario and one way to work through this is by reactivating the redundant spaces into temporary and productive use for the benefit of community cohesion, place making and enterprise, to bring in diversity to this otherwise mono culture, single programmatic (retail) use within SoHo. The idea is to form a commercial co-operative of a sort where in a board is established not just with landlords but also residents of the neighborhood. The understanding is that SoHo will reach its tipping point, as it did in the past and these spaces could accommodate activities that would bring in the market rate rent but also activities that cannot, but while a daycare, for example, will not bring in money, it will bring in foot traffic on the street which in turn will support the coffee shop that is able to bring in the market rate rent but not people. The idea is to form a larger network where these spaces support one another in different ways and bring balance and stability in this ever changing market.
A myriad of problems have been causing water to become one of the most rarefied and contested resources that people cannot take for granted any longer. From the market vying for the privatization of water and sea level rise impacting real estate values, to waterfronts being threatened by climate change and a growing concern for access to clean water, water has done its job so “well” that we have become desensitized to nature and oblivious to its rarity. Charles Fishman, author of “The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water”, calls the human race “water illiterate” - and rightfully so. Due to our apathetic consumerist behavior, we don’t even question the process of treatment of water, the one resource-based commons that is most intimately tied with our homes, our neighborhoods, and every living being on this planet.

Since the implementation of underground water and sewer systems, we seem to have hidden water from our sights and lives, forgetting that water was the focal point for social gatherings from as early as the bath houses of ancient Rome to the wash houses of France. Even today, several European neighborhoods incorporate a drinking fountain in their public spaces, around which people spend hours of leisure or recreation, and many cultures around the world hold water in high regard, as an asset that unifies large groups. Whatever the relationship with this resource, we are starting to develop this dissolute behavior, in a world where children die of diseases caused by water at the same time communities struggle to get water more than once a week. It very simply needs to stop.

This increased distance from our relationship with water and creeping destruction of the hydrosocial cycle has caused a distorted perception of water and lack of public knowledge, barely considering the global discussion surrounding water access and its consideration, missing a huge opportunity for urban designers to intervene and produce collaborative spaces for the state and public to harmonize and share knowledge on our critical resources, perhaps even spark ideas for alternative methods of resource negotiation.

I stress that this is an opportunity for the local water authority, the PWSA, to reassess their vision and potentially collaborate with local water nonprofit organizations, with the goal of providing accessibility to clean drinking water and awareness about its issues through various micro-urban spaces that not only provide access to public drinking water in urban areas, but also reactivate public spaces around this resource to increase visibility and knowledge of this infrastructure, encouraging its preservation as a public good. The interventions would cultivate a growing relationship between the Allegheny River, the PWSA, and the 300,000 customers across the Greater Pittsburgh region.

It goes without saying that water is one of the most contested resources in the world right now, at both local and global scales. However, there are disadvantages to both governing and negotiating this resource from solely the top-down or the bottom-up approach. I believe that when considering our natural resources - especially in times where they are subject to destruction by private interests - we need to bolster the relationship of the state and civic spheres to work towards the access and treatment of the resource through placemaking that heightens partnerships and kindles advocacy.
As a result of urbanization, habitat fragmentation and edge effects are causing a 27% drop in biodiversity around the world. Interior forest species has decreased significantly and cities are expecting an increasing number of edge species, including synanthropic species who benefit and rely on man-built structures. To help foster a mutually beneficial relationship for humans and synanthropic species and to design for urban cohabitation in Pittsburgh, the project aims to incorporate underutilized urban woodlands to provide new habitats and unique experiences/interactions with urban wildlife on the deteriorating public staircases, while raising awareness of environmental impacts of daily human activities. Pedestrian infrastructure like the public staircases is often located in ecologically valuable urban woodlands close to human activities and communities that actively use and are able to maintain the space. Inspired by the works of Laura Zuroska, Joyce Hwang, Saran Gunawan, Issac Monte, and many others, I am proposing a taxonomy of public space plug-ins on the staircases to incentivize usage, maintenance, and environmental stewardship, while designing for four of Pittsburgh’s most prevalent synanthropes, including raccoons, squirrels, chimney swifts and little brown bats, as they are experiencing conflicts and threats in shared urban spaces with humans.

commoning the city

veronica wang
synanthropolis
rethinking cohabitation with urban wildlife on pittsburgh’s public staircases

LEVEL 3

review 4.00pm 4/19
The future of viable water systems necessitates a rethinking of water paradigms to address the implications between varying scales of material, informational, and organizational structures.

