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A SITUATION WHERE ARCHITECTURE MIGHT HAPPEN

PETER ZELLNER
Welcome to the 2016 edition of the Graduate volume of INDEX, the USC School of Architecture’s annual publication of student work. While in past years we have shown a broad sample of projects from every year-level in the M.Arch program, this year we have devoted the entirety of the volume to the work of the M.AAS and M.Arch students’ summer research studio in order to highlight an important dimension of our reinvigorated program. The focus of their effort was the revitalization of the Broadway Historic Corridor in downtown Los Angeles (DTLA). This work marks the first steps in a renewed USC initiative to connect our particular expertise at the School of Architecture with the problems and opportunities presented by the City of Los Angeles.

Los Angeles is unique among major metropolises; it is far younger than most established cities, but old enough to have seen several distinct waves of development. These waves have washed over the geographic center of town, adding volume, density, and history, before then dissipating that energy as they wash back out—and into the iconic suburbs, usurping the city’s identity, taking away population and jobs, and leaving behind homeless nomads and empty storefronts. Currently, though, the city is enjoying an incoming wave, as David Bergman notes in his essay, and the opportunity exists to channel that energy in a way that benefits all of her citizens, including those previously left behind, disenfranchised by economic or cultural circumstances.

Just as the unique physical layout of Los Angeles presents an exceptional laboratory for evolutionary urban study, so its vibrant, youthful, diverse culture suggests new models for structuring that study. Peter Zellner argues for one such model in his essay, the results of which are demonstrated in the present volume. What is shown here is a record of the students’ final presentation—all the slides, showing the developed arguments as well as the projects that embody them. Presented thusly, the viewer is able to get a sense of the multi-dimensional thinking encouraged here at USC.
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BROADWAY Brought Back

DAVID BERGMAN

Broadway today is experiencing a return to its historic form. For the first half of the 20th century, Broadway served as a commercial spine for downtown Los Angeles and as a key central place in the development of Los Angeles as a poly-nucleated region. As this issue of Index has explored through speculative design and analysis of Broadway’s functions, the street is a critical component in the shaping of a new downtown. It is useful to provide some context for Broadway’s current state, its revival, and what this implies for future visions of the street.

Despite the street’s historical importance, the general narrative of Broadway is one of decline. The redevelopment era for downtown Los Angeles began with the creation of the Community Redevelopment Agency, enabled by California’s redevelopment law in 1949. Redevelopment, which presupposed that there was an underlying inadequacy to the infrastructure and physical conditions which existed in the city, was the most powerful tool for the creation and reinvention of Los Angeles. This transformative power was particularly strongly felt downtown, where the city’s historical “third downtown,” the downtown of the second half of the 20th century, was designed, financed, and implemented on Bunker Hill through the use of redevelopment as a financing tool. This third downtown was an explicit attempt to recreate the central place functions that had existed in prewar downtown by creating new fields for private investment, supported by public financing for infrastructure. The intent of this policy was to create a new urban core that would supplant the existing urban fabric, including Broadway. The redevelopment-backed urban growth machine was enormously successful and was responsible for developing modern downtown Los Angeles. However, by the 1990s, environmental, community, and capital interests began to push back against this efficient process that underlay downtown Los Angeles’s urban growth dynamic.
The end of the Cold War and its concomitant shock to the Los Angeles economy are an important point of inflection in patterns of regional development. Infrastructural investment priorities began to change, and the merger of the RTD and the LACTC created a unified framework, Metro, that would guide public investment in infrastructure moving forward. The opening of the first Metro Blue Line stations in 1992 had the effect of beginning the process of resetting downtown’s primacy as the indispensable commercial core of Southern California. At the same time, redevelopment went through a series of structural reforms mandated by the state government in Sacramento that weakened its ability to make wholesale changes to the urban fabric without mitigating key social consequences, providing affordable housing and limiting its ability to clear and hold parcels in the urban core. This transition between redevelopment as the prime agent of downtown redevelopment and Metro investments as the critical driver for the creation of value and investment opportunities in downtown Los Angeles began in the early 1990s and was made complete with the dissolution of redevelopment authority by Gov. Jerry Brown in 2012.

