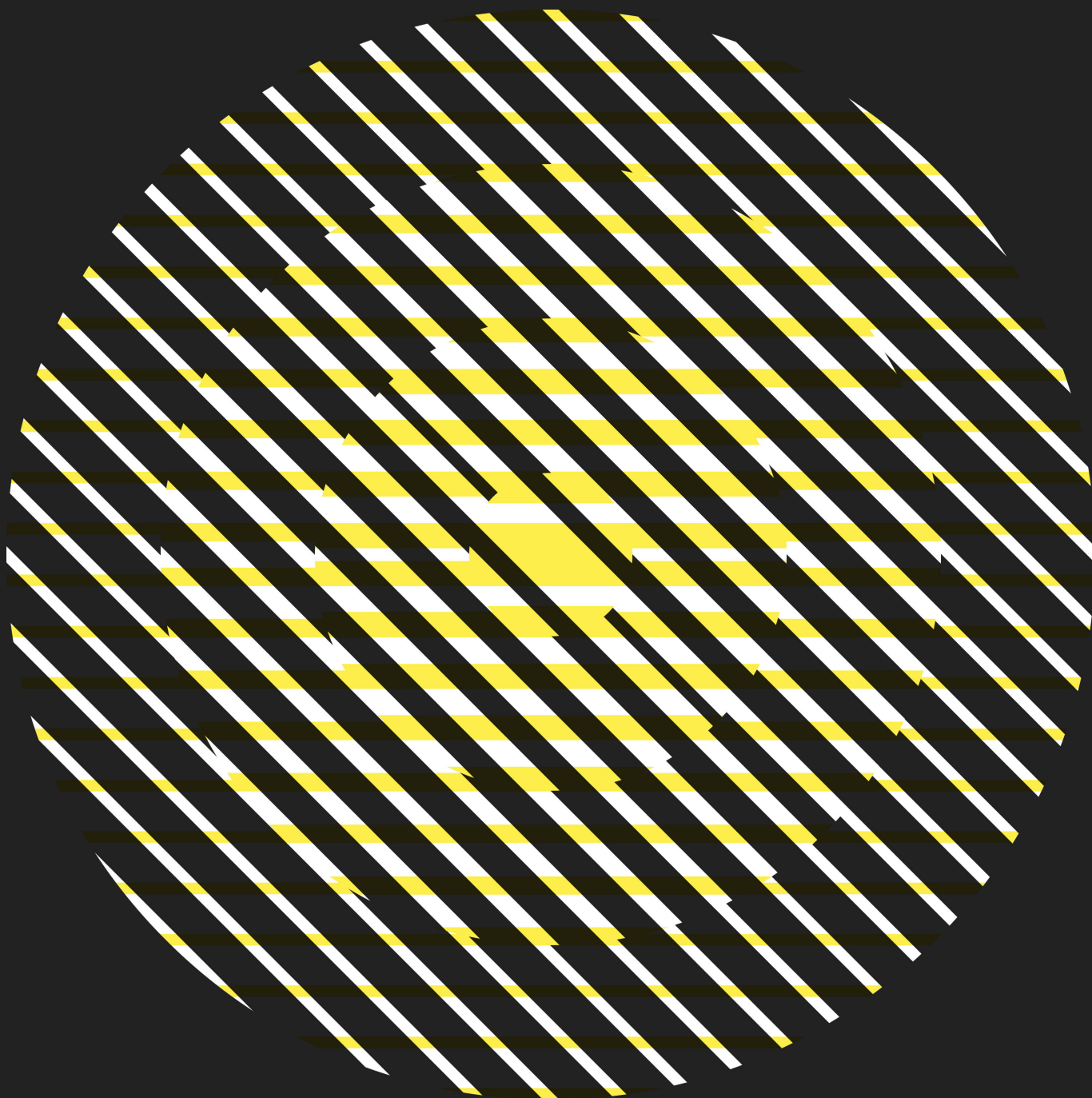


Dialogue on Design  
Issue 38.1  
Summer 2020

**PHASE SHIFT**

# ARCADE





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ARCADE's mission is to host inclusive and insightful dialogue on the designed environment. ARCADE's vision is to expand the idea that design at every scale of human endeavor impacts our quality of life.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, ARCADE fulfills its mission through its award-winning magazine and community events. ARCADE creates opportunities for writers and designers in print and on the web, and provides thoughtful professional development opportunities such as writer workshops. As the bridge between the wider community and the design field, ARCADE connects design ideas with the very people design influences.

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Summer 2020

ARCADE

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

This January, the ARCADE team met to discuss the theme of the upcoming issue. We wanted something that reflected the powerful transitions happening in the world, as well as the internal changes taking place as ARCADE comes into a new era. We decided on the theme of “Death,” thinking of it as part of a larger cycle – not an ending, but a mark of change. Little did we know how poignant and prescient this theme would become just a few months later.

The world today feels a completely different place than in January. As we write this, the number of people in the U.S. who have died from the coronavirus has surpassed 100,000. Around the world, total deaths are nearing 390,000. Protests are happening daily demanding police accountability and the deconstruction of ingrained systems that have enabled hundreds of years of violence against the Black community. The amount of loss is unfathomable as people across the globe grapple with the deaths of family members, friends, and loved ones, both recent and long passed. As a society, we are coming to terms with death in a way few of us would have ever imagined.

As the coronavirus took hold, our Editorial Committee struggled with what it meant for ARCADE to produce an issue around the theme of death during this time. So, we decided to take the topic down to its roots. What is death, really? Scientifically, it’s a shift, similar to how elements change from one state (solid, liquid, or gas) to another, an idea called phase transition. With this inspiration, we conceived our new title: PHASE SHIFT. From the start, our thinking has been framed by ideas of change, considering death as a threshold or catalyst for transformation, rather than an endpoint. We hope that this issue, reborn as PHASE SHIFT, can encapsulate the present moment: one of uncertainty and loss, but also undeniable momentum towards transformation.

Many of us are currently experiencing the emotional aftereffects of death in highly charged ways. We are too close to the loss, and the change is staring us blankly in the face. But there is value in taking a close look at moments of loss and passing, rather than turning away. These are experiences that unite us and bind us together as humans, and there is much to be gained in seeking to understand them, together.

From all of us at ARCADE, we are humbled and honored to present to you this issue, our first of 2020. From cemeteries in Hong Kong, to the near-death of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin West, to Seattle’s new AIDS Memorial Pathway, authors from the design community provide their own unique lens on the topic, inviting readers to consider new perspectives. Some are personal and raw, others are analytical and objective. Some are bright-eyed and hopeful, others are more pessimistic. All are valuable. And, we think, they couldn’t have come at a better time.

Yours,  
Lauren Gallow & Jocelyn Beausire

*Lauren Gallow is a Seattle-based writer passionate about sharing the human stories behind visual art and design in ways accessible to diverse audiences. She is currently the co-host of By The Hour, a livestream art walk broadcasting on [www.bythehour.live](http://www.bythehour.live).*

*Jocelyn Beausire is a Seattle-based performance artist, designer, and spatial researcher, originally from the Midwest. She currently serves as Co-Editor of ARCADE and is a member of Seattle’s SOIL Gallery. Learn more about her work at [www.jocelynbeausire.com](http://www.jocelynbeausire.com).*



# LETTER FROM THE BOARD



All of us who volunteer with ARCADE are very excited about this issue, number 38.1. This issue marks an evolution for ARCADE, and one that is much needed. 38.1 will be ARCADE’s first first digital/print hybrid issue and, by extension, a great stride towards our goal of increasing access to an inclusive design dialogue. As we have recently learned, change can happen almost overnight. This issue represents ARCADE’s response to the changing world around us – changes in Seattle, changes in the design community, and changes in what design and the built environment means.

At the core of these changes is the idea of equity. Our nation, our city, and our industry are all reflecting, discussing, and wrestling with the role equity has played in the past, what role it plays in this moment, and what role it will play in the future. We at ARCADE see working toward greater equity in design and the built environment as a key part of our mission. In order to host insightful and

truly inclusive dialogue, we understand that we need to work harder to make sure there are seats at the table for everyone who wants to be involved in the discussion.

ARCADE stands in solidarity with the Black community, and supports the calls of Black Lives Matter Seattle King County and other BLM chapters for structural change to address the centuries of systemic racism in Seattle and beyond. We acknowledge the power of media to shape collective thinking and influence change, and ARCADE is committed to using our platform to amplify the voices of underrepresented populations within our industry, and our community at large.

This issue is also being published at a unique moment in time, both for Seattle and the world at large. The issue’s theme, PHASE SHIFT, reflects a timely and important discussion of this moment and our shared experience.

Thank you for your continued support of ARCADE and our mission.

David M. Brown, Board President

# A NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE: LEARNING FROM TALIESIN IN THE AGE OF CRISIS

By Ayad Rahmani



Last January, it was announced that the School of Architecture at Taliesin in Arizona was closing. Just two months later, however, the news was reversed and the school may remain open after all. This is the school that Frank Lloyd Wright started almost ninety years ago, and it just had a “near-death experience.” Like any other near-death episode, this one will undoubtedly be accompanied by divine awakenings. It is not uncommon for those who approach death and come back to life to describe that interstitial space as gravity-free, with a vision of oneself from an out-of-body point of view. From that angle, the past looks very different – it is not the dull scene we thought we’d remember, but a landscape rich with meaning and lasting lessons.

What those lessons might be and how we might harvest them to serve our own time of crisis is the concern of the moment. COVID-19 has left us all wondering how

to adapt and, ultimately, how to renew our commitment to friends and community. At one point, Wright himself contracted pneumonia and had to look beyond the immediate horizon to survive, moving part of his practice – and later his school – to Arizona. Our current isolation, otherwise known as “social distancing,” will one day yield. How we, as educators and practitioners, might return to place and space afterward will be critical. We can do so as if not much has changed, happy to be back in the office and the school; or, we can return with a sense that what happened was not for nothing, but rather a call to reexamine key values and relations, including the worth and substance of architectural education.

Wright’s school – originally known as the Taliesin Fellowship – started in 1932 within a social crisis of its own: the 1929 economic crash. Work was slow, so what better way

to navigate the moment than to start a program focused on reflection and the development of a better future? Credit must be given to Wright’s third wife, Olgivanna Lloyd Wright, who urged her husband to take the initiative. To them, the previous architectural education just seemed wrong. Based on the precedent and formality of spatial and programmatic hierarchies, it left little for the architect to imagine. Indeed, it was less a response to personal inner values and more a formula meant to satisfy the pretentious needs of kings and queens, who aimed the education toward producing privileged institutions such as grand hotels and museums, rather than homes and schools – two programs of more modest, but lasting, impact.

Architectural education needed a change of direction. And yet, the shift required more than a new curriculum. It demanded a new mind especially cultivated to see



the one in the many, and vice versa; a mind capable of indirect as well as direct thinking. Ideology had to vanish in favor of a healthy skepticism of established norms – or what Wright referred to as “radical” thinking, not as it might have related to the avant-garde, but as it did to the notion of “roots” and the search for organic truths. None of this could have been accomplished while merely sitting in a studio designing buildings in the abstract. Never. The challenge had to be distributed, across terrains, doing work that may or may not have anything directly to do with architecture.

Wright’s educational program at the Fellowship would entail building structures, but also milking cows and fixing equipment. Not for the love of more buildings and dairy products, but for the building of character. “Taliesin,” said Wright in his first promotional circular, “aims to develop a well-correlated human being, [currently] lacking in modern education.” Nothing was too low or too high for him – all work was honorable if it served the betterment of both self and humanity. To Wright, no “shovel, hoe, or axe” was too menial to carry and use, but was rather the source of education in art and science. Wright also saw their value in building camaraderie and a healthy system of reliabilities. What one student dug with a shovel, the next cut with an axe, until together the good society was formed.

Gone are “the drawing board architects,” as Wright called the university-educated students of architecture; replaced, as it were, by apprentices whose “daily bread” was not a metaphor for hard work, but the result of several daily tasks that demand manual labor. Each is part of a bigger whole, organically lending a hand knowing that another will be lent in return. Back and forth until a beehive of sorts becomes the modus operandi of the place.

Of the harder tasks expected from the apprentices at Taliesin was the building and maintenance of structures on the campus, first for storage and shelter, but later for living and dining. These were serious and arduous endeavors, requiring careful attention to issues of safety and precision. How to lift a beam or erect a wall was more than a matter of creating space, but rather an important lesson in mutual reliance. Miss a beat and you risk bringing the whole house down, potentially hurting people. You simply couldn’t operate selfishly in scenarios like these, but instead in lockstep, together.

Nor could you operate without first understanding scale and proportion; namely, to every problem there is an equal and appropriate solution. You don’t apply the same tool to steel as you do to wood, nor do you ask the same number of men to lift a chair as you do a roof. Each deserves a commensurate response. Each also adds to the making of a better character, including the capacity for sympathy and empathy. Among the many critiques Wright leveled on modern culture, implicitly or explicitly, his critique against the market was the most persistent. He knew that unless calibrated with the natural diurnal and seasonal cycles, production could outpace consumption or vice versa, leading to material and intellectual waste. Rather than owning our goods, our goods would start to own us. Washing machines and ice boxes seemed particularly sinister to Wright in this way:

“When we got the machine going and got science going like we have it going so that the very streets crawl with it, even out into the tenth mile beyond the center of the city, and when gadgetry is at it everywhere – the oven, the washing machine and especially the ice box, not to mention the deep freeze – what have we?” (“Aristocracy and Democracy,” in Fellowship Talks, 1953)





No sooner did the Fellowship start in 1932 than Wright had the apprentices working on a remedy for the American problem – in essence economic, but also social and personal – specifically through a reform plan he would come to call Broadacre City. For over twenty years, he kept returning to it, always with a view to the changing demands of the time. Key to its strategy was agriculture – to provide food, but more importantly, to keep man's desires and needs relevant. Even homes were conceived less to accommodate the functional needs of the American family and more to activate its creative potential. Just as the kitchen and bedroom were important, so were the garden and workshop – included to implore the American to tinker and explore.

Today, architecture schools have done a good job of teaching students how to design and put together a responsible building. But, have they taught the complete human: the ability to transcend professional boundaries and adapt to changing needs? Have they taught, in the spirit of Wright, how to farm, paint, or fix a toilet? Or for that matter, science, business, or welding? Otherwise odd and unreasonable, these questions may be the right ones to ask in our time of crisis – a time when the architectural market is down and the traditional role of the architect may be in question. No school was able to turn a problem into an opportunity for self-improvement better than Wright's. This is a good time to look to it for answers, even as the future of the school itself remains suspended between life and death.