DESCRIPTION
What do you think of when you think of water? Is it a water bottle, or tap water? Perhaps rain, or the ocean? Our cultural understandings of water have been crystallized into distinct categories, yet water that is bottled is the same water that flows through pipes, falls in rain, and fills bodies of water. These complex systems can no longer be distinguished between artificial or natural because they are deeply interrelated.

In human efforts to use water, discard waste, or sell water, we have radically altered water quality and water access, putting the world on a dangerous trajectory. Historic infrastructural decisions and currently growing demands are revealing the widespread implications of water manipulation, from empty aquifers and dried lakes to lead poisoning and chemical contamination. Water is both a hyper-local issue and a global one, and as such requires a radical rethinking.

METHODOLOGY
Using a modified framework for complex systems analysis developed by environmental scientist Donella Meadows, Water Imperatives proposes a methodology for assessing water systems and identifying leverage points within them. Systems can generally be broken down into three areas: the material organization (how the physical pieces act together), informational flows (how information and feedback inform the acting of the pieces), and structural organization (how the entire system functions). Ultimately, paradigms inform how all three function together. Thinking of our concepts about water as a spectrum, our attitudes towards water can be mapped from complete disregard for water to the opposite, respecting water or even worshipping water. By plotting components onto the system structure along one axis and the corresponding paradigm on the other axis, a constellation of points reveal the tensions, overlaps, and contradictions of existing water systems.

CASE STUDIES
Through a contextual and systemic analysis of five case studies, this project highlights different points in water systems that are problematic: Management in the Flint Water Crisis, 2) Drought in Los Angeles, 3) Profit in Nestlé Waters, 4) Pollution in the Ganges River, and 5) Manipulation in Teotihuacán. For example, in Flint, Michigan, the failure of the sociopolitical management systems of regulation, testing, and accountability resulted in tens of thousands of people being exposed to lead over a period of multiple years. Meanwhile, the Ganges River is both ritually bathed in and filled with three billion liters of human and toxic waste each day. Similar stories can be found all around the world.

PROPOSALS
Beyond highlighting different points of the system that are problematic, this process also serves as a method for identifying opportunities for engendering change. This project makes five proposals that could flip the narrative of the previous five case studies to 1) Collective, 2) Decentralization, 3) Equity, 4) Longevity, and 5) Synthesis. Beyond proposals, this project is a demand to reframe our paradigms around water for the future of our water systems.
How might an abandoned Catholic church in Pittsburgh become a place of physical and psychological healing for victims of clergy abuse?

With recent revelations about the gravity of abuse scandals within the Church, especially within Pittsburgh and its surrounding areas, the question of how to deal with the offenders has openly been discussed. However, the course of action for the victims is often overlooked or overshadowed, when in fact it is the most important aspect of embarking on the healing process. Perhaps the most controversial component of this intervention is the decision to situate it within the ruins of a Catholic church. However, there is evidence for the cathartic power of recognition and rebuilding of the past to promote healing for the future. In the pamphlet MOVE: Sites of Trauma, Johanna Selah Dickson writes that, "...Reconstruction of the traumatic memory through architecture can free the present from the past...any act of transformation must recognize recovery as a process of construction, just as the trauma was a process of destruction..." (quote). In addition, the project also implements the basic tenets of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) through architectural intervention. These points include Cognitive Restructuring, Skills Training, Psychological Education, Dealing with PTSD, and Exposure to Trauma Reminders.

