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## Critical Proximity: Uniting Community Engagement and Research in The Architectural Design Curriculum

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### Abstract

The architecture curriculum is usually divided into studio courses and lecture, or seminar courses where design and research, respectively, are separately pursued. Although the curriculum is crafted to unite the approaches of design, the humanities, and the sciences that together comprise the architectural endeavor, in practice, these forms of inquiry are divided along epistemic lines into separate courses that rarely intersect.

Two structures common to architecture programs, however, avoid these divisions: the community design center, and the research studio. The first unifies design with community engagement and exposure to real-world issues, while the second incorporates humanistic or scientific research into the studio. In this paper, we present the work of a three-course Humanities Lab sequence recently taught at Miami University of Ohio that pursued methodological promiscuity by uniting community-based research and design. In so doing, we jettisoned the expertise traditionally claimed by the architect to create a more inclusive practice by centering on the lived experience, history, and expertise of community members instead of buildings. We engaged in what Eyal Weizman has called “critical proximity,” in which the distanced position of the researcher is rejected in favor of working alongside and for marginalized communities. Over the course of three semesters, we explored the impact of critical proximity in three different endeavors—a seminar, a research studio, and in exhibition design—and engaged corollary pedagogical and methodological strategies that leveraged our critically-proximate position: thickness, community-based research, and decentered production. Together, these strategies allowed us to reimagine the role of the architect as a designer-researcher aligned with community interests.

**Keywords:** Community design, social movements, design research, research studio, engaged pedagogy.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although architectural research has come to embrace inter- and multidisciplinary, the experience of architectural education can often feel fragmented as students are called on to engage in dramatically different epistemologies as they march from class to class in the course of their day (Groat and Wang 2013).

Instructors approach architecture as a physical science in the building systems class, as a social science in the professional practice course, as a design discipline in the studio, and as a humanistic discipline in the history/theory seminar. Rarely are approaches shared between classes of different types, and rarely do they converge in the forms of research that students undertake. Architecture is an inherently

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multidisciplinary field, one in which a single object of investigation—the building—is subject to widely varying modes of research, including practice-based designerly modes—something that Jane Rendell argued was unique to the field of architecture (2004, 143). However, the traditional cultural emphasis on the design studio, and its corresponding de-emphasis of other coursework as supplementary, enculturates students into a mindset that overvalues the “variant” (individual creativity, formal exploration, speculation and experimentation) over the “model” (convention, precedent, or type), as architectural theorist Dana Cuff has described (2012). Schools thus equip students with a “variant”-oriented toolkit in which the core skills of drawing, diagramming, spatial organization, and material assembly are used primarily to invent “variants,” or, design solutions that prize novelty and innovation (388). Students carry the “variant”-oriented toolkit with them even into service-learning courses, in which students engage communities outside of the university and are ostensibly charged with prioritizing community needs. There, the tension between individualism, creativity and novelty and the realities of community needs can foster skepticism, and at worst falls into a paternalistic *noblesse oblige* (Schuman 2012, 258). Generally speaking, architectural pedagogy has grown increasingly inclusive in recent years, recognizing the value of voices and practices beyond the Eurocentric canon. But architectural pedagogy has not yet grown inclusive enough to challenge the siloed nature of its constitutive epistemologies, nor has it allowed a real questioning of the value of architectural expertise and made room for the uncertainties that emerge from community-based research and its potential to exceed architectural expertise.

In this paper, we look to structures and models in the architecture curriculum that offer opportunities to bridge epistemological divisions and expand our notion of expertise: the research studio and community-engaged service learning through the community design center [CDC]. In different ways, the research studio and the CDC allow for methodological promiscuity in which expertise and lived experience, the quantitative and the qualitative, and the academic and the designerly come together. The opportunity to explore and hybridize these models arose in the context of a long-time partnership between Miami University and the Cincinnati-based Over-the-Rhine People’s Movement. Over-the-Rhine People’s Movement is a coalition of activists, institutions, and residents who have

engaged in many “struggles” or campaigns over the course of five decades fighting for housing access, schools, parks, and services against hypergentrification, and against a municipal bureaucracy actively working to eliminate the poor from their picturesque, historic neighborhood. (Addie 2009; People’s Movement 2010) The People’s Movement recently sought an opportunity to reflect on their achievements and to consider the fate of a considerable collection of materials built up over the years. Together with students, we worked with Movement activists to survey their informal archive, to delve deeply into some of their most consequential campaigns, to examine the contemporary status of the issues around which they continue to organize, and to project their legacy forward to imagine a more just and equitable future.

In this paper, we first review the history of each model, and articulate the innovations they offer as well as their shortcomings. Second, we propose an alternative positionality with respect to research in the architectural school that eschews critical distance in favor of what Eyal Weizman has termed “critical proximity.” In so doing, we jettison the “variant”-oriented toolkit to collaborate with the Movement on work that recuperates their history of activism, exposes ongoing neighborhood injustices, and projects a future in which poor and marginalized people are both seen and valued. This work required the development of a new, critically-proximate mindset and toolkit that allowed us to research in-community with the Movement. To elaborate this toolkit, we present the pedagogy and outcomes of three courses taught from this positionality: a seminar, a research studio, and an independent study, culminating in a collaboratively designed exhibition at the Cincinnati’s Contemporary Arts Center. Finally, we reflect on the forms of pedagogical inclusivity that critical proximity allows us to achieve.

## THE RESEARCH STUDIO

The phenomenon of the architectural research studio has a decades-long history. We often attribute its origin to Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown’s 1968 Yale studio in Las Vegas, the products of which were published as *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), and their 1970 studio in Levittown, PA (Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour 1977; Colomina 2008; Lautin 2013). Those collaboratively taught studios were informed by Scott Brown’s earlier pedagogical experiments at UCLA and Penn. They also drew upon the tradition of collective research found in planning

studios, which Venturi and Scott Brown translated to the context of architectural education to focus attention on commonplace suburban patterns and everyday building typologies dismissed as kitsch or as undesignated by Modernist practitioners (Scott Brown 2021; Lavin 2022; Didelon 2011).

More recently, Rem Koolhaas renewed the research studio in the late 1990s with the Project on the City at Harvard University Graduate School of Design. In it, Koolhaas revisited and expanded Venturi and Scott Brown's model, focusing the project on complex urban systems (such as metropolitan Lagos or China's Pearl River Delta) and the activities that defined them (shopping) through multiple lenses and diverse methods (Chung and Chang 2001; Chung et al. 2001; Koolhaas et al. 2000). In both research studio models, designers used the studio context to grapple with the contemporary, market-driven city as a way of making it intelligible and thus intervenable for architects (Inaba 2004). Moreover, the studio projects combined traditional humanistic and social-scientific research methods with the architectural skills of visual analysis (drawing, diagrams, and photography) to create unique genres such as the research exhibition and the encyclopedic, if not particularly systematic, "big book" compendium.

Kazys Varnelis (2007) has argued that the research studio must be understood in the larger context of architectural research practice, a category that includes early, mid-century examples like the Eames and the Smithsons who utilized methods like documentary film and photography to visualize the city in a way that challenged received ideas. To this category of research practices, we might profitably add the "datascape" approach pioneered by Dutch offices like MVRDV and OMA in the 1990s, which introduced the analysis of complex quantitative data and its translation to architectural form to the architectural toolkit (Maas 2003).

These examples from academia and practice construct a wide variety of relationships between research and design. David Salomon pointed out that OMA's Project on the City eschewed design altogether in favor of the research project, while subsequent versions of the research, like UCLA's Research For Design project (published as the *LA Now* series), reserved two-thirds of the year-long course for research and asked students to design research-responsive projects in the last third (2011). The Dutch approach was perhaps the most direct, seeking to

translate information in the form of statistics and other quantitative data, directly into architectural form (Maas 1998). In every case, Salomon concludes, the very structure of the research studio asserted the importance of research as a necessary precondition for design. Similarly, Varnelis found that the unique nature of research as pursued in the studio differed from purely humanistic or social-scientific research in that it did not simply aim to understand the past or present, but to see the future differently—and, he implied, to intervene in that future through design.

