

# Critical Practices in Architecture



# Critical Practices in Architecture:

## *The Unexamined*

Edited by

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and Aletheia Ida

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## FOREWORD

# CRITICAL SPATIAL PRACTICE: INTRODUCTIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS

JANE RENDELL

When I first introduced the term ‘critical spatial practice’ (Rendell 2003a, 221–33), to describe projects located between art and architecture, and the standpoints theory offered for playing out disciplinary definitions, I was keen to stress three particular qualities of these practices as the critical, the spatial, and the interdisciplinary. I proposed that the definition of the term ‘critical’ be taken from Frankfurt School critical theory, particularly those processes that involve self-reflection and the desire for social change, that seek to transform rather than to only describe. Where Max Horkheimer, arguably the originator of critical theory, distinguishes it from traditional theory, by arguing that traditional theory is a theory of the status quo designed to increase the productivity and functioning of the world as it presently exists (Horkheimer 1937/2002), according to Raymond Geuss, in his later account of the work of the Frankfurt School, of which Horkheimer was a founder member, critical theories are forms of knowledge that differ from theories in the natural sciences, because they are ‘reflective’ rather than ‘objectifying’. In other words, according to Geuss, critical theories take into account and reflect upon their own procedures and methods: ‘A critical theory, then, is a reflective theory which gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation’ (Geuss 1981, 2).

In my own work, I have argued for an extension of ‘critical theory’ to include the work of later theorists, poststructuralists, feminists and others whose thinking is also self-reflective and desirous of change, both to oneself and to society. For me, this kind of critical theoretical work provides a chance not only to reflect on existing conditions but also to imagine something different – to transform the world rather than to simply describe

it.<sup>1</sup> My intention has been to consider how the key qualities of critical theory – self-reflection and social transformation – might be transposed into practice. Drawing on the work of Michael de Certeau (2011) and Henri Lefebvre (1991), I have distinguished between those strategies (for de Certeau) or representations of space (for Lefebvre) that aim to maintain and reinforce existing social and spatial orders, and those tactics (for de Certeau) and spaces of representation (for Lefebvre) that seek to critique and question them, defining the latter as ‘critical spatial practices’.

I later developed my understandings of the potential for critical spatial practices by examining a series of projects located between art and architecture, which sought to question and transform the social conditions of the sites into which they intervened, as well as to test the boundaries and procedures of their own disciplines (Rendell 2006, 1–2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 66 and 191; see also Rendell n.d; 2016, 16). I suggested that while multidisciplinary could be described as a way of working where a number of disciplines are present but maintain their own distinct identities and ways of doing things, an interdisciplinary mode of practice was one where individuals operate between and at the edge of their disciplines and in so doing question the ways in which they usually work (Rendell 2006, 10–11).

Other theorists and practitioners have since worked with the term critical spatial practice, evolving it in different directions. For example, there was the reading group and blogspot initiated by Nicholas Brown in the early 2000s, which came out of discussions around Brown’s own artistic walking practice (IPRH Reading Group. 2006–08; Senn 2006). In 2011, Nikolaus Hirsch and Marcus Miessen started a book series with Sternberg Press called *Critical Spatial Practice* which focused on architectural discourse and practice, and in the first publication they asked the question: ‘What is Critical Spatial Practice?’ (Hirsch and Miessen 2012). Hirsch and Miessen went on, in 2016, to set up a website site called *criticalspatialpractice.org* to archive their work in this area since 2011. And also in 2017, the *MaHKUscript, Journal of Fine Art Research* published a special issue on critical spatial practice, where many of the contributors describe critical spatial practices they have been engaged with that concern, above all, political and ecological issues (MaHKUscript 2017).