Infrastructure and accessibility have always played a critical role in patterns of urban development. Broadway’s establishment as a central place in the Los Angeles region was reinforced through its role as a conduit, along with its neighbors Spring and Main Street, for both the Los Angeles Railway and the Pacific Electric streetcar systems. This historic connection to transportation infrastructure helps to explain the particular uses that are found within the historic Broadway core. For example, department stores, which require having access to the largest possible regional consumer base, were located along Broadway. The street was the original site for the Broadway Bullocks, Desmond’s, and Hamburger’s department

Broadway in Downtown Los Angeles has historic value as a theater district between Third and Ninth. Not only has the program evolved from the historic intentions, there are potential cultural, social, and economic developments brewing that can be addressed using architectural innovation and urban planning.
The Broadway Infill Studio focused on several empty gaps above low-rise buildings sandwiched between taller, monumental buildings.
stores. In a similar manner, the giant movie palaces, including the Million Dollar Theater building, the United Artists Theater, and numerous other examples that define the historic district, are examples of urban uses that required easy access to the largest possible market. This combination of department stores, mega movie theaters, and other central place functions anchored Broadway into the regional economy of Southern California. The introduction of the automobile and its role in the pattern of commercial places and urbanization in Southern California is a well-described phenomenon. In fact, the opening of Bullocks Wilshire in 1929, which represented the first major department store to move out of the Broadway core and was the first major department store located outside of a downtown shopping district in the U.S., was emblematic of the transition away from fixed rail connections to the private automobile as a way of determining points of maximum accessibility within the region.

Metro’s rail investment program has changed this dynamic along with a relative disinvestment in freeway capacity. Note that the opening of the Century Freeway, the last link to be built within the Los Angeles Basin happened concurrently with the reestablishment of the rail transit system and the economic restructuring of the early 1990s. The opening of rail connections to facilitate movement has contributed to reestablishing downtown as a commercial center, but this effect is largely overwhelmed by the effects of disinvestment in freeway and auto-oriented infrastructures. As a result, congestion-driven opportunity costs of travel have increased throughout Los Angeles, and areas throughout the city, including downtown, have seen residential premiums for locations close to employment. With the implementation of the adaptive reuse ordinance in 1994, Broadway and its neighbors

Among the existing context, there are several notable theaters and office buildings that are registered as historical monuments in the County of Los Angeles.
A notable existing feature of Broadway is the accessibility of public transportation. This also strengthens the potential of Broadway increasing its pedestrian traffic.

What has happened is a kind of inversion, where once Bunker Hill was the residential neighborhood that served downtown, it is now the new center for office employment. The old commercial core, including Broadway, has become a neighborhood. As residential uses began to take up what had been commercial real estate, built in the first half of the 20th century, the character of the community is looking more and more like a neighborhood in the midst of the urban center. At the same time, Broadway’s central place functions remain and as a result, create the distinctive urban condition where the neighborhood is overlain by region-serving transportation infrastructure and land-use functions.
Pedestrian zone diagrams showing sidewalks and typical street-end crosswalks. The City’s Bringing Back Broadway developed mid-street crosswalks to increase pedestrian safety and add an additional level of vehicle traffic control.

Pedestrian zones with seating and plant pots have been added to support more pedestrian-centric zones and act as urban pedestrian attractions along Broadway.
The height analysis of the building begins to show that there are several low-rise buildings sandwiched in between the taller, high-rise buildings.
According to the Planning & Zoning Code of Los Angeles, most buildings along Broadway are classified as commercial buildings and follow the Commercial Planning criteria.
To enable students to delve deeper into design investigations, studio briefs oftentimes deliberately ignore the surrounding noise and focus narrowly on an isolated subject. But life is filled with noise, and sometimes it’s important to hear life’s cacophony and learn how to make sense of the competing sounds. Our initial studio brief identified three disparate issues to be conjoined and ameliorated through a synthetic design proposal:

1. URBAN 
   street wall elevation; 
2. SOCIAL 
   homeless vocational re-training 
   development ordinance; and 
3. ARCHITECTURAL 
   spatial design strategies for infill sites.