The site chosen for the intervention is Saints Peter and Paul Church in the Larimer neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Founded in the latter half of the 19th century, the church was a prominent establishment within the German-Catholic community of Pittsburgh, and also spawned two additional parishes from its Irish and Italian congregants. It has been vacant since it closed its doors in the late 20th century, and has been falling into ruin ever since.

Architecturally, the intervention disrupts the axis of the church as a gestural move, thus contradicting the established spatial hierarchy of the existing architecture. This move also skews the perceived entry to the site, which could be a possible trigger for those hesitant to return to such a building. By playing with the notion of threshold between the old and new structures, the intervention seeks to provide a degree of personal exploration and decision; essentially allowing the user to determine the depth of their re-entry at their own pace. Residual spaces within the hull of the former building are intended to be altered in a way that changes their perception while recognizing their existing (through means such as the addition nature or intentional deconstruction).
The people of Kathmandu Valley - especially those in historic districts - have faced a lot of problems and challenges in their built environment often creating paralyzing conditions over time as dependencies on the apathetic state and market continues. Drawing from traditional collective practices called Guthi - the project looks to exercise radical planning to propose a new form of neighborhood cooperative designed to share resources among low-income residents of communities in the historic core of Kathmandu, increasing their agency and fostering economic sufficiency. It aims toward the production of a solidarity economy that reinstates the access to resources.

The neighborhood guthi will potentially reinstate the citizens as a polity, engendering a transition to an autonomous system that is resilient to future shocks and stresses. Through interventions that aim to create a systems level change in the mindset of the resident community, the Guthi aims to achieve social transformation invoking the sense of what it is to exercise citizenship as it evolves.
How can North and South Korea feel connected through a series of design and infrastructural interventions in order to begin delineating and perforating the DMZ through both physical and emotional means?

HANNARA is a proposal that focuses on the speculation of experimental connections in the context of a unified Korea. The DMZ serves as both a physical and emotional barrier, where the divide further widened the gap between North and South Korea. Through a thorough research exercise and consolidating multiple visits to South Korea with the compilation of North Korean testimonies, a speculative design exercise aims to project different interventions that highlight both a physical and emotional connection between North and South Korea through the narrative of the life of an inter-Korean family during the transitional phase of the unification process.

The framework is divided into three phases: Contextual history research, Potential future speculation, and Experimental scenario possibilities. When approaching speculative design, understanding the history behind the situation is very important, especially in the context of Korean unification. As someone of Korean blood, but born in the United States, this proposal was a journey of my attempt at immersing myself in the culture of North and South Korea. The involved history starts from the Joseon Dynasty, into the occupation of the Japanese, into the Cold War and understanding the circumstances in which they were divided through the Korean War and contrasting how North and South Korea developed under different political institutions. Then we look at the past few years of how unification efforts have developed at an unprecedented rate, revolving around current South Korean president Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un.

Then we go into the “Potential future speculation”, where a spectrum of futures is laid out based on Anthony Dunne’s “Spectrum of Possible Futures”. Expanding out from a central present time, the futures are organized in terms of their probability from possible to plausible to probable, and a cone of preferable futures that lay within this range. In terms of this proposal, the present is signified by the handshake between Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un, where it signifies the beginnings of a unification process at unprecedented rates. These possible futures range from using crypto-currency as a inter-Korean currency to World War III. It is important to consider all possible futures, even the ones that are borderline impossible because all of these futures present a discourse between people on what they could do influence or avoid some of these factors in these futures.

With the spectrum of futures laid out, this presents the opportunity of an “Agency to Design”, where “Experimental Connection Possibilities” are laid out based on the nature conservation of the DMZ, building an inter-Korean infrastructure, speculating future exposure and Pro-unification propaganda, and promoting an objective educational system between the two Koreas. This led to the development of 5 different interventions that promote both a physical and mental connection that can be established between North and South Korea. This family narrative addresses these 5 interventions as part of their timeline, beginning to interweave how these different infrastructures contributed to a gradual implementation on normalizing both the crossing of the border and interacting between North and South Koreans.
How can we use earth and processes of making with it to (re)connect people with construction, materiality, and collaboration? How can those connections, in turn, build collective capacities for an empowered population?