For me, looking back at the term now thirteen years on, many of the debates and practices around art and public space into which I proposed the

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of the various possibilities opened up by critical theory for thinking the relationship between theory and practice, see Rendell 2003b.

term have been reformulated in some important ways, and so I want to offer five adjustments to critical spatial practice for today. The first is perhaps the most obvious, but also the most complex, as it relates to the distinction between art and everyday life. This has been a key aspect of art criticism over at least the past 50 years, and although there is not the time nor space to get into the detail of this here, I do want to highlight how the term critical spatial practice, as I originally proposed it, may not pay sufficient attention to the ways in which distinctions can be made between practices that operate as art and those that are intrinsic to everyday life and less interested in their role as art. In Lefebvre's work, it is those practices of representational space, in offering forms of resistance, that might be thought of as closest to critical art practice, and it is through his understanding of different notions of the everyday, that we can also start to distinguish between specific kinds of life practice, from those that simply go along with dominant economic urban forces, to those which react against them, trying to offer change in multiple modes, from revolutionary political confrontation to more playful subversions. And it is this paying of attention to types of spatial practice that is important, from those that are critical in an aesthetic mode to those that are more questioning of economic 'function', the latter being more important in architecture where the category of use has such vital implications for people's lives. The essays in this book, and the critical spatial practices with which they engage, develop this aspect of the debate in some fascinating ways.

Second is an adjustment which explores relations between interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. The presence of the unconscious in interdisciplinarity interests me, because it indicates how difficult such work is, not only materially and intellectually, but also emotionally. In demanding that we exchange what we know for what we do not know, and that we give up the safety of competence and specialism for the fears of inability and failure, the experience of interdisciplinary work produces a potentially destabilizing engagement with existing power structures, allowing the emergence of untested knowledges and uncertain understandings. Cultural critic Homi Bhabha has described interdisciplinarity in psychoanalytic terms as 'the acknowledgement of the emergent sign of cultural difference produced in the *ambivalent* [my emphasis] movement between the pedagogical and performative address' (Bhabha 1994, 163),<sup>2</sup> while Julia

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<sup>2</sup> In an interview with W.J.T. Mitchell Homi Bhabha has distinguished the widely accepted 'Interdisciplinarity 1', where the 'foundational truths' of disciplines are put 'in proximity' in order to create a 'wider base', and the more problematic, 'Interdisciplinarity 2', which, 'posed at the point of our disciplines' liminality ...

Kristeva has noted that ‘interdisciplinarity is always a site where expressions of *resistance* [my emphasis] are latent’, arguing that because of ‘a tendency to jealously protect one’s own domain. Specialists ... do not ... teach their students to construct a diagonal axis in their methodology’ (Kristeva 1998, 5–6).

So if interdisciplinarity is concerned with working in a place *between* disciplines in order to question their edges and borders from a psychic as well as social perspective, transdisciplinarity is often described as a horizontal movement, concerned with moving *across* disciplines, transversally. Derived from the Latin preposition ‘trans’, meaning ‘across, to or on the farther side of, beyond, over’, the term can be used to give the sense of ‘across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing, or state to another’ (OED 2019). But as philosopher Peter Osborne points out in his important intellectual history of transdisciplinarity, where he traces the term back to its roots in systems thinking, the distinguishing feature of transdisciplinary work has been its way of connecting to disciplines outside academia (see e.g. Osborne 2015), this insight allows us to remember that these terms are historically generated and to reconsider the relation of practices both inside and outside academia and their associated disciplines in new configurations.

In this vein, I have been particularly interested in Gary Genosko’s discussion of how, for the philosopher Félix Guattari, the interdisciplinarity (of 1968) was compromised: it relied too much on the disciplines between which it was located, and served to strengthen rather than question their dominance (Genosko and Guattari 2002, 24).<sup>3</sup> For Guattari, it is transdisciplinarity that holds the potential of radical critique, linked in his own philosophy to transversality, an ‘unconscious source of action’, that carries a group’s desire, ‘a dimension opposite and complementary to the structures that generate pyramidal hierarchisation’ (Guattari 1964, 22). A key early question for Guattari concerns what becomes of transference in

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requires us to articulate a new and collaborative definition of the humanities’. See Mitchell 1995.