Working on three fronts, students learned how to expand their design domain and to negotiate multiple variables.
URBAN INFILL
of underdeveloped properties to reinforce the historic street wall

Above the ground-level prime retail space, Broadway has a street wall elevation that is similar to many urban streets: inconsistent and spatially incomplete, resembling a youthful smile with missing teeth. Our aim was to develop design guidelines for these spatially underdeveloped properties that would complete Broadway’s street wall elevation without damaging the historic designation of Broadway’s urban fabric. But having a design project that is contextual or that fits in is rarely lauded within the academy. Students are typically encouraged to push the boundaries, to think outside the box, and to be stylistically innovative. Status quo is a pejorative term, and contextual defaults as the status quo; our challenge was to find a (contemporary) method of working within Broadway’s historic building fabric without defaulting to the status quo. After careful analysis of the historic urban fabric, students identified common qualities and characteristics that are found in many of the building’s elevations; these “Broadway” attributes were strategically challenged by the students towards the development of a new contemporary design palette that would straddle Broadway’s past and future. Students established “contemporarily contextual” elevation design strategies—simultaneously being both contemporary and contextual and enabling the project proposals both to stand out and fit in—that serve as urban infill guidelines for Broadway’s future development. Implementation of the aforementioned design guidelines for all of Broadway’s underdeveloped properties will establish a new collective sub-identity on Broadway.

URBAN OASIS HOTEL

The boutique hotel with its hospitality training program seeks to provide the homeless with skills and experience that will improve their future job prospects. Hotels provide a wide range of work opportunities, such as valet services, kitchen work, administrative and service positions, etc. The main goal and design concept of this hotel is to create an urban oasis on Broadway that cultivates pedestrian traffic and addresses economic concerns related to the homeless population.
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INFILL STRATEGY
SYMMETRICAL FACADE
NATURAL COLORED STONE
VEGETATION

Infill strategies adopted for the Urban Oasis Hotel based on the urban context of Broadway.

Natural stone primary façade that blends with façade material on Broadway.

Material detail of the façade on Broadway.

Elevation proposal blending with the urban context of Broadway.

Detail showing vegetation on the primary façade that brings light and air into the interior space.

Highlight of the Broadway elevation variation following design guidelines.

Perspective elevation of the hotel on Broadway between 7th & 8th street depicting the similarity of the urban context to integrate the new construction onto the street.

Broadway elevation from 5th to 9th street showing the missing teeth.
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to reintegrate DTLA's homeless population into the local workforce under the cover of (market-rate) development. Probably more city planning than architecture, our proposed planning initiative requires private developers to actively participate in the vocational retraining of the city’s homeless population by allocating a percentage of each new development’s building area to be used for an industry-specific training facility that complements the building’s occupancy type. Our planning initiative is modeled after San Francisco’s Inclusionary Housing Program: successfully shifting the burden of providing affordable housing from government to private (market-rate) development by way of mixed-income properties. Acknowledging that many homeless already have professional training and/or a college degree, our initiative seeks to match their individual skill sets to a specific vocational re-training center, providing much-needed continuing education to help reintegrate them into a modern workplace. As the Broadway Theater District develops under our proposed program initiative, a diverse collection of occupancy types will amass, each having their own conjoined industry-specific training facility. After researching the existing businesses in the greater Broadway Theater District, each student team proposed an economically feasible occupancy type (boutique hotel, tech lab, library, theatre, art studio, and family housing) and considered how much homeless reintegration (vocational retraining) could be added to the standard program while still maintaining the development’s economic feasibility. This collective (vocational retraining) program will be indistinguishable, yet fully integrated into the city’s business community rather than seen as an isolated (homeless) campus that is distinct from economic production. Our distributed collective program works to dilute the collateral problems linked with localized intensities of homeless services/programs, which often result in adverse effects on a community.

