Informalism: **made by the people**

examining new ways for architecture
to both help and learn from those
marginalised communities creating
their own informal settlements

Byera Hadley
Travelling Scholarships
Journal Series
2015

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Hugo Moline was awarded the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship in 2006.
Cover image: La Mona, a five-storey high concrete construction built by Armando Garcia Muñoz as an addition to his home and tribute to the fortitude and beauty of Tijuana's women in the informal settlement of Casa Aeropuerto. Photo by Hugo Moline

Four global case studies explore the new ways architects today are working with, and learning from, the unlikely communities setting their own architectural agendas

This project looked at four global sites, aiming to learn the new rules of engagement with marginalised communities who create their own informal settlements, and learning from them how to effectively use architecture to help them.

1

Introduction

The UN estimates that more than 1 billion people are living in slums worldwide[1]. This figure translates into roughly 1 out of every 3 city dwellers living without access to basic services such as sewerage or clean water, or any formal recognition of their rights to the land they occupy, living day to day under threat of forced eviction from their land and demolition of their houses. These informal settlements built and inhabited by such people are growing. They are an expression of the most massive exploitation and inequality at the same time as being home to the most remarkable examples of resourcefulness, ingenuity and co-operation.

The professionsof architecture, planning and design, through the formal production of space, have historically been used to reinforce the interests of the economically and politically powerful. As the work of architects literally makes concrete the desires of those with the means to buy, build and hire, we are simultaneously building out all those who do not. We measure out space, detailing precisely what goes where, who gets what, uncritically making physical the social and economic divisions of the society in which we build — rearranging the furniture, without effecting change.

But architects and other urban professionals are realizing that we must understand the dynamics at work in informal settlements if we are to be of relevance to the city and its inhabitants. We have a duty to use our skills to improve the built environment for all people, not just the wealthy. In order to do this we must move away from the outdated model of architect as solitary genius, and towards a model that embraces collaboration with the community as the basis for good design. Such an approach is particularly important when working within informal settlements where almost every aspect of life is negotiated and undertaken cooperatively, in concert with one's neighbours and friends.

There are positive sign emerging, with innovative practices by architects who have chosen to smash up the furniture and invite local people to help make something

better from the pieces. These practices reject the old mercenary paradigm, regaining their independence and the power to change the way our cities are produced. Crucially, these practices seek out collaborations with the people who actually use the places they design. They join with community organisations, activist groups and people in the street to pursue interests outside existing power structures. They use architecture as a vehicle to explore and expose entrenched socio-spatial injustice and create concrete alternatives. They continue to learn and innovate, becoming more rigorous, open and effective.

These practices are as diverse as the highly specific geopolitical contexts in which they work. **CASE Studio of Thailand**, **Estudio Teddy Cruz and GERMEN of the San Diego/Tijuana Border region**, the **Centre for Urban Pedagogy and Hester Street Collaborative in New York**, and the **Permanent Workshop for Participatory Design in Caracas** represent just a few of the diverse approaches to reinventing the way we make our cities. With this in mind, the aim of this research was two-fold:

1. Working with the Informal: to learn techniques of engagement and collaboration practiced by architects and other urban practitioners working with marginalised communities in informal settlements. How can the formal disciplines of architecture, planning and design be used by local communities to truly represent their situation and work in genuine collaboration to improve it?

2. Learning from the Informal: to understand the dynamics at work in the development of informal settlements and how these dynamics can inform other settlements and cities more broadly, even in the 'developed' world.

This research (July 2007—January 2009) was updated online at www.informalism.net. It involved engaging with communities of informal settlers and the architects, planners, grassroots and advisory community organizations, academics, artists and government agencies who work with them.

An Introduction to CASE

CASE studio is a group of young Thai Architects practising in Bangkok, Thailand. As their name implies these *Community Architects for Shelter and Environment* are committed to working with communities in informal settlements to improve their living environments.

CASE began in 1997 as a small voluntary team of recent graduates from the Nabeel Hamdi's *Centre for Development and Emergency Practice* at the University of Oxford Brookes in the UK. Returning to Thailand they found linkages with UDCO (now renamed CODI: Community Organisations Development Institute) and began to engage with communities living in informal settlements across Thailand.

Over the last 10 years CASE has grown from a group of a few volunteers working from a garage each night after work to an office of 12 full-time staff and a constant stream of students and volunteers. They have worked on projects all over Thailand as well as some in Vietnam and Laos. A sister organisation, CASE Japan, has been set up to work with communities of Urban poor in Osaka. CASE has also held workshops on their mode of working with communities inThailand, Japan and the UK. Two years ago, CASE founded its own construction company, CONCASE, based on the principles of affordability for the clients and improved living standards for the builders.

During my time with CASE I was able to participate in two of their current projects (the Min Buri playgound and the 'On another people's land' project). I was also able to visit some of their past projects and gain an insight into the way CASE operates, their philosophies and methods.

Chapter One.

A playground for the Min Buri Old Market
Community.

Project as Catalyst for Community Solidarity.

Before...

...After

New Minburee Market
And a bus terminal

Middle-new Minburee Market

The site for the playground

Old Minburee Market

Aerial Photo 2544

In the outer Bangkok suburb of Min Buri, about 5 minutes walk from CASE's office, is the Old Market. The market, situated on the San Seab Canal, was once the main commercial and transport hub of Min Buri before roads replaced canals and the commerce relocated to the highway. Over time the abandoned Chinese shops have been taken over by day labourers and others who have converted the shops to houses. The land is property of the Royal Treasury and the community has been threatened with eviction.

CASE has been visiting and interacting with the Old Market Community for some time leading up to this project, looking for a way in which to work with them. With the help of the Chumchonthai Foundation CASE was able to conduct a study of the area. After 6 months of observation, conversation and survey the community identified the need for a place where the children and young people could spend their time.

There were a number of spaces which were being used for play: mostly the streets, shared with motorcycle traffic. The site chosen for the playground was that of a house which burned down 10 years previously. The site still contained a lot of rubble and was subject to flooding, but was frequently used by the kids to play football.

The community was divided into two groups. Based on where in the market a family lived they were part of either the 'bamboo' group or the 'cinema' group. The two groups do not always get along. A significant advantage of the chosen site was it's neutral position, being considered part of neither the 'bamboo' nor the 'cinema' territory.

GE Money, the financial wing of General Electric in Thailand, approached CASE in early 2007, seeking to involve their employees in a community development project. CASE, who were searching for funds for the Old Market Playground suggested the project to GE Money. GE agreed to provide the funding for the project and give interested employees the chance to work on the project voluntarily.

CASE proposed a series of 10 workshops, every Saturday, working with the community (especially the kids) to design and build a new playground. As with all of CASE's work the project is intended not just to produce a playground but to build a stronger and more unified community, more confident of their capacity to make positive change and able to demonstrate their stewardship of their place through any eviction struggles in the future.
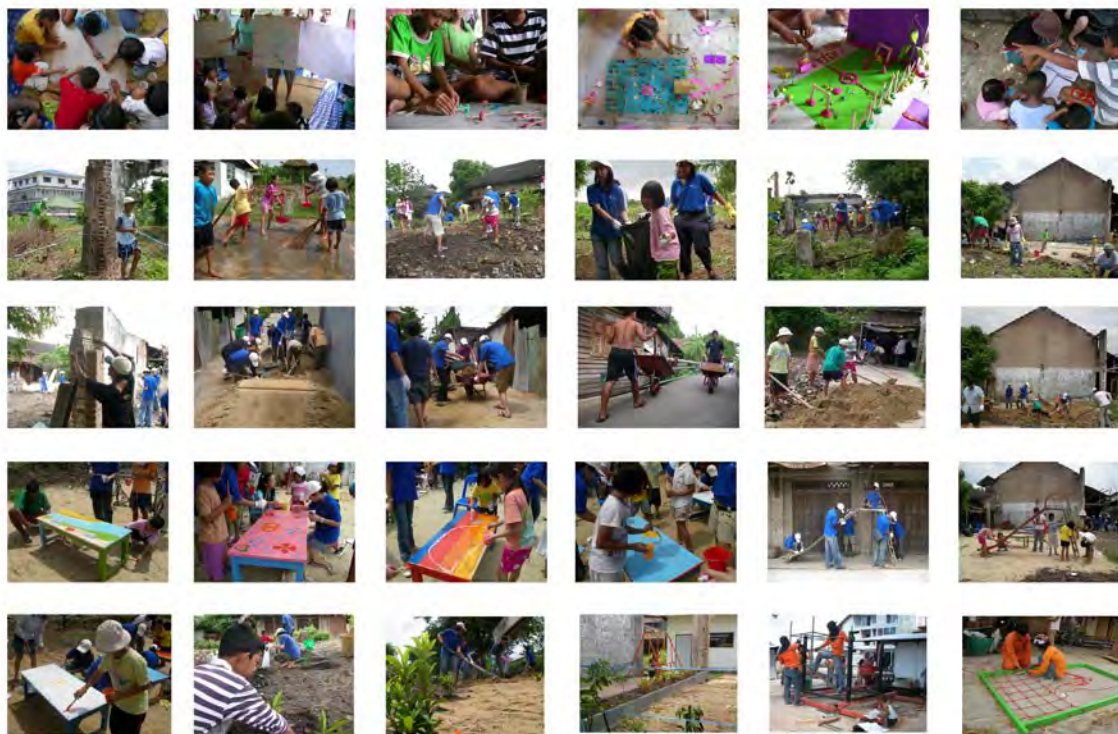
ดูซิว่าเราทำอะไรกัน

Week 1. Introducing the project.