<sup>3</sup> In many ways the problems of the interdisciplinarity of 1968 as recounted by Genosko, in terms of being ‘team-based’, adopting ‘brain-storming’ and the ‘growing influence of the marketplace’, resonate both with Homi Bhabha’s definition of interdisciplinarity 1 and my characterisation of multidisciplinary as I discuss above. However, a real interrogation of the relation between these three pairs of distinctions would need a much longer piece of research thoroughly embedded in the material conditions of the late 1960s in France and the mid/late 1990s in the UK and the US.

the institutional setting of the hospital, and it is transversality which for him provides the possibility of critiquing the ‘institutional context, its constraints, organisation, practices, etc., all those things and relations which normally exist in the background’ (Genosko and Guattari 2002, 71).

If critical spatial practice, as I introduced it in 2002 and 2006, prioritized the role of the interdisciplinary, that I defined as *a place between* disciplines, to provide a critique of existing methodologies – including artistic projects which adopt architectural processes, architectural works which draw on fine art approaches, as well as art/architectural collaborations – how might the *between* of interdisciplinarity might relate to the *across* of transdisciplinarity today?<sup>4</sup> If the *between* remains related to the points from which it is separated, then perhaps the *across* is more focused on the movement between these points and what lies beyond them,<sup>5</sup> an emphasis which is particularly useful when investigating the operation of critical spatial practice in and through time.

So the third adjustment I want to focus on concerns the importance of time in critical spatial practice. My experience of the time-based curatorial premise of *One-Day-Sculpture* curated by Claire Doherty and David Cross, encouraged me to think again about some key spatial terms and to ask: ‘what occurs when time comes to the fore rather than space?’ (Rendell 2009). The subtitle of geographer Edward Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies* of 1989, ‘the reassertion of space in critical social theory’ refers to one of the main projects for cultural geographers in the 1970s (Soja 1989). A number of marxist geographers in that period took issue with the dialectical processes of historical materialism, where history was taken to be the active entity in

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<sup>4</sup> My initial conceptualization of the ‘between’ drew on the radical move offered by Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction as a critique of binary structures, to think ‘both/and’ rather than ‘either/or’, in order to invent a new term, like ‘critical spatial practice’, which operates simultaneously as both of the binary terms, and yet exceeds their scope. Yet I also drew inspiration from Gilles Deleuze’s notion of the relay as important for thinking about the relation of theory to practice. See Rendell 2006, 9–10.

<sup>5</sup> Although current debate is full of references to multi-, inter-, trans- and post-disciplinary research and practice, there are very few accounts, which attempt to define the terms, or discuss on what basis an account of their differences might proceed. An exception is Isabelle Doucet and Nel Janssens (2011, 2), who have suggested that transdisciplinary knowledge in architecture and urbanism is distinguished by three features: the relation of discipline (theory) to profession (practice), an ethical dimension, and the experimental quality of design.

shaping social production, and space was considered merely as the site in which social relations took place.

Geographers such as Soja, as well as David Harvey and Doreen Massey argued for the importance of space in producing social relationships and in so doing had turned to the work of Lefebvre (Harvey 1989; Massey 1994) and his understanding of the two-way relation between the spatial and the social: 'Space and the political organization of space', he argued, 'express social relationships but also react back upon them' (Lefebvre 1991, 8).<sup>6</sup> The 'turn' to spatial theory in the late 1980s and early 1990s highlighted the importance of space in the postmodern period, when academics from all kinds of disciplines turned to geography for a rigorous and theoretically-informed analysis of the relationship between spatial and social relations, and of place and identity.

But more recently we have seen the valorisation of the relational and the performative, two terms that cannot be theorized or practised without reference to time. These emerging critical thematics are integral features of what is being called the 'performative turn'. Noticing time again has huge implications for spatial practice, practice is a process, it is nothing if not time-based: to practice is a verb, verbs are words of action – they make or take place over time. So what happens if we rethink Soja's call for the 'reassertion of space in social theory' as the 'reassertion of time into critical spatial practice'? It is stating the obvious that the spatial must be thought of in relation to the temporal; yet what we are considering here is not necessarily time only as history, but a rather fuller investigation into time's various modalities: flow, flux, duration, ephemerality and event.