*Acknowledgment from the author: This and other related writing projects on Wright were made possible through the generous support of the Center for the Art and Humanities at Washington State University, and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, which granted me two month-long residencies at Taliesin and Taliesin West.*

*Ayad Rahmani is a professor of architecture at Washington State University, where he teaches courses on design and theory. He is the author of two books, the latest titled Kafka's Architectures, published in 2015 by McFarland Press. He writes widely on subjects related to art, architecture, and literature, currently acting as the architecture critic for the Moscow Pullman Daily News. He is currently working on a new book on Frank Lloyd Wright and Ralph Waldo Emerson that will examine the American project through the lens of architecture and literature.*

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# SUPPORT LOCAL BLACK BUSINESSES

As Seattle hits the streets demanding accountability, action, and amplification, we at ARCADE are in full support.

The Black community represents only 2% of architects and 3% of designers (according to the Directory of African American Architects, and the AIGA, respectively). We acknowledge that we are part of a system of oppression, and we demand more accountability and anti-racist action from ourselves and others within the design industry.

As a publication, what we can offer is space and visibility. With this in mind, we are giving the following pages to our local Black-owned businesses, many of which have also been impacted by COVID-19. Please invest in these businesses, and in other Black-led organizations and individuals in your community. Let us know how we as a magazine can better serve as an agent of change, because, as Audre Lorde said, “revolution is not a one-time event.”

We are listening.  
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<b>Delish Ethiopian Cuisine</b> 5701 Rainier Ave S Ste A Seattle, WA 98118 206-723-3821
<b>Zagol Ethiopian Restaurant</b> 2722 E Cherry St, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-322-1019
<b>Momona Cafe &amp; Restaurant</b> 6754 Martin Luther King Jr Way S, Seattle, WA 98118 206-766-0607
<b>Angel City Deli</b> 12621 Renton Ave S Suite C, Seattle, WA 98178 206-772-2223
<b>Catfish Corner Express</b> 11805 Renton Ave S, Seattle, WA 98178 / 206-735-7084
<b>The Comfort Zone</b> 5016 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118 / 206-246-2800
<b>Amy's Merkato</b> 5710 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118 / 206-324-2527
<b>East African Imports and Restaurant</b> 306 23rd Ave S #104, Seattle, WA 98144 / 206-322-7717
<b>Tougo Coffee</b> 860 Yesler Way, Seattle, WA 98104 / 206-467-5042
<b>Cafe Campagne</b> 1600 Post Alley, Seattle, WA 98101 / 206-728-2233
<b>Fat's Chicken and Waffles</b> 2726 E Cherry St, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-602-6863
<b>Corte Fino</b> 6721 Martin Luther King Jr Way S, Seattle, WA 98118 206-687-7491
<b>Cafe Selam</b> 2715 E Cherry St, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-328-0404
<b>Joyce's Market and Cafe</b> 2717 E Union St, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-322-9140
<b>Plum Pantry</b> 305 Harrison St, Seattle, WA 98109 / 206-428-6337
<b>Jerk Shack</b> 2510 1st Ave, Seattle, WA 98121 / 206-441-7817
<b>Lil Red Takeout &amp; Catering</b> 4225 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118 / 206-760-2931
<b>Plum Chopped</b> 1419 12th Ave, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-402-6861
<b>Adey Abeba Ethiopian Restaurant</b> 2123 E Union St., Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-322-1617
<b>Kaffa Coffee and Wine Bar</b> 8136 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118 / 206-453-3558
<b>Pam's Kitchen</b> 1715 N 45th St, Seattle, WA 98103 / 206-696-7010
<b>Heaven Sent Fried Chicken</b> 14330 Lake City Way NE, Lake City, WA 98125 206-363-1167
<b>Ezell's Famous Chicken</b> 2300 N 45th St #6906, Seattle, WA 98103 206-453-5250
<b>Emma's BBQ</b> 5303 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118 / 206-413-1523
<b>Taste of the Caribbean</b> 1212 E Jefferson St, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206 323-9112
<b>Cafe Avole</b> 6630 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118 / 206-359-1271
<b>Emerald City Fish &amp; Chips</b> 3756 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98144 / 206-760-3474

<b>The Station</b> 1600 S Roberto Maestas Festival St, Seattle, WA 98144 206-453-4892
<b>Bana Ethiopian and Eritrean Restaurant</b> 4423 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118 / 206-723-3587
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<b>Boon Boona Coffee</b> 724 S 3rd St., Renton, WA 98057 / 425-496-8618
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<b>Safari Njema</b> 5041 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118 / 206-723-3058
<b>Queen Sheba Ethiopian Restaurant</b> 916 E John St, Seattle, WA 98102 / 206-322-0852
<b>Nate's Wings &amp; Waffles</b> 1224 E Jefferson St., Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-629-2051
<b>Downtown Spirits</b> 2300 7th Ave, Seattle, WA 98121 / 206-812-6591
<b>Poco Wine + Spirits</b> 1408 E Pine St, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-322-9463
<b>Plum Bistro</b> 1429 12th Ave, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-838-5333
<b>Osteria La Spiga</b> 1429 12th Ave, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-323-8881

Catering
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<b>The Sugah Shack</b> mysugahshack.com / 253-470-8157
<b>Healthy Creations</b> healthycreationsseattle.com
<b>Umami Kushi</b> 9099 Seward Park Ave South, Unit 1, Seattle, WA 98118 206-265-1923
<b>Mety's Events</b> 3250 Airport Way S #223 Seattle, WA, 98134 206-696-2972
<b>That Brown Girl Cooks</b> 2822 Martin Luther King Way S, Seattle, WA 98144 catering@thatbrowngirlcooks.com
<b>Conscious Eatery</b> 5620 6th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98108 / 206-659-4098
<b>Nadine's Soul Kitchen</b> nadinessoulkitchen.com
<b>FOODart</b> foodartllc.com

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<b>In Bloom Salon and Beauty Boutique</b> 101 Cherry St, Seattle, WA 98104 / 206-682-7768
<b>Andro</b> 219 James St, Seattle, WA 98104 / 206-631-9207
<b>Queencare</b> 3702 S Hudson St Ste. 103, Seattle, WA 98118 206-403-1266
<b>Earl's Cuts and Colors</b> 1162 23rd Ave, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-322-2687
<b>Good Hair Salon</b> 1918 E Yesler Way, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-709-7699
<b>Coven Salon</b> 2719 E Madison St. Suite E, Seattle, WA 98112 206-323-9010
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<b>Project 968</b> 4617 37th Ave SW Seattle, WA 98126 / 206-504-7661
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<b>Altogether Lovely Botanicals</b> altogetherlovelybotanicals.com
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<b>Valerie Madison Jewelry</b> 1411 34th Ave, Seattle, WA 98122 / 206-395-6359
<b>Lika Love</b> 535 Warren Ave N, Seattle, WA 98109 / 206-384-1710

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<b>Buckley &amp; Associates Attorneys at Law</b> buckleylaw.net / 206-622-1100
<b>Pacific Northwest Bail Bonding</b> 321 Yesler Way Seattle, WA 98104 / 206-322-1900

Auto
<b>Scott Sherman Auto Care</b> 9234 Greenwood Ave N, Seattle, WA 98103 206-322-0886
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# THE LOST HOMES PROJECT: AN INTERVIEW WITH OSAMU TSUKIHASHI

By Robert Hutchison



Following the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that devastated the coastal towns and villages of the Tohoku region in 2011, architect Osamu Tsukihashi and the students in his workshop at Kobe University, in the Kansai region of Japan, began to create a series of models that documented the towns and villages prior to the disaster, in memory of the lives lost.

To date, Tsukihashi's *Lost Homes* project has created hundreds of models, each of which have been donated to a corresponding town or village affected by the disaster. The detailed white paper models – which were all delivered to the communities at 1:500 scale – are hand painted by the surviving community members, who also imbue personal memory notes to specific buildings and places of reverence. While on a trip to Japan in March of 2019 sponsored through a University of Washington Rundstad fellowship, I had the privilege to meet and get to know Osamu Tsukihashi, and the two of us have remained in touch. What follows is an edited and condensed version of my conversation with Tsukihashi *san* in March of 2020 regarding his *Lost Homes* project.

**Robert Hutchison: Tsukihashi *san*, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me about your *Lost Homes* project. Would you mind introducing yourself?**

Osamu Tsukihashi: I am an architect, and I have been running my office, Architects Teehouse, for eighteen years, and at the same time, I have been teaching as a professor at several universities. From 2003 to 2009, I worked as a lecturer at the Tohoku Institute of Technology in Sendai, and it is in Sendai that I also started my office. In the middle of 2009, I moved to Kobe University as an associate professor, and so I also moved my office to Kobe. So, one and a half years after I had moved to Kobe is when the big earthquake hit Tohoku. I have a lot of friends and colleagues in Sendai and the Tohoku area.

**RH: Can you tell me about the 2011 earthquake and tsunami?**

OT: Because earthquakes are so common in Japan, the communities are well trained, and people know that you must get to higher ground because of the possibility of a tsunami. In the small villages and communities along the coast, the elders know that a tsunami can happen once every

30 years, and they always tell the children that in the event of an earthquake, just run to higher ground after an earthquake. So every kid knows this. But nobody imagined how big the 2011 tsunami would be. A total of 18,428 people are dead or missing. In addition, more than 3,700 people died in the evacuation and from related conditions. So more than 22,000 people have died from the disaster. I cannot say the exact number of communities, it is difficult. But over 550 kilometers [or roughly 342 miles] of coastline were affected.

**RH: Can you tell me about that day? Where were you when you found out?**

OT: The tsunami came thirty to forty-five minutes after the earthquake, depending on the location of the village along the coast. I actually had visited the town of Kesennuma one week earlier when I was there to check on a project of mine – a large steel structure that was being fabricated by the Takahashi shipyard there. Of course, the shipyard is located right on the water. When the earthquake occurred at 2:46pm JST, I was driving to the University in Kobe, and I got the news by radio. So I stopped my car, and I made a phone call to my friend at the shipyard in Kesennuma to

make sure he and the workers were OK. But because of the earthquake, my phone call would not go through, and in fact three days passed before phone service began to be reconnected. With Google Person Finder, people were able to get information regarding the towns and communities. Unfortunately, one of the workers at the shipyard died after he was evacuated but the rest of the workers were safe.

**RH: Let's talk about the *Lost Homes* project. Can you describe how this project started?**

OT: I was very moved by what happened to my friends in Kesennuma. As an architect, I wanted to go to the affected areas to help, but at the same time as a teacher, I wanted to include my students in some way. Two weeks after the tsunami we had a graduation ceremony at Kobe University. I had a celebratory meal with my graduated students and other young architects at a restaurant, and we started to discuss what we could do.

**RH: So the idea came out of a conversation with your students and young architects?**

OT: Yes! What we talked about is that nobody is a specialist for this kind of event. The disaster was so huge. All we could do was talk about it as a group and discuss how we might be able to help. It was a very simple conversation. We all agreed that we wanted to support the affected areas and communities. But we only knew about the affected sites through TV shows and YouTube, and we did not know much about them before they had been affected by the disaster. We wanted to know what had existed before, and what had been lost; but more specifically, what images the people in the affected communities had of their happy town before the disaster. We wanted to connect with the people's shared image of their community. In this very simple way, we came up with the idea that architecture students could make models of the communities' buildings to help them connect to this shared image.

**RH: How did you decide what community or series of communities to start with?**

OT: As I said, I had a connection to the Takahashi shipyard factory in Kesennuma. Three weeks after the tsunami, I went to Kesennuma with food and supplies. I discussed with Takahashi *san* about the

reconstruction and regeneration of this area. I mentioned to him our idea to make models of the communities. Because it was so soon after the disaster, I think it was difficult for Takahashi and his workers to understand how a model could help them. But I believed that over time they would start to understand. A few weeks later, I went back to Kesennuma again, and I spoke with several people from the City Office. The people said they wanted to see their hometown again as a reconstructed model. I was very moved by this. When I met with them, one staff member told me, "We have lost our hometown. I would feel glad if I could see our town again...even the models. Because we have lost everything."

**RH: Wow, that is very moving.**

OT: Yes. I believed that this project would be able to touch people. The first model that my students and I made in Kobe, of Kesennuma, used existing maps and photographs. At the center of the model is the Minami-Kesennuma railway station. The model represents 500 square meters [5,382 square feet] of the center of the town. The model is all white, and of course since we are architects we found it very beautiful. [Laughs] But we thought it might





be hard for the town's people and children to understand that it was their own town. At the same time, we found the existing maps and photographs did not provide enough information for us to give more detail. So, we brought this white model to Kesennuma, and just one week later it had been painted with the help of the local people. Do you see this pink line of color? These are the cherry blossom trees along the river. While we were building the model, we could not have known of their presence by just using maps and photographs. These cherry blossom trees are very important as a local landscape feature in the springtime. Only with the help of the locals, were we able to record this on the model. We realized that these communities have thousands of episodes that are very important and loved by the local people. Every episode needs to be included on these models because each one, while small, when combined with the other tiny memories, helps the model become a memory landscape.

**RH: Can you explain how the students were involved?**

OT: We brought the white model to the city office of Kesennuma, and we placed it in the lobby. Suddenly, lots of people started to gather around the model. One woman pointed at a house and said, "I lived here," and then they all started talking about their memories of the town. The city office gave us a dedicated room for one week to do a workshop. Over that week, many townspeople came to the room to paint the model with the students, and they enjoyed the experience. I think this is important – the process of painting the model and putting trees along the river is the process of rebuilding their memories of their town.

**RH: How many models have been made now?**

OT: All told, we've made models for over 65 communities.

**RH: Are the workshops also helping communities to think about how they might rebuild?**

OT: Yes, but the rebuilding process is very rushed because housing and infrastructure must be implemented immediately; it's not easy to use the scale model directly for such purposes. But some communities in Kesennuma have used their models as a way for the townspeople, the government, and a consultant to come together to discuss how to rebuild. The models have helped their discussions to be more productive and have allowed for better communication between the community and the government.

**RH: Next year is the ten-year anniversary of the disaster. Are any special things being planned?**

OT: We are continuing to work with local communities, and we are collaborating with NHK [Japan's national broadcasting organization] for a large exhibition in Tokyo. In local communities, they never forget the disaster. But in Tokyo and other places outside of the affected area, it is more difficult for the next generation to remember. We are also planning an exhibition of some of the models at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. After the tsunami, some small fishing vessels from the town of Ofunato washed up in British Columbia, so the museum wants to display the model of that town. It will be in the museum from November of 2020 to April of 2021.