Despite the pedagogical achievement of the research studio as a model for research in a design field, it was not without its problems. While influential within architectural schools, geographer Matthew Gandy points out the model encourages a bird's-eye level analysis without accessing the nuances inherent in policy-making and on-the-ground dynamics (2005). Such critiques suggest that studio instructors tend to be more interested in "a new reality to explore," (Jameson 2003) as opposed to any grounded practice. They also illustrate the short-term investment that most research studios make in their subject contexts. Groups of students work fast and furious to gather facts, make diagrams, and delineate speculative, impossible proposals. After the exhibition or the publication, academic architects are on to the next topic and communities are left with little to show for their investment in the process. Across many disciplines, repeated experiences with semester-long projects result in research fatigue and disillusionment with community-university partnerships (Clark 2008).

## THE COMMUNITY DESIGN CENTER

More radically, architecture as a discipline established alternative pathways to practice and engagement stemming from the '68 era of protest. In the wake of post-war suburbanization, broad disinvestment in cities, and destructive modernist planning principles, there emerged reformist and even radical approaches to re-thinking architecture's engagement with the city that acknowledged the harms wrought by Modernism. In 1968, civil rights activist Whitney M. Young, Jr. spoke at the 100th Convention of the American Institute of Architects decrying "a white noose around the city" and identified a "thunderous silence" and "complete irrelevance" of the architectural profession in responding to the city's multiple crises (Blake 2015). Similarly, European polemics from the '68 era critiqued architecture's avoidance of social issues, such as Giancarlo de Carlo of Team X,

who cited the “bourgeois professionalisation” and “specialisation” of the architect as the foundation of the profession’s inability to adequately address “architecture’s public” (De Carlo 2005, 5). Similar debates in the planning profession led to such reforms as advocacy and equity planning, applied with varying degrees of success to build the capacity of communities to influence development and political circles.

Beginning in the early 1960s, community development and socially-inclined architects leveled further critiques of institutions and professionalization, proposing two nonprofit structures in response that share the same acronym—community development corporations and community design centers (CDC’s). Community development corporations as a structure grew out of Robert F. Kennedy’s critiques of Johnson’s War on Poverty strategies, including the perception of continued housing discrimination and fiscal mismanagement (Taylor, 2019). As a model, community development corporations and more broadly, community-based development organizations (CBDO’s), sought to provide decent affordable housing through the partnership of public and private sector dollars (Lounsbury and Pollack 2001; Blake 2015; Martin, Moore, and Schindler 2015). Alongside the growth of community development corporations and other CBDO’s, the community design center emerged as a professional service and advocacy practice model amongst architects and planners. In the mid-1960’s, groups like the Architect’s Renewal Committee in Harlem formed from specific neighborhood concerns linked to large-scale urban renewal projects, while at the university level, the Pratt Center for Community Development first emerged as a model for working between universities and the communities they serve.

While some CDCs are independent, non-profit corporations, the vast majority of CDCs are institutionally sponsored by universities and are often physically embedded in the communities they serve (Finn and Brody 2014). CDCs provide design, planning, and technical services to communities, institutions and municipalities that could not otherwise afford them. Within the architecture curriculum, the CDC is one of the primary venues within a school that offers service-learning opportunities for students. Those opportunities are often limited to a single course or studio that focuses on design-build projects or neighborhood planning. Despite this limitation, CDC-based learning encourages architecture students to pursue

alternative professional pathways through on-the-ground engagement.

Although community design centers provide invaluable educational experiences and introduce students to marginalized groups and difficult circumstances, the forms of community engagement they offer are often limited. While CDC models vary, the CDC can often only contribute where communities have already had success, for example, in obtaining official non-profit status, securing funding, and attracting municipal support. CDC’s, often tied to the funding sources of their partners, can be limited in scope. Such a model is predicated on an assumption that community partners hold enough agency and ability to attract funding to engage in design services, sometimes excluding the communities that are most in need. In this sense, both fee-for-service and philanthropically-funded community design work operates through a market logic where measurable impacts are often emphasized as a priority over understanding the needs of a community, and allowing the community to prioritize its needs. Broadly, the result of such an institutional structure creates an organizational tension between attracting private sector dollars for development, and preventing displacement caused by that same development.

The nature of CDC funding makes it an imperfect, though highly potent, venue for research. Working on a project-by-project basis, CDC work rarely allows for a more systematic examination of the multiple, complex, underlying structural problems that communities in poverty face. While a few large-scale projects (like New York’s Rebuild by Design) incorporate research into their more typical technical and creative visioning services, such instances are rare and often emerge from specific national tragedies, like Hurricane Sandy (Waggoner and Ball et al. 2014). Despite these difficulties, some CDC practices engage in applied research activities in service of their action-oriented mission. David Perkes, director of the Gulf Coast Community Design Center, and urbanist Kristen Zeiber refer to this as “practical research,” which is tied to design process and on-the-ground realities and is defined as a “type of research for practice” (2008). In the context of the Gulf Coast, this includes building elevated housing for flood resistance given new flood requirements after Hurricane Katrina and sharing the results of this work with the broader community.

Given their long-standing relationships with community partners, community design centers are well-positioned to facilitate community-based research. Community-based research in service of action might productively inform community direction and activism, given the complexity of multiple overlapping issues impacting marginalized communities like climate change, infrastructural collapse, and the disappearance of public space. If the CDC's typical educational offerings are oriented toward "core," practice-based skills through design-build and planning programs, then a research-oriented curriculum engaging the CDC's served communities can augment the architecture student's capacities to work with communities to produce meaningful outcomes.

### COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH: BUILDING INCLUSIVITY THROUGH CRITICAL PROXIMITY

If community design centers offer an embedded site for alternative forms of practice and service-learning opportunities, how might they also act as sites for alternative forms of community-based research and learning? If practical research is an established tradition in CDC's, how might community-based research foster engaged participation in students, and foster agency for community groups through dialog and deep analysis? This question leads us to question the positionality of the researcher, and the traditionally-held distinctions between the architect-as-expert and the "user" (Forty 2000).

In this project, we draw upon two major threads of community-based research frameworks. The first emerges from the humanities and includes historical research, ethnography, and cultural landscapes to construct a social history and approach to aesthetics. Dolores Hayden offers that this trajectory is a "scholarly terrain where many fields intersect" including cultural geography, landscape studies, environmental psychology, and architecture, as well as left-of-center politics rooted in the social sciences and economic geography (Hayden 1997, 15). Hayden's interests in this scholarly overlap are best exemplified through projects such as the memorial in Los Angeles to Biddy Mason, the first free Black woman to own property in the city.

The second community-based research framework we draw upon is the empirical analysis and understanding of the city as a systematic concern. While this approach may be scaled up, such as in the work of Neil Brenner working on issues of globalized

urbanization, many of these projects are often understood at somewhat local levels. This type of study is most famously associated with projects like Laura Kurgan's "Million Dollar Blocks" critical cartography project, where data-driven mapping makes visible the geographic concentration of imprisoned individuals in Brooklyn, N.Y. This framework offers an understanding of specific neighborhoods, while also revealing broader systemic phenomena linked to inequalities in incarceration and policing (Kurgan and Cadora 2005). Variations, such as Annette Kim's "Sidewalk City" project, emphasize the qualitative aspects of spatial experience that go beyond typical formalist or data-driven analyses of the city (Kim 2015).