The first week is an opportunity for the Min Buri Community and the GE Volunteers to meet one another and for everyone to understand the project and get familiar with the site.

There are a few speeches, but by and large the day is an informal one. Games and drawing are organised for the kids, and everyone has lunch together. After lunch the GE volunteers are taken on a relaxed tour of the Old Market.

Ploy (Kasama Yamtree) is the CASE architect in charge of this project. She has been meeting with community members and advertising all the workshops with posters. Each week we will make a new poster describing the coming weeks' activities and inviting everyone to get involved.
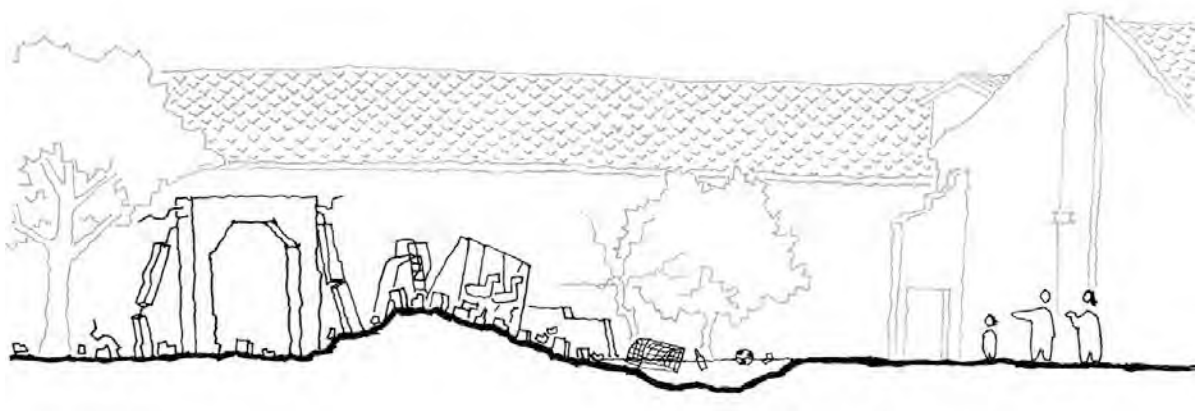
Drawing.

Lunch.

The site.

Postering for next week.

Taking a tour of the Old Market.

Week 2. Drawing ideas.

For the second week the kids are invited to draw their ideas for what the playground could be. We encourage them not only to draw how the playground should look or what things should be in the playground but to really think about all the things they like to do and what they would need in order to do those things.

The kids sit in four groups. Each group has a large sheet of cardboard on which they can together compose their ideal place to play. Although a little shy at first, after a bit of encouragement the kids are busy discussing, arguing and drawing.

The drawings are amazing. They include: football fields, swings, see-saws, slippery-dips, vegetable gardens, bike tracks, bridges, ponds and flower gardens. There are spaces for birds and for trees and plenty of sun.

At the end we hold up all the plans and the kids clap to vote on which plan should go on the poster for next weeks activities.
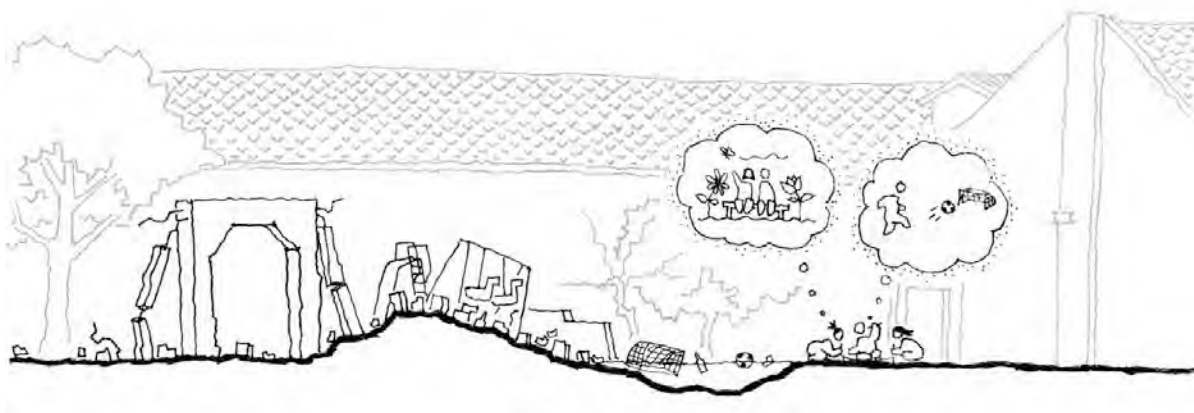
The kids plan their ideal playground.

The kids explain their ideas to us.

The kids vote on the best plan.

Week 3. Making ideas.

In the third week we ask the kids to use the ideas they drew from the previous week and take them further, building them in three dimensions.

We have brought some cardboard, plasticine, paddle-pop sticks and glue. The kids bring some old containers, plants, flowers and leaves.

We begin by discussing the ideas of last week. The kids decide that there needs to be three main areas: a place for sports fields, a place for play equipment and a place for gardens. Everyone decides which area they would like to help design and we get to work.

By the end of the day the model looks amazing! So many ideas have emerged. The kids have created lush gardens with romantic seating, fountains and fish ponds; a football field with stadium seating, basketball and volleyball courts; see-saws, swings, slippery-dips, merry-go-rounds and a small stage for performances. They have even made some rubbish bins and a public toilet.

We discuss with the kids all their wonderful ideas. We explain to them that because the site is small we may not be able to build all that they have dreamed of. So we discuss what the most important things are. Next week we will start marking out the areas on site.
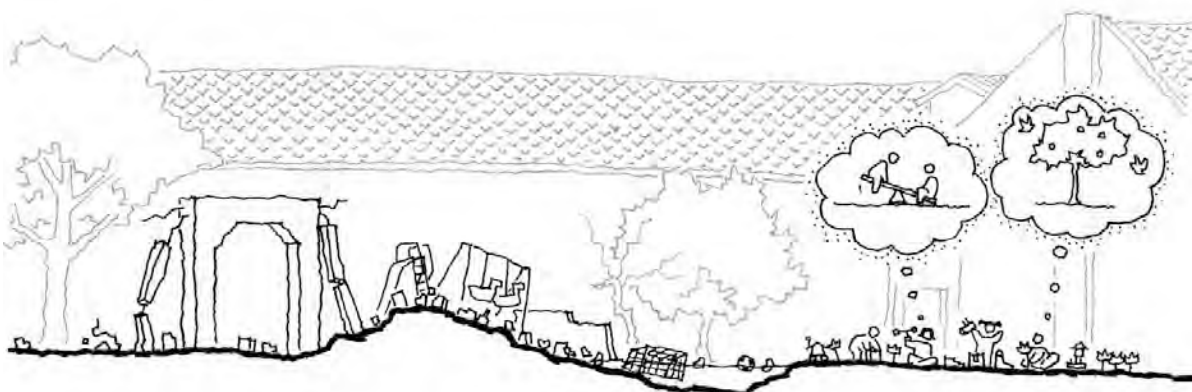
Gathering materials

Gardens and seats

Basketball court and play equipment

Making the see-saws

The kids make their ideal playground.

Week 4. Marking it out on site.

When we arrive on the morning of the fourth week, the kids are excited to show us the plans they have made since we last saw them. These plans are based on the models made last week but they have been tailored to the site.

After a bit of cleaning the kids use string to mark out the areas and then put signs up to say where the football field, play equipment and gardens will be.

The kids show us their plan

Cleaning out the water

Marking out the different areas

Putting up signs

สวนผัก- the vegetable garden
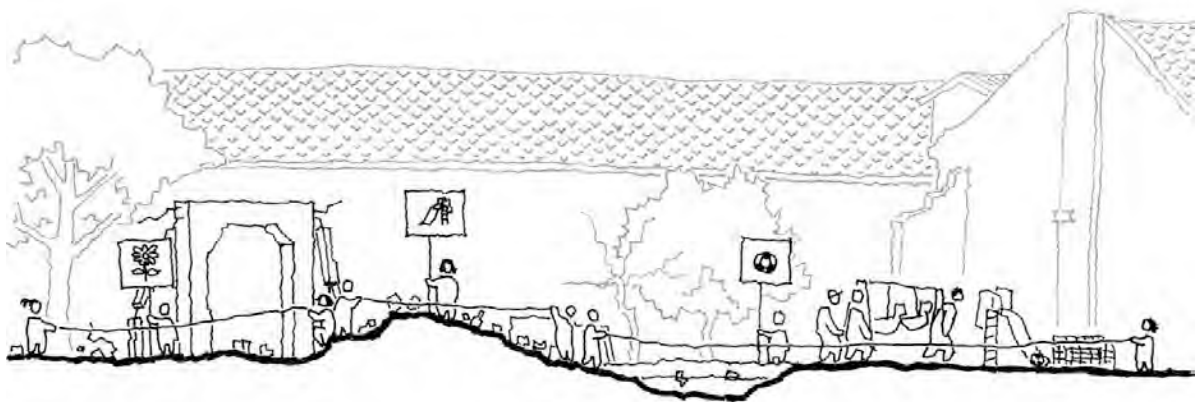
Week 5. Cleaning up.

วันสวนสะอาด
30 มิถุนา 50

พ่อแม่พี่น้อง !!!!มาช่วยกันทำต่อนะ!!!!

สถานที่ สนามเด็กเล่น
เวลา สิบโมงเช้า

This week we get to cleaning the site in earnest. The kids get rubber gloves and garbage bags and start cleaning up all the rubbish lying on the ground while the GE volunteers get stuck into all the overgrown plants and rubble.