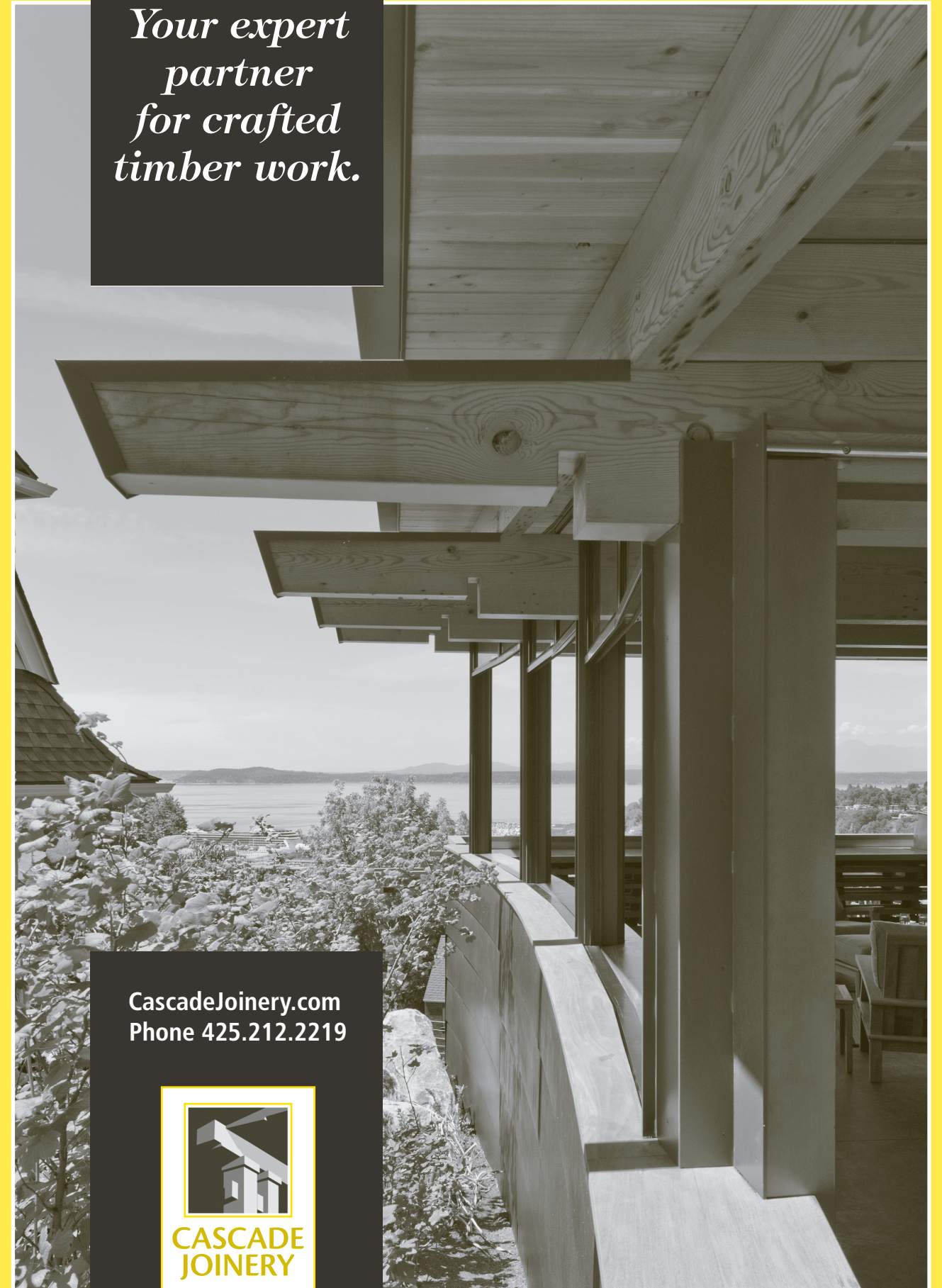
**RH: In Japan, you have an earthquake and tsunami about every 30 years. And so, you live with it, and the older people make sure the children know about it. But in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest, we have not had this experience and understanding. Do you have any thoughts on how we can convince our government and the general public to be better prepared?**

OT: I think that local history and people's memory is the seed for human resource and development. But most important is coexisting with history – having the discussion and generating culture. What is interesting about the memory models is that they only embody the memories of the inhabitants who have lived there recently, although the communities have been around for hundreds of years. In Japanese communities, the elders are typically the leaders of the community, but today's young people don't have time to connect with the older generations. With the models, the old people put their memories on the model, which allows for the younger generation to understand. What is so important is communication between generations. The question is – how can this happen in your communities?

*Robert Hutchison is a Seattle-based architect who founded his eponymous architecture studio in 2013. His practice balances architectural commissions with installation projects and teaching—he is currently Affiliate Associate Professor of Architecture at University of Washington.*

*All images: 'Rikuzen Takata' reconstruction model, Disaster and Future (2020), Courtesy of Lost Homes Project.*

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# HARD TO SEE: LIFE, DEATH AND THE ART OF JOHN AKOMFRAH

By Erin Langner

The day I experienced *Vertigo Sea*, there was so much tension in the air, it was all I could feel. It was Friday, March 6, and the first known COVID-19 death in the US had been announced a week earlier. The CDC's striking novel coronavirus illustration was everywhere. The gray sphere and its red spikes flared with disconcerting beauty throughout social media, newscasts, and warning fliers, though how to conceptualize the virus evaded me. The Seattle Art Museum was still open – it was mostly business as usual in the city that day. I was there to see *John Akomfrah: Future History*, an exhibition comprised of three large-scale video installations by the British artist that had opened a week earlier. The vacant lobby felt ominous – a typically bustling space made foreign by the stark stillness. I avoided the escalator's handles as I ascended toward the galleries, wondering if seeing art was “worth the risk,” though I struggled to envision what “risk” really meant in that moment.

When I approached the darkened gallery containing *Vertigo Sea*, I was stopped by a sign that warned of the film's “... occasional scenes of violence, including humans in distress at sea, humans held captive, and the hunting of whales, bears, and deer.” Ordinarily, I might have been reluctant to enter, since I always shield my eyes from animal death scenes in nature documentaries. But that day, I was so absorbed in real-world distress that these filmed deaths sounded remote and unalarming by comparison. I walked in and found an empty wooden bench facing the three massive screens that sprawled across the otherwise empty space. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I realized several other people were scattered around me. I wanted to ask them what they expected from *Vertigo Sea* in this moment – would it be a place to escape from or to drown in the tension of the world?

Conceived for the 2015 Venice Biennale, *Vertigo Sea* is nearly five years old. But from the moment a ticking clock fills the space with the sound of time passing, Akomfrah's

video installation creates an environment that immerses us in some of the most pressing global issues of the present. Its largely wordless progression of images unfolds in a collaged format that integrates footage of the ocean, its fauna, and, most prominently, its tumultuous relationship with humans. In addition to staging his own scenes that reference the eighteenth-century voyager and survivor of the transatlantic slave trade, Olaudah Equiano, the artist assembled the fragmented footage from a range of sources, including the BBC Natural History Unit, cinematic films, and archival recordings. Over the course of its forty-three minutes, the piece's visual meditations interrogate the ways humans have tried to use the sea to exert dominance – often to the point of death – over members of their own species through colonialism, slavery, and responses to migration, as well as over other animals through hunting and environmental destruction.

Lush scenes captured by the BBC are familiar and easy to watch: whales elegantly breaching through waves and seabirds slicing their beaks through the sea's blanket of blue. But, the dark undertones of the *Vertigo Sea* soundtrack consistently bring an edge to these moments of beauty, mirroring the ocean's lurking, unpredictable violence. As viewers, we're constantly aware that the next wave of images could be those that we were warned about at the gallery entrance. The piece's most jarring progressions include rich documentary footage of a polar bear curling around its cub; not long after, an archival, black-and-white film portrays hunters proudly shooting and skinning a polar bear before leaving its naked carcass to freeze.

Since the 2015 premiere of *Vertigo Sea*, the wandering polar bear on the brink of death has become one of the rare images to successfully portray the impacts of climate change – an image that has undoubtedly generated empathy, though our lack of substantial action in response to the crisis speaks to our continued

inability to conceptualize the catastrophe. As philosopher and theorist Susan Sontag wrote in her essay *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003): “An image is drained of its force by the way it is used, where and how often it is seen.” I thought of Sontag's assessment in relation to the CDC's illustration of COVID-19; it floods the front pages of so many online newspapers, I struggle to extract the information I actually need for my well-being.

Akomfrah's repeated use of images like the polar bear is affective in part because *Vertigo Sea* forgoes a traditional narrative structure. Instead, the film's visceral urgency builds through a visual accumulation of histories. His technique calls attention to the ways that history converges with the present, often by unearthing and revisiting images that portray the brutalities many prefer not to see. In a video playing at the exhibition's entrance, Akomfrah says: “You make a documentary because you want to both capture something that's going to 'die' unless it's captured, but you're also trying to capture something because you want it to live.” I left *Vertigo Sea* enmeshed in a consciousness of so many deaths – the kind of consciousness we desperately need to survive.

*Erin Langner is a Seattle-based writer and arts professional. She works on exhibitions and publications at the Frye Art Museum. She has written for METROPOLIS, Hyperallergic and The Stranger, and she is currently working on her first collection of essays.*



*The exhibition John Akomfrah: Future History has been extended through September 7, 2020 at the Seattle Art Museum. The museum remains closed at the time of publication.*

*Video Stills from Vertigo Sea, 2015, John Akomfrah, three channel HD color video installation, 7:1 sound, 48 minutes 30 seconds. © Smoking Dogs Films; Courtesy Lisson Gallery.*





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**By Clair Enlow**

Sunlight is precious here. We channel it from all directions and sometimes pipe it directly from the sky to make interior spaces seem both expansive and intimate. Alan Maskin, a principal/owner at Olson Kundig, has been thinking for years about how to bring filtered light into a new kind of space for Recompose. Led by founder and CEO Katrina Spade, Recompose will be the first facility in the world to provide a sustainable option for after-death care. In the Recompose space, memorial acts will truly be put into a “new light.” Mourners will gather and file into the remodeled interior of a historic warehouse. They will stand in filtered sunlight with living trees

## RECOMPOSE: SPEEDING UP THE NATURAL DEATH AND LIFE CYCLE



all around them and engage in new rituals or familiar customs with the body of their loved one lying in a highly specialized “vessel.” The bereaved can participate by adding compost material, or not. The vessel will then be closed for a month. When it is reopened, the dark, rich soil inside can be used in various ways, such as fortifying second-growth forests. Recompose refers to this as “natural organic reduction” – a process of gently converting human remains into soil.

Last year, Washington became the first state to legalize human composting. California, Colorado, and New York are also pursuing legalization. This way of disposing of a loved one’s body is a final act of recycling – a decision that will come naturally to many, especially in the Pacific Northwest. Recompose estimates that every time their organic reduction method is chosen over cremation or conventional burial, a metric ton of CO<sub>2</sub> will be saved. Families can also save a few thousand dollars over conventional burial, although the cost of composting is more than cremation, which is still the least expensive. After a long process of testing and re-testing, Recompose will be ready to offer their service in 2021.

The Recompose building shell is a repurposed hundred-year-old railroad warehouse in Seattle’s SoDo district. Enormous bow trusses allow for a wide-open main interior space with no columns. According to Maskin, the space is cathedral-like in scale, warmed by the Douglas Fir trusses. The vessels, or composting cells, were designed by Recompose and others on the project to be hexagonal when closed, which means that they are not only beautiful individually, but they also fit together in a modular arrangement that makes them part of the Recompose interior environment. In renderings, they look a little like a wall of honeycomb standing in the background.

Recompose is a pioneering design project that seems more like a theater or event space than a funerary institution – but with a sacred cast. The interior is a gentle backdrop that will recede into the distance as groups gather inside. Partitions and large container plantings (trees or bamboo) can be moved around the main floor to create unique combinations of large and intimate spaces that fit the traditions or rituals of the groups involved.









The idea of human composting is not new, but it wasn't more than an idea until architect Katrina Spade made it into a design problem—and then her life's work. After earning her Master of Architecture from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Spade founded Recompose as a public benefit corporation. Spade had been working on ideas around recomposition since 2013, and after moving to Seattle she founded Recompose as a company in 2017. Here, Spade found support from Maskin, who had heard about the project through a mutual friend.

As the lead architectural collaborator, Maskin found himself returning again and again to the value of “transparency” in making Recompose into a real facility:

***We want the space to feel transparent and open, but don't want people who are mourning feeling like they're in a fishbowl. So we use light and nature and materials to create distinct spaces that are architecturally “veiled” or screened, and we introduce privacy without losing that sense of openness. We believe people feel most comfortable—and arguably safer and more welcome—if they can see into spaces and anticipate them before they cross the threshold to the next room.***

Recompose is built around a simple concept: the human body is part of a life cycle, from birth to the end of time. After death, the decomposition of the human body at the molecular level (and its reuptake into other forms of life and natural systems) can be delayed, but not prevented. Yet throughout Western history, rites and traditions tend to emphasize separation of the body from nature and from the natural processes of decomposition that follow death. Aside from any comfort and sentiment involved, the result is environmental loss. Scarce land goes to graves; toxic embalming chemicals are released. Additionally, modern cremation involves a large amount of energy.

Spade has studied all these aspects of customary burial and cremation, and their immense environmentally negative impacts. In her patent-pending human composting method, the natural process of decomposition into simple organic matter is accelerated. The Recompose team's research discoveries have allowed the process to be dramatically expedited, from years to weeks, allowing final disposition to be accomplished easily and safely by removing barriers between the body and natural elements. Compostable materials such as wood chips are heaped around a body; then all the materials are enclosed in a special capsule and aerated for a little over thirty days. The resultant product is about a cubic yard of clean, rich soil that can serve as a growing medium for trees or other plants.

Like many transformative ideas, human composting is divisive. Some people see it as an inevitable option—a logical extension of what we understand about death and burial so far. But others think it is not “right.” To make it a realistic option for individuals and families, Spade faced barriers in the form of deep tradition and rooted cultural bias. She also faced the resistance of breaking into a vast, heavily regulated yet somewhat invisible funeral industry. Despite the challenges, she found that there is pent up demand for such a service. Interest has continued to grow steadily since Spade first presented this idea in her Kickstarter campaign of 2015. Recompose has seen over 17,000 people sign up for their newsletter and has raised \$4 million out of a \$6 million investment round for the project.

It is intuitive. Human composting is what nature does if it is allowed, but Western traditions around death run against it as a rule. It's an alternative to burial or cremation, but until recently it's been just an idea—a theoretical possibility that lacked cultural support in America. The idea has been embraced by the Death Positive movement, a global community founded in Southern California. The main idea is to overturn a history of denial and secrecy and to reverse some of the emotional, environmental, and financial costs of funerary proceedings. Recompose is our own progressive version of older traditions. It scientifically supercharges the cycle of de- and re-composition, bringing it full circle. It also brings the process indoors.

There is a certain satisfaction in knowing that Recompose's method is radical; Spade and her partners are overturning entrenched interests that have defined and controlled our choices around human remains. That tradition rests in cemeteries that look like golf courses. Most cemeteries in the U.S. have rules demanding that coffins, and even urns with “cremains,” be placed inside a thick concrete container so that the ground level will remain smooth and mowable. Recompose changes all of this, promising to transform the ways we think about death and dying, in Seattle and beyond. After the inevitable shock of losing a loved one, Recompose offers mourners a gentler process of separation, with creative control. It's a rite of passage that ends not with chemicals or ashes but with fertile soil and healthy trees. It gives a small amount of control back to those who have been visited by wrenching loss. Beyond its design opportunity, Recompose offered Maskin and his team a way to create more meaningful experiences around our ultimate fate—and a way to celebrate that fate. It will help change the inevitable end of a life into an intentional beginning.

This COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of many things we cannot control and how precious our limited power to change things really is. In the spring of 2020, it brought new fears and claimed many lives. But spring will change to summer. We will emerge, adjust our eyes to the sunlight, remember where we are, and start to change things once again.

*Clair Enlow is a freelance journalist and opinion writer specializing in urban design, infrastructure, and environmental policy. Her byline has appeared in Metropolis, ARCADE, Architectural Record, Landscape Architecture and more. She has been a Loeb Fellow, a NIAUSI (Northwest Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in Italy) Fellow, and a visiting scholar with the American Academy in Rome.*

*Renderings by Olson Kundig*



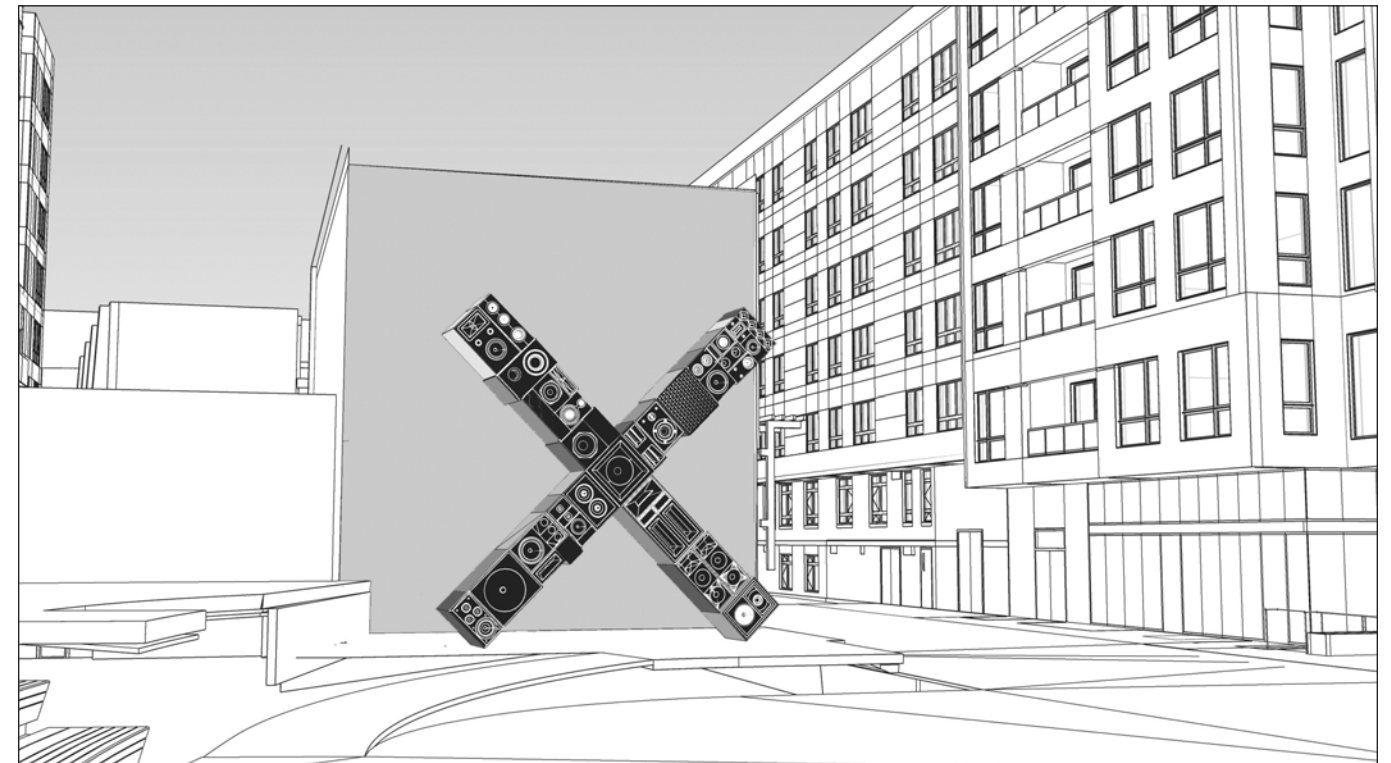
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# SEATTLE'S AIDS MEMORIAL PATHWAY PROJECT

## AN INTERVIEW WITH HORATIO LAW, CHRIS PAUL JORDAN, AND ROSETTE ROYALE

By Gabriel Stromberg

Gabriel Stromberg is the Creative Director and co-founder of design practice Civilization. He has created classic and elevating design solutions for clients across the globe, including for Storm King, Biennale of Sydney, Shout Your Abortion, and The Nature Conservancy, among others. He is also a professor of Graphic Design History at Seattle Central Creative Academy.



This year, Seattle will join the ranks of cities around the globe with public memorials addressing the cultural impact of AIDS and HIV. Seattle's AIDS Memorial Pathway (AMP) is scheduled to be installed this summer within the new Capitol Hill development along Broadway between Denny Way and John Street, continuing through Cal Anderson Park.

The AMP consists of four large-scale public works centering on different aspects of the AIDS epidemic, from community response to recollection and remembrance. The project also includes a collection of digital stories spotlighting the experiences of people of color – narratives and perspectives that have been historically neglected in the discourse around the crisis.

Being a queer man who came of age in the eighties and nineties, I have a lineal understanding of the AIDS epidemic and its perpetual impact. As one of the contributing artists, with my design firm Civilization, I am honored to be part of this vital project. The Pathway is an opportunity not only to honor those whom we have lost to the epidemic, but also to showcase a subject that critically connects to our present and future realities.

What follows is a conversation between myself and three of the other creatives behind the project: artists Horatio Law and Chris Jordan, and story gathering consultant Rosette Royale, who conducted the interviews that will be published on the AMP website. The conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity.

**Gabriel Stromberg: Horatio, when you were developing the Master Art Plan for the AIDS Memorial Pathway project, what were some of the challenges or concerns that came up during the process?**

Horatio Law: The real challenge was the scope of the subject: the epidemic of AIDS and HIV affects so many people in so many different ways. Some of us lived through it and experienced it. It's really hard to capture in one project. I'm glad that the AMP leadership team had the foresight to know that we needed more than one artwork because there are so many aspects of the pandemic. I also want to mention the location of the Pathway. It's comprised of two main areas: one is a brand-new development adjacent to the Capitol Hill light rail station which will contain multiple art pieces, and the second is Cal Anderson Park.

Rosette Royale's project – the interviews he has been doing – really formed the basis of the Pathway. It's not an art piece in the Pathway proper, but his work serves as the starting point. Storytelling is the foundation of the AMP project.

**GS: Rosette, you are the story gathering consultant for the AMP project. How did you first become involved in the project?**

Rosette Royale: My partner saw an ad in the Seattle Gay News – they were looking for someone to gather stories of black and brown people talking about HIV and AIDS. I had the job interview in March of 2019. I will be honest – I didn't think I was going to get the job.

The original format of the stories was supposed to involve people speaking on a tablet. They would have short sound bites – 60 or 90 seconds long. The project organizers wanted to have 165 stories that I was to gather in a year. People were going to be talking about things that were emotional or difficult, that touched on experiences of grief. I thought, if people are going to talk about something so real, maybe we should sit down with them and let them tell their stories instead of relying on a tablet. So, we began the interviews, and very quickly I realized that these people had been waiting to share their stories. These stories determined what the project should look like. I just had to sit and listen and then advocate for what the people were saying.

**GS: Why is it important for these stories to be accessible as a resource for people?**

HL: It's been almost forty years since the AIDS epidemic started. How we thought about it at the beginning is very similar to how we think about the coronavirus now. Is it a rumor? Is it real? Is it going to pass? There were all kinds of stories out there in the early eighties when AIDS first began, which changed over a matter of months and years. We kept hoping a cure would come or therapy would happen, but they didn't. More and more people died. I lived in New York at that time, which was one of the epicenters of the AIDS crisis. Suddenly, something that was in the periphery turned into close friends dying. Within a few years I lost most of my friends in New York City.



**GS: How did you deal with that – losing so many people?**

HL: I literally had to escape New York for the Midwest. I was in St. Louis for several years getting my Master’s degree. I used to make art for fun. I took a lot of classes after college, but I never called myself an “artist” back then because I didn’t feel I was useful as an artist. I felt that art had to have a purpose. The AIDS crisis gave me that purpose. It gave me the courage to jump off a cliff and do something that I had never done before. I decided to be an artist even though I had no idea how to make a living. There were no artists in my family. No one could tell me what to do as an artist. Because the AIDS crisis was so traumatic and important in shaping my view, I felt that I needed to become an artist to express all of those feelings.

**GS: Chris, how did you become involved in this project?**

Chris Jordan: What really got me interested in the AMP project was the opportunity to shift the narratives of the crisis to be more equitable. There are clearly disparities of representation in how we look at the crisis and its history, as well as how we understand it as it continues to unfold. In this time period, where people in the mainstream feel somewhat distanced from the climax of the AIDS pandemic, you have the undercurrent of communities who are still at the forefront. It’s a really critical moment to clarify who is impacted and to push for greater commitment and action to support folks who are living with HIV and AIDS.

It’s so jarring to be speaking about a pandemic from the vantage point of a pandemic. And to do that with humility – not to force comparisons that aren’t really adequate. But what both pandemics show is that our personal health is intertwined with our collective health, inextricably linked with the opportunities, access, and social context that we’re born into. We can see HIV and AIDS increasingly becoming a poor person’s experience, targeting people at the margins. It is a critical moment to ask, “Who matters here and who are we going to fight for?”

**GS: Chris, you are currently working on the centerpiece artwork in the AMP project. Can you tell us about your process for this piece?**

CJ: I think that my role in public art is listening to people – particularly those who haven’t been heard enough. For me, the process was about finding opportunities to sit down with folks who are impacted by HIV and AIDS, and then creating an emblem that could celebrate the loved ones who are no longer with us.



Previous page: Rendering of artwork by Chris Paul Jordan, andimgonnamisseyverybody, the centerpiece of the AMP.

Above, top: Rendering of artwork by Civilization, We’re Already Here, a series of connecting artworks in the plaza and Cal Anderson Park.

Above, middle: Rendering of artwork by Horatio Law, Ribbon of Light, consisting of three separate pieces in Cal Anderson Park.

Above, bottom: Video still from Rosette Royale’s interview with Teresia Otieno who speaks about the resilience of women with HIV.

Early on, I was inspired by the wake tradition, which is something I learned about when I was studying in the Caribbean. In a wake, you go to the house of someone who has recently passed, and their entire extended family, loved ones, and friends are there celebrating at an extended party over several days. It’s a palpable celebration with a sense of shared spirit.

I went in thinking of the AMP centerpiece as trying to create an emblem and an action that could symbolize the wake celebration and gathering. I was thinking about what non-Western traditions show us about how remembering and memorializing our loved ones can be an act of celebration, gratitude, and joy. Something that is a full-body experience. Something that is not about just watching, but is about getting every part of you engaged. I heard from people about ways they have celebrated across time, finding out about spaces where people have connected with their loved ones throughout the history of this pandemic. I got to have dinner with different groups of folks and hear their stories – specifically stories about Capitol Hill and how people have cared for each other in these spaces. Suddenly, it became clear to me where the project needed to go. It was like a lightning bolt, and then a week later, a thunder bolt. It just hit me once I saw the light.

**GS: It’s interesting that for all of you, an important part of your process was connecting with people and listening to their stories. Rosette, what was it like sitting down with so many people and bearing witness to their experiences with HIV/AIDS?**

RR: People said to me at first, “How are you going to do that? It’s going to be really hard. How are you going to take care of yourself?” However, I didn’t have so much concern about that. Somehow, I’m able to sit with people and listen to them go through things and not wear it. I am able to be a witness and supporter in this space without feeling like it’s mine. What I try to do is make the space as welcoming as possible for whatever needs to happen there.

**GS: What are your strategies for that? How do you create an environment of trust and safety?**

RR: I usually don’t start off talking about what we are there to talk about. I talk about anything: the weather, Beyoncé. I try to find a way to connect with the person so they realize we’re both people. Next, I’ll say, “Listen, you’re in control. I’m sitting here talking to you, but you decide what we do. So, you can talk about whatever you want to talk about – or you can say that you don’t want to talk about something. I’m going to listen to you, you’re the person who is important here.” I let them know that I embrace them claiming their own power in the story.

I also know that memory is different for everybody. Some people are very good at going A, B, C, D, E, F, G through history. Other people have to go to A, then go to G, then go back to C, remember B, then get to D, and to E, and to F. I have to sit and support their process. Everyone has a story about something. It does so much for our hearts when someone takes the time to listen to what we have to say.

**GS: While collecting these stories, did anything unexpected or surprising come up?**

RR: Something unexpected always comes up. Some of the stories are funny; people make references. One person started talking about TV shows and asked whether I liked Rhoda or Mary Tyler Moore. Which led to a whole conversation that I didn’t expect.

**GS: Just for the record, I’m Rhoda all the way.**

RR: Me too. [Laughs] So that was great. But different themes come up and not all of them are easy. I spoke to a number of women who had lost children. One woman spoke about having survivor’s guilt and having outlived her doctor, her healthcare workers, and the queer men who were in her support group. She was the only woman.

I talked with one person about love. We were having a conversation about being a black queer man with HIV and he started talking about love. And that, to me, was radical. We don’t often talk about love with one another.

**GS: I love the concept you touched on Rosette, that memory is different for everyone – that it’s a singular experience. Memory is a huge part of this project, and it is specifically the focus of your work, Horatio. How did you approach this element of memory?**

HL: Memory is a funny thing. You don’t know what will trigger a memory. Rosette’s interviews evidence that: he can ask a question, but he doesn’t know what’s going to come out of the response. By changing one part of the topic you can change the narrative and trigger a different thread of memory.

When I first began thinking about the part of the Pathway that has to do with remembrance and reflection, I was hearing different stories and opinions on what the memorial should be. It was daunting. How could I come up with something that everyone would like? But, at a certain point, you have to put that away. Like Rosette and Chris, I tried to listen – not just to people I talked to, but also to myself as an artist. Like Chris said, it’s like a thunderbolt. The artwork that came out in the end is something that is, in a way, passive. I am hoping it will allow people to find their own thread. I am putting something out there that will allow people to activate the thread

of their own memory and allow them to process or experience it. I can’t tell someone what to think or how to respond, but I can help people remember.