SPATIAL DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR INFILL SITES as a disciplinary investigation

While all sites offer unique opportunities for design, we tried to position the opportunities of this specific site as a general subject matter for disciplinary investigations. Here we investigated
the architectural potential for infill sites: deep rectangular plots with no setbacks, limited external surface exposure due to neighboring buildings, and only one public street elevation. While deep, open floor plates would maximize an infill site’s developmental potential, the resulting spaces seemed unfit for occupancy by contemporary standards. Our results were a bit ironic in that our common approach to fill the spatial voids in the urban street wall was to generate internal spatial cavities within a solid volume: void networks, courtyards, atriums, tunnels, and crevasses. Our new spatial cavities flipped the building’s focus from an outward (distant) gaze through the single public street elevation to an intimate inward engagement. This inward focus worked as a vacuum, drawing urban elements (and programmatic responsibilities) into the interior of the projects. The projects became increasingly multi-faceted and self-sustaining, offering internal access to natural features, a mixed-use program, and an architectural promenade. Nature was drawn into the spatial cavities; living materials such as planted walls, vine-screen walls, garden decks, and intensive green floors lining the interiors. Traditional,

**WALKING THEATER**

Bingyu Wang, Fengquan Shangguan and Weinan Zhu

This walking theater is not only a continuation of Broadway theatre, it is also an innovation of traditional theater form. The theater itself is a maze stage. The audience can be involved in the performance by walking among stages located in different spaces. The audience can also change their view of the show by walking through different characters’ storylines. In terms of actors, the theater will train homeless people on Broadway to perform their own story. The idea is to draw people’s attention to the issue of homelessness.
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In conclusion…

Broadway is a territory in transition: temporally set between its historic (theatrical) past and bright future and spatially located between the city's (historic core) business district and Skid Row. These six proposals offer an urban/social/architectural vision for Broadway's future and have established a new platform for further discourse. At first glance, the studio work may not have the developmental depth we are accustomed to seeing at USC, but depth and complexity are not always aligned; here, complexity is demonstrated through the fusion of three disparate issues—urban, social, and architectural—into a synthetic design proposal.
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the architectural potential for infill sites: deep rectangular plots with no setbacks, limited external surface exposure due to neighboring buildings, and only one public street elevation. While deep, open floor plates would maximize an infill site’s developmental potential, the resulting spaces seemed unfit for occupancy by contemporary standards. Our results were a bit ironic in that our common approach to fill the spatial voids in the urban street wall was to generate internal spatial cavities within a solid volume: void networks, courtyards, atriums, tunnels, and crevasses. Our new spatial cavities flipped the building’s focus from an outward (distant) gaze through the single public street elevation to an inward engagement. This inward focus worked as a vacuum, drawing urban elements (and programmatic responsibilities) into the interior of the projects. The projects became increasingly multi-faceted and self-sustaining, offering internal access to natural features, a mixed-use program, and an architectural promenade. Nature was drawn into the spatial cavities; living materials such as planted walls, vine-screen walls, garden decks, and intensive green roofs were integrated into the design. Traditional, single-use programming was abandoned in favor of a mixed-use, creative concept, offering an all-in-one solution. Circulation was elevated from a functional element to an experiential highway and burdened with the task of hosting or fostering social interaction. With the steady rise of urban density upon us, the architectural potential for infill sites may lie in finding new ways to maintain small amounts of the urban void through internal spatial cavities.

In conclusion... Broadway is a territory in transition: temporally set between its historic (theatrical) past and bright future and spatially located between the city’s (historic core) business district and Skid Row. These six proposals offer an urban/social/architectural vision for Broadway’s future and have established a new platform for further discourse. At first glance, the studio work may not have the developmental depth we are accustomed to seeing at USC, but depth and complexity are not always aligned; here, complexity is demonstrated through the fusion of three disparate issues—urban, social, and architectural—into a synthetic design proposal.
By European standards, Los Angeles is not an old city. In fact, by those standards, many might argue that L.A. is not really a city at all—more of a node in an expansive, ill-defined, suburban carpet. But L.A. does include sections of recognizable urbanity, mostly located in the “older” sections of town that have survived waves of development and subsequent neglect without becoming cratered with the surface parking lots that until very recently, had come to occupy 60% of the space in the Downtown area.