A hybrid of such approaches leads to the work of practices like Forensic Architecture, a research group founded by Eyal Weizman and based at Goldsmiths, University of London that utilizes architectural techniques to investigate and document human rights violations globally (Forensic Architecture, n.d.). Forensic Architecture departs from both traditional professional and research frameworks. Working globally, they deploy a variety of methods to work through issues of humanitarian and activist importance. These include, but are not limited to, archival research, spatial analysis, machine learning, critical cartography, and audio-visual analysis of official government media, to advance issues related to dispossession, state-sponsored violence, and other spatial injustices. Here, we find Weizman's term "critical proximity" to be an important one. In contrast to the "critical distance" typically seen as a way to construct objective analysis for researchers, critical proximity acknowledges that any research involving humans is inherently entangled with their future and everyday lives, and is thus an arena of political concern, and must acknowledge the researcher's positionality.

Weizman sees critical proximity as a way to decolonize the practice and scholarship of architecture. The inherent power differential between researchers and the communities they study is well documented and drives much of the research fatigue and suspicion felt by marginalized communities (Clark 2008.) Weizman describes his methods as working between architectural and critical-biographical approaches involving a combination of theory, practical investigation, and engaging "the thick and complex politics of the present" (Weizman 2013, 169). Researchers and students may not be of the community, but working in "critical proximity" means working alongside it in ideological alignment as an unfolding act of politics.

Critical proximity positions the classroom as a site where skills can be developed alongside the community, and where various forms of knowledge work in communion to achieve a desired goal and advance community priorities. The work of critical proximity also bridges the gap between community-focused work that is embedded and action-oriented with research that tends to be further removed and at the level of systematic critique. In our work, such a space was possible due to a long-standing relationship between the People's Movement and the Miami University Center for Community Engagement in Over-the-Rhine (MUCCE). The center was founded by Miami Professor of Architecture Thomas A. Dutton in 2002 after he spent two-decades working with and supporting the People's Movement as an activist and as an educator. Building upon design-build studios he taught in the neighborhood since the 1990s, the centerpiece of the Dutton's pedagogy at the Center was the Over-the-Rhine Residency Program that embedded students in the community to take classes with instructors from the community, volunteer in community non-profits and work on community campaigns, and get to know community members through potlucks and other social interactions (Dutton 2015). Decades of embeddedness thus built up a solid bank of trust between Miami University's Department of Architecture and Interior Design and the People's Movement's activists. The current director of the MUCCE, John Blake, continues the Center's residency program and design-build work, and he first identified the People's Movement archival materials as a community problem in need of academic resources and labor.

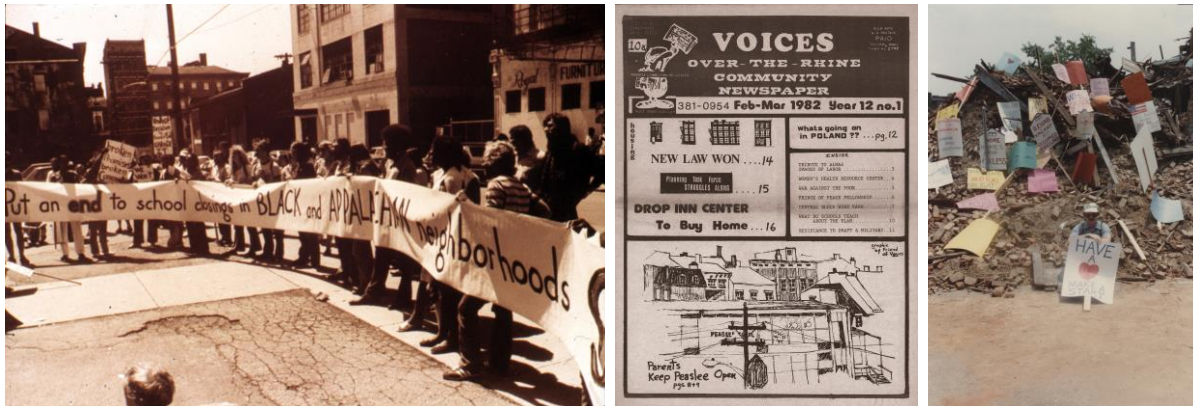
This kind of knowledge production with a single community over time advances an ethos and empiricism that forwards what theorist Donna Haraway refers to as "situated knowledge". For Haraway, knowledge emerges from a positional perspective, and is always partial and finite, as opposed to universal and objective. In opposition to critical distance as a way of knowing, situated knowledge denies the "god trick" found in traditional research models, where a supposedly neutral and detached observer operates with a conquering "view from above, from nowhere" (Haraway 1988, 589). Such a perspective not only denies subjectivity, voice, and presence, but also enacts a universalization of visioning and knowledge reserved for the researcher, thus enacting power over a group (581). Situated knowledge echoes the aims of critical proximity, a method that originated with sociologist

Bruno Latour and developed by Weizman, suggesting that researchers are never fully distanced, and in fact are implicated in the very issues they study. As a method developed outside of architecture in techno-anthropology, critical proximity grants communities "their own rights and abilities to problematize grand scale claims (Birkbak, Petersen, and Jensen 2015, 266)."

We undertook our Humanities Lab project through the positionality of critical proximity, seeking to leverage an existing community relationship with the People's Movement to develop a project that combined humanistic research with architectural design skill, to recover and disseminate the People's Movement's struggles to shape the city.

If critical proximity serves as a theoretical term describing our academic position with respect to the community, then the practical construction of our research methodology is best described as "community-based research" (CBR). Community-based research is an approach originating in the late 20th century that utilizes a collaborative partnership between faculty, students, and community members to address a pressing community problem (Wood 2020). Unlike traditional research, which values knowledge for knowledge's sake, CBR is post-positivist in its emphasis on the potential for "practical action." The principles of CBR as described by Caine and Mill highlight the necessity for shared power and agency within the research process, and the need for research results to have both academic and community benefit. They include the "authentic engagement of researchers and community members," "adherence to collaboration," and an "acknowledgment of the need for flexibility in the research design due to the iterative nature of the process" (2016). Moreover, community-based research is often (but not always) participatory, which requires an equitable process with substantial community involvement in determining both the research question and its design (Hacker 2017, 3).

Community-based research does not belong to any particular discipline; rather, scholars from a range of primarily social-scientific disciplines - such as education, sociology, psychology, public health, and social work - regularly utilize its methods. The use of CBR in the humanities is far less common and constitutes an emerging practice under the umbrella of the "engaged humanities" (Jay 2010). In the design fields, the



**Figure 1:** Examples of the documentary materials held in the People's Movement Archive. Left: Demonstration against Peaslee School closing (1982); Center: cover of Voices community newspaper, (1982); Right: Protest signs in front of the just-demolished Reading Road building (1988). Photos from the Over-the-Rhine People's Movement Archive, reproduced with permission from Bonnie Neumeier.

potential to dovetail design, research, and community engagement has not yet been systematically explored. In this project, we extend CBR from the realm of the social sciences to our humanistic and design inquiry. In so doing, we reformulate some of its terms to align with existing structures and concepts within our architectural discipline. In particular, we recast "research design" and its traditionally textual conclusions in terms of historical inquiry, contemporary critical cartography, and exhibition design to result in a project whose content cannot be disaggregated from its designed form.

### DESIGNING IN CONTEXT: THE OVER-THE-RHINE PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT

The pedagogical interventions we made into the research studio and into the architecture school's typical mode of community engagement through the community design center could not have been pursued outside of our partnership with the Over-the-Rhine People's Movement and the MUCCE. Emerging out of the counter-culture protest movements of the late 1960s, the Over-the-Rhine People's Movement grew out of that era's anti-war, anti-poverty, civil rights, and women's liberation efforts. Located just north of Cincinnati, Ohio's central business district, the neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine is an exemplary case study in preservation-by-neglect in the post-war period, and, subsequently, in large-scale displacement and gentrification today. In Over-the-Rhine, the People's Movement emerged out of a grassroots community concern with the provision of shelter for the neighborhood's unhoused. Suspicious of most

institutional and professionalized approaches to constructing and governing the city, the People's Movement helped to fill the gaps in inadequate social service provisions in areas such as mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness.