Such 'a reassertion of time in critical spatial practice' (to paraphrase Soja) leads us to search for the temporalities of site-specificities. This time-based focus would seem to be particularly appropriate for thinking through my fourth adjustment, which is a reflection on how the dynamic of work in this area has been until recently at its most vibrant in relation to urbanism, from resistance to neo-liberal patterns of regeneration, including state-led gentrification to the ways of reconstructing after disaster, and to broader propositions for alternative forms of planning and practising 'otherwise'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>This quote from Henri Lefebvre, emphasized by David Harvey, is discussed in Soja 1989, 81, footnote 4.

<sup>7</sup>See the work of Doina Petrescu on altering practices and practising otherwise. For example, Petrescu 2007; Petrescu et al. 2010; and Petrescu and Trogal 2017.

Reflecting on the work of art-architecture collaborative muf, critic Kath Shonfield posed the following questions and observations: ‘How do you develop a city-wide strategy when you are fascinated by the detail of things? And how can you make something small-scale in the here and now if you are driven by the urge to formulate strategic proposals for the future? muf’s work ... develops the particular to the general and back to the particular... It is expressed in the formula  $d/s = \text{DETAIL/STRATEGY}$ ’ (Shonfield 2001, 14). Shonfield frames the micro-macro interactions of muf’s working processes through the spatial turn, as does my own term ‘critical spatial practice’. However, it has become increasingly clear that the tactics and strategies – ambient, ambulant, direct, DIY, instant, insurgent – to name but a few, of this current phase of urbanism set the tone for a nuanced exploration of temporality, the need to include both the fleeting event as well as the patience required to ride out the long duration of planning, as in the work of the Austrian collaborative duo, transparadiso, and architect and visual artist, Apolonija Šušteršič, which span the making of temporary interventions and long-term engagements and projects (see e.g. Holub and Hohenbüchler 2015; transparadiso 2013; Šušteršič 2019).

But the fifth and final adjustment is perhaps the most important one, as it concerns the effectiveness of criticality to deal with the kind of challenges we currently face. Does a critical position contain within it the offer of an alternative, or is it simply a negation or rejection, of a norm? This attempt to position criticality in relation to the positive and the negative relates to current debates around both the post-critical and the question of the ‘unexamined’ in the title of this book. So I offer these thoughts as an opening into the book’s content, perhaps as a lens through which to consider the different perspectives put forward here, all of which deal in practices that are forms of art, design or architecture, that offer not only critique as a rejection of practices and ideologies that are understood as unacceptable and unjust, but also alternative ways of doing things that affirm a set of alternative aspirational values and start to enact a path towards the futures to which they point.

The US version of post-criticality dominant in the architectural discourse of the early 2000s, exemplified by Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting’s paper, ‘Notes around the Doppler Effect and other Moods of Modernism’, is something I took issue with in the introduction to *Critical Architecture* (Rendell 2007). While I agreed with Somol and Whiting’s rejection of an autonomous form of disciplinary, previously advocated by critical architects like Peter Eisenman, I disagreed with their rejection of an oppositional dialectic, believing that there are certain things and ideas that

need to be opposed. My position then was to hold onto the basic tenets of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School – namely forms of knowledge that are self-reflective and emancipatory – and to argue for their transposition into practice (for a more detailed discussion, please see my chapter at the end of this book, which can be read together with this foreword). I still hold those views, but here I want to focus on the question of why opposing something and choosing to reject it might have been considered a problem in itself.