**GS: The AMP project is about acknowledging and honoring past experiences, but it’s also about how those experiences inform the present. Why is this project important now?**

CJ: Wow – six months ago, it would have been harder to convey that importance, but within our current circumstances, it’s much more obvious. We are seeing in real time the racialization of a pandemic – seeing how systemic inequities, access, and all of the underlying vulnerabilities that different communities face at the front lines of this crisis shape the trajectories for who is impacted. But also, we see that existing inequities create exponential degrees of unsafety for everyone. If your agricultural workers don’t have healthcare access, that is circling right back to you. Just because you are not part of that community, you are not disconnected from that community. If your grocery store workers don’t have insurance and paid time off, that is circling right back to you.

We cannot have a healthy and safe world while prioritizing isolation from our communities. One big take away is how important it is to advocate for and fight for each other – to fight for our front-line people with the conviction that it is necessary for our own health, no matter how disconnected we might think we are.

HL: I agree with Chris. In a way, disease is a great equalizer. In our current time of quarantine, everyone has the same role and responsibility to keep the disease at bay. This highlights the importance of good leadership. When the AIDS crisis started, the White House was happy not to talk about it. They were ignoring the fact that people were dying. As long as it was happening to “those” kinds of people, it didn’t concern them. But disease doesn’t discriminate.

RR: I grew up with a story about what HIV and AIDS was. It was partly presented to me through media like newspapers, movies, and books. But, when I sit down and talk to these people, I realize the story of HIV and AIDS is much more complex. The thing about history is that it’s never static. A story in a book will never be a full history.

That is what this project can do: show us that this HIV and AIDS history that we think we know, might not actually be complete. In sharing their own stories, people can help make it more full. That’s one of the great things about art. Art gives us the chance to look at what we think we know and to see, hear, and experience it in a brand-new way.

For more information on the AIDS Memorial Pathway project, visit [www.theamp.org](http://www.theamp.org).





# DEATH IN THE CITY

By April Ng  
Photographs by Thomas Johnston

*“Every death teaches us that all humans  
have to die in the end.”  
Ichiraku Makoto  
(from a leaflet on Shin Buddhism)*

Throughout the world, cemeteries and columbaria delicately balance the threshold between the essential phases of humanity: life and death. Hong Kong holds a particularly fascinating relationship between the two. Here, a dense living population and an equally dense deceased population share a limited land mass.

Hong Kong tradition holds that the dead physically inhabit the space in which they are interred. This belief creates a cultural requirement: families must live nearby in order to regularly visit and care for these final resting places. And yet, *feng shui* dictates that columbaria and cemeteries should not be visible from one’s dwelling place. As Hong Kong’s urban center grows, the living are increasingly encroaching on the cemeteries and columbaria previously located beyond city limits. The paradox of familial closeness and philosophical separation is amplified by the mountainous topography and limited land available for development. Is there an architectural solution to creating new places for remembering and respecting the dead that satisfies both cultural values – proximity and separation – within the limits of a city forced to grow vertically?

In the spring of 2015, I visited the resting places of my ancestors in accordance with the tradition and customs of my Cantonese family. Despite the different methods of interring remains, the rites during visitation were similar. Whether at a columbarium or cemetery, visiting relatives always clean the marker of the deceased; light incense; and offer greetings from and bring news about the rest of the family. The traditions are simple and beautiful, and the ritual for visiting the dead carries more celebration than grief – an act of coming together as a family to offer reassurance in the face of death.





Visiting my deceased relatives exposed me to the full spectrum of funerary sites in Hong Kong, in all corners of the city. Some sites are sprawling hillside cemeteries where new towers loom just outside, while others are located adjacent to new highways with graves packed so densely that one must apologize at every step while walking over the remains of others. I visited centuries-old columbaria in temples with walls patterned by bright orange and yellow niches for remains alongside mythological murals and sculptures; 1950s-era columbaria containing delicate shelves lined with porcelain urns; and entirely new, modern crematoriums with crisp white alcoves bathed in light and adorned with fresh flowers.

This journey through a frantic mega-city to these quiet places of reprieve and contemplation also gave me a deeper understanding of Eastern relationships to the dead. Ultimately, I must ask why Westerners have such an estranged relationship to those who are no longer living, as well as what that means for me, with one foot in each of these worlds. Closeness with the dead is an integral part of what it means to live in Hong Kong, and this travel experience revealed both the resilience and adaptability of a culture and its architectural response. So long as the ability to visit the deceased remains, cultural acceptance of the physical context is variable, as seen in the

wide range from grand family burial plots to the library-like collections of niches for cremated remains. Scarcity of land cannot diminish the desire to commune with one's ancestors, and thus novel design will surely continue to spring forth, as the perpetually intertwining cycles of life and death continue.

**Diamond Hill Cemetery  
Public Cemetery  
Wong Tai Sin, Kowloon**

There are many types of cemeteries and columbaria in Hong Kong, but the most disparate types are distinguished by ownership: public or private. Private cemeteries offer permanent interment of the deceased and are managed by private companies. Land shortages in the late 1970s forced Hong Kong to ban construction of new permanent burial sites, and from then on, public cemeteries were ordered to exhume and reinter the remains of the deceased after six years to make way for newcomers. This double

burial process has two stages: the initial burial of the deceased in a coffin, and the subsequent disinterment and re-interment of the remains. During disinterment, the bones of the body are exhumed, cleaned and placed in a funerary urn that is interred in a niche or buried in front of a horseshoe grave.

In a horseshoe grave, remains are placed in a jar in front of a stone marker that displays information describing the deceased. Pictured here at Diamond Hill Cemetery are relatively small horseshoe graves. Traditional horseshoe graves are typically three to five times larger, accommodating full coffins and offering

an area in front of the marker for relatives to picnic and visit. Today, even the two-stage custom of burial with re-interment in a horseshoe grave takes too much room. New horseshoe graves are located in the mountains, far away from the city.







**Wo Hop Shek  
Public Cemetery  
Fanling, New Territories**

Wo Hop Shek is the largest public cemetery in Hong Kong. In 1950, the cemetery opened in the New Territories, which surrounds Hong Kong Island, where the cemeteries had begun to reach capacity. Completed in 2013, Phase V is the most recent construction; it contains 43,700 new niches.

New Western-style and Chinese-style Gardens of Remembrance were constructed as part of Phase V. In recent years, there has been growing acceptance of alternative burial methods. Applications for scattering cremated ashes at the Gardens of Remembrance have increased fivefold.

It is more common to cremate than bury in Hong Kong, where cremation accounts for ninety percent of funerary dispositions. However, there are still not enough niches to keep up with the death rate. The process to inter remains in a public columbarium is tedious – families must go through an annual application and lottery process. If the application is successful, applicants are invited to go to the Office of Cemeteries and Crematoria at a designated time for niche selection and allocation. If the application is unsuccessful, it will be added to the following year's lottery. Securing a niche can take up to five years, and there are now officially more than 22,000 deceased on the waiting list for a space in public columbaria.



**Tsz Wan Shan Tsz Wan Kok  
Private Columbarium  
Tsz Wan Shan, Hong Kong**

The sheer density of Hong Kong means that columbaria are running out of space as well. Many people object to building new columbaria out of discomfort; they don't want the ghosts of the dead too close to their homes. The private columbarium pictured here existed before the surrounding residential towers were built.

Families typically reserve niches in private columbaria located next to one another. In this photo, the orange tags signify reserved niches. The locations of niches, both in the building and in the room, vary in price. My family prefers niches at or just above eye level, so that our deceased have a good view of the room. If there is a window or view nearby, even better. My family insists on avoiding a niche near the floor or benches, because they do not want our dead relatives staring at people's feet for eternity.

It is customary for whole families to make an outing to visit their relatives' graves at least once a year. They present offerings of pork, fruit, and flowers; burn incense and candles; offer prayers; and set off firecrackers. Newly constructed columbaria are typically located on the outer edges of the city, high in the mountains, and far away from public transportation – all of which make it difficult for families to visit as often as they'd like.





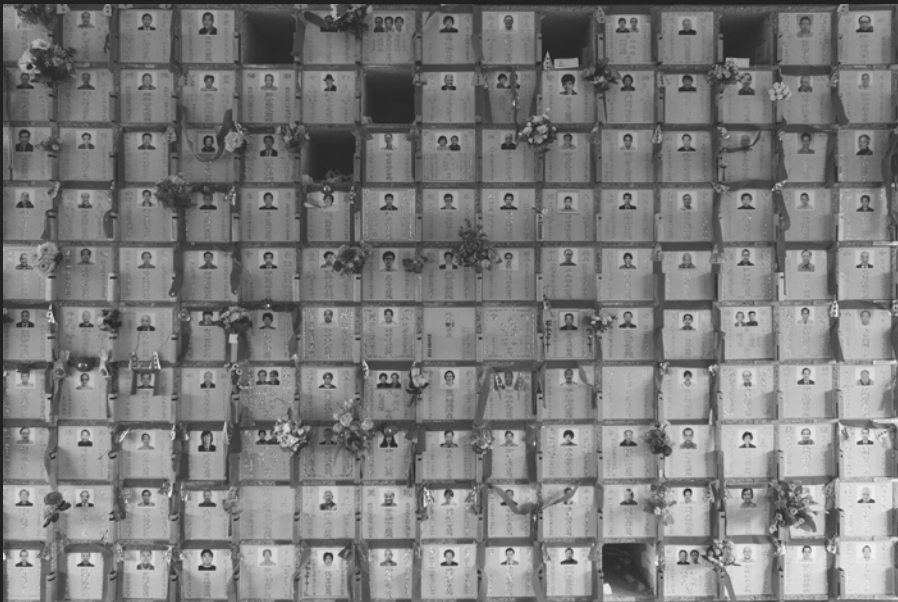
**Tsuen Wan Chinese Permanent Cemetery  
Private Cemetery  
Kwai Chung, Hong Kong**

There are few private cemeteries remaining in Hong Kong that allow the permanent interment of remains, rather than the double-burial method commonly used in public cemeteries. However, costs for permanent burial can exceed \$200,000.

Families often visit graves to clean markers, burn incense, and pay respect to their ancestors. Depending on the type of grave, incense may be located in front or in back of the marker. Incense in front is often larger and more gracious, whereas incense in the back is typically smaller and less formal. Both are intended to guard the grave and are described as the front and back door to greet the deceased. The act of bowing three times, with three incense sticks in hand, is my favorite part of the visitation. At a minimum, three bows are required to open the line of communication with the deceased, but one could continue bowing to have a conversation for as long as one wants.



*April Ng is an architect at Miller Hull where she works on high performance buildings with aggressive sustainability goals to improve both occupant and environmental health. In their free time, April and Thomas Johnston run a small fabrication and ceramics business, called Et Cetera Workshop, out of their backyard studio.*



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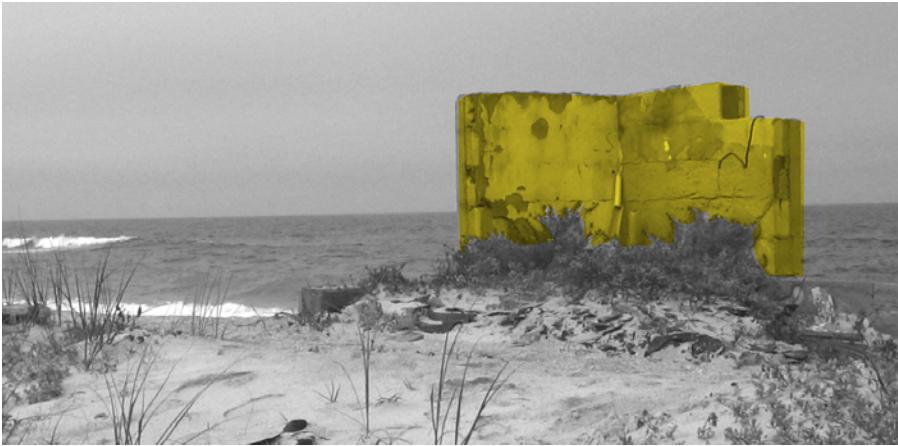
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# THE GRACEFUL DEATH OF BUILDINGS

By Adam Bettcher



*“When we build, let us think that we build forever.” —David Ruskin*

*“READ MORE BOOKS.” —Anonymous graffiti, decaying factory, Cleveland*

Like a calcified shell encircling quivering mollusk flesh, a building is shaped around the life that gives it form. However, when the life that gave it shape dies, the shell is abandoned to fossilize. Our bodies’ cells die on the scale of days to years. Our cities’ buildings die on the scale of decades to centuries. Facilities managers typically plan for buildings to die after 50 to 120 years.

Where neighborhoods are growing, this metabolic churn of buildings can be seen as a sign of vigor. Built form evolves as the underlying needs change. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps buildings, and so the building is discarded to be replaced by progressively larger buildings.

Where neighborhoods are declining, buildings decay in a reflection of the condition of the life that gave them form. A withered, Dark-Age Rome decayed into the earth over centuries, while the bricks of its ancient monuments were abandoned or cannibalized for new needs. Similarly, the contemporary American Rust Belt is a ruin pornographer’s playground.

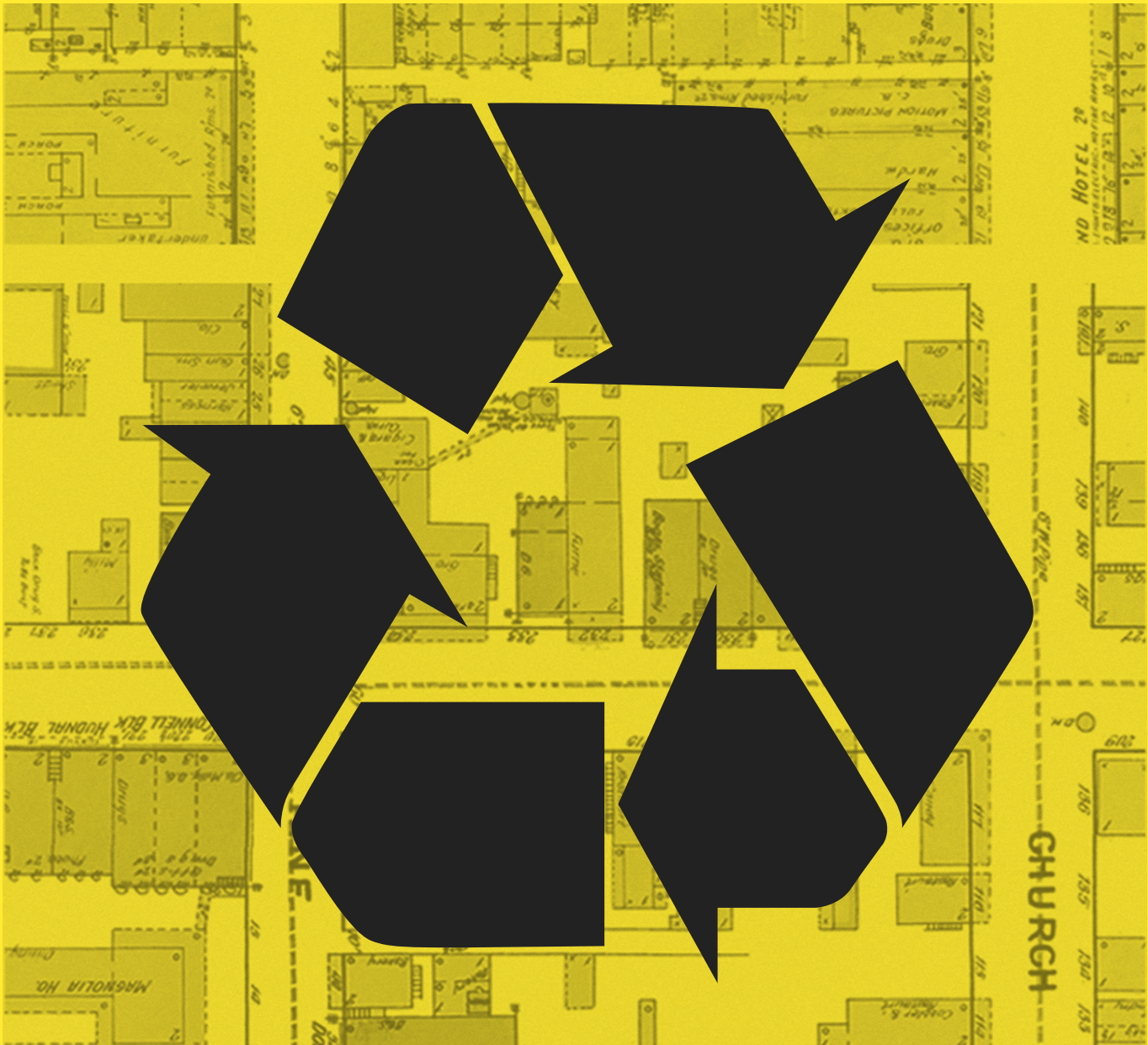
At some moment in a building’s future, it will cease to be used and maintained by human life. What happens next can vary depending on context. Sometimes, the building’s end will be intentional — a killing. The end and its aftermath can also be slow and gradual, like a natural death — the building decays, an eroding memory of the era in which it was built.