These struggles in Over-the-Rhine were exacerbated by demographic shifts in which the neighborhood grew more racially diverse and increasingly poor. Urban renewal and highway projects from the adjacent West End neighborhood in the late 1950's and early 1960's displaced more than 25,000 African-Americans, many of whose ancestors first came to Cincinnati during the Great Migration (Davis 1991). Many of them took root in Over-the-Rhine and joined with the predominantly White Appalachian communities in the neighborhood who had been displaced since the 1940's from the regionally-adjacent coal mining towns in West Virginia and Kentucky (Miller and Tucker 1998). The People's Movement's efforts initially focused on affordable housing, and quickly grew to include issues of educational equality, desegregation, affordability, and other "right to the city" issues of urban access. Finding common ground in poverty, a unique coalition of urban Appalachians and African Americans politically united in the People's Movement.

Active through many decades, the People's Movement continues to fight against active displacement and hypergentrification, as the late 19th century urban fabric and proximity to downtown is highly desired. Business-friendly local politicians actively encouraged development through the largely



unaccountable Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC), leading to a large displacement over the past two decades of many of the residents who once called Over-the-Rhine home. (Addie, 2009) The 3CDC is a private, nonprofit community development corporation headed by the city's corporate elite that determined and enacted local planning and development priorities emerging from the shuttering of the city's planning commission in 2002. ("About 3CDC") As a private entity and preferred developer, 3CDC has wide latitude in shaping the city's physical (and by extension social) structure. Evaluation researcher Shireen Deobhakta said, "Today, the city is no longer the regulator of development, but instead, its progenitor." Acting in tandem with 3CDC, the developers, and corporate stakeholders, the city has adopted policies geared toward attracting the middle- to upper-middle income class back to its urban core. Conspicuously missing from the decision-making table are Over-the-Rhine's (OTR) "longtime residents, social service organizations, advocacy groups, and the displaced and homeless." (Deobhakta 2014, vi) Their efforts have led to more than \$1.4 billion in investment in Over-the-Rhine since the mid-aughts, coinciding with a doubling of the White resident population and a halving of the Black residents (Katz, Black, and Noring 2019, 13, 45).

The People's Movement has had to fight for housing and public space access on behalf of poor and marginalized residents, but it has also had to fight against the erasure of those residents from the memory of the neighborhood. The dominant narrative of the neighborhood, promoted by preservationists, developers, and local businesses, is one that hearkens back to a

romantic distant past when scores of German immigrants arrived in Cincinnati in the nineteenth century, built up its stock of decorated tenements, and established a vibrant culture of beer halls and Protestant churches (Over-the-Rhine Brewery District, n.d.). The neighborhood composition changed in the twentieth century after the Great Migration and the influx of African-Americans from the south, as well as the arrival of poor Black and White Appalachians (Miller and Tucker 1998). By the late twentieth century, the city was plagued by poverty and other social ills common across the Rust Belt, exacerbated by white flight, suburbanization, and deindustrialization. Cincinnati's business elite, led by executives at corporations like Proctor and Gamble and Kroger, led the charge to re-invest in downtown Cincinnati and Over-the-Rhine. Such efforts were accelerated with the creation of 3CDC in the early 2000s to "revitalize" the neighborhood (Katz, Black, and Noring 2019).

Over the past two decades, long-time residents have witnessed their neighborhood transform as a result of accelerating gentrification. Rents and property values have skyrocketed, and where bodegas and lunch counters once served the neighborhood, today one can dine on \$14 hot dogs and \$21 hamburgers. The demographics of the neighborhood, which became increasingly Black after urban renewal projects decimated the historically Black West End, have lightened up considerably. A new football stadium too has "brightened" up the neighborhood, its constantly flashing, illuminated facade drawing complaints from residents. The erasure of old neighborhood establishments and the constant appearance of construction scrim, signifying ever more out-of-reach market-rate



**Figure 2:** The People's Movement collections. Photo (left) courtesy of John Blake.



housing, is the visual marker of a threat far more existential—the displacement and dispossession of poor, marginalized community members from their homes. At the same time that the 3CDC invested \$1.4 billion in public and private funds in the neighborhood, the percentage of White population has doubled while Black population has reduced by half from 2000-2017, confirming fears of development agendas used as a tool of racial segregation (Katz, Black, and Noring 2019, 15, 45).

Through their decades of organizing, the People's Movement now holds a vast yet sprawling collection of rich materials related to their campaign efforts<sup>1</sup>. Protest banners, a rich collection of photographs from beloved community photographer Jimmy Heath, zines, documentaries, and artwork comprise their collection of more than 150 boxes in a precarious attic storage space above one of their affordable housing warehouses. In conversations with the People's Movement, they expressed a desire to operatively utilize their collection to collectively understand their own history and to inspire current campaigns and activists. By securing a small grant from Miami University Humanities Center, we constructed a three-course sequence that drew upon the People's Movement's collection to recuperate their histories and construct a public-facing exhibition.

Activist Bonnie Neumeier has described Over-the-Rhine People's Movement as the hub of a larger wheel that encompasses a variety of neighborhood organizations, including the Peaslee Neighborhood Center, the Shelterhouse (formerly the Alcoholic Drop-Inn Center), the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, and Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (OTRCH), among others (Wilkey 2009). Indeed, those organizations grew out of the grassroots community organizing and neighborhood campaigns or "struggles" spearheaded by the People's Movement. One of the Movement's central figures was Buddy Gray, a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War and a fiery activist who fought for those experiencing poverty, addiction, and homelessness through his work, including founding the Drop-Inn Center and the Race Street Tenant Organized Cooperative, which eventually became the OTRCH (Neumeier 1997). Buddy's long-term partner, Bonnie Neumeier, participated in this work alongside him, and led her own successful campaigns, such as the fight to create the Peaslee Neighborhood Center. After Gray's tragic murder in 1996, Neumeier took on a leadership role in the Movement and continues to work with many others, both long-time activists and the next generation of organizers and nonprofit leaders, to fight against gentrification and displacement and for affordable housing and equitable access to public space.

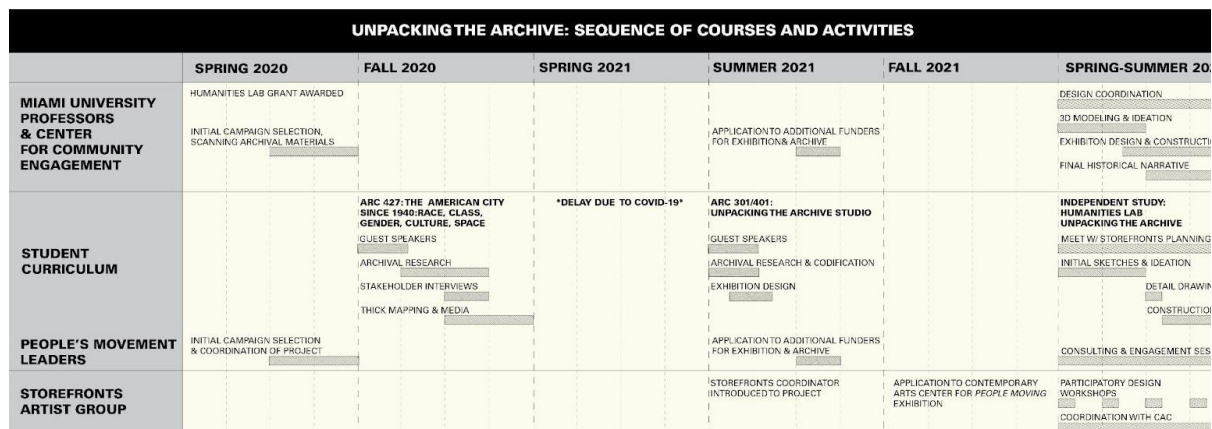


Figure 3: "Unpacking the Archive" Humanities Lab course sequence and activities

<sup>1</sup> The People's Movement collection is collectively owned by its long-time leaders and stored in a building on Republic Street in Over-the-Rhine owned by Over-

the-Rhine Community Housing. We accessed the collection with the permission of Bonnie Neumeier.