In an age of relentless positivity, where the demand is to see even problematic situations in terms of their potential ‘going forward’, one of the reasons to reject a critique which takes the form of opposition, may well be to do with the perceived negativity of such a position, and the problems neoliberal cultures have with the negative. For this reason alone, it is interesting to consider how to argue for the potential of the negative. In the *Work of the Negative*, the late French psychoanalyst Andre Green puts forward four specific thematics for considering how the negative operates in psychoanalysis – through absence, refusal, reversal or inversion, and nothing (Green 1999). He writes that the practice of psychoanalysis is a particular kind of work, one which makes the negative visible, and that this is because it concerns intersubjective confrontation, not just the address of another subject, but an experience in which the other subject must be included but not controlled. There is the confrontation of another without, he says, which corresponds to the self-confrontation of another within. This is a doubled confrontation with the other – without *and* within. Green called this method – where ‘the positive’ equates to ‘the negative of the negative’ – ‘dialogical’ (rather than dialectical) ‘thinking’ (Urribarri 2018, 66). Green’s ability to complexify negativity, and to understand that it contains – as well as refusal – reversal, absence or even nothing at all, might offer a way of considering how the negative of the critical function is still relational and perhaps then even ethical.

Following a different philosophical trajectory, Rosi Braidotti has proposed ‘that political agency need not be critical in the negative sense of the oppositional and thus may not be aimed solely or primarily at the production of counter-subjectivities. Subjectivity is rather’, she writes, ‘a process ontology of auto-poiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability.’ She has argued that: ‘Contemporary nomadic practices of subjectivity – both in pedagogy and other areas of thought – work towards a more affirmative approach to critical theory’ (Dolphijn, and van der Tuin 2012, 19–37. And in their work on a post-

critical pedagogy, Naomi Hodgson et al, posit that this affirmation does not need to accept, but can take the form of caring and protecting what we love, and in so doing turn towards hope (Hodgson, Vlieghe and Zamojski 2017).

The post-critical is used here not to reject or negate criticality but to consider how work that occurs after criticality has been asserted can operate in dialogue with it in order to develop more possibilities. We could think of the post-critical here as a way, not of saying that because we come after the critical, that everything critical is over, but rather as an indicator that the critical has arrived, and that everything which occurs after this announcement, is in its midst, marked by it, and so a form of continuation with, or relation to, rather than breakage from, the critical.

The art critic Jan Verwoert, by suggesting that we need to enact refusals of options which allow us either a no or a yes, takes things one step further in opening up the space for other possibilities. He refuses to choose the negative nor to assert a positive: ‘Maybe the secret of autonomous agency and the good life lies precisely in opening up the space of those other options through a categorical refusal to accept the forceful imposition of any terms, leaving us no choice but to choose between *either* yes or no?’ (Verwoert 2017, 208). In this light, the work that is done through the ‘unexamined’ need not be understood as that which is not there, not examined, and so considered in the negative, nor as what is there, as a posited possible unexamined, but rather as a refusal of the existing options of yes or no, and instead a way of negotiating a space of multiple alternatives placing ‘the affirmative potential of no alongside the dissident capacity of yes-saying as a species of refusal’, as artist-writer Emma Coker has put it in *The Yes of the No* (Coker 2016).

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# INTRODUCTION

*Critical Practices in Architecture: The Unexamined*, embraces the idea that in today's complex, unsustainable world, multiple, emerging perspectives are critical to the design fields and the environment as a whole. This orientation to complexity, questioning, and self-reflection characterize critical practice. In opposition to conventional conceptions of architectural education and work, Jane Rendell's ground-breaking work defines critical spatial practice as "self-reflective modes of thought that seek to change the world." This mode of practice is reflected in the growing body of work done by socially engaged architects and artists across the world. This book extends a much-needed conversation on the built environment. It seeks to open up directions for understanding various aspects of critical practice as an expanded field encompassing architecture in all its entanglements, questioning the experience, agency, ethics, and the making of place—and what critical practice means in our changing times.

The book contributes to newly emerging and established dialogues occurring within today's art and design professions internationally. Focusing on the broad theme of critical practice and what that means for the work of architects, artists, urbanists, planners and social theorists in our complex, changing times, each chapter seeks to find places of convergence for the multiple strands that form around themes of practice, methods, theory, pedagogy, and representation across these disciplines. The goal is to engage and challenge readers from across countries and fields of study.