Preeminent among these is the stretch of Broadway between 3rd Street in the north, where the famous Bradbury Building stands, and 8th street, where the city begins to diffuse into a hopscotch pattern of mid-rise office buildings repurposed as sweatshops and surface parking lots, all marking time until the next development boom. Along these blocks Broadway retains much of the physical character of its better days, though the quality of the merchants has declined significantly, and most of its famous theaters have closed. Squint, and it is relatively easy to
imagine what it once might have been like as a vital urban street scene.

This part of L.A. is recognizable as urban, because it maintains a more or less intact “street wall,” uninterrupted by gaps of open parking. Even here, though, the urban façade is not unblemished. Above the continuous wall of street-level retail, there are “missing teeth” visible in the air rights overhead. While these holes in the fabric are apparent only when viewed from the opposite side of the street, their subliminal presence belies the erstwhile substantiality of that street wall and undercuts the viewer’s confidence in the civic enterprise that façade represents. The serrated skyline along the length of the block seems to chart the insubstantiality of the institutions and fickleness of the market, rising and falling with the fortunes of those occupying storefronts below and intermittent offices above, hinting at a Potemkin temporality that belies the apparent history of the old, soot-etched façades.

As architects, we naturally see these missing teeth as opportunities and sites for new construction, blank canvases for our ameliorative imaginations. In fact, these canvases are not so blank, though, if the goal is to repair or complete the street wall in order to support a more cohesive urban experience. It is not enough to fill in the holes where the teeth are missing in order to complete the smile. The new construction must also be teeth, and they must fit the face, or the repairs will forever preserve the very disjunctions the new additions were supposed to ameliorate. When the teeth are actually buildings, the thorny issue of “fitting” becomes complicated by concerns about anachronistic forms or construction techniques. Further, the usual slash-and-burn development process assumes removal of the remaining retail “root,” which often has a history and character that cannot be matched by a new ground-up development.

For these reasons, the best solution to this problem might involve preserving these remnant street wall “roots” and only adding new construction above, where the absence is literally “present” and noticeable, but the necessarily anachronistic contemporaneity of the addition
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Identity: modern architectural language contrasting existing buildings
Connection: extending the existing historical street context rather than contrasting with it

Rule 1. Reflective Façade: The material of the new building volume should be glass with reflective metal finishing. The color of the reflective façade should be neutral or warm-toned
Rule 2. Open Space: Façade should be open or using transparent material on the ground level of the new building volume if the floor height is less than 30 feet from the ground
Rule 3. Signage System: Signage system faces street direction on ground level of the new building volume
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New building mirrors its surroundings

Façade pattern design

Façade changes from reflective (top) to transparent (bottom)
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Architectural volume

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is appropriately isolated. While the grosser examples of urban renewal are a thing of the past, there is still room for perfecting such a nuanced approach to urban revitalization. What is wanted is an approach that allows a cohesive, large-scale statement without simplifying the issue, overwriting existing context, or obliterating the margins. The messy problem should be cherished, not solved. By engaging the visitor in the issues it raises and making them visible, the preservation of such a question mark ensures the continuing vitality of the city. In contrast, a solution that “cleans up” that messiness by starting over, replaces a potential critique with a solution that might forget its own necessarily critical origin.

II.
Like most urban markets, Los Angeles is “home” to a large, disenfranchised population that has no voice in that market but an obvious presence on the urban stage. Most visible are the homeless nomads, with their shopping carts and bricolage lean-tos, but there are also others who are less apparent, though equally “present.” They are an underappreciated but vital fold in the urban fabric who labor on lowest rung on the so-called economic ladder, filling the low-wage, menial jobs that help the city to function—parking lot attendants, maintenance and cleaning staff, fast-food workers, leaflet-ers.

Architecture places us in the world. But who is this “us?” Architecture has always been related to power and understood as a means of establishing authority, not only because of the resources it consumes in its construction but because of its literal stature in—or as—the environment. That authority has varied through history, along with architecture’s patronage, but during the modern period and with the rise of capitalism, that authority and patronage has largely shifted away from church and state to private interests, including industry, mercantile forces, and particularly in Southern California, real estate. With this shift in patronage, architecture has let slip its inherent sense of responsibility to the larger community, so that today, this obligation must be imposed by legislation or teased into consideration by market forces. And both of these lead to imperfect results: legislation tends to oversimplify any situation and
create lowest-common-denominator solutions, while market forces only work for those actually participating in the market.