Because the streets in the market are so narrow, we need to take all the rubbish out in wheelbarrows to be collected in the main street.

After an hour or so of working on the site, we are approached by a local community leader, Pi Un, who begins to ask what we are doing. At first he seems quite sceptical. He is worried about the flooding of the site and whether it is really suitable for a playground. Pi Un has some ideas on how to make the site flood proof, so we invite him to join us. He gets some local young men to help as well and they begin to level out the site, filling in the lowland with earth and rubble from the higher parts. We discuss with Pi Un what materials would be good to have as a final playing surface. In the end we decide that sand, with blockwork retaining walls, will be the best.
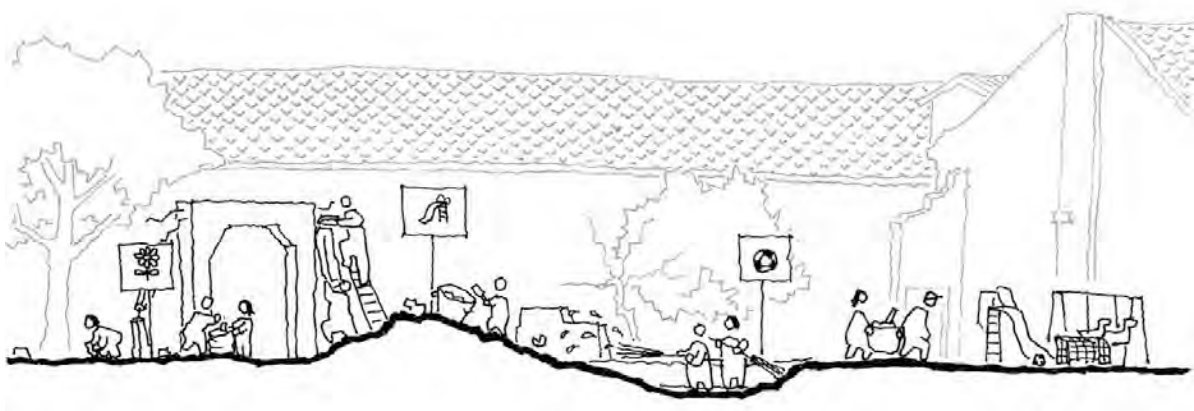
Taking the rubbish out to the street

Pi Un and his crew of helpers

Pi Un fixes the archway.

Week 6. Ground work.

Over the week Pi Un and some other locals have finished off the levelling of the rubble. Ploy has arranged for sand to be delivered by truck to the entrance of the Old Market.

We have made some posters to explain to everyone (especially the new volunteers form GE) what we have done so far and what we need to do today. We organise people in groups: some loading the wheelbarrows with sand, some taking the wheelbarrows of sand form the entrance of the market to the building site and back for re-filling, and some to spread the sand on site and make it level.

Everyone works really hard and by the end of the day we have used up all the sand but have only covered a third of the playground! Over the week we will order more sand. The kids start having fun in the sand already, drawing pictures and writing their names with sticks.

When we visit mid-week to put up the posters, the community is busy moving the newly arrived second batch of sand to the site. Ploy and I are so impressed with their commitment, working so hard after finishing their day-jobs. Pi Un and his friends have also begun work on the retaining walls to hold the sand in place.

The plan for the day

The kids start drawing in the sand

Community members come after work during the week to finish the ground.
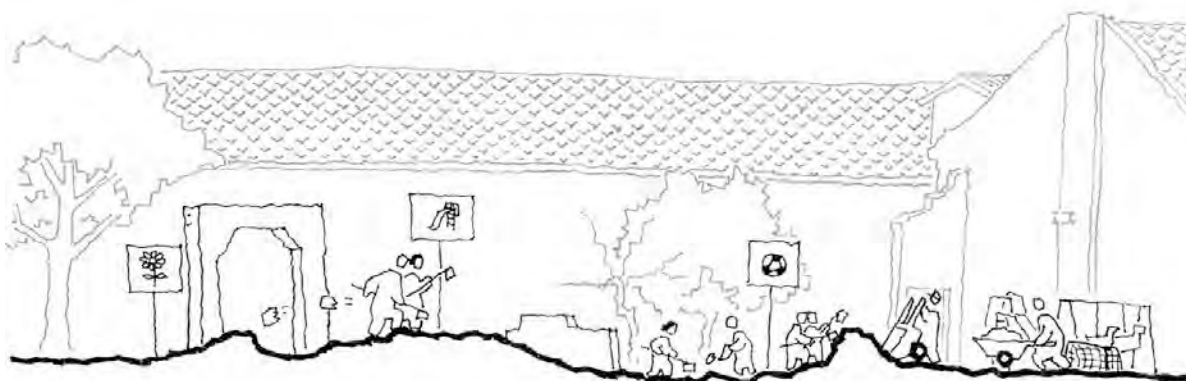
Week 7. Painting the playground.

Throughout the week some of the CONCASE carpenters have been building some benches for the playground. On Saturday we take them to the site for the kids to paint. We also sand back the existing play equipment and give it a new coat of paint.

The kids paint seaside landscapes and colourful garden scenes. They add sand on the paint to make texture-real beaches and use leaves and bottles as stencils and stamps. The end results are magnificent. We took some films of the kids painting. We will return later in the week to show them the films.

CONCASE making the benches

What we will do today

Preparing the old slide for re-painting

Two of the finished benches.
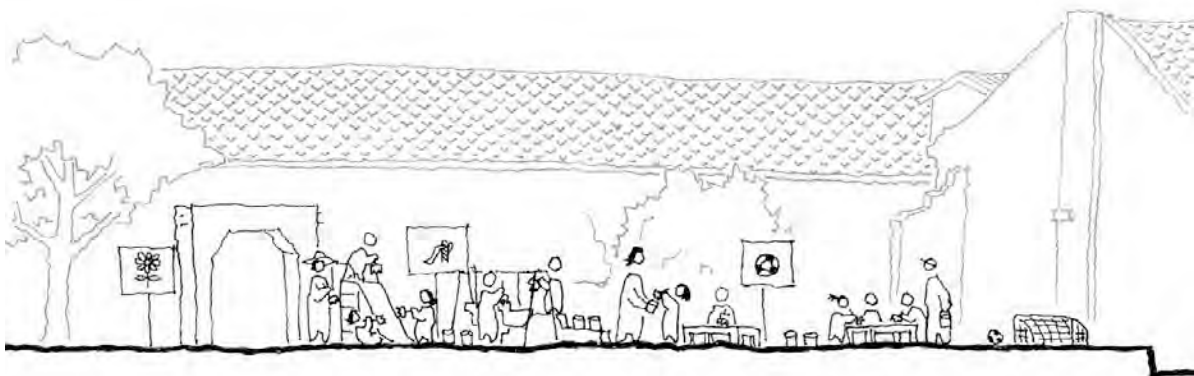
Week 8. Planting the playground.

At the beginning of the week we return to the community with the music video we made from the footage we took of the Painting day. The Kids really enjoy seeing the films.

We have found money in the budget from GE to build a new piece of play equipment for the playground. We want to get the kids involved so we take a 'kit-of-parts' model with us when we go to show them the video. We ask the kids to put it together in a way they would want it to be.

At the end of the week we get some plants and on Saturday everyone comes round to help plant them. It's been raining a lot so the plants will grow easily.
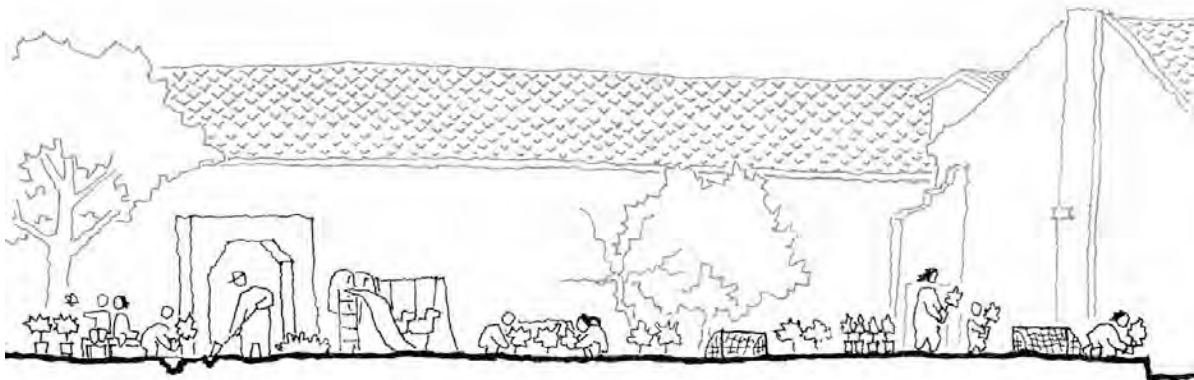
Watching the painting day movie

The kids use the model to design

Planting

Week 9. The Grande Finale

Su Thep and the team at CONCASE have been busy making the new piece of playground equipment this week. The night before the final party we bring all the pieces on site and weld them together.

On the day of the big party, GE has arranged some food and a great sound system. There are speeches for GE representatives and Khun Pa Sunee, the community elder who initiated the project with CASE. She announces that she is going to take all the kids who worked on the project on a trip to the sea.

We have set up a mini cinema in the storeroom, playing the painting-day movie and a slideshow of all the stages we went through to build the playground.

Nawg Gor, a young musician from the community who helped a lot working on the playground (and was our self appointed bodyguard when we came to the community at night), is in charge of the music for the day. He says he is looking forward to holding a New Year's Eve party at the playground at the end of year.