As one of the oldest building typologies in existence, earthen construction serves and impacts billions of individuals worldwide. Abundant, reusable, and cheap, the dirt below our feet can be transformed by anyone into a multitude of forms and functions through the addition of water and manpower. It has stood the tests of time, nature, and usage across continents, and can be seen as a material to pave the way for a more sustainable and equitable future. However, as a material that has served as the basis for civilizations, lifestyles, and spaces to be built upon for centuries, earth has seen waves of (ab)use, shifting, and trauma by humans, and become a discursive and material repository for pollution. We now associate it with dirtiness and laden it with toxicants, only to then excavate and dump it, cover it up, and hide its imperfections beneath layers of asphalt and concrete. The values of societies have shifted, as well our relationship with materials, making, and building. A consumerist mentality and system of specialization have decreased not only collective sharing of knowledge and skills, but also individual awareness and familiarity with construction. We are desensitized from the earth that surrounds us.

‘Dirt Forms’ looks to connect people back with their surroundings, one another, and the material world around them through the power of earth. The project highlights earth as a means for space and place-making: a way to inform thought, action, and collaboration through the creation of an introductory guide to adaptive earthen construction techniques. The aim is not only to show the public the advantages, versatility, and simplicity of working with such a material, but also to propose the power individuals and groups may have by adapting the qualities inherent in earthen construction to their needs and comforts for collective use. By looking at implementation in Pittsburgh, an opportunity arises to widen the impact, usage, and audience making with dirt can through navigating the unique challenges of working in a post-industrial context and how we can start to influence spaces by reclaiming dirt despite its imperfect nature. Through a hands-on process of making with the material, Dirt Forms encourages individuals to share their process and experiences in order to add to the evolving lexicon of earthen construction and further the potentials of earth as a material for sustainable creating in architecture and design, now and in the future.

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commoning the city

In a backdrop of privatization and state apathy, how can the organizational and architectural model of the library leverage its institutional history to the nurturing of a commons institution?

The library occupies a unique niche in the collective cultural imagination of Americans and has an unrivaled opportunity to mitigate the unequal distribution of resources to the masses. As an organizational model, the library’s purpose is simple: to collect, store, and provide access to knowledge. As a political institution, the library represents a pinnacle of cultural knowledge and power—the primary point of access to objective truth for a curious citizenry. As an urban space, the library acts as a public recreational space while simultaneously providing simple human needs like shelter, employment assistance, and interpersonal connection. As an architectural symbol, the library acts as a reference to historical democratic ideals of free assembly and free speech. The library accomplishes all this without conforming to the pressures of the market.

But in a time of extreme political turbulence, reduced funding for social services, obscured privatization, and unregulated surveillance of spaces masquerading as public fora, the role of the library has expanded. No longer simply needed to collect knowledge, the library is now responsible for providing free educational programs for kids after school, free access to ever-evolving technology, free assistance with research and resource questions, and more. More than a holy space for solitary research pursuits, it’s a physical space unencumbered by the burdens of censorship and paywalls that virtual spaces suffer; it is a tool for empowerment in historically disenfranchised communities, arming citizens with evidence and solutions to problems often created by unsympathetic market forces or apathetic government inaction.