## THE HUMANITIES LAB FRAMEWORK: GOALS & CRITICAL PROXIMITY

The pedagogical interventions made into the research studio and into community engagement, working in critical proximity with the People's Movement, was underwritten by a funding structure that allowed us to sustain our pedagogical experimentation for three semesters. The Miami University Humanities Center sponsors a Humanities Lab designed to encourage pedagogical exploration by allowing faculty to create individually and collaboratively taught seminars around a larger topic, and supports that effort with a \$10,000 grant. Our Humanities Lab, "Unpacking the Archive: the Cincinnati Over-the-Rhine People's Movement," consisted of three courses: Jeffrey Kruth's "The American City Since 1940," a summer studio jointly taught by Kruth and Elizabeth Keslacy entitled "Collective Memory and the City," and, finally, the collaborative creation of an exhibition at Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center. The PM-related Storefronts Artist Group worked alongside a team of faculty and students from Miami to create the installation, entitled *People Moving*.

In constructing the series of courses, we developed three guiding frameworks. First, we eschewed depth in favor of "thickness." If depth implies greater singular certainty, thickness allows for multiple perspectives and contradictory ideas to coexist in the class and in a drawing. Second, recognizing the inadequacy of traditional methods of research to address marginalized populations, we utilized community-based research methods to recuperate the People's Movement history that we term "research-in-community." Much like their archival materials, residents of the community are also precarious, and many stories have inevitably been lost, or are incomplete. Research-in-community with the People's Movement in this context meant taking on the cares and concerns of the group, centering their perspective in the work to construct history as an essentially political act, and to rely as much on the situated knowledge of community members as on the academic knowledge of the faculty researchers. Finally, we set aside our traditional expertise as architects and joined the community as participants and guests who had something to learn rather than something to say. Such an act asked us to consider our positionality as researchers, and to question critical distance often asked of researchers in other fields.

## THE HUMANITIES LAB SEMINAR: THE AMERICAN CITY SINCE 1940: RACE, CLASS GENDER, CULTURE SPACE

The first course in the Humanities Lab sequence sought to develop an inclusive pedagogy where students and community might critically self-reflect, and develop methods for understanding the significance of the People's Movement through spatial, visual, and ethnographic means. In the first seminar course of the Humanities Lab "The American City Since 1940: Race, Class, Gender, Culture, Space," students were tasked with getting to know the stories of people and their places. Students first engaged in constructing a power inventory to understand their own positionality based on various identities, and whether they were targeted or beneficial. Their backgrounds and experiences helped shape a shared understanding that any single issue discussed in class might be understood in a variety of ways. This formed the foundation for understanding knowledge construction and various modules on urban epistemology and representation.

Students connected historical People's Movement struggles with contemporary issues confronting neighborhood development. Relying on resident interviews, archival materials, and data from the County Auditor and other official records, students developed a narrative that brought together "fact" and "atmosphere," the quantitative and the qualitative, through animated digital media through which a story of the neighborhood emerged.

To do this work, we acknowledged two guiding frameworks. First, we recognized the inherent shortcomings in any singular discipline's ability to investigate and engage the city. Sociologist Henri Lefebvre described disciplinary "residues" tied to research methods that evade a more complete understanding of the city and its multiple phenomena (Lefebvre 2003, 56). Student enrollment largely consisted of architecture students, but because of the course topic, several students from urban planning, geography, finance, and business also enrolled. The multiple disciplinary perspective enriched classroom conversations, leading to an understanding that the city was a complex overlapping of formal, historical, economic, and social forces.

Second, we aligned ourselves with the framework of "thick" investigation and practice, as defined by Dana Cuff, Todd Presner and others (Cuff et al. 2020).

Thickness as a method goes beyond simple description or the representation of a set of spatial relationships through mapping and media. It visualizes aspects of the city that are typically invisible, including social information as it plays out temporally. Through the overlapping of data, media, and ethnographic narrative new ways of understanding the city and its power relationships arise. Thickness as a method allows multiple voices, narratives, and forms of representation to arise simultaneously without declaring a supposed neutrality or objectivity.

Using this framework to orient our work with the People's Movement archive, we focused our approach to not only understand historic campaigns, but how historic issues shape experience in the city today. Thus, multiple "thick media" student projects examined the qualitative, experiential, and affective components of the neighborhood. For example, based on a community member's narrative likening the neighborhood to a "prison yard, a student group examined how qualities of lighting prioritize security in early stages of gentrification through the installation of glaring security lights by 3CDC. This was compared to sophisticated lighting qualities in streetscape projects constructed in more advanced stages of gentrification. Such investments also highlight the disparity of how tax dollars are used to criminalize one population and bolster real estate prices for another.

Another group examined how varieties of signage found in the neighborhood revealed competing narratives about its identity. Neighborhood signage developed prior to gentrification, for example, is no longer sanctioned within the historic signage guidelines now ubiquitous in the community. This, in effect,

erases evidence of Black-owned businesses present prior to gentrification, ultimately reinforcing a top-down narrative of blight supplanted through investment. Similarly, People's Movement murals compete with developer signage and more abstracted murals palatable to new gentrifying residents.

Other student groups examined specific campaigns of the People's Movement in relation to the changing shape of the neighborhood. For example, two student groups traced changes occurring within a few blocks over several decades. Examining a People's Movement campaign from the early 1980's to preserve affordable housing, the group reinforced the necessity of such a struggle by documenting increasing real estate prices and visual markers of gentrification through data and historical research. In these "thick media" drawings, People's Movement archival materials are visually layered with other sources documenting neighborhood change, suggesting how the historic event resonates with similar issues today.

#### DESIGNING THE ARCHIVE: PUBLIC HISTORY AND THE COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH STUDIO

The second component of the Humanities Lab project comprised a research studio entitled "Unpacking the Archive: Collective Memory and the City." We resuscitated the research studio model, refiguring its traditional form of "research" from one meant to primarily benefit the discipline to one that engages in community-based research for the benefit of Over-the-Rhine residents and their activism. We used this strategy to recuperate a counter-history of the neighborhood's past, allowing the community to reassess their present and future.



**Figure 4:** Stills from student animation indexing the social impact of lighting qualities in the neighborhood. (Anna Hendryx, Esther Amonor, Grace Griffith)



**Figure 5:** Stills from a student animation documenting the multiple categories of extant signage in Over-the-Rhine (Michael Waite, Nigel McKinney, Muchen Cao)



**Figure 6:** Stills from a student animation linking archival documents to the contestations over ownership and access of 1421 Republic Street (Julia Bohlen, Alejandro Flores, Jeanette Gaw).

We positioned our research studio, “Unpacking the Archive: Collective Memory and the City,” consciously within the urban-focused lineage of the research studio of the aughts but made several interventions in the model. First, our research was urban in nature, but it focused less on the physical facts of the city to instead emphasize conflicts over access and control of housing and public space. Second, while much of the research in the typical research studio is broad in its scope, we narrowed the scope of our research to allow students to penetrate deeply into their subject matter. Third, we introduced historical research methods not commonly found in the architecture research studio, exposing students to archival research and oral history. Most importantly, we worked with our community partners to determine both the scope of the research and as a key source of knowledge and information.