The kids play games and win prizes. Its a great day. Everyone is really proud of the work they have done and can see the positive change they have created in their community.

Su Thep and the CONCASE team

Working through the night

Watching the movies and slideshow

Nawg Gor on the music

Playing 'pop-the-balloon'
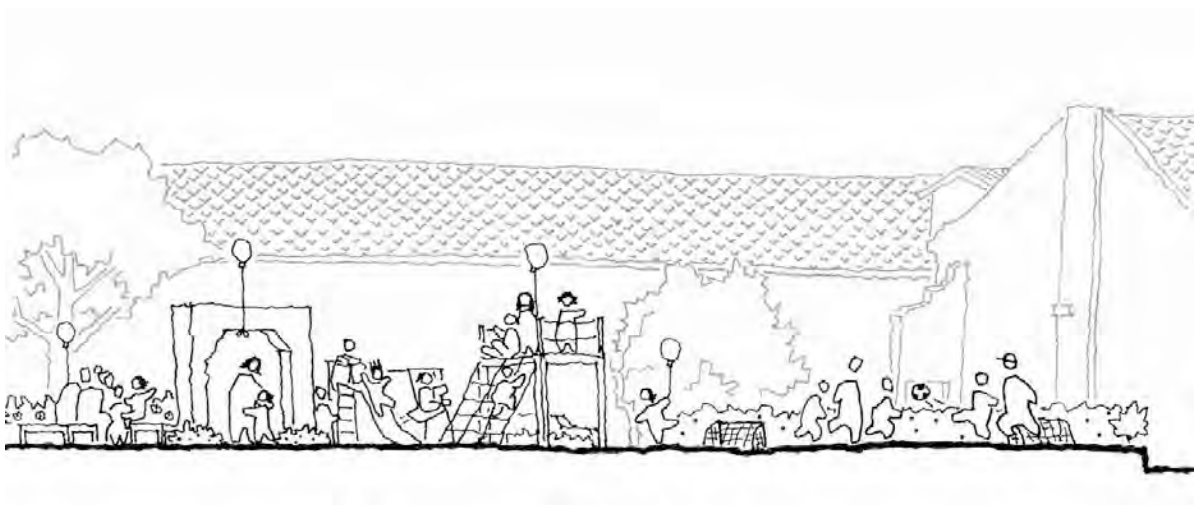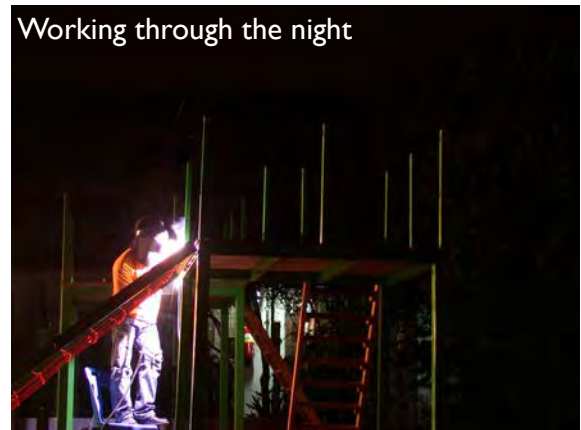
Reflections on the project.

As CASE's role in the project comes to an end it is encouraging to see how much the community has taken on the project.

Pi Un, whom we first encountered as a vocal critic of the project, became, through the process, a true leader of the project. Pi Un not only contributed greatly to the project and has assumed responsibility for its maintenance, but has actually requested that we inform him of any future projects in the area in which he could be involved.

CASE may well be calling on Pi Un's talents. During the project several representatives of surrounding communities approached us, enquiring about the project and the possibility of doing something similar in their place.

Chapter Two.

บนแผ่นดินของคนอื่น

On Another People's Land.
Case Study of Baan Mankong in Rural Areas

Between August and September, CASE began a new project on the behalf of CODI (Community Organisations Development Institute). CODI has, among its other activities, been implementing the large scale บ้านมั่นคง (Baan Mankong- 'secure housing' in Thai) projects across Thailand for the last 4 years. The Baan Mankong projects are an innovative programme of urban upgrading projects which place Thailand's urban poor at the centre of a process of developing long-term, comprehensive solutions to their cities' land and housing problems.

CASE studio has been working with CODI (and its previous incarnation UCDO) since 1996 and has been highly involved in the development of the Baan Mankong programme. The success of CASE studio's 1997 Akarn Songkroa project, for community-led upgrading in Ayutthaya contributed to the original drafting of the Baan Mankong Project. CASE was then asked by CODI to undertake the largest and most ambitious of 10 pilot projects for Baan Mankong in Kaoseng, Songkla. CASE has subsequently facilitated 8 other Baan Mankong projects across Thailand.

CODI has now asked CASE to undertake a pilot project for the development of บ้านมั่นคงชนบท (Baan Mankong Chonabot) a version of the Baan Mankong project specifically tailored to rural areas.

A team of four of CASE studio's architects, a film maker and myself have proposed to visit 7 of the communities participating in the Baan Mankong Chonabot programme to document their situations and problems as well as the solutions which are emerging. This broad understanding will then be the background to a specific pilot project where the CASE team will work with one of the communities on the issues identified.

The CASE team, from left: Sut (filmaker), Ae, Hugo, Nad, Ploy and Wan.

The project has been titled บนแผ่นดินของคนอื่น (bon phean din khawng khon euhn - 'on another people's land' in Thai) the title has a double meaning reflecting both the situation of the communities who live upon land legally owned by another and our own situation as outsiders attempting to enter and work with a community which is not our own.

The Sites:

1. อัมพวา (Amphawa, Samut Songkhram)

2. วังสมบูรณ์ (Wang Sombun, Sa Kaeo)

3. วังน้ำเขียว (Wang Naam Khio, Nakhon Ratchasima)

4. บ้านแฮด (Baan Haet, Khon Kaen)

5. นาน้อย (Naa Noi, Nan)

6. บ้านแม่ละนา (Baan Mae La Naa, Mae Hong Sorn)

7. ปิล๊อก (Pilok, Kanchanaburi)

1. AMPHAWA
ต.อัมพวา

An old market town on the Mae Klong river, Amphawa has long been famous for the fireflies which live amongst the mangroves in the estuarine waters where the Mae Klong meets the sea.

The CASE team began their investigation by wandering along the riverside. Pi Sut was filming, Ae was sketching, the rest of us were taking photos, asking questions and chatting with shopkeepers, homestay owners, residents, and anyone who had the time to tell a little of their own story of Amphawa.

Amphawa has recently been targeted for rejuvenation through a number of tourism initiatives. A floating market has been set up. The old Chinese shop-houses have been renovated for use as shops, cafes and accommodation, assisted by a partnership of the

Tour boats have been a noise problem

Amphawa is famous for its fire-flies

Parts of Amphawa are thriving...

... while others are left behind.

Amphawa Municipality, the Office of Natural and Environmental Policy and Planning, the Faculty of Architecture at Chulalungkorn University and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). In just a few years, the number of visitors to Amphawa has gone up dramatically, especially on the weekend, attracting hordes from nearby Bangkok. People go there for the fireflies, but is their habitat being threatened by the tourism which they attract?

We met with some of the community representatives who are coordinating with CODI on the Baan Man Kong assistance for Amphawa. They described some of the conflicts within the community. While the market is thriving, the economic benefits of the new visitors are not spreading to the surrounding areas. Only the negative effects are being felt: the rubbish, the noise of firefly tour boats at night. They have tried setting curfews for the boats, but they are hard to enforce. They have tried employing people to collect the rubbish but there are squabbles over who will pay their wages.

There have been some successes though. Pi Daeng described an inovative strategy, sponsoring a public, open-air karaoke initiative to bring people over to formerly overlooked areas of the market.

Laughing with the community...

.... and listening to their stories

Pi Daeng explains...

.... outdoor karaoke

2. WANG SOMBUN
๒. วังสมบูรณ์

In Thailand's northeastern 'Isan' region, close to the Cambodian border, the municipality of Wang Sombun, in the province of Sa Kaeo, has gathered together some of the poorest families of the district to join in a start-up agricultural scheme, growing organic asparagus. นิคมปลูกหน่อไม้ฝรั่งอินทรีย์ is the name of the new community which translates to: 'organic asparagus group'.

The project was the idea of the local อบต (office of the municipal government) who conducted surveys to identify those in the district most in need of assistance. The land was given by CODI as part of Baan Mankong Chonabot. The water, roads and electricity was provided by the อบต who also connected the new community with

Asparagus fields

We meet the community leader in his simple yet sophisticated rest-house

This participant is happy with the money she now makes

FISHBALLS ON STICKS, COFFEE

LAUGHING + CHATTING WHILE PACKING

Packing asparagus

SWIFT Co, a Thai agricultural company specialising in growing organic fruit and vegetables.
SWIFT Co provided the people with seeds and training on organic methods of farming. The people have signed a 5-year contract with SWIFT guaranteeing SWIFT will buy all their produce at a fixed (and by the people's accounts quite good) price. In exchange the people have to live with plenty of rules imposed by the company, for example, no smoking and no living on site. These rules are intended to maintain the strict organic status of the produce.

Many are happy with the money they are now getting, even in the dry season (which is severe in the Isan Region). They can usually make around 500 Baht a day (around AU $20) which is a lot more than they can get by working outside.