The chapters in this volume connect several relevant conversations under the umbrella of critical practice. For example, chapters in *The Experience of Place* relate to the kinds of conversations about social engagement, art, and design. The chapters on data mining, digital tooling, and soft materials relate to a growing interest in the intersection between the built environment and technology. *The Unexamined* builds on questions raised by several existing edited collections, including *Fast-forward Urbanism: Rethinking Architecture's Engagement with the City*, edited by Dana Cuff and Roger Sherman, *Beyond Shelter: Architecture and Human Dignity*, edited by Marie Aquinilo, *Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism* - edited by Bryan Bell and Katie Wakeford, and *Becoming Places: Urbanism/architecture/identity/power*, edited by Kim Dovey.

As noted in the acknowledgements, *The Unexamined* presents a selection of work from an international conference co-hosted with Architecture, Media, Politics, Society (AMPS) at the University of Arizona School of Architecture in February 2018. The conference was titled “Critical Practice in an Age of Complexity.” It offered an interdisciplinary critique of the built environment and brought together global delegates from various fields and backgrounds, including artists, architects, community activists, designers, ecologists, film-makers, historians, landscape architects, media specialists, sociologists and urbanists. The conference call asked participants to question “whether in today’s increasingly complex world, practice can be ‘critical.’ Can it understand the conditions it operates in? Can it challenge these conditions? Can it change them? Can it make a difference?”<sup>1</sup> Our faculty found these themes and questions especially pressing, as we had been grappling with them in the context of institutional pressure to keep an architecture program relevant to the shifting priorities of a land grant institution in the early 21st century.

*The Unexamined* continues and develops this initial line of questioning about critical practice, elaborating on theory, methods and practice. Inviting Jane Rendell to keynote the conference was a natural choice due to her stature and relevance to the concept of critical spatial practice. At the last minute she was not able to travel because of a strike across the United Kingdom that was opposing proposed cuts to pensions for those in higher education. Instead of traveling to the conference, she woke up in the middle of the night to give her presentation in Arizona by Skype so she could remain present in London to participate in the strike. The backdrop of the strike gave her lecture an especially memorable, critical context, which she related to her theories and experiences with ethics, research and teaching. What could have been a conference organizational disaster ended up being an inspiring lesson in personal character and ethics.

Since the conference the need to double down on our commitment to critical practice has grown even more apparent. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on Global Warming, released in the fall of 2018, made clear that the time we have to prevent the worst effects of climate change is dwindling rapidly. The pressures of migration and increasing political instability around the world have become impossible to ignore, especially from our location in Tucson, Arizona, close to the border with Mexico. We are reminded daily that architects, landscape architects, and planners are instrumental in creating the built environments that are the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://architecturemps.com/arizona/>

backdrop for the global processes of late capitalism. There is a growing understanding in discourses about architecture and design that to be critical means not only to understand how our work perpetuates and accelerates global processes, but also to question how reframing the work of design might lead us to establish different trajectories for our culture and the built and natural environments we all share. This is an expansive definition of what it means to be critical, spanning education, practice, community engagement, and theory-building.

The work of the authors in this volume illustrates the potential of critical practice through a series of rich examples and theoretical inquiry. Building on Jane Rendell's work on critical spatial practice, many authors engage the discourse of contemporary design by expanding upon ideas that infuse political, social, and environmental agendas into art, architecture, and urban design. Critical theories of Marxist sociology introduced by Max Horkheimer in the 1930's can be traced from the first chapter onwards, registering in references to Noam Chomsky's disaster capitalism theories, and then again in Manfredo Tafuri's general critique of the architecture profession in the 1970's as a support mechanism for capitalist objectives. In many chapters, the authors cite concepts from materialist and assemblage theories, including those of Deleuze and Guattari, Michel de Certeau, and Kim Dovey, as well as the social complexity theories of Manuel DeLanda. The introduction of the aesthetic as a core value to be considered in contemporary practices arises in these writings by way of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological position on direct individual experience as a means for understanding environmental conditions and human-nature relationships, is echoed through Graham Harmon's object oriented ontology and notions of enmeshing, and in Bruno Latour's arguments on the politics of science vs. the arts under contemporary climate change. Authors who are concerned primarily with the urban scale engage the reader with early thinkers, such as Walter Benjamin, who identifies architecture in the urban environment as a background that crafts life's social experiences. These ideas are echoed in the ideas of simulacra by Jean Baudrillard and in Henri Lefebvre's opposition of conceived and lived space. Experimental approaches to mapping urban conditions are addressed in several chapters, including Kevin Lynch's notions of human flows and interactions as a significant element of city form, Ian McHarg's ecological design theories informing contemporary GIS techniques, as well as William Mitchell's assessments of landscape and power and the emerging invisible conditions of technology pervading urban life. Many authors, in one way or another, tend to culminate their arguments around the reactions to late capitalism and technical determinism using the work of critical theorists, from the