It is hard to imagine in Seattle’s recent boom that the long-term trend is toward decline. The UN DESA’s Population Division released a study in 2004 that projects population growth through the year 2300 will likely plateau or fade into decline in the coming centuries. Decay is a very possible long-term future.

Furthermore, a world of rising seas will irrevocably drown many buildings. Sea level rise is happening now, and there is uncertainty about how much land will be lost. With the potential for hundreds of feet of sea level rise over the very long term, buildings being designed now will experience this eventuality in their lifespans in many surprising places.

The death of what we build today cannot be an afterthought — we must design our buildings to decay with grace as the life within them changes or departs. But architects are building obstetricians, not undertakers; after gestation and birth, a building is handed to its owner.

How can the experts who shape buildings at the moment of their formation forge a bigger role in gracefully shepherding the death of buildings? As someone whose profession is dedicated to the creation of buildings, this is something beyond the scope of most projects I’ve worked on, but should be considered. In the decades after I retire and die, people will have to deal with my buildings as they become obsolete. I haven’t seen a universal consensus on how this can happen, but many of my colleagues are reacting to this reality through design.



Below are some of their interesting strategies.

**Design for evolution:** Offices continually upgrade, expand, and move. Many designers use demountable systems that are rearranged on floorplates for maximum flexibility in place of fixed walls. Building technology evolves at a much more rapid pace than a building’s life; we can choose to specify our architectural systems to evolve, piece by piece.

**Design recyclable buildings:** A brick is a brick, whether a thousand years ago or a thousand years from now. Today, cutting-edge research plans for adaptive reuse; it’s referred to as the circular economy. An approach to building can use replaceable, reusable components. This could lead to a number of new design strategies; future buildings will be like axes, which periodically have their handles and heads replaced but are still the same axe.

**Design with decay:** Some decay can be anticipated. Architects designing for any places at high risk of sea level rise should plan for what can be salvaged and what can be left to drown. As the ocean slowly claims low-elevation places like Florida, the bits of our buildings and infrastructure left behind will become underwater ruins for future generations to explore. They can be a focus of future architecture; Michael Maltzan’s proposal for a replacement pier in St Petersburg, Florida made use of the old pier’s remains as a reef at the center of the new pier, lit up from below and highlighting the submerged ruin.

**Adapt old forms to new life:** Many abandoned buildings lie in stasis, waiting to be reborn. In the Rust Belt, grand old temples of commerce — once hulking ruins — have been reclaimed by the artists’ co-ops, apartments, schools, and grocery stores of a modern city.

We are becoming conscious of how our buildings will adapt and die, even as new buildings are born. They can be recyclable, disassemblable, and adaptable. And, as a last resort, they can decay with grace.

*Adam Bettcher likes buildings and has several credentials that say he is qualified to design them.*

*Opposite page: Remnants of a former structure in St Augustine Beach, FL slowly being washed out to sea. Photo by Adam Bettcher.*

*Above: Map of a block in Orlando, Florida. Sanborn Fire Insurance Co.*



# PASSING (A)WAYS: ROUTING DISEASE, TRAILING DEATH

By Elizabeth Umbanhowar



**D**eath intersects our built environments in ways subtle and conspicuous. The specter of mortality wends metaphorically and messily along highways and byways, and through complex histories of passage, loss, and memory. Such morbid musings have informed my thoughts since being “grounded” here in Denmark, where the government closed borders and ceased business as usual early on due to the global outbreak of novel coronavirus. Like many people, I have endeavored to stay informed and circumspect amidst the flood of grim reports. Fortunately, limited travel is still permissible for groceries, medical care, and exercise. And in a city distinguished by its extensive public infrastructure,

in Copenhagen there is no shortage of nearby bicycle lanes, dedicated trails, historic gardens, beaches, and even former military ramparts-turned-promenades to temporarily escape my apartment’s confines. The tumult of the coronavirus landscape stands in notable contrast to the seemingly peaceful and nearly car-free Copenhagen streets. It is a strange irony that despite the ravages of the pandemic, the roadways are momentarily “safer” for pedestrians. But, critical efforts to limit the global outbreak depend not only on medical proficiency, political will, and resource mobilization, but also on the isolation and *immobilization* of populations. Tragically, it is *movement*—along manmade routes between population centers—that has been a critical factor in the rapid dispersal of COVID-19.

Historically, transportation networks have facilitated myriad and extraordinary mobilities: human migration, commercial trade, scientific exploration, military invasion, colonization, and, often, concomitant pestilence and suffering. Today however, our associations with mortality and motorways constitute more ordinary data on traffic volumes and automobile fatalities. But, contemporary roadways obscure other threats. World Health Organization studies map transport-related concentrations of air pollution adjacent to traffic arterials and reveal higher incidents of allergies, asthma, cardiovascular ailments, and cancers.

In the past, scourges such as the Black Death also trafficked along travel corridors, periodically devastating populations in Europe, Asia, and North Africa. In his study of the plague in Europe, Joseph Byrne contends that populations spent their days out-of-doors where the performative rituals and visceral realities of life and death played out, strengthening the social fabric and at the same time, exposing vulnerabilities. In Denmark and elsewhere in Europe, formal efforts to control contagion comprised proscribing movement. Officials employed physical barriers, quarantine and even prophylactic prayer, “miasma” fires, and the slaughter of swine erroneously supposed to prevent the spread of disease. While the Catholic Church encouraged public penance through municipal parades and religious pilgrimage, Protestant regions levied punishments for formal gatherings. Despite governmental strictures, belated and erratic mandates, illegal smuggling, and unauthorized travel compounded impacts of the epidemic. Byrne observes ensuing destitution and fear of violence often forced survivors to flee their homes. Shunned elsewhere, these plague evacuees led interstitial lives. They camped along highways, unprotected from the elements and thieves who preyed upon them. Spiraling death rates from plague required desperate measures including mass graves. Plague wardens regularly warned residents to vacate the streets or risk exposure as macabre tumbrils piled high with cadavers wheeled by.

Periods of upheaval such as the Black Death spurred religious fervor and mass movements. Pilgrimages offered a space of atonement and escape, if not camaraderie and adventure. In the transmission of bodies, goods, and ideas, roads also became imbued with symbolic import, metaphors for more profound journeys. In the arts, pilgrim roads figured prominently as poetic avenues for the imagination and sanctioned alternatives for penitents who could not travel physically. Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* presented readers both entertainments and what Ruth Evans calls an “ideational journey.” In story and song, roadways were frequently otherworldly, haunted by the figure of Death or the Devil. Intersections were especially supernaturally fraught, and so crossroads were often marked with apotropaic stones or wooden crosses. The German artist Hans Holbein the Younger created a print series, *Danse Macabre*, that drew upon the late medieval European tradition of *memento mori*—an object that serves as a reminder of death. Yet Holbein’s “dance of death” proffered reflection on human frailty and social criticism, where the skeletal specter of Death confronted peddlers, knights, and priests alike. These widely circulated woodcut images were also poignant reminders of the literal perils of the road—robbery, warfare, famine, and plague.

In many regions of Europe, paths accommodated requisite transport of the dead from natal villages to consecrated grounds. Recurring processions of mourners inscribed rituals of grief into the landscape along these “corpse roads,” which were punctuated by coffin stones laid for pallbearers to rest their burdens. In the Netherlands, as Paul Devereux chronicles in an essay on divination and mental geography, such *doodwegen* (“death roads”) or *spokenwegen* (“ghost roads”) were usually straight paths, the result of topography and tradition. Geometry ensured the spirit of the dead did not tarry or deviate. By contrast, the geography of corpse roads in hilly terrain was less direct to confuse spirits and prevent them from returning home. Tracks also skirted the boundaries of agricultural fields and avoided main roads to abide property rights and to avoid corporeal contamination believed to cause crop failure.

In the contemporary Western world, journeys of the dead are mostly rendered invisible. Borne in ambulances and hearses, “evidence” of the deceased is confined to hospitals, morgues, and cemeteries. And yet, we still yearn for spaces of collective witness. Customs honoring the passage from life to death endure and change along asphalt corridors and green ways with makeshift crosses, plastic flowers, white bicycles, and signs. Even pilgrimage persists. The historic routes of the Hadj, the Shikoku Henro and the Camino de Santiago remain important sacred and secular arterials, supporting spiritual and

tourist economies alike. Reactivation of these ancient tracks has inspired preservation of important cultural sites, restoration of healthy ecological corridors, and catalyzing social cohesion. The British Pilgrimage Trust as well as the Trees for Life day in the Netherlands, during which shared walks and collective tree plantings celebrate the lives of cancer patients, attest to shifting needs and evolving practices around mortality, meaning-making, and movement. Shared traumas in public space make heartache tangible and bearable.

Paradoxically, COVID, like the medieval Black Death, has forced us to abandon our collective material commons. We now shelter indoors in virtual exile, rambling along cyber channels, simultaneously physically safe and existentially vulnerable. But perhaps when we reemerge from this crisis, even as certain death retains its grip, we might benefit from encounters with these historic echoes, present traumas and novel rites of the open road, and be moved once again in complex and consequential ways.

*Elizabeth Umbanhowar, PLA, ASLA, LEED AP, is a lecturer in landscape architecture at the University of Washington (UW), where she teaches landscape studios and history. Her pedagogy incorporates film, new media, and art as critical tools for design storytelling. As a licensed landscape architect, she has a decade of practice in large-scale public infrastructure, active transportation design, urban design, and habitat restoration. She is currently a PhD student in the UW interdisciplinary program in the Built Environment and concurrently pursuing a graduate certificate in Cinema and Media Studies. Her dissertation research focuses on the representation and experience of urban landscapes mediated by cinematic and digital technologies; and the exploration of walking history, infrastructure, urban pilgrimage, and the Anthropocene.*

*Opposite page: Hans Holbein the Younger, “The Peddler” from Simolachri, Historie, e Figure de la Morte (In Lyone Appresso Giovan Frellone, 1549).*



# EVENT HORIZONS AND ALGORITHMS:

By Mark von Rosenstiel



A signal becomes interesting when it hints at what comes next, without telling precisely what it will produce. In this instance, I'm using the word "signal" to talk about information moving from one place to the next – communication in its most simple form. A signal that becomes useful, interesting, is one that lies somewhere between the blinking existence of a lighthouse (a signal that is essentially

Morse code for the phrase "watch out" extended to infinity, which ends up being an object in motion rather than a signal) and completely randomized patterns, like molecules bouncing around in an extremely hot object. The most interesting signals exist in a narrative above "watch out," but in a setting a bit cooler than pure heat.

From the viewpoint of modern physics, humans are flying through spacetime along geodesic curves created from the gravity of large objects, hurtling toward some distant black hole. That's our container. Within this container – itself a sort of signal weaving this way and that among the stars – we are sending out signals using cultural norms that we hope formalize our signals in such a way that they become digestible to others. As Gilbert Simondon states in his 1958 paper titled *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, "A culture establishes regulatory communication among those who share that culture." Culture can be understood as a means of making our output an interesting, understandable pattern.

This whole business of hurtling toward a black hole mirrors the arc of our lives – as we grow old, we eventually come to a point where our body and mind cease to be agents of communication. At some point, we can no longer communicate after we pass from wherever "here" is. We slip over the event horizon of life.

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEATH OF SIGNALS



Scientists have long grappled with what happens to celestial bodies when they move past an event horizon. Most scientists agree that the universe maintains information, but aside from some Hawking Radiation – the result of a particle or antiparticle losing its partner – black holes seem to swallow up and lose mention of what exactly they have ingested. Signals lost behind an event horizon. In a twist in 2014, Stephen Hawking renamed the "event horizon" as the "apparent horizon," acknowledging that information can come back, but is often scrambled to the point of being unrecognizable.

But before we slip past this point of no return, what about the horizons within the container of our human life? What is the state of the signals we are sending out into the world, and how are they being shaped and curated? What sort of black holes are these signals slipping toward?

The answers have something to do with what I refer to as "algorithmically created culture." As we scroll and double tap on phones acting as windows into others' lives, peeking into the lives of our neighbors, we are generating data points that allow algorithms to offer curated content to us. Typically, algorithms are used to automate tasks, thus optimizing or amplifying an output – in this case, cultural content. But what does "optimized cultural content" really mean? Social media platforms think it means content that feels familiar.

Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook drive us toward content that is extremely localized while basking in the glow of appearing global: a heat radiating from these services disguised as signal. This heat is the equivalent of an algorithmically created Hawking Radiation. Before these services, most of us ran through the internet blind, being yanked from one domain to the next with little continuity. Go down a Wikipedia rabbit hole and you'll quickly move from the chemical compositions of asphalt to sugar beets. It takes two clicks. The internet is extraneous noise masquerading as signal. Naked content that is sometimes, but not always, able to wear clothes of meaning.

Instagram and others over-correct and serve content based entirely on what they know we like: the things we fiend for; the weighted blanket of our impulses. We seek to explore the highest peaks in the world of content, only to take baby steps up the small incline of a raised piece of sidewalk outside our apartment. These services tuck us between algorithmic minimums and maximums because their step sizes won't allow us to see past the topographical features of our immediate interests.