The “Unpacking the Archive” studio tasked students with a research project that was unconventional for the studio context. Students were asked to draw on an informal archive of People’s Movement materials to create an illustrated micro-narrative of the Movement’s most consequent campaigns, and then to design an installation and exhibition that would communicate that narrative. In so doing, we pursued the following question: Could the research, visualization,

problem-solving, and collaborative work skills taught in the architectural curriculum be successfully applied to historical research? Would students’ engagement in historical research lead them to produce more sensitive or compelling installations? How might the graphic design of the historical narratives integrate more interestingly with the formal characteristics of the installation? How might architecture students, who most commonly work with form, expand their thinking to integrate text, sound, and image in their designs?

Working closely with People’s Movement activist Bonnie Neumeier, we developed an attitude toward the archive that diverged from the usual historical objectivity or journalistic neutrality typically assumed of public history exhibitions. Unlike the “critical distance” expected of scholars and researchers, we embraced Weizman’s notion of “critical proximity” to work alongside, and in solidarity with, the community. Situating this work squarely within Miami’s decades-long relationship with the People’s Movement, we explicitly acknowledged that we would be telling the story from the “people’s” perspective. To the archival record of flyers, photographs, hand-written notes, and the journalistic coverage found in local newspapers, we added the living memory via oral history interviews with People’s Movement activists,



neighborhood residents, and the professional architects, preservationists, and lawyers who assisted them.

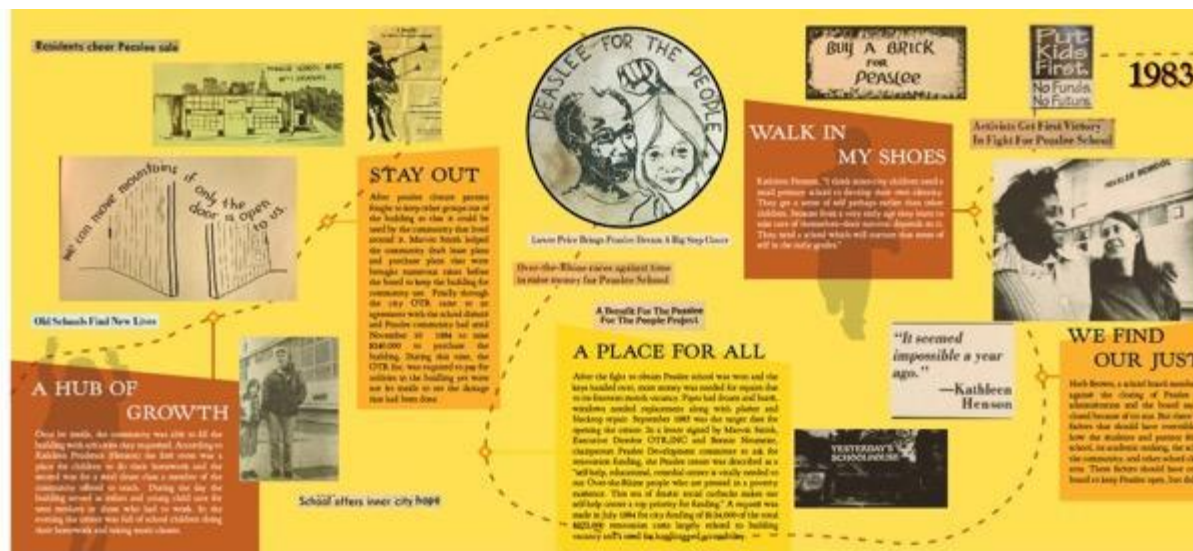
Formulating the first half of the studio as a kind of research atelier, we divided students into five groups, each of which chose a People's Movement campaign to address. The types of materials available for each campaign varied widely. Some groups were given substantial amounts of archival material, while others relied on newspaper accounts and oral history interviews with People's Movement activists. Some materials were heavily textual in nature, including such documents as city planning reports, legal documents, and meeting minutes, while others drew upon rich visual material like posters, flyers, protest signs, and dramatic photographs.

Given the relatively short duration of the studio, which took place in an accelerated summer semester of just six weeks, and the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated entirely remote interactions, a great deal of preliminary work and organization was necessary. We, the instructors, scanned relevant documents and created packages of materials for the student groups to work with. We designed a workflow and a set of collaborative Google documents that prompted students to collect certain forms of information. These included a timeline, a running list of

protagonists and their biographies, a list of images and their sources, and a research notes document. Each group member was assigned to be 'Keeper' of one of the shared documents.

We also designed a series of exercises intended to introduce students to the studio's research methods and to introduce the format of the history exhibition and installation. For example, to introduce the problematics of oral histories, we asked students to interview one another and write up their "findings." Students were required to visit (whether virtually or in person) a history museum, and to analyze the types of materials found there and the methods of presenting its historical narrative. Students presented on such diverse institutions as the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, England's National Museum of Computing, and the University of Oklahoma's exhibition, "Renegades: Bruce Goff and the American School of Architecture."

After working their way through historical materials and conducting oral history interviews, groups developed exhibition design proposals that addressed the full spectrum of images, texts, and physical objects that comprised their installations. Groups developed a variety of approaches to the project. One group



**Figure 7:** Student-designed graphic narrative of the People's Movement campaign to retain the Peaslee School, and later to establish the Peaslee Neighborhood Center. (Rachelle Casbeer, Lydia Noll, Claire Bateson, Jieping Song)

designed an exhibition about the Peaslee Elementary campaign (1982-84) in which People's Movement activists fought a two-stage battle. First, they fought the Cincinnati School Board to prevent the closing of their neighborhood high-performing, racially integrated elementary school. They lost this fight, which resulted in its students being diverted to one of the worst-performing schools in the system. They regrouped to secure the Peaslee Building as a community center that would host a daycare, after-school programs, recreation and enrichment classes, and other community-oriented services. The complexity of the Peaslee campaign narrative necessitated a graphic approach in which a visual timeline studded with photos, flyers, and protest signs took center stage. To hone the campaign's historical account, the group supplemented archival material with interviews, tenaciously searching for, and ultimately locating, one of the Peaslee mothers at the center of the fight.

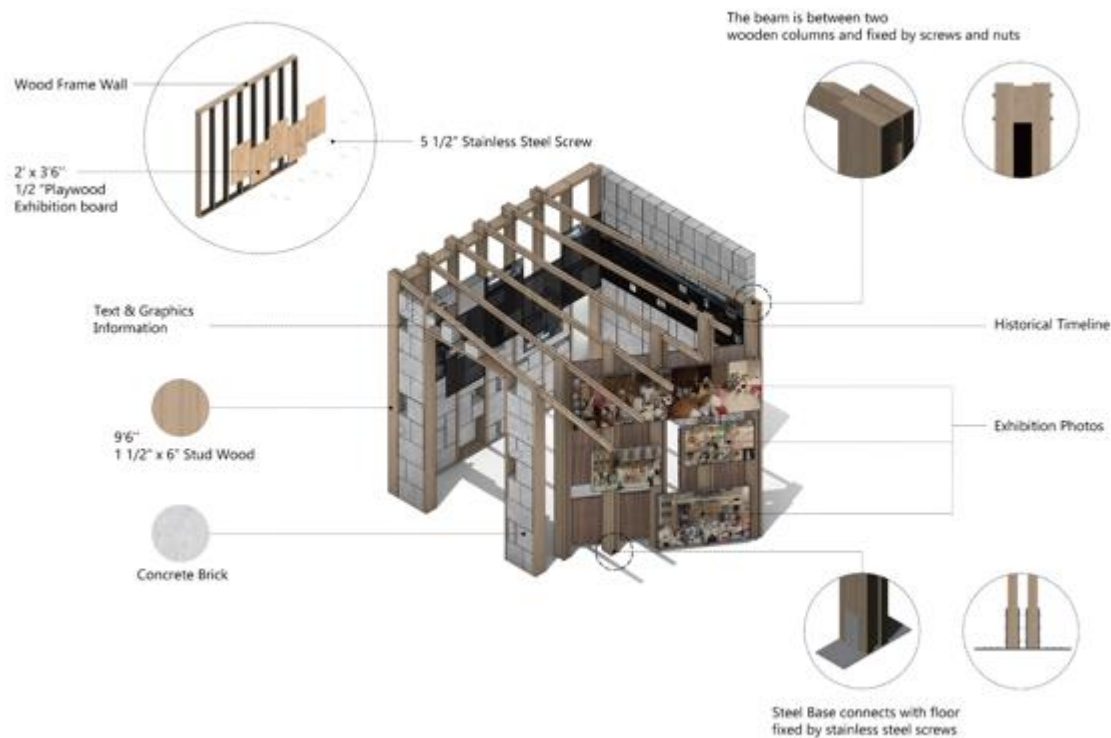
Another group developed a scheme that integrated graphic and formal strategies to experientially