The intention was to give a chance to the poorest. But for most it is not a fresh start. They carry debts from former working arrangements. Debt cycles are a common problem of the rural poor in Thailand (as in other semi-feudal rural contexts). The farmer rents land on which to work, and borrows money from his landlord or the big produce buyers (the only locals with money to lend) in order to purchase new seed, fertilizer and pesticide, which are all necessary to produce enough to make ends meet and service the debts. The landlords and buyers often exploit this relationship with high interests or reduced payment for produce.

Some of the people do not fully trust the new system and continue to work outside as day labourers, disrupting their chances of making a fresh start and forming strong links with their fellow participants. There is a feeling amongst many in Wang Sombun that this artificial grouping of people is not yet a 'community': they have, after all, only been living together for the past 3 years. There are practices in place, however, such as the common germination of seedlings, which are intended to build stronger relationships amongst the people.

In two years' time the contract with SWIFT Co. runs out. There is some discussion about what else they could do with their land but most likely they will renew the contract for another 3 years.

3. WANG NAAM KHIO
ต. วังน้ำเขียว

Moving up to the mountains of Wang Naam Khio, in Nakhon Ratchasima province, we reached the cool air and green hills of นิคมเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง (settlement for self-sufficient economy) .

Like นิคมปลูกหน่อไม้ฝรั่งอินทรีย์ in Wang Sombun, นิคมเศรษฐกิจพอเพียง is a 'start up'community which began from a survey by the municipal government to identify impoverished families without land for livelihood. The municipality contacted สปก (so-pa-kaw), an organisation which supports agricultural development, to set up a project for the people. In 2545 (2002) สปก purchased land for the project (around 4000 m² per family) and began to train the members. The project was set up to grow gradually, with members joining in groups of 50 each year (so far 3 generations have joined). In
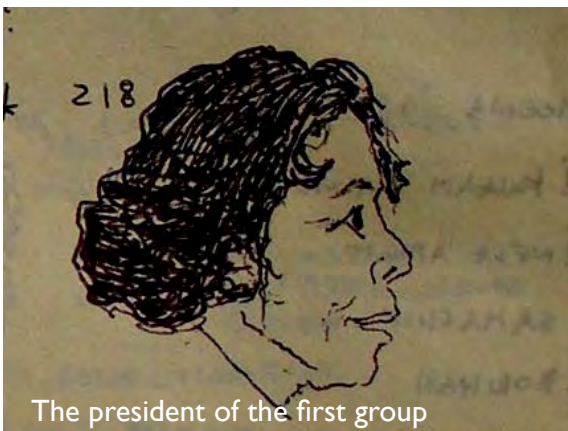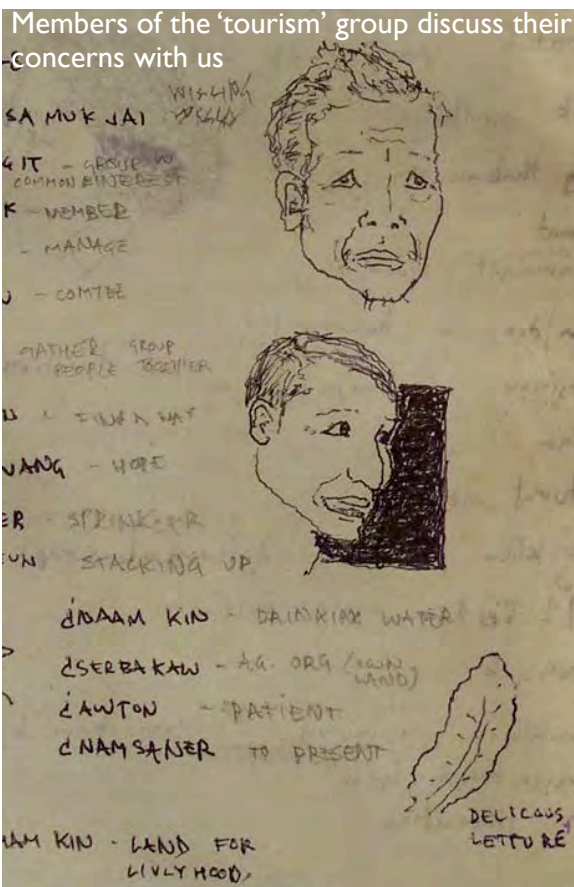

The president of the first group

The workshop

2548 (2005) a delegation from the new community approached CODI and was invited to join the Baan Man Kong Chonabot project.

The community have set up 3 livelihood study groups, one experimenting with growing vegetables, one focusing on raising animals, and one attempting to develop tourism. Particularly interesting is the tourism group's plan to tap into the growing trend of health tourism: 'Come to Wang Naam Khio, ride bicycles in the cool mountain air and eat fresh vegetables, its good for you!'.

The community have also started various other support projects, including a community shop, a micro-finance group and a small workshop producing bricks for use in building houses. The brickmaking technology was developed by Kasetsart University.

Some problems have occurred with the 'generation' system of adding members in groups each year, since members from different generations have tended to stick together and not trust one another. There have been complaints from later generations of nepotism and a lack of transparency from the initial generation. But aside from these problems the community is now looking to move on from livelihood projects and begin building houses and moving in permanently.

Members of the 'tourism' group discuss their concerns with us

The conference centre

Some have moved in, but lack electricity

4. BAAN HAET
๔. บ้านแฮด

Continuing our journey into the Isan, we travelled north to the district of Baan Haet in the province of Khon Kaen and visited the community of นิคมโนนสมบูรณ (group of abundance).
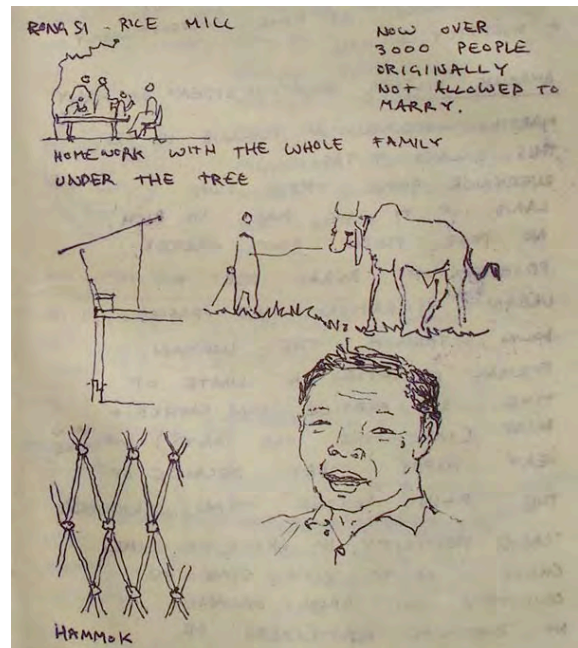
The community was founded in 2507 (1964 in the Christian calendar), when 460 hectares of crown treasury land was set aside for people suffering from leprosy to live

Speaking with the village head

Raising cows is one of the main occupations

together and try to heal themselves. At first there were very strict rules. No-one was allowed to marry or have children. Human nature being what it is, however, people did have children and the population has swelled to 3111. As leprosy has now been eradicated, only 1 in 4 of the people in the community have ever suffered from the disease. The hospitals and 'group houses' have been emptied and the villages appear much like any other in the area.

By regaining their health, however, the people now face the possibility that the Crown Treasury Department may take back their land. It was this concern that brought the community to CODI to join the Baan Man Kong Chonabot project and to begin negotiating for a long term lease of the land.

Speaking with one of the original inhabitants, now cured.

The new generations have no experience of leprosy.

พ่อหอมดี (Papa Good Smell), the person who originally contacted CODI, shows us his land. He is able to grow enough rice to feed his family all year round and has space left over to grow vegetables and raise fish and cattle.
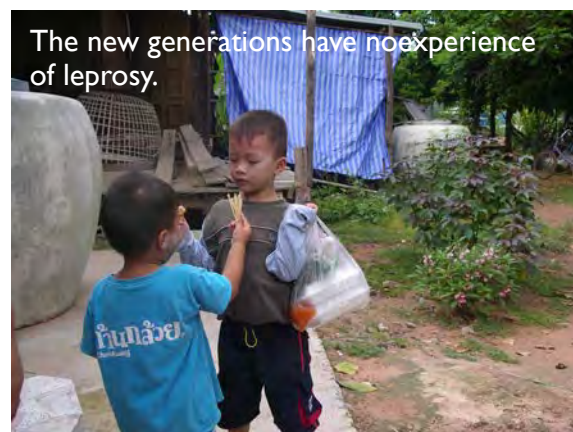
5. NAA NOI
๕. นาน้อย

In the cool mountains of Nan province, the district of Naa Noi contains some remarkable case studies of communities who have taken their fate into their own hands. The villages of ศรีสะเกษ and บัวใหญ่ been employed some innovative approaches to ensure their continued survival in difficult circumstances.

Ten years ago these farming communities were heavily dependent on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. They were trapped in a vicious cycle of debt, borrowing in order to buy the fertilizers which would allow them to produce enough to service their debts already accrued from buying the expensive chemicals in previous years. In fact it was impossible even to get the loans if the farmers where not using chemical farming methods.