Mine is not a comment on the value of these content platforms (for that I'd recommend the article, "My Instagram," by Dayna Tortorici in the Winter 2020 issue of *N+1* magazine), but rather a comment on the way the algorithms used by these platforms reduce the typical step size we

use to explore the vast universe of content. They cause us to take shelter in places that aren't all that scenic, while telling us we are seeing the world. Their common trait is repetition.

As we stand on this content landscape, eyes algorithmically glued to sneakers, wrapped in weighted blankets, planting flags of our affiliation on some raised piece of sidewalk, we have failed to notice that these algorithms are essentially giving us the same thing over and over again. They've removed the sense of horizon altogether, shuttling us past it on boats carved from the content they are purportedly promoting. These algorithms are shaping content into a repeating signal that is acting as a lighthouse on the banks of culture. We should heed their warnings of "watch out"; once we pass the event horizon, we become signals, scrambled beyond what is recognizable ourselves.

*Mark von Rosenstiel is a multi-disciplinary artist who uses mathematical algorithms to interact with and explore human relationships and emotions. His site-specific installations create internalized representations of the human experience that explore the boundary between observation and participation. Von Rosenstiel's work has been featured in galleries across the globe, from Seattle to Bangkok.*

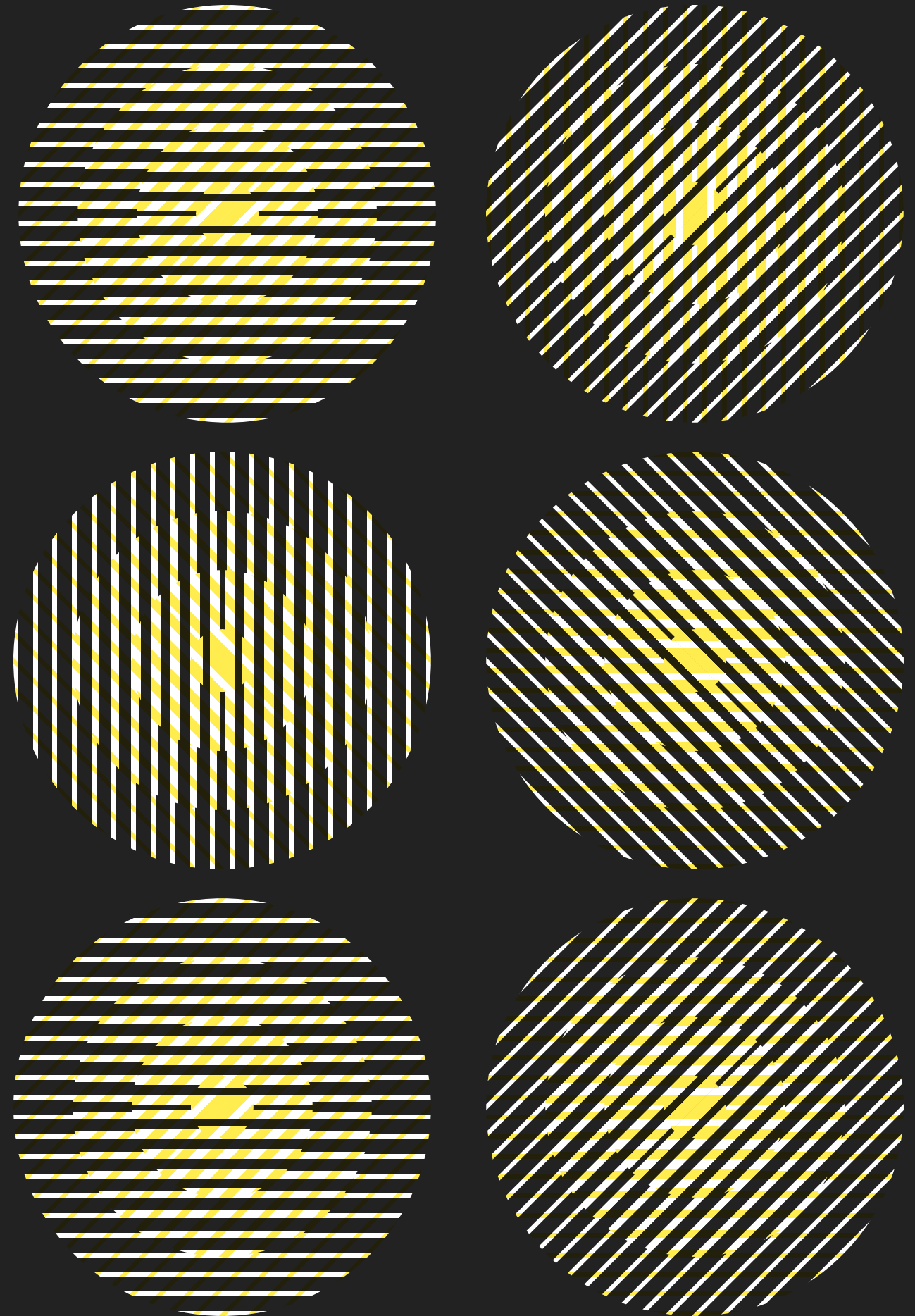
*Opposite page:  
Photo by Mark von Rosenstiel*



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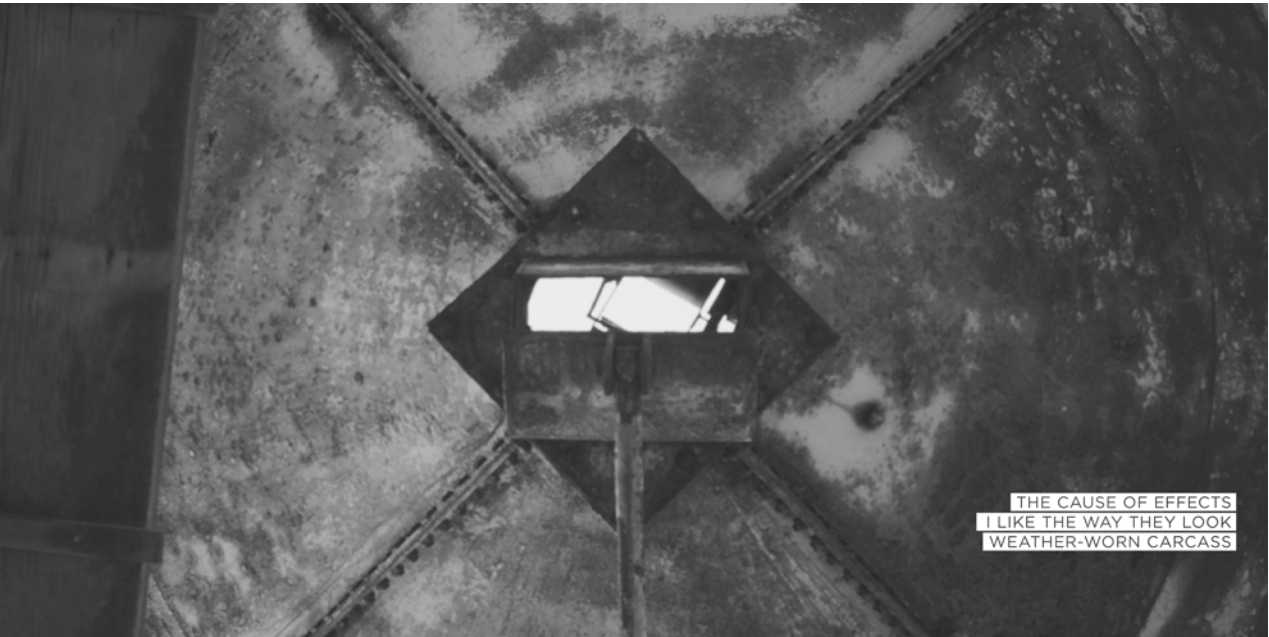




# THE PATTERNS THAT CONNECT: LESSONS ON LIVING AND DYING FROM STEVEN SKOV HOLT

Text by Mara Holt Skov  
Illustration design by Yoann Resmond





**"Keywords: Things that He Was" (1991/2019)**

Opposite page, top:  
 Photograph by Steven Skov Holt  
 Keywords by Mara Holt Skov and Yoann Resmond  
 Design by Yoann Resmond

Previous page:  
 "Clouds #3" (undated)  
 Photograph by Steven Skov Holt

Self-described "design culture polymath" Steven Skov Holt was many things when he was alive. He was the first card-carrying design visionary in Silicon Valley history and a Distinguished Professor of Design at California College of the Arts. He was a teacher, writer, curator and curiosity advocate who shaped young minds and influenced culture. He was a selective historian of the future and an ancient astronaut theorist. A reveler in juxtaposition, surprise, and transformation, he was simultaneously blessed and cursed by the determination to do more and go further. Steven's search for "patterns that connect" (inspired by biologist Gregory Bateson) extended across topics, boundaries, and genres, reflecting a deeper search for meaning that became his life's work.

Steven endured over fifteen years of kidney dialysis with its attendant health complications including cancer, osteoporosis, lung infections, and a host of other physical challenges. Throughout it all, he continued to teach, write, curate, and inspire generations of young designers while continuing his own personal practice of creating handmade books. He died on August 13, 2015 at 6:30 pm, peacefully at home as the summer light slowly shifted from afternoon to evening. He was fifty-seven years old.

What follows is a series of life lessons inspired by Steven's work, as interpreted by those he left behind.

**On Environmental Renewal and Rebirth**  
 Steven photographed a series of rusted, weathering sand mining structures on the beach north of Monterey when he first moved to California from New York in 1991. Those photographs became the raw material for layered textile artworks and a richly illustrated book that tells how the Monterey Bay site evolved from a place of industry, to a place of ruin, to a place of environmental rebirth. The book also relates Steven's personal story as he witnessed the slow decline and decay of his own body – at each step of the way, he searched for meaning and purpose. Stories of renewal and rebirth give us hope as we contemplate the inevitability of death and the other endings that we face in life.

**On a New Definition of Beauty**  
 Steven's love of decaying industrial sites – one shared by many industrial designers – was really about reckoning with the processes of nature slowly taking back what humans have made. He was drawn to the sand mining structures and the dignified way they stood up to the elements even as they rusted and weathered over time. In photographing their physical failures, he captured a new kind of beauty in them, stretching to find the same kind of beauty in his own failing body that he saw in the mirror every day.

**"Unexpectedly... Order from Chaos" (1991/2019)**

Opposite page, middle:  
 Photograph and Poetry by Steven Skov Holt  
 Concept by Mara Holt Skov  
 Design by Yoann Resmond

**"Weather-Worn Carcass" (1991/2019)**

Opposite page, bottom:  
 Photograph and Poetry by Steven Skov Holt  
 Concept by Mara Holt Skov  
 Design by Yoann Resmond





**On Creative Gestures as a Response to Loss**

What can we do when we experience loss in our lives? Designers, artists, musicians, and authors can turn to their creative practices to cope with and move through adversity. In doing so, they use their negative experiences to make something positive. Steven's illness led him to find some kind of positive outcome in every new setback, and in doing so, he infused his work – and his life – with poignancy and richness.

**On the Acceptance of Impermanence**

Steven was a big, blue sky thinker by necessity. In his early twenties, he was diagnosed with renal failure, which led to a kidney transplant, followed by a lifetime of health challenges. As his body let him down, he was forced to depend more upon his brain. One persistent query characterized his thinking from then on: how can we accept in our designed structures and in our own bodies, the natural world's impermanence and entropy that are essential to life? Put another way, how might we transcend the inevitable end of life by creating meaningful work – work that can lift us up while we are living and inspire others after we are gone?

**On Form Follows Meaning**

In the early nineties, Steven revised the modernist credo “form follows function” to fit his search for the patterns that connect. His approach, “form follows meaning,” was fitting in a post-modern world where every word, object, and system signified something deeper.

If we are only here for a short time on earth, then who and what are we when we are here? What are the essential qualities of a person? And beyond that, what qualities remain when we are gone? What will our legacies be? Steven was many things when he was alive – visionary, fearless, contemplative, inspirational, feisty – and those qualities remain in his work, in his writing, and in the relationships he formed.

**On Transcendence**

Two days before Steven died, when asked what it felt like to be dying, he replied enigmatically, “It's like a movie, in which the past, present, and future are all happening simultaneously.” He may be gone now, but the professor still has something to teach us.

**"Positive Contact/Negative Contact" (1991/2019)**

Opposite page:  
(After Deltron 3030)  
Photo contact sheets by Steven Skov Holt  
Concept by Mara Holt Skov  
Design by Yoann Resmond

**"It's Like a Movie..." (1991/2018)**

Above:  
Photographs and text by Steven Skov Holt  
Concept by Mara Holt Skov  
Design by Yoann Resmond

Mara Holt Skov is an art and design historian, curator, author and educator at California College of the Arts and San Jose State University. She identifies rising macrorends and tracks the convergence of the fine arts, design, craft, and popular culture. She champions design for overlooked human needs especially those in healthcare and the end of life. Her creative practice merges research, writing and storytelling in designed books, artifacts and installations created in collaboration with others. Steven Skov Holt is her late husband. Together they wrote books and articles, curated exhibitions and taught design seminars and studios at California College of the Arts in San Francisco.

The illustrations for this article were created in collaboration with former CCA student and designer Yoann Resmond who designed the book The Impermanence of Things from which this visual essay is condensed. The book includes Steven's photographs of Monterrey Bay sand mining machines, Mara's historical and cultural storytelling, and Yoann's graphic design and artwork.



# EYES WIDE OPEN: THE 'DEATH' OF OUR GREAT AMERICAN CITY

By Jocelyn Beausire



Buildings don't die.

A hulk of brick, wood, glass, and metal goes through natural cycles of construction and deconstruction – it is only through our eyes that these are personified as “death” and “life,” respectively. People can't help but give meaning to places – we inhabit them, we ritualize our lives around and within them, we grow to love them, we grow to hate them, we feel trapped by them, we feel uplifted by them. The built and natural environments become fat with layers of meaning and memory.

Seattle, like most places, has been shaped by those who occupy it. From the Coast Salish people's long and foundational relationship with the lands and waterways, to the recent Seattle transplants' search for the best late-night cocktail spot, the city is ever-evolving. Meaning is built, destroyed, and rebuilt in unsteady and inequitable cycles, to feed and water the masses. Seattle's exponential growth in recent years has only led the pace of these cycles to increase. With each frenetic spin, cultural landmarks established over the past hundred years are razed in the blink of an eye, and new structures are erected, offered as potential landmarks to the Seattleites of the future.

Seattleite Cynthia Brothers has taken notice of these blinks and has presented them en masse through Vanishing Seattle. The platform, hosted on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, serves as an immortalization of the cultural touchstones threatened by Seattle's rapid growth, presenting each in a few images, a description of less than 2,000 characters, and an assortment of applicable hashtags. By these blunt and humble means, Brothers presents each place not as a passive victim, but as an active member of an ongoing conversation.