Bottom-up community organizations that are focused on providing social services, monitoring community development, and advocating for the rights of historically disenfranchised residents are best equipped to tackle issues of gentrification, housing, and access to resources, but are often unable to scale their efforts to that of the market or state. The historical model of the library can be adapted to fit this purpose, acting as a centralized, symbolic anchor point through which these community resources might identify common ground in order to scale up their operational scope. Known today as the birthplace of America and a major node within the Northeast megalopolis, the City of Philadelphia has a long history concerning issues like contested land ownership, utopian planning ideologies, and radical political undercurrents. These narrative threads are tied not only to the city, but can be extrapolated to the history of the library and the country as a whole. It’s therefore appropriate to consider Philadelphia as a foundational archetype in the ideological premise of democracy: a city built on concepts of freedom, symbolism, and unity. Philadelphia also suffers the urban ailments common to cities today; vacancy, gentrification, and the uneven distribution of resources are particularly prevalent in South Philadelphia. Assembling disparate resources and local initiatives in a disinvested South Philadelphia neighborhood in the form of a library offers space for the commons, acting as a symbol for civic-minded, bottom-up institutionality for the future.

Historically, the architecture of the library has been concerned primarily with communicating the power of objective truth. But as we are propelled into a future of political and climatic uncertainty, the architecture of the library must adapt; like a codex, the building must tell a story: a playful mimicry of institutionality, a bowl-like reading room surrounded by resources in text and human form, otherworldly light, endless labyrinthical shelving… an architecture that embraces multiplicity, evolution, scale, ambiguity, and contradiction.
In her writing Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection, philosopher Julia Kristeva introduces the concept of the abject and describes that it is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.” The abject exists within a liminal space that lies between the subject and the object. The boundaries that define it exist within our own self-rejection and thus creating a sense of displacement and disowning pieces of our own being as well as related objects around us. When it comes to the abject in relation to architecture, one must consider how we as humans interact with space. We inhabit space, we use it, we occupy it, and we rarely consider it an entity. To make a space abject, it first must be considered an object, and for it to be an object, our relationship with it must change. The architecture must diffuse into taboo elements, creating discursive objects and a corporeal space that is unoccupiable.

The works and theories of 3 artists—Robert Smithson, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Louise Bourgeois—can be utilized to help understand what abject space is. Each of these artists had their own theories and concepts relating to space, more specifically its aspect of temporality and affect. Smithson’s Nonsite calls on the concept of boundaries, or rather lack of boundaries, creating metaphorical representations of different sites or locations in places or forms they do not actually exist in. Matta-Clark’s Anarchitecture acts as a mirror for architecture, disrupting not only physical forms but also dismantling architectural authority of the modern era and the aesthetic elitist spaces it creates. Bourgeois’s Unsafe Narrative infuses form with memory, either implementing or denying a narrative that acts as a medium of temporality and the counterpart of spatial architecture.

When it comes to the question of where abject space exists, the answer lies within the proximal neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. These neighborhoods starkly vary in sociopolitical status and many of them suffer from severe poverty and an oversaturation of condemned homes. These condemned homes are abandoned, deemed unfit for occupancy, and serve as an emblem for a new concept: Dead Space, a structure that is killed by its own emptiness. If one were to strip a condemned home of all its structure, the only thing left would be an unoccupiable dead space. It is perceived as an object because we understand that we cannot and should not occupy it, but simultaneously it still exists as a space. This creates ambiguity within our relationship with it. The concept of Dead Space goes beyond a dilapidated condemned home when considering the impoverished neighborhoods they exist in. These neighborhoods themselves become abject Dead Spaces to the adjacent affluent neighborhoods surrounding them. They are perceived as unsafe spaces that should not be occupied, calling upon a significant sociopolitical disparity issue that prominently exists in modern society.
By targeting and redesigning the physical design and operation framework of Flushing’s multi-use mega structures, can small businesses be reenabled to exist amidst large scale developments, and the unique aesthetic and gritty authenticity of Flushing’s streets be preserved?

Food is more than just sustenance.

Restaurants are more than just places to consume it.

Everyone has their own ideas on how food ties to the more unseen aspects of life. Long lost friend reunions, big family gatherings, nervous first dates – these all revolve around a plate of food that holds the power to bring people together. Small “mom n’ pop” shops become the vital physical extensions of the single bedroom apartment bursting with the family of six. A place where the kids grew up doing homework, giving taste tests to their parents’ recipes, and running around bringing a smile to customers’ faces but stern scolds from their parents. Ethnic grocery stores are shining little beacons that both welcome those immigrant enclaves as well as engaging curious outsiders with these groups. It’s these invisible threads that weave food and life together.