reinforce their campaign's history. Their project recounted the People's Movement's Spring Street/Reading Road campaign that took place in 1988. During this campaign, a People's Movement organization, the Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, protested the planned demolition of multi-family apartment buildings in the adjacent Pendleton neighborhood. These were abandoned buildings owned by the city that sat boarded up for years while the city's homeless population skyrocketed. Though the city had promised earlier to rehabilitate them as subsidized housing, by the late 1980s an area business wanted the land for parking, to which the city agreed. Coinciding with the national "Take off the Boards" campaign planned by the Washington DC-based Community for Creative Non-Violence, People's Movement activists occupied the Spring Street building until Cincinnati Mayor Charlie Luken agreed to turn over the property to the community. They attempted a second occupation of a building on Reading Road, only to be expelled and the building immediately demolished.



**Figure 8:** Student-designed installation proposal for the Take Off the Boards campaign. (Jun Li, Jacky Yan, Jackson Barngrover, Annika Hemminger)





**Figure 9:** Material and construction details for the Take Off the Boards installation proposal. (Jun Li, Jacky Yan, Jackson Barngrover, Annika Hemminger)

The Spring Street/Reading Road group conceptually engaged the dramatic moment of the campaign, when activists literally pried boards off the windows, as well as the slower yet more significant act of renovating the buildings and offering them to low-income families. Utilizing a framework of wood studs to support the campaign's graphic narrative, the group proposed a simulated brick infill of lightweight foam blocks that could be taken down and reassembled by visitors. Ultimately, each of the groups strove to create spatial and formal experiences that reinforced some aspect of their campaign.

The exhibition design undertaken by the students leveraged their architectural design skills in the creation of a micro-architectural installation. Just as in a traditional building design, students attended to the scripting of experience, the articulation of promenade and circulation, and the development of a material and tectonic proposal that reinforced the campaign's narrative. More importantly, the students worked to communicate an alternative history of Over-the-Rhine that contrasts with the dominant

narrative of past blight and optimistic redevelopment through gentrification. The campaigns they studied—including those to save a neighborhood school, to create or retain housing for residents in precarious circumstances, or to resist the creation of an Historic District so as to avoid the restrictions such a regime would impose—tell a story of a neighborhood of people fighting to retain their home and to retain control of public spaces in the face of municipal and developer forces that would drive them out on the basis of their poverty (Skirtz 2012).

The results of the studio project demonstrate the feasibility and value of combining community engagement with historical, even archival, research. Even community groups with a cadre of engaged, long-standing members and substantial collections of documents and ephemera can lose track of the details. This kind of community-engaged project not only recovers an important history that may otherwise fade into obscurity, but it also provides those groups with an opportunity to bring old and new members together to connect past achievements with future



**Figure 10:** Installation view of *People Moving* in the Artist-run Spaces exhibition, Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center, May 27-September 11, 2022.

goals and battles that remain to be fought. Community involvement throughout the process was key to not only developing the historical narratives, but community feedback during regular pin-ups allowed the students to integrate their aesthetic feedback as well.

#### EXHIBITING IN COMMUNITY: PEOPLE MOVING

The final component of this pedagogical experiment centered on the design and fabrication of an installation entitled *People Moving* at the Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center (CAC). Through a design process that decentered architectural expertise in favor of the community voice, we designed and built the installation in collaboration with the MUCCE director John Blake and Storefronts, an artist collective of Over-the-Rhine residents so named for the usual site of their installations and to the civic life of the street to which they contribute. Facilitated by socially engaged artist Mary Clare Reitz, *People Moving* was included in a larger show featuring the work of ten artist-run spaces from around the western Ohio and northern Kentucky region.

The central theme of the installation, determined by Storefronts, was the idea of seeing the unseen. Many Storefronts artists identify as poor, black, queer, disabled or otherwise marginalized, and carry with them a strong sense of being left behind by the gentrification of Over-the-Rhine—their economic and social

needs going unmet by new high-end businesses and wealthy new neighbors. The fact that the exhibition would be held in the Zaha Hadid-designed CAC resonated with Storefronts as a site of earlier community harm. Starting with the 1995 opening of the Cesar Pelli-designed multi-stage Aronoff Center across the street, the city focused its early revitalization efforts on the “Backstage” section of downtown because of its proximity to the historic Fountain Square. Just after the CAC was opened in 2003, the city began a targeted campaign to redevelop the adjacent Metropole Hotel, one of the last single-room occupancy hotels in the city (Keslacy and Kruth 2021). Despite the Movement’s hard-fought campaign to save this last residential foothold in downtown for poor residents, the 3CDC purchased the building and redeveloped it as a 21c Museum Hotel. The CAC’s invitation to Storefronts thus allowed the community to re-engage a contested site. Through the installation design, they reasserted their humanity and value by displaying themselves as legitimate members of the community and visually recounting their contemporary activities and history.

Toward this end, the installation features both contemporary representations of neighborhood residents as well as historical Movement imagery and archival documents. The installation design itself is made up of three primary components. First, a large-scale portrait of Storefronts artist Elizabeth Burnside



**Figure 11:** Spreads from the Milner, Peaslee and Take Off the Boards zines that explain the campaigns' histories. Part of *People Moving* in the Artist-run Spaces exhibition, Cincinnati Contemporary Art Center, May 27-September 11, 2022. 1

from an earlier performance project looms over the gallery, depicting her holding a sign that reads "You need to look at me!" Second, along the two walls of our corner location in the gallery, a low millwork wall holds a collection of protest posters collected from many of the Movement's civil actions, some dating back as far as the early 1980s. Third, three tall columns stand in the space in front of the low wall.

Reflecting the experience of walking down a city street, guests must maneuver around the columns, and can in fact rotate them. Each column relates the story of one consequential People's Movement struggle. Three sides of each column are dedicated to archival imagery of the PM's campaigns and contains a zine that recounts the campaign in detail. The fourth side of each column presents a collage collectively created by Storefronts using the Movement's traditional symbol of the sunflower.

The nature of collaboration in the creation of "People Moving" differed from the studio or the seminar. Here, a small team of faculty and students enrolled in an independent study served in an advisory, support and enactive capacity for the Storefronts artists, whose creative direction drove the concept and primary features. Working through several cycles of ideation and concretization, the "academic" team supported the artists by visualizing their ideas to scale in a digital model of the gallery, bringing examples of related installation design to the group, and suggesting modifications according to the concerns of spatial and visual experience, cost, life safety and accessibility. As the overall design progressed and the artists turned their attention to the historical component, we facilitated their access to the archival materials that our studio assembled. As the artists selected images to illustrate the campaign narratives, we offered technical assistance on issues of fabrication, assembly and installation within the CAC's parameters. One artist, June Alexander, likened our role to the tech crew that makes a theatrical performance possible, and we followed through on this role through the construction of the installation's major elements. Finally, we extended the historical narrative writing initiated in the studio, crafting full, contextualized accounts of the three campaign histories using a community writing process that folded together the professional writing of the historian with community voices.