Brothers, a North Seattle native, is quick to contextualize her work. One gets the sense that Vanishing Seattle was created



as a temporal lens, quickly focusing and unfocusing on whatever business is most vulnerable, what building is most at-risk, or which story is least listened-to. “I think I probably started the whole thing from a mix of emotions, but including things like anger and loss and this urge to resist erasure,” Brothers says. “It's not like, ‘Oh this is the natural life cycle.’ It's like, ‘Oh this is happening against people's will, or against small business' will.’ It's these little discrete things, but also on a broader level, it's the city itself being erased.”

From first glance, it is somewhat difficult to identify how Brothers positions herself in the process. Is she an author, activist, documentarian, preservationist, photographer, concerned neighbor, all of the above, or something else entirely? Vanishing Seattle seems almost to run itself, the buildings and businesses presented with passion but distance, a kind of objectivity that begets anonymity. In this sense, it is as if the places themselves are doing the talking – they are brought alive and given a chance to say their piece.

This decentered-yet-invested authorship is something Brothers actively cultivates. She sees her work not only as part of a larger conversation, but also as a counterbalance to dominant canons of historical discourse around the built environment. “I feel like, as a person of color, there is this awareness of how history is told, who gets to tell it, and

what is valued in that history. Some of the places in the [Vanishing Seattle] project may not necessarily have a lot of past documentation. So, if I can, I pull from different sources to convey the value or flavor of the space, as if it is a character or a person. I think it's also trying to convey that a lot of these places, that may not seem to another person to have a particular specialness or value, did have value – maybe to the people who lived there or grew up there, or to the folks who went to that business or depended on it for certain products or services. It is challenging all the assumptions that capitalism puts upon what we should assign as valuable.” Through Vanishing Seattle, Brothers both mediates and amplifies this “clash of narratives,” literally and figuratively bringing people out of the woodwork. Vernacular buildings that may be perceived as “dying” are cut into; their vitals exposed, and their importance made salient.

Her choice of highly-accessible modes of communication plays a huge role in the impact of her work's message. Social media is at its root a kind of futile attempt at immortality – a quest for relevance in an ever-shifting timeline controlled by anonymous algorithms. In a way, this serves Brothers' purpose, allowing her to compile a critical mass of immortalized buildings, accessible by the touch of a button. But in other ways, the algorithms operate similarly to the buildings' real-life threats – as larger systems of

erasure. “You want people to know about the totality of the work, but it's very difficult with the medium of social media – it's so temporal,” Brothers says. “I think the thing that keeps me going are the people I get to interact with and that human aspect, that human connection – the followers, commenters, people who I've met and built relationships with by virtue of this project, in real life. There are instances where I feel those connections have made a difference, around advocacy or supporting an artist or a small business, hopefully making some dents in civic discourse.”

At the end of the day, Vanishing Seattle may seem like a kicking-at-the-shins-of-giants effort: a few thousand images on a page with 30,000 followers, in a city with a population of over 800,000 and growing. But it is more than a static page. Cynthia Brothers' platform is a call to action, an opening of eyes, a hopeful vision for the future and a recognition of memory, meaning, and people themselves – as well as the places they value. It is an acknowledgement that the city is made up of the lives of those who occupy it. If closing one's eyes – or self-imposed blindness – is a kind of death, then Vanishing Seattle is at its core an effort to give life and agency back to the city. “I post about spaces, but at the end of the day, it's about the people of Seattle,” Brothers states, “Who can be here and who can't. I try not to be too dogmatic about what that looks like exactly, but I want people to connect with each other, to get activated and engaged, whether that's through organizing or using their art or getting involved in local politics, because I think it takes all of that. And I think it can be done.”

*Jocelyn Beausire is a Seattle-based performance artist, designer, and spatial researcher, originally from the Midwest. She currently serves as co-editor of ARCADE NW and is a member of Seattle's SOIL Gallery. She would like to thank her favorite Seattle small businesses for feeding, watering, and keeping her smiling over the years.*

*Opposite page: Illustration by Jocelyn Beausire. Photos left-to-right by Daniela Parmley (@danielaparmley), Cynthia Brothers, Cynthia Brothers (@vanishingseattle)*

*Above: Photo by Cynthia Brothers (@vanishingseattle)*



I'm crammed into my four-and-a-half-by-nine-foot home office where I have been working for the last several weeks. Yes, it often feels claustrophobic, but I'm thankful to have work, health, and family. Today, I received my yearly copy of Architectural Record's Record Houses. In the context of COVID-19, it seems just a bit ill-timed and insensitive—akin to billionaire David Geffen's Instagram post of self-isolating on his \$590 million yacht. Moreover, the issue has ignited my annual internal tussle with the American super-sized single-family house.

How comfortable would you be if the travel section of *Wallpaper\* Magazine* featured an article about the best places for the rich to hunt endangered animals? What if next month's issue of *Architectural Record* focused on America's finest-designed coal-fired power plants? Or how about a story in *Architect Magazine* that encourages the exploitation of foreign interns for free labor in high-design firms? In all these cases,

I imagine the average conscientious architect would experience some degree of cringe. I feel the same wince about the subject of capacious houses on pristine properties that cater exclusively to the American aristocracy — and much of this under the false pretext of cutting-edge design.

In this age of climate change, social upheaval, economic disparity, global pandemic, and elimination of virgin habitat, why are we still applauding this embarrassingly outdated and toxic typology? In his book, *The Death and Life of the Single Family House: Lessons from Vancouver on Building a Livable City*, author Nathanael Lauster proclaims the single-family home “an invasive parasite, evolved from the maelstrom of the twentieth century's rapid, market-led growth...[that] leads to disengagement, contributes to inequality, and encourages a sedentary, unhealthy lifestyle. In short, the house is

a parasite.” And in our profession, we have books, magazines, award ceremonies, conferences, committees, and workshops dedicated to venerating them.

Before I write another word, I will confess that I live in a Pacific Northwest mid-century modern house. Designed by the young and aggressively contemporary firm Van Horne and Van Horne, it was considered cutting edge when finished in 1953. Yes, I feel a bit of baby-boomer hypocrisy writing this sideYARD installment. However, it's one thing to live in a single-family house; it's another to glamorize and perpetuate homes for the uber rich like groupies do hedonistic, dysfunctional rock stars. They hang on to every poor lifestyle choice as proof of eccentric genius, rather than seeing it for what it really is — irresponsible privilege and destructive decadence.

Over the last decade, I have been tracking the average size and bedrooms of the

residences presented in *Architectural Record's* Record Houses. This year, the median home size is a whopping 5,100 sq. ft. (down from 6,440 sq. ft. in 2019!). The 2020 square footage per bedroom is an almost implausible 1,800! Per usual, the average price tag is “withheld.”

Incongruously, in the January 2020 edition of *Architect Magazine*, page forty proclaimed that “humanity has been on a carbon binge since the 1950s.” A month earlier the same magazine gave residential design awards to a 6,500 sq. ft. house and a 4,400 sq. ft. “cabin.” Price tags, withheld. According to the book *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*, by John de Graaf, the average American home after World War II was approximately 750 sq. ft. By the 1960s, the standard house inflated to about 1,100 sq. ft., and in the 1970s, to 1,350 sq. ft. It wasn't until the 2000s that the average home size in America reached 2,000 sq. ft.

On top of the ridiculous size of these pointless behemoths, all these homes have an overly predictable narrative, almost to the point of cliché. They aren't even as cutting edge as we want to believe. I have several books of award-winning homes from the forties through the sixties. Today's floor plans have virtually not changed in the past seventy years: open designs with large planes of glass and oversized fireplaces that aren't really used.

From the perspective of sustainability, just by the nature of their size, volume, and configuration, these homes are energy- and water-sucking monsters. Usually located far outside the squalor of the urban masses, they require hefty, carbon-emitting-automobile treks just to reach them. And, these houses archetypally require marring otherwise pristine landscapes, while extracting virgin — and often endangered — materials to bestow on their owners an ironic sense of connecting with nature.

On top of it all, the remoteness and exclusivity of the Record Houses further reinforce the already dismal discrepancies between most of us and the extremely few people who can afford a home whose costs are “withheld.” A few days ago, my weekly online edition of *Architectural Record* just happened to arrive on Earth Day and featured one of the Record Houses I referred to earlier. It's a lavish, 10,000

sq. ft., four-bedroom, single-level house, filled with unmitigated floor-to-ceiling glazing with views of a lush landscape set in hot, humid, and thirsty Dallas, Texas — cost “withheld.” Talk about social distancing! The carbon footprint of this family dwelling must be bigger than the state of Texas.

Immediately following the story was an interview with Earth Day organizer, Denis Hayes. The editor asked him, “Is there hope that we can avoid the worst impacts of climate change?” The unapologetic duplicity of the question juxtaposed with that house is as stunning as a Trump COVID-19 press conference!

The weather is improving, and the sun coming through the window helps alleviate the sense of walls closing in on my 40 sq. ft. home office. Sure, it's a tight fit, but I honestly don't need more space. It reminds me of a conversation I had with Audrey Van Horne (now in her late nineties) about the design of our house. She had just started the architectural firm with her husband, John, and this was their first commission. They had a simple, post-World War II design philosophy: make these houses as efficient and practical as possible. They just happened to be lovely too. A mansion in its time, this 2,300 sq. ft. home averages 575 sq. ft. per bedroom — about the size of a modern-day walk-in closet.

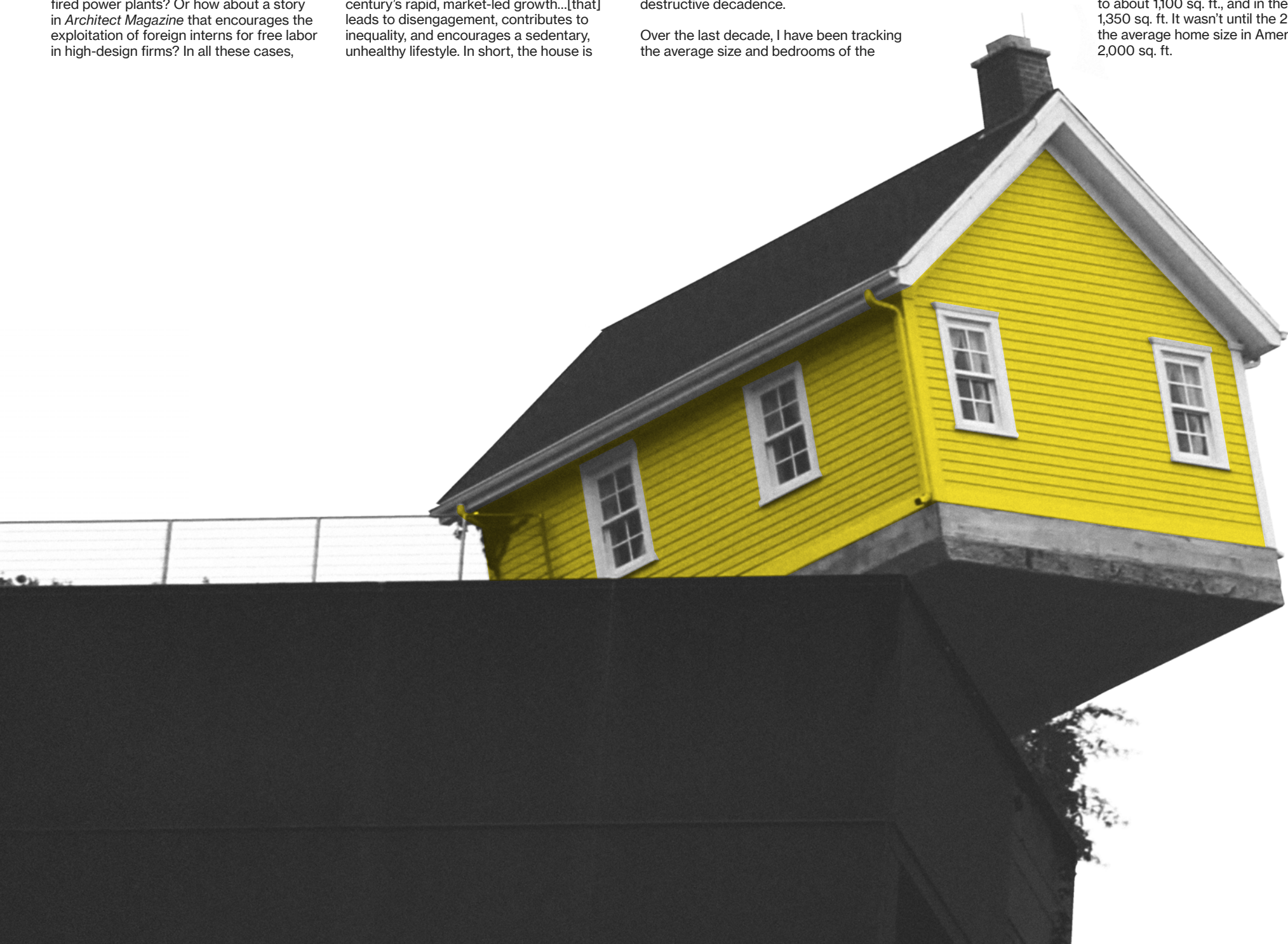
When I asked Audrey about the cost of construction, she answered me slyly, “withheld.”

# COST WITHHELD: RECORD HOUSES IN THE AGE OF A PANDEMIC

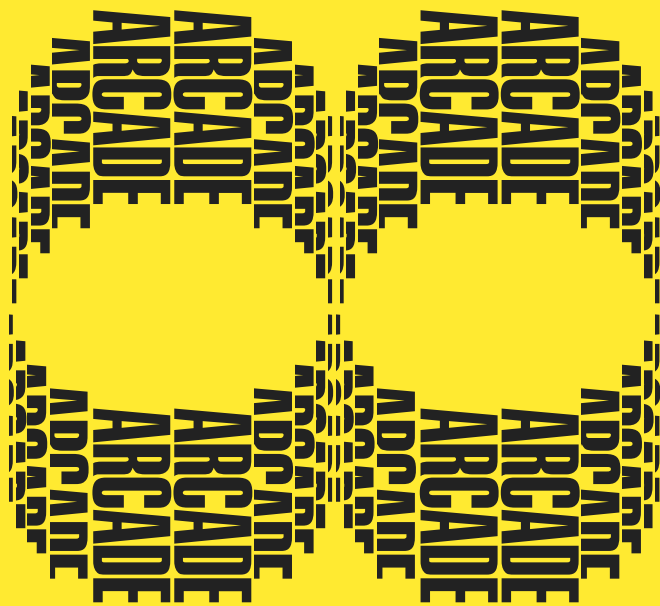
**sideYARD by Ron van der Veen**

*A principal at NAC Architecture, Ron van der Veen, FAIA, is our faithful sideYARD correspondent. He is typically much more breezy and fun-loving in his sideYARD column, but attributes this harsher criticism to weeks of social isolation. For comments and ideas, rvanderveen@nacarchitecture.com.*

*Photo by @tangcindy on Unsplash*







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