Yet these connections may seem like second nature to some, and an indisputable fact of daily human life. There’s nothing immediately special about family run grocery stores, hole in the wall diners, street vendors. It’s just how life is. And when big developments threaten these spaces, it’s just how life is.

Yet is there a logic and an untapped network to these mundane slices of life? I believe there is a massive one. Looking at Flushing, New York, one can see all the necessary ingredients – massive migrant population, ethnic enclaves scattered across the neighborhoods, hidden gems and undying nightlife. The migrants of Flushing have used these blue-collar places to fund the next generation, and traditionally, helped facilitate the next wave of migrants. The massive developments pose a threat to these new waves of migrants, making it harder and harder to run these small businesses throughout the city. A network of existing spaces, run by a co-op that maintains the rent and existence of them will help these new waves of migrants gather the necessary resources to continue this cycle. These developments are also drastically changing the aesthetic and the function of Flushing’s streets. The dense and vibrant apertures of retail spaces that exist every couple of feet are being reduced to one or two entrances a block, which is the typical size of these new mega developments.

Presenting a mixed media experience of Downtown Flushing’s Main Street and the atmosphere of the surrounding back streets, FLUSHING: SMALL SCALE MEGA DEVELOPMENT re-enables small scale businesses to exist amidst large scale developments.

Commoning the city

Alvin Wong

flushing: small scale mega development

re-enabling small scale businesses to exist amidst large scale developments

LEVEL 2

Review 3.15pm 4/20
Former industrial strongholds in the rust belt have struggled with population loss and economic declines stemming from deindustrialization, the latest attempt in several of these cities is immigrant driven revitalization. This urban strategy is used to restore populations, rebuild vacant neighborhoods and recuperate their economies. The application and screening process for refugees averages to about ten years, whereas the resettlement process lasts for 90 days. After the provision of legal, medical, housing and employment assistance, refugees are need to self-reliant to navigate a smooth transition into an unfamiliar environment.

Rust belt cities like Buffalo have both economically and infrastructurally benefited from the resurgence of refugees in the East and West edge neighborhoods of the city. The process of resettlement is highly institutionalized, the federalization of social integration has isolated the multicultural formation of refugee networks to deteriorating suburban neighborhoods which limits interaction with the local community. The contained development of these neighborhoods undermines and conceals the social contributions made by refugees in cities like Buffalo. This is largely because the revitalization strategy is controlled and monitored by a limited number of resettlement agencies targeting to cure residential vacancy. Unless the resettlement process recognizes the diversity of skills different refugee groups bring, it is going to become increasingly difficult to contextualize their represent their labor.

The refugee agora attempts to implement the revitalization strategy by using commercial vacancy to influence residential vacancy and making resettlement a community driven process. Many refugee groups in Buffalo become entrepreneurs as a way of continuing to practice skills they acquire in their home countries, especially coming from agrarian societies, they are highly skilled at agriculture, carpentry, culinary and textile skills. They are also more likely to start their own businesses, except they lack the required guidance and expertise to root themselves in an unfamiliar society. The language barrier hinders majority refugees from developing a sense of belonging to their host countries.

Hence the refugee agora attempts to be a centrally located platform for refugee advocacy and skill exchange, where they are given the opportunity to hone new skills and receive appropriate entrepreneurial and social support. Refugees are a highly underrepresented population that have managed to contribute to the urban revitalization of deteriorating environments. Refugee agora consolidates service provision and integration efforts into a vacant five storey building located in downtown Buffalo aimed to serve the refugee community and build a medium of interaction between newcomers and local residents in order to strengthen pro-immigrant services by having the community be a priority participant in the resettlement process.
Memories, culture, and experiences shape the built environment as the built environment is shaping them.