In this process, our "critical proximity" to the Storefronts artists required us, at times, to leave our expertise and our ideas at the door to instead follow the community lead. Unlike the participatory processes developed in the 1970s by Lawrence Halprin or Charles Moore, in which the architect designs and facilitates the community engagement process, we were instead invited to join a process created by Storefronts (Halprin and Burns 1975). We joined and witnessed, but did not actively contribute to, initial concept-generating sessions. We provided sketches and renderings to visualize the artists' ideas, but our



**Figure 12:** Evolution of design ideas for *People Moving*.

own did not take center stage. Eventually, as the project turned from design to realization (which itself required design at the scale of the detail), we brought the installation to fruition.

Although architecture is ultimately a service profession, architects and students are unused to having their expertise and ideas decentered to a supportive, rather than leading, position. Students and faculty alike struggled to rein in ideas when meetings focused on community voices, and to temper our aesthetic preferences. Design characteristics such as austerity, clean lines, pure geometries, exaggerated tectonics, and limited color palettes are common for architects, but less relevant to community members who were interested in symbolism, density, variety, and a hand-made aesthetic.

Within the academic team itself, decenteredness extended to the development of the project and the

distribution of labor among faculty and students. As a project largely completed during the spring semester when multiple obligations competed for our time and attention, faculty members took turns leading or attending meetings, developing visualizations, resolving details, and fabricating the installation. This process eschewed professional hierarchies and the typical studio paradigm of the solo-authored work. Rather, it was a result of many hands, of individuals taking and sharing responsibility for the project's various components.

The student experience, in particular, lay well beyond the arc of a typical course. At first, students served as little more than observers in community meetings. As they took on more responsibility for visualization or detailing, the values of creativity, innovation, and exploration (in other words, the “variant”-oriented toolkit) normally so prized in the studio context



became something of a liability. Instead, the students were asked to design according to the “core” values of efficiency, simplicity, ease of assembly, and material economy. The independent study continued the tradition of “learning by doing” that is a hallmark of architectural education, but in this case they were not responsible for developing their own, internally consistent design process, only the community-determined product. Ultimately, our collective experience of decenteredness reflected the Storefronts’ artists own experience exhibiting in the CAC, which they viewed as a predominantly White, elite institution that for better or worse had accelerated the gentrification of downtown and Over-the-Rhine and the displacement of marginalized residents.

## CONCLUSION

Pedagogically, this three-course sequence asks fundamental questions about the nature of research in architectural education, about the balance of power and expertise in community engagement, and what is gained when the two, usually separate, endeavors converge. How does community-engaged work change when a research imperative is introduced, and how must research methods shift when utilized in the context of marginalized communities? As Tom Dutton pointed out, service learning and community engagement practices too often position communities as “deficient, places in need of treatment that can use a hefty dose of university-medicine. This one-directional discourse—from the university to the community—ignores the fact that universities have much to learn from communities that are already producing knowledge and struggling to enact democratic practices based upon that knowledge” (2015, 187). Community-engaged projects such as ours require not just consent and cooperation, but real buy-in that allows community members to become full participants and co-creators. We do not undertake this work for the community as a client or a research subject, but with community members as collaborators with their own forms of expertise based in lived experience. In this way, community-based research allows “for participation of all stakeholders in a collaborative enquiry, to not only come to a better understanding of the problem, but also to effect change” (Wood and Zuber-Skerritt 2022, 14).

University-community relations such as the one we have in Over-the-Rhine cannot be created overnight, and we were fortunate to be able to build upon an existing, long-standing relationship initiated by

Thomas Dutton and others. Others interested in this kind of work who are at institutions without a community design center or pre-existing community relationship within their department, can look to the larger university for institutes, research centers, or even other departments to find existing community partnerships with community groups, activists or political groups, neighborhoods, religious institutions, indigenous tribes, city departments, or non-profits that have a need for the architectural toolkit and that may be amenable to further engagement.

The choice to align the seminar or studio with a particular community, to work with them in critical proximity, is a political choice. Architecture students often believe that politics is something they can avoid by simply operating within the market of architectural services, not understanding that, as Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, we are always already operating in an ideological system, and that our position in our profession and in the world is inherently not neutral (1989, 16). The market logic of the professional world of architecture is a world away from the struggles of the People’s Movement, and many others in similar circumstances. Exposing students to the radical choice to align with marginalized communities, and indeed requiring them to take on that alliance if only temporarily, demonstrates how one might productively blur the boundary between working as an academic/professional or an activist (Brydon-Miller and Wood 2022, 39).

On a more granular level, introducing humanistic research into the studio and seminar required architecture students to expand their research and representation skills. Architecture students often refer to history and theory when undertaking studio projects. However, they are less familiar with humanistic methods or how they frame their research to be accessible to a broader public. This project required students to combine their design research skills with methods from history and urban design. We asked students to broaden their conception of an architectural inquiry and the data that could be brought to bear on it, to learn how to organize and analyze that data, and to construct narratives and draw conclusions from their analysis. Moreover, students drew upon their existing design and visualization skills to disseminate those narratives in formats that were new to them: through animation, exhibition, illustrated historical narrative, and others. Perhaps most importantly, they gained the confidence to work with community partners in a variety of capacities in a way that developed their

own expertise while maintaining respect for the expertise and lived experiences of community members. Training in humanistic methods strengthens students' abilities to work in critical proximity to communities, and to structure narratives that ultimately shape space and culture.

The nature of academic employment contracts and departmental teaching needs do not often allow for collaboratively taught courses. Yet, this course sequence, and *People Moving* as its ultimate product, would not have been possible without the collaborative nature of the faculty team and the range of expertise brought by each member. The research studio in particular required the historian's experience in archival research, oral history, and history writing. Having a faculty member well-versed in historical research methods allowed for student training in the best practices of organizing material, working collaboratively on research within a multi-person team, proper forms of attribution, and ethical practices around oral history-taking with marginalized communities, to name a few. The project also required the architect-urbanist's expertise in the participatory techniques of community work, critical mapping, graphic design and visual argumentation. For academics interested in working in this way, securing funding at the college or university level (or beyond) can be a useful lever to realizing teaching collaborations, particularly forms of funding (such as the Humanities Lab) that encourage pedagogical innovation.

Community-based research projects can leverage university resources to further community agendas. The process of engaging the Humanities Lab course sequence has helped coalesce a group of People's Movement leaders interested in carrying this work forward. By sifting through materials, reconnecting with campaign participants, and co-constructing a narrative of their own history, the group's leaders developed a three-part agenda going forward. First, they will use programming around the *People Moving* exhibition to build solidarity with young Cincinnati activists through engagement and exploration of the archival materials. Second, their work on this project has prompted further discussions to determine a more permanent location for their archival materials. In the coming academic year, the academic team will help facilitate conversations between community members, relevant academic experts, and representatives from institutions that may house the archive. Finally, Jeffrey Kruth will continue work with the community around the possibility of permanently

inscribing the history of the People's Movement into the neighborhood as an act of commemoration and counternarrative.

Overall, our project demonstrates the value of engaged humanities scholarship for an architecture student. Serving as a corrective to the "variant"-oriented toolkit valorized by architecture's educational and research cultures, the community-engaged research studio project exposes students to important values and methods not otherwise found together in the curriculum. Critical proximity, thickness, research-in-community, and decentered production here come together to expand the architect's capacities for using research and design together in service of community agendas.

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