The challenge for architecture is obvious: how to accommodate the physical needs of this population, draw them into the civitas, and express their contributions to the urban welfare—in short, how to place them in the city. Architecture accomplishes this feat through representation, both symbolic and empathetic. The viewer is connected to that representation by use and form, understanding themselves as audience and subject.

This asks what form of “projection” or empathy is possible or appropriate for them. A modern understanding of the ancient Greek practice, which related specific architectural elements to the human body so that the viewer might “see themselves writ large” in that construction, poses a particular challenge to the homeless “problem.” The Doric Order, for example, has been seen as representing a young man; when this relationship was extrapolated to an entire colonnade, such as might circumscribe the agora, the entire community of citizens—the civitas—was represented. In this way, a direct, formal connection is made between the work and its audience, uniting them in a larger vision of how things should be: literally placing that audience in their world. Needless to say, this idea sits awkwardly with a subject population whose lack of accommodation establishes their current identity as “homeless.” However inadvertent or unfortunate that condition might be, this identity does give them what voice they do have and is therefore an important asset when identity is important for advancement.

III

In 1973, Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber coined the term “wicked problem” in their essay “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning” to name those seemingly intractable problems that bedeviled the otherwise well-meaning redevelopment efforts of the time. The wicked problem, which has no obvious solution or method or clear conclusion for judging the results, was contrasted with the tame problem that does. Homelessness is an obvious wicked problem, as the need for solutions is stark and the issues complex. In this project, studios and galleries are programmed to benefit homeless artists. It is a dynamic system that provides an efficient space and artistic environment on South Broadway. Artists work in the studio space, and their work can be exhibited and sold in the central gallery. The main design concept of this project aims to strengthen the connection between homeless artists and the general public and to help these artists achieve their artistic goals and a better life.
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Homelessness is an obvious wicked problem, and the solution is sought in the design of the buildings that house it. The goal is to create spaces that provide both shelter and structure to the human condition, providing more than just a roof over one's head. The design must be more than a temporary fix, but must provide a sustainable solution that allows for growth and development. The architecture must recognize and accommodate the needs of the population, creating a space that is both safe and secure, and that promotes community and social interaction.

The sample site and original buildings are spread over two lots, side by side. At the lowest, new level is a restaurant with interior voids for ventilation. The skylights provide daylight into the central atrium space from above. Additionally, the skylights provide daylight into the central atrium space from above. The sample site and original buildings are spread over two lots, side by side. At the lowest, new level is a restaurant with interior voids for ventilation. The skylights provide daylight into the central atrium space from above. Additionally, the skylights provide daylight into the central atrium space from above.
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Homelessness is an obvious wicked problem, which has no obvious solution or method or clear conclusion for judging the results. However, it is possible to understand these problems, which are perhaps the root of the human condition, perhaps a "problem of being" less "problemed" than we have become. The modern condition was perhaps the one that has been the most "problematic," where the entire human condition was turned inside out.
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At the ground floor the existing retail space is maintained, and a new lobby and set of vertical circulation and access connecting both Broadway and the alley behind is slipped in along the side.

Gardens and green spaces enliven the split atria and enhance the air quality.

Within the gallery exists an independent vertical circulation system that allows visitors to see all the levels of the gallery from within the gallery volume.

Visitors first experience the new restaurant on their way up.

The third level up continues the same organizational structure, with the mezzanine of the lowest gallery accessible from within the gallery and from the general circulation ramp.

On the second level the first gallery and studios are accessible, and the split atria are revealed.

The fifth floor is the top floor of the gallery and overlooks the roofs of the adjacent buildings.

The elevation shows that the brick screen wall is functionally transparent except when viewed on the oblique, from down the street, where it becomes more solid to fit better into the context.
create lowest-common-denominator solutions, while market forces only work for those actually participating.

The challenge for architecture is obvious: how to accommodate the physical needs of this population, draw them into the civitas, and express their contributions to the urban welfare—in short, how to place them in the city. Architecture accomplishes this feat through representation, both symbolic and empathetic. The viewer is connected to that representation by use and form, understanding themselves as audience and subject.