From East to Islands is a documentary style and moving image project that uses the advantages of the medium of film to makes cuts across time and geography in order to explore similar problems across history, politics, and countries. The narrative is driven by two main parts. The first part is to understand the ways architecture and the built environment both effect and represent the memories and cultural identities of the people who use and inhabit spaces, buildings, cities and neighborhoods. The second part is to understand the history and political insights into the way urban environments have developed over time and the patterns they tend to take.

On one side, the focus is on the Kelly Strayhorn Theater and the historical and current development of East Liberty. On the other side, the focus is on the Plaza de San Juan de Dios in Camagüey, Cuba. With a side by side narrative, the project opens up a dialogue of similar events and stories across different cultures, people, and identities. Recognizing that historical themes and events have repeated themselves throughout history and countries, such as colonization, relocation, and even political racism. The film compares the effects on the architectural and urban development across two different countries and cities. Comparing similarities between their colonization, the effects of the 1929 Stock Market Crash, the destruction of the built environment through political injustice and instability, the displacement of underrepresented populations, and the attempts made to rebuild and revitalize.

As the narrative begins with a look back into history, we as an audience witness both the buildings belonging to the Plaza de San Juan de Dios and the Kelly Strayhorn Theater (originally name the Regent Theater) open, close, and re-open as the past and present combine to blur the differences with how the audience views historical and current events.

Through a series of interviews with American and Cuban citizens that are intercut with historical photographs and footage taken within the past few months, the film makes connections with memories artists and citizens have to their home. Listening to their own, personal experiences and memories they have with architecture and their own culture and urban environment, they speak out what culture is to them, how they were introduced to it in the past or while growing up, and the way they have interacted with built environment on a personal and experiential level. Going into the way they have seen other people come and go or stay as they’ve moved through spaces of culture, time, and history.
How can the touristic representation of Caribbean historical narratives and postcolonial development be reclaimed through national heritage sites?

In the Caribbean, sites of significant historic trauma have been reduced to touristic symbols of a preserved colonial past. This project is a study of the role of colonial-era architecture in the development of Caribbean postcolonial identity and the social, political, and economic positioning of the current Caribbean. Since Jay D. Edward’s “First Comparative Studies of Caribbean Architecture” in the New West Indian Guide, there has been a gap in significant research regarding Caribbean architecture, particularly in relation to the anthropological and sociological aspects of the region. This project would be used to get a better understanding of the use of architecture to create and define a cultural and national identity in a post-colonial society. The goal is to create an understanding of architecture as a clear indicator of the historical narrative of the Caribbean’s development and its relationship with other cultures.

Colonial-era architecture formally preserved through historic designation by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in the Caribbean serves as a basis for case study. The chosen sites are: historic Bridgetown and its garrison (Barbados), Trinidad and the Valley de los Ingenios (Cuba), the first coffee plantations (Cuba), historic Camaguey (Cuba), catedral de Santa María and colonial Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), National History Park (Haiti), Brimstone Hill fortress (St.Kitts and Nevis), and historic Paramaribo (Suriname). The architectural preservation of these locations are seen as a form of “heritage preservation” from a significant time of European rule in the Caribbean’s cultural development history. Today, these sites that were built in the 17th-19th centuries, have become an integral part of the significant tourism industry in the Caribbean; a direct influence to the economy through the preservation of these cultural relics. For example, the neoclassical colonial town of Cienfuegos in Cuba and the National History Park Independence Monuments of Haiti represent different relationships between the architecture of the colonizing country and the Caribbean colony where they are situated. This project will analyze how the preservation of these case studies play a role in the distinct developments of cultural and national identity in Cuba, Haiti, and other significant sites of Caribbean colonial history.

This project asks: How are these countries/architectural sites represented as sites of tourism? How should colonial architecture be reinterpreted for a post colonial identity? How has the cultural narrative been reclaimed, particularly with the role of UNESCO designation?