Community land titles
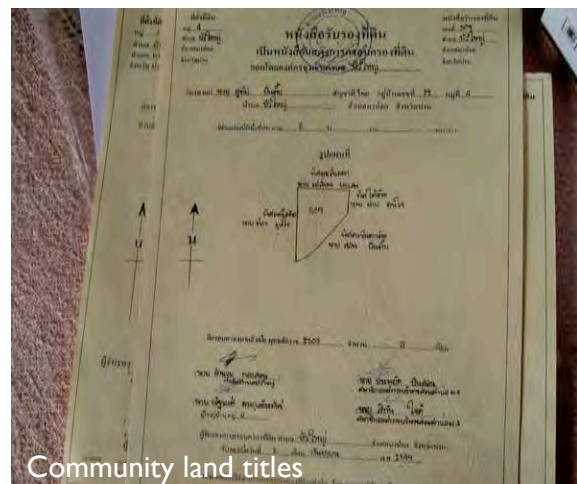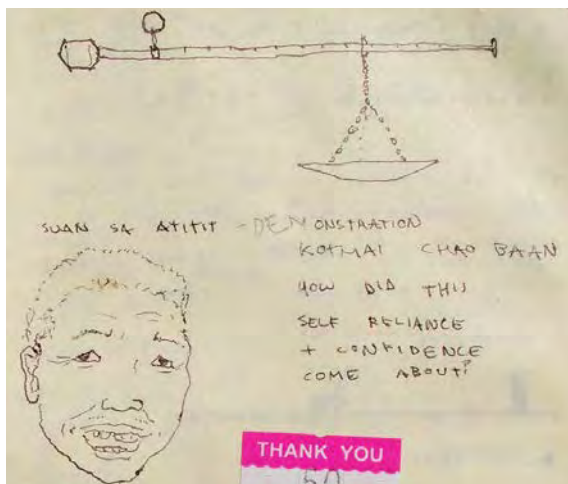
The village head shows us some edible fungus

The people of บัวใหญ่ explain their process to us

It was then that some of the farmers got together and calculated that for all their work and all their expense, they were making no profit. These farmers began to look back to traditional farming methods, using natural cycles and processes rather than chemicals. The village head obtained some funding to undertake a range of community projects, from researching medicinal forest plants, to drawing up a map of all people with special knowledge and skills in town. Livelihood and housing projects were initiated with those in need.

During this time the Royal Forestry Department declared the entire area of Naa Noi a national park, so that the people could be fined and arrested for living on the land their families had occupied for over 200 years. Having now a community structure strengthened by working together on their previous projects, the community was ready to act. They began to draw up their own 'community land titles' like a traditional survey, these documents showed the boundary of each family's land as well as areas of 'community forest' (parts where one is able to gather food and materials) and areas of 'deep forest' (parts, particularly near water sources, where humans should not venture). These areas have long been part of these communities' balanced relationship with the forest. By acting to demonstrate this understanding to the government they have secured an agreement with the Royal Forestry Department to stay permanently on the land.
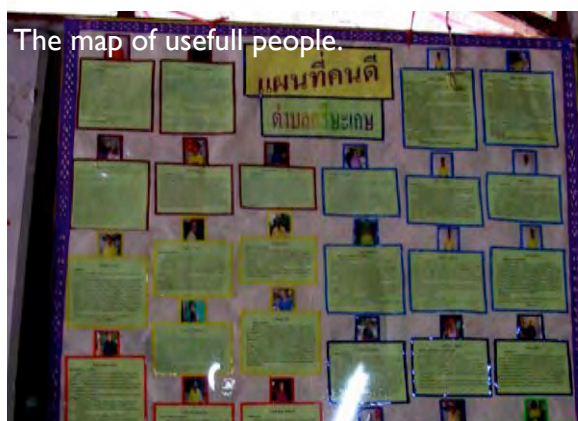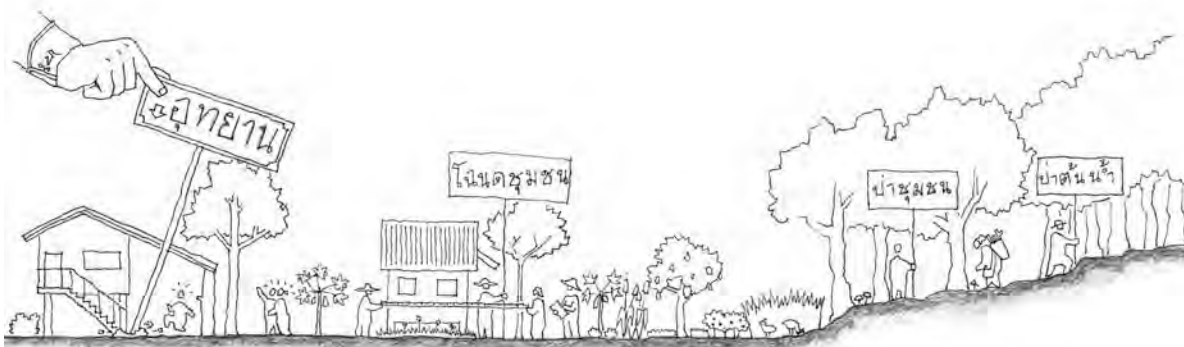
The map of usefull people.
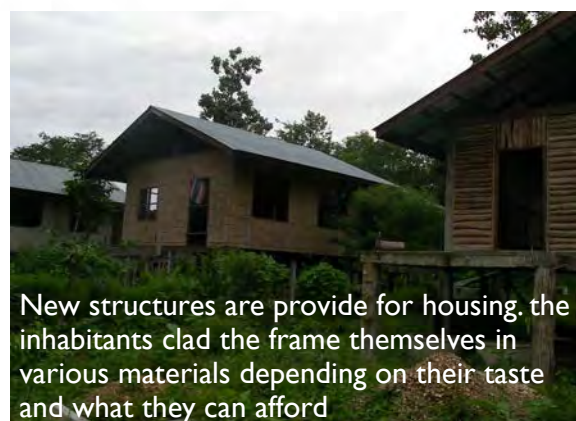
New structures are provide for housing. the inhabitants clad the frame themselves in various materials depending on their taste and what they can afford

6 - MAE LA NAA
๖ - แม่ละนา

In the far north of Thailand, close to the border of Burma (Myanmar) in the province of Mae Hong Sorn, the CASE team visited the village of Mae La Naa, whose inhabitants are of the Tai Yai ethnic minority.

The village suffered flood two years ago when fifteen houses were damaged. The village leaders then approached CODI for assistance and joined the Baan Mankong Rural project.
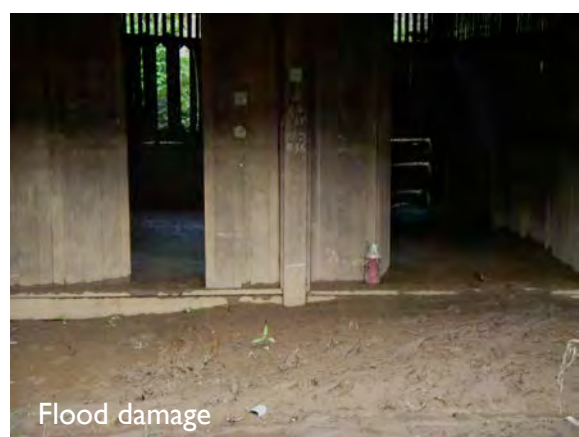
The Tai Yai have their own unique culture, including their own language and writing system. The community is very proud of their independent identity and have published books and toured with musician groups. A village elder plays for us a little of

The local leader of the Baan Mankong project

The temple at Mae La Naa, built in Tai Yai Style

Flood damage

the Tai Yai music, using xylophones, cymbals and a Burmese violin (with the strings of a European violin but with the wooden body replaced by a metal horn).

Travelling into the village, we had to pass through an Army checkpoint. Officially this is border security to guard against illegal immigration from Burma. In practice the movements of the Tai Yai are also highly controlled. They do not hold Thai citizenship or ID (reserved for ethnic majority Thai), having instead a 'high altitude person' card. They must seek permission to leave their village and are rarely permitted to be gone more than six months at a time.

Mae Hong Sorn is in the midst of a tourism boom, with many foreigners taking 4WD tours to visit the remote 'hill tribes' (a catch-all term for Thailand's diverse ethnic minorities). Although the 4WDs drive straight through their village, the people of Mae La Naa are yet to benefit economically. Some have set up 'homestay' accommodation, but so far no tourists come to stay or even stop to eat in the village. The 4WDs (which travel through at break-neck speeds) are known only as a safety hazard. There is talk of setting up a 'museum of culture' to take better advantage of the tourism boom, and teach outsiders something of the culture and traditions of the Tai Yai people.

These boy scouts carry handmade bags typical of the Tai Yai

After demonstrating the Burmese violin, this village elder shows us a sample of Tai Yai writing

The CASE team are given books published by the village about their culture.
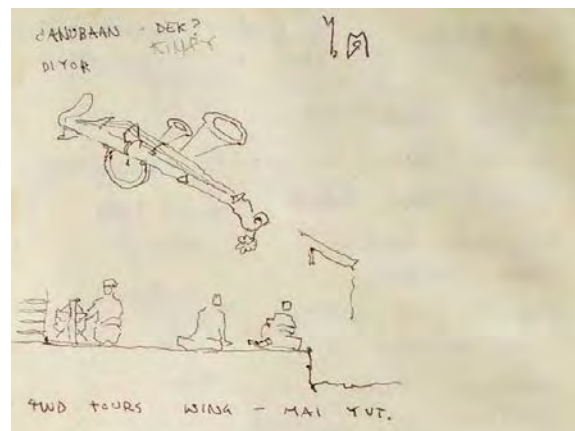
7. PILOK
๗.ปิล๊อก

In the district of Pilok, in the western province of Kanchanaburi, the CASE team visited 4 villages which have been subject to massive changes due to decisions from afar.