This asks what form of “projection” or empathy is possible or appropriate for them. A modern understanding of the ancient Greek practice, which related specific architectural elements to the human body so that the viewer might “see themselves writ large” in that construction, poses a particular challenge to the homeless “problem.” The Doric Order, for example, has been seen as representing a young man; when this relationship was extrapolated to an entire colonnade, such as might circumscribe an agora, the entire community of citizens—the civitas (to mix ancient referents)—was represented. In this way, a direct, formal connection is made between the work and its audience, uniting them in a larger vision of how things should be: literally placing that audience in their world. Needless to say, this idea sits awkwardly with a subject population whose lack of accommodation establishes their current identity as “homeless.” However inadvertent or unfortunate that condition might be, this identity does give them what voice they do have and is therefore an important asset when identity is important for advancement.

III

In 1973, Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber coined the term “wicked problem” in their essay “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning” to name those seemingly intractable problems that bedeviled the otherwise well-meaning redevelopment efforts of the time. The wicked problem, which has no obvious solution or method or clear conclusion for judging the results, was contrasted with the tame problem that does. Homelessness is an obvious wicked problem,
because it touches so many aspects of the city, though couched in physical terms. And the city, by definition, poses lots of other squishy, wicked problems, which is the principal reason that urban vitality is so difficult to manufacture from scratch—any single, holistic, or comprehensive approach necessarily glosses over that wickedness, missing all the immanent problems that are actually the secret of the city’s interest. The city is constantly evolving; the problem(s) it poses never ends.

For this reason, a strategy that maintains the “disconnected” siting of the planned facilities—leaving them up in the air, preserving their appearance as infill patches—allows the accommodations to remain critical and visible, while still ameliorating the “problems” they address (at least the physical ones). Further, it serves to change the projective reference from the body to the condition by removing that reference from the stable relationship with a ground that would provide an orientation or foundation.

Such a change is appropriate generally in an age when the technology of virtual experience and social media is dematerializing the body and specifically for individuals of this population who are so often facing mental challenges. On the other hand, architecture’s recent embrace of randomness and chaos as a means to “form-finding” is not so congenial. Transferring such thinking to the social sphere risks insensitivity and the possibility of exploitation.

Thus, while the engineering solution connecting homelessness with Broadway’s “missing teeth” as a location for services is straightforward, the architectural problem it poses remains wicked. Architecture places us in the world by making that world visible, telling the truth about it, offering a critique sometimes or an exhortation, or serving as a cautionary example or an inspiration.

It is not too much of a stretch to imagine a relationship between the missing teeth in the streetscape skyline and these invisible denizens of the street. Architecture can make that connection visible, hopeful, restorative.
In an interview by art critic Christopher Knight at the artist’s studio in Santa Monica, the seminal Los Angeles artist John Baldessari had much to say about the state of art education in L.A. in the early 1970s and his efforts at the then-na- scent CalArts program. At the time, the domi- nant pedagogical model in most art academies, as in many architecture schools, was founded on the inviolable relationship between master and disciple within the studio environment. This tra- dition, mostly established in medieval artisans’ guilds and professionalized in the 19th century academy, relied on a few well-worn shibboleths:

1. Creative or technical knowledge can only be passed on through direct supervision;
2. The hand and eye of the disciple can only be cultivated, monitored, and authenticated by an appointed authority, typically a master or a master’s apprentice;
3. The authority of the master’s opinion is evidenced by the replication of the academy’s official styles and through the copying of known works by the master;
4. Until sanctioned by the master or the academy itself, the disciple remains a novice and therefore an intellectual and creative subordinate; and
5. Any challenges to this mostly patriarchal order are consid- ered heretical (to wit: The Salon des Refusés of 1863).
Baldessari and other notable L.A. art educators (Michael Asher, for instance) upended these received traditions by teaching what is now known as post-studio art practice. Post-studio art teaching was conceived of as a model of academics that inverted the relationship between what is taught, if it is taught at all. It leveraged intensive group critiques between students to attack what was practiced by artists in an effort to create space for new forms of art. Asher, Baldessari, and others at CalArts shifted the onus of responsibility from the teacher to the student, moving art teaching from a master-disciple model to a communal and relational notion of education. This new model of art education was founded around open conversation, relentless critique, and the demand of a radical autonomy assumed by each individual student. Baldessari explains:

“Well, the whole idea was to raise the question what do you do in an art school? And you say, “Well, what courses are necessary to teach?” and that is question begging in a way, because you can say, “Well, can art be taught at all?” And, you know, I prefer to say, “No, it can’t. It can’t be taught.” You can set up a situation where art might happen, but I think that’s the closest you get. Then I can jump from there into saying, “Well, if art can’t be taught, maybe it would be a...
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Architectural education today, perhaps not surprisingly, finds itself at a similar juncture some 50 years after institutions such as the IAUS, the Cooper Union, SCI-Arc, and the Architectural Association challenged accepted architectural academic orthodoxies, much like CalArts did in the arts. Many of the very schools of architecture that modeled new and innovative forms of teaching and pedagogy in the 1970s and '80s now find themselves mired in various forms of academic cult worship: digital traditionalisms, faux-art fetishisms, mannerist dead-ends, philosopher-shaman worship, and other neoconservative returns. The outcomes of this neoliberal and cultish return to a seemingly 19th century Beaux Arts modeling of architectural education have been devastating: several generations of students robbed of their voices and the...
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Some facts about the homeless population in Los Angeles. 52% of homeless did not complete high school, which means that they may need basic job skill trainings such as reading and writing. The average age is 40, which indicates that most are able to work. And many of them are recently employed, which means that they may just need job opportunities.
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opportunity to grow potent individual practices; the architecture school has been made mostly into an imprimatur-machine for its academics, superseding the idea of a school as a space for free conversation, debate, and critique; and most worryingly, the notion of the architectural school as an autonomous intellectual and cultural institution has been traded in, cheaply, for the bad faith concept of education as business enterprise, student and teacher as entrepreneur and investor.

Freeing architectural education now seems imperative and necessary. If we have reached the end of the current road, perhaps this is a golden opportunity to challenge these tired orthodoxies and to create a space for new forms of education, perhaps in post-studio and post-digital formats. This will require a ruthless challenge to these cults, and of them, the cult of the digital must be confronted and interrogated. Technology and its misuse and abuse, in particular, must be wrestled with immediately. As Peter Eisenman recently noted, “Technology is a cruel tool, because what it does is defer the possibility of the student being creative. The student can take an algorithm, produce 50 alternatives to the same problem … It takes away from you the possibility of value judgment.” Beyond the problem of too much technology, which might have an easy fix—namely, turning off the screen once in a while—one imagines that an inversion of the aforementioned and blindly accepted new academic traditions might produce a post-studio model of architectural education that could be constructed along these lines:

1. Creative or technical knowledge can be shared through engaged debate, critique, and conversation;
2. The relatively high value placed on the approved hand and eye of the student as an expression of the notion of individual genius should be challenged;
3. The fast-paced reproduction of official styles and the copying of contemporary professional works should be exchanged for awkward experimentation and slow growth;
4. The student and the teacher must be seen as intellectual and creative colleagues whose conversations follow shared but not parallel paths; and
5. Intelligent challenges to accepted academic concepts by students and teachers alike should be celebrated and not extinguished.

Without placing more expectations on the current models of architectural education, our schools will forfeit their ability to fulfill their
cultural and academic missions. Without a space for architectural education to explore the space between vocations and ideas, the profession and the discipline will wither. Without a return to the value of an architecture of ideas rather than an architecture of marketing concepts, the very purpose and need for a school of architecture may be on the table.

As these are not acceptable outcomes, the new goal of post-studio and post-digital education in architecture must be to promote genuine intellectual change through a radical questioning of the very purpose of teaching, of the academy, and by extension, of architecture itself.

The question one might ask now, after Baldessari, is this: “Can architecture be taught at all?” And, the answer might be “No, it can’t. It can’t be taught. You can set up a situation where architecture might happen, but I think that’s the closest you get.”

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2. Ibid.