significance of play by Miguel Sicart, to the optics of disciplinary methodologies by Henri Lefebvre, and the resistance to conformist operations of dominant culture by K. Michael Hays. The origins of such contemporary subaltern theories may indeed have roots in Michel Foucault's critiques of architecture and urban design, which make clear the instrumentality of these disciplines as mechanisms that serve authority and as an inherent form of social control. Yet the critique of the top-down influences from these critical theorists may be exactly why some chapter authors seek knowledge through theories of human psychology, such as those developed by Donald Broadbent and Amos Rappaport, or the feminist and sexual theories of Luce Irigaray. In sum, the diversity of theoretical discourse presented in this book reflects a common perspective with similar threads and echoes of thought in different contexts. At the same time, each chapter provides specific theoretical insights and nuance to spark our curiosities, raise questions, and engender hope for alternate possibilities to emerge.

**Section 1**, *Working on the Ground*, builds on the authors' first-hand experiences in design studios in Australia, in an informal settlement in Kenya, in the Ninth Ward in New Orleans, and in two redeveloped districts in Montreal. These chapters show how critical practice can shape pedagogy, community engagement, and research. In Chapter 1, Janet McGaw explains how she teaches a critical studio to engage international students in deeper exploration of the consequences of global flows. The techniques she uses, grounded in theory, set up the expectation that design is emergent and redefine difference as a "subjective and dynamic encounter between cultures which produces new hybrid architectures." Her approach helps students find a critical perspective to make sense of a changing world. In Chapter 2, Courtney Crosson and Kepha Ngito investigate the different ways access to water is controlled in an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya. Using Participatory Urban Appraisal as a method, they find that, despite past reform efforts and future plans to expand access to water, a critical perspective means considering how water distribution can be achieved effectively and equitably. Chapter 3, by Joern Langhorst, uses the lens of a built project in New Orleans's Ninth Ward to argue that the discourses of sustainability and resilience are built on fundamentally shaky ground. The design project described, a platform over the bayou, is used as a community gathering place. It reflects the concept of critical practice by providing a community a place to determine their own future. Chapter 4, written by H el ene B elanger, Dominic Lapointe, and Alexis Guillemard, with Sara Cameron, discusses the rise of neighborhoods in Montreal where the techniques of tourism are reflected back upon the people the developers

and city planners hope to attract to the area. The authors question whether critical planning is possible and argue that public spaces should be designed in a way that is broadly inclusive, rather than that narrowly targets specific users and activities. These chapters set the scene for the rest of the book, illuminating the many ways the concept of critical practice can inform the work of design.