The first village อิต่อง, high in the mountains which separate Thailand from Burma, has lost its economy twice over. In former times it was a busy tin-mining town and a centre of the trade in seafood brought over from Burmese fishing towns on the nearby Andaman coast. Cheaper tin from elsewhere caused the mine to close, while increased border security around the controversial Thai-Burma gas pipeline put an end to trade with the Burmese. Now the town is half empty, the only source of income for the people comes from their children who have all gone to the cities to work.

อิต่อง has become a town without young people
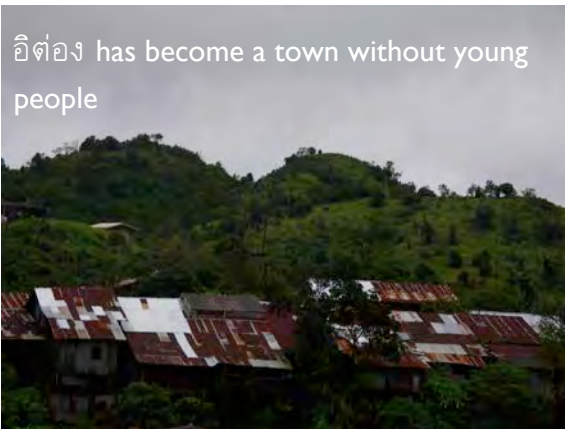
The Thai-Burma Gas Pipeline

We meet the village head out on a boat in the lake

The other 3 villages have had to deal with a different calamity. Twenty-three years ago a hydro-electric dam was built and the valley in which they lived and farmed rice was flooded. Amazingly the people have adapted, using bundles of bamboo to float their houses, and farming fish rather than rice. But despite their amazing resistance and flexibility, life is hard for the people of Pilok, especially those of ethnic minorities such as the Karen or Burmese. These people are not given the same assistance as Thai nationals, who receive support such as free solar panels from the government. This discrimination in turn causes conflict amongst the different groups.

The flooded valley

A school for Karen children
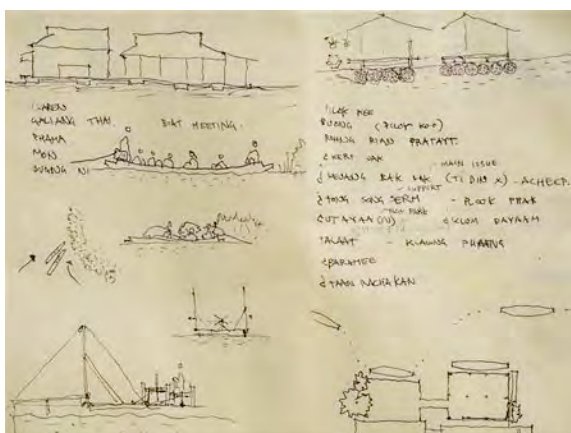
Epilogue.
ปัจฉิมลิขิต

After the trip, CASE produced a two-part book and a documentary of the trip and all that we had learnt. The first part of the book detailed the situation and response of each community, and the second part focused on sustainable agriculture. The documentary was a compilation of the many interviews we took with townspeople and local leaders. Altogether the publication was intended as a way for the people of each place to learn from one another's experiences, creating links between villages.

Until now CASE has not returned to any of the communities to undertake a Baan Mankong Rural 'pilot project'.
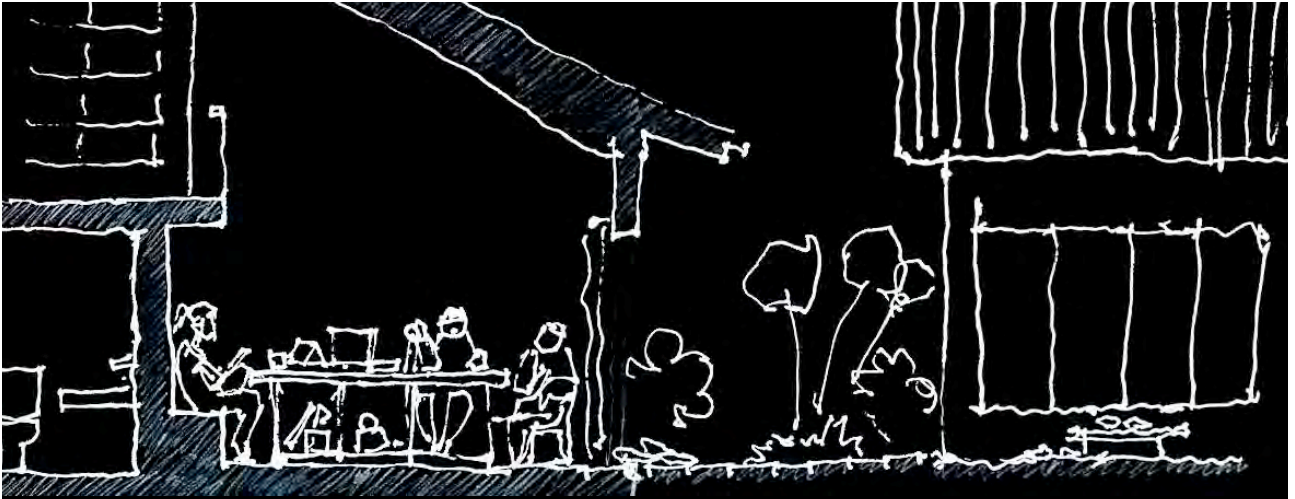
Chapter Three.

A selection of CASE Studio's past projects

8 unique approaches to 8 unique situations

ใต้สะพาน
UNDERBRIDGE

In the beginning of 1999 CASE began working with a group of people living under the highway overpasses of Bangkok.

The Bangkok Municipal Authority (BMA) saw these settlements as unsafe and ugly and proposed to relocate the people to a site in On Nut, near a large rubbish dump.

Over 10 weeks the CASE team worked with the community on the design of their new houses, culminating in an exhibition of 1:1 model houses in front of the BMA building to show the capacity of the people.

The workshops began with people drawing their 'dream house'. They redrew them to scale and tested out the plot sizes on site. The next week the people made their designs as models, first roughly then using standard modules (provided by the architects). When all houses were placed on site, there was no open space. This began a discussion about community layout. When all the models were done the architects took photos of them so they could draw up the plans at home. They also collected lists of materials which people wanted to use, so they could estimate the cost. When the costings came back, they were too

Life under the bridge.
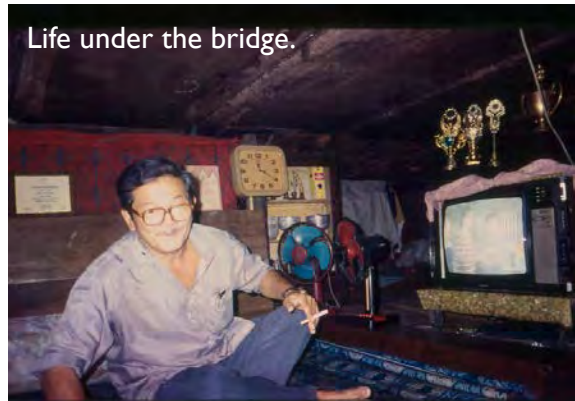
Drawing.

Models

Testing on site

expensive for most people, so CASE held some workshops experimenting with using waste materials in construction. After getting feedback on the final design drawings the architects made the final amendments. On the 25th April 1999 the people held an exhibition of full size, mockups of their houses-to-be using timber and fabric. This convinced the BMA to give the people support and allow them to build the houses as they chose.

When I visited the community, now settled in On Nut for almost 10 years, not everyone remembered the architects and their process of participation. Houses were well-maintained with beautiful gardens. Some had been made with recycled materials. Particularly impressive was a house clad in unrolled biscuit tins (the clear plastic display sections functioned well as windows).

We met a lady who was washing plastic bags and laying them in the sun to dry. She could sell the plastic bags, which she gathered with her children for 3-8 baht (10-25 cents) a kilo depending on the colour. Living near to the rubbish dump may be a resource but it is certainly not a profitable one.

Experimenting with materials

The Exhibition day

The biscuit-tin house

The local hairdresser shows us her

Sorting plastic bags

อยุธยา ขนมถ้วย อาคารสงเคราะห์
AYUTTHAYA: KANOM TUAY & ARKARN SONGKROA

In 1999 in the city of Ayutthaya, the ancestral capital of Thailand, the community of Kanom Tuay was to be evicted to make way for a new road. The CASE architects had been sent in to work with the community on designs for their relocation site. Within a short time of speaking with the people, it became clear that they had no interest in being 're-located'.

The CASE team then began to ask what the community did want. Quite quickly the pathway which connects their houses was set upon as the main concern. CASE worked with the community to show that if everyone contributed a little money and labour, a new concrete pathway could be built. The people decided to give it a try and were so impressed with the result that they began a spontaneous process of upgrading their own houses.

This process demonstrated the commitment and ability of the people and until now the community remains in place. When we visited them in 2007 a new house had just been constructed for a couple of newlyweds. Economically, life remains tough for the people of Kanom Tuay. Most people along the lane were busy with menial tasks outsourced from a local auto parts factory

The former pathway.

Community members make a new path

The new pathway and other upgrading

A few blocks from Kanom Tuay, the community of Arkarn Songkroa also approached CASE with a project for on-site upgrading. This project was more ambitious and involved 'reblocking', the demolition of existing buildings to be replaced on-site with new dwellings.

Through a series of participatory design workshops done in tandem with the work of CODI (then UDCO) setting up micro-savings groups and establishing the levels of repayment which could be afforded by the people.

The result was 3 house types based on different levels of repayment. To achieve maximum affordability all models were 'shell' houses with only the structure and services provided. Internal walls and fitout were to be done by the people themselves, potentially re-using materials from the old houses.