**Section 2, Taking a Step Back,** seeks to question the core assumptions behind how designers engage with the built environment. In Chapter 5, Eduardo Kairuz and Sam Spurr clarify the ramifications and complexities of coal mining in Australia. In defining mining ideology as a hyperobject, they engage with a form of resistance aesthetics, specifically with its scale and violence, looking at creative practice as a way to develop new forms of communication. In Chapter 6, Kathleen Kambic uses the example of the Colorado Compact to show how water resources have often been overlooked in the field of landscape architecture. The project has been managed and distributed through socio technical processes associated with capitalism and neoliberalism, often considered to be outside the boundaries of the traditional professional field. Yara M. Colón Rodríguez and Luz M. Rodríguez explore the situation after the Hurricane Maria disaster in Puerto Rico in Chapter 7, with a critique of the assumed irrelevance of the architectural profession to make transformative change. The chapter provides specific Puerto Rican architecture practices and case study examples that are pushing the boundaries towards the pluralist and critical place-making that the authors' positions aspire to. In Chapter 8, Najlaa Kareem ties together theoretical ideas to highlight and parallel a shift from the conventional praxis of architecture and urbanism which uses dualisms, to a more process-based, inclusive design methodology. Peter Eisenman's work as a theorist and practitioner is highlighted to explore these new directions in critical architectural practice. These chapters invite us to question our frameworks and propose a way to work toward change.

**Section 3, Making in Detail,** focuses on creative work that engages critical practice in the space between art and architecture. Each of the four authors locate their work in the field of critical theory and explain how this perspective has informed their practice's work. Julia Jamrozik presents her interactive public installations in Chapter 9, which engage multi-generational populations with acts of play and curiosity, offering a lens to view the concept of play as a socially liberating force in the public realm. In Chapter 10, Andrea Wheeler explores nontraditional relationships of humans and nature and the resultant ecological aesthetic and sustainable implications. She highlights the increasing need for the inclusion of

aesthetics and ethics in the field of sustainable design and narrates an exhibition of kites at the Venice Biennale, which reflects and anticipates these questions. Kathy Waghorn's practice is discussed in Chapter 11. She describes her work as an event marked by openness and change rather than something bounded and static. It is a process of exchanges. She puts her projects in conversation with the dynamism of assemblage theory as opposed to static concepts of the master narrative and plan. Beth Weinstein's work in Chapter 12 delves into the instruments, artifacts and laborers in our midst. It shows how her performances engage the senses and body in a series of multi-layered critical, spatial practices that challenge and reveal the seemingly at times invisible processes and their manifestations in our midst. These chapters put a spotlight on the significance of the moment of interaction—between people and people, people and objects, and objects and other objects—in critical practice.

**Section 4**, *Transforming What's Next*, brings the perspective of critical practice to bear on the technological changes transforming our world. In Chapter 13, Maya Przybylski discusses software-embedded design, where computation is key to the ongoing mediation between the designed object and the external world. Drawing from concepts in the field of Software Studies, she argues for a higher level of literacy, not just in computational techniques, but also in the qualitative and quantitative aspects of data quality. These “soft materials” profoundly transform the way space is designed, used, and experienced. In Chapter 14, James Brazil, Shruti Khandelwal, and Esber Andiroglu outline a proposal for a way the urban built environment could be better integrated with the food production system. Their concept uses a dynamic model to match the food needs of a given population with the affordances of different building types and locations. Chapter 15, by Celen Pasalar and George Hallowell, raises provocative questions about the implications of smart technologies that suggest a top-down, rather than bottom-up, implementation of technology with a primary focus on efficiency. The authors suggest planners work towards a human-centered perspective on how planners could evaluate the interaction between the implementation of smart technology and the goal of creating high-quality places for everyday experiences. In Chapter 16, Marantha Dawkins begins by describing landscapes as the result of power relations. Applying this lens to present-day Pittsburgh, she introduces the concept of the superorganism, returning agency in a landscape that has long been dominated by human activity to an ecosystem of plants. She describes a project called Behavioral Landscape, a collaboration with Nicolas Azel, that shows how critical practice works from theory to design. Together, the

chapters in this section show the role of theory in creating—and critically questioning—new futures.

Much of the work in this volume makes an explicit or implicit case for foundational change in the practice of design. Some see data-driven approaches as a way to advance the goal of equity, while others argue for a fundamental shift in the theoretical underpinnings of design. While critical practice resists a categorical definition, one shared element is a continual drive to challenge assumptions. Future work in the field should continue in this tradition, ensuring that we shape the conversation to engage students, practitioners, policymakers, along with everyday people, to engage as thinkers and makers of the built environment.