Next the community divided themselves into 'zones' and worked on the overall layout, eventually deciding on one based around common plazas and a childcare facility.

This project became the key precedent for CODI's Baan Mankong programme. When we visited the site it looked like a real success. The common plazas were full of community life. Although one man complained to us of the cost and poor durability of original building elements like doors, most people we spoke to were pleased with their new homes.

The original condition

Meeting about the housing types
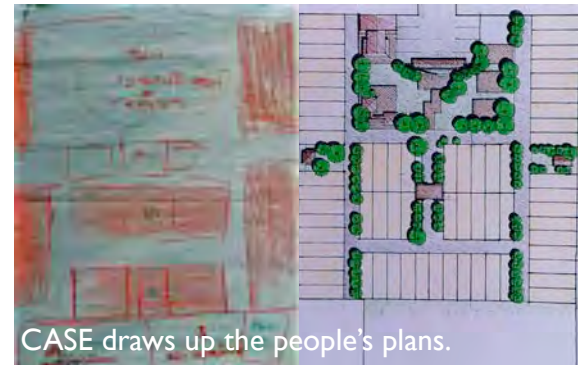
CASE draws up the people's plans.

One of the lively plazas today

ปั๊มหากาฬ
POMMAHAKARN

In 2002 CASE became involved, through an NGO, with the community living in Pommahakarn, a former fort near the centre of Old Bangkok. The BMA had plans to evict the community. The people responded with street protests.

The initial idea was that CASE work with the community to formulate a 'people's plan' for the site. The community however found it very hard to work on something so abstract while their houses were in danger. So the CASE team changed their approach. They began working with the kids, taking photographs and filming interviews with residents. Then they asked some residents to help them mount an exhibition of the photos. The people got together and fixed up one of the oldest houses for the exhibition, they also made beautiful the path through the community to this building. They held the exhibition and invited a lot of famous people and media.

Through this exposure, the people's cause got a lot of positive publicity. The BMA relaxed their effort to evict them and the people were able to work on the community plan. Although in 2007 their plans are as yet unfulfilled the community has continued to improve itself with a series of community garden projects.

Life under the threat

The exhibition in2002.

The photos are still found around the community 2007

สามชุก ตลาดมีชีวิต พิพิธภัณมีชีวา
SAMCHUK: LIVELY MARKET - LIVING MUSEUM

In 2003, Samchuk, once the main trading centre on the Suphan Buri River, was decaying and unpopular. Even the merchants' committee themselves considered replacing the building or closing it down.

CASE was invited to work with the community to discover what could be done. When they began speaking with the people, they found a community of merchants with many subtle conflicts and hierarchies blocking collective decision-making. They also found a talented musician who had written a song about Samchuk. The CASE team produced a music video for this song, with all the community lip-syncing to the words, then edited the video, placing those in conflict side by side. When the people saw the video they began to see their differences fade. Those in conflict began to speak, those without a voice found confidence.

From here CASE could work with the community on a re-planned market square and the refurbishment of a beautiful old house as a community museum. Today Samchuk is thriving again, making it a prime example of a community acting together to give new life to places of historic significance.

Stills from the music video

Samchuk today is more popular than ever

EDEN, UK: BUILDING COMMUNITIES WORKSHOP

In 2005 CASE was invited by *Architecture Sans Frontières* to do a workshop for architecture students in the UK about how architects can work with communities.

At the beginning the students formed groups of 6 and were asked to design for themselves a shelter with public spaces, etc., using recycled materials. Many beautiful designs were made and discussed. When the students were shown the site, 10 m x 5 m ('For each house?' 'No, for everyone!') they forgot their grand plans and scrambled for land. One group seizes half the land, the next takes half of what is left. The groups fight and renegotiate. When they are told there is only one entry to their site, the groups have to devise rights of way. The recycled materials are brought in, but there are too few materials, so new fights emerge. The groups find ways to share, using party walls between dwellings.

After a few days' tiring work, and cold, uncomfortable nights sleeping in their 'shacks', the students are awoken by the Eden groundskeeper on a tractor. They have built in the wrong spot, he says, and everything must be torn down. They protest, they have worked so hard! Now the students are beginning to learn how it is to live in an informal settlement.

Claiming land

Claiming materials

เกาะมุก ปลูกบ้านปลูกชุมชน
KOH MUK: BUILD THE HOUSE, GROW THE COMMUNITY

After the 2004 Tsunami, CASE was called in to help the people of Ko Muk, an island off Thailand's Andaman coast, to rebuild their houses.

The architects found a situation far more complex than simply rebuilding houses. The tsunami had reignited old disputes over land and many communities faced eviction. CASE began 6 months of in-depth work with the affected people, uncovering, together with the community, the land status of each household: those who owned the land they lived on, those who owned land elsewhere, and those who had no land. They then worked with the different groups on the new house designs, visiting other post-tsunami projects to see and compare the approaches. For the group without land, some partially cleared mangrove forest was purchased for their relocation. At first the community wanted to fill in the mangrove land with earth, but the architects proposed a way to build the houses and pathways above the water, to retain the mangroves. The people saw that they could also build this themselves, saving money, and were convinced.

The houses are currently under construction. The community is managing all the finances and the construction for the project. The people who have moved miss living by the sea, but they are optimistic that once the mangroves are re-planted, it will be a good place to live. There are also plans for a fishermen's co-operative and a small mosque. It is hoped that with the skill and confidence gained from the project, the people will go on improving their place.

The community visits other post-tsunami reconstruction projects

The houses under construction

Some residents have complaints

บ้าน 10 & CONCASE
TEN Bangkok & CONCASE

Inspired by a similar project by their sister organisation, CASE-Japan, in Osaka, CASE initiated TEN Bangkok as an alternate housing vision for middle-income households (including some architects who work at CASE). Learning from the communities they had worked with, they have created a model where 10 individuals pool their resources to buy land and develop the site as a form of co-operative housing.

CASE employed their usual participatory approach to this design, with all members of the future community designing together, working simultaneously on the design of their individual dwelling and on the way the whole complex fits together.

Once the project is complete, they hope to maintain this spirit of 'doing together'. The design includes shared courtyards and facilities such as a kindergarten and a swimming pool.

In order to build the project themselves CASE founded CONCASE, a design-and-build company which is dedicated to balancing affordability of housing with good living and working conditions for the often exploited building workers. CASE hopes that CONCASE will provide a link between their client groups, both rich and poor. It is also planned to start an income sharing model where the builders and architects share the profits from each job.

TEN Bangkok demonstrates that the CASE approach is not only applicable when working with marginalised communities. For CASE everyone is a client and every client a part of a community

Design process

Under construction

Chapter Four.

a rigorously informal process

{some of CASE studio's guiding principles}.

The first three months: drinking coffee, asking questions and getting into arguments. {The wisdom of apparent laziness}.

While to many outside eyes 3 months of hanging around in a community prior to starting any real work may be viewed as bone idleness, CASE insists that this is the most important stage of any project. While sitting around, drinking at coffee shops, the CASE architects are, in fact, observing the multiplicity of relationships, networks and interactions which are the real substance of 'community'. After a while, locals begin to recognise them and ask them questions, 'what are you doing here?' this is a chance to explain, and also to begin asking questions in turn: 'what is this?', 'what do you use it for?', 'where is the water?'. For CASE information is everything, and everything is information. A community is an extremely complex entity and the architect who hopes to understand one must be constantly questioning the roles and links of all the evidence at hand (*what is this plastic bag doing in the gutter? what does that have to do with this old lady selling something? how is she*

connected to this dog barking all the time, and how does all that link with this kid going to school...). Always opportunists, the CASE architects even view confrontations with members of the community as a chance to reach more people, if someone shouts at them in a empty backstreet they may well just ignore it and move on, but if someone shouts at them in a crowded marketplace, its a great opportunity to yell back "What are we doing here? Well, let me tell you..."

Leaving the knowledge behind. {Against a community architecture of books on shelves}.

Any project with a community must begin with a thorough survey of the existing condition. Such an attitude is not unusual, what is more unusual is CASE's insistence that the community must be learning as much from the survey process as the architects. Many, many theses have been written on this or that community to sit forever on a dusty shelf unread. CASE is in favour o a much more active type of study, where the community is asked to look at themselves, their place, their relationships and think about the problems, the opportunities and the things to be done. This knowledge has a life and will go on informing the communities decisions long after the 'expert' has gone home.

# Architecture as catalyst. {Building communities beyond the physical}.

The projects always focus on an object widely held to be beneficial to the community (e.g. new housing, a relocation plan, upgrades to infrastructure, a playground, a community museum, a tourist guide, a photo exhibition, a music video) but the real success of a project is, for CASE, never judged on this physical artefact alone. Rather it is how the community have come together to work on the project, how their ties have been strengthened, how new voices have emerged, how capacity has been demonstrated, how pride and self confidence have increased, how ready and willing the community is to continue, building, growing, fighting. Members of CASE will often shrug off questions about their visually impressive mass housing projects but are always eager to show pictures of a house which the community repainted themselves. The level of success is judged not on volume of people affected, or the size or expense of projects but rather by what the people involved have gained in the way of skills, understanding and confidence.

The dissolvable architect. {The triumph of being forgotten}.

CASE has a mantra: 20% effort for 100% effect. While this again sounds like an excuse for indolence, it is in fact a statement of one of CASE's most cunning strategies for community participation and ownership of projects. As the community gains confidence, CASE gives them more and more of the

control; over collecting information, over the design, over managing finances. CASE is constantly working to remove themselves from the project, until, in the end they have virtually disappeared. In many of the past project which I visited the people had only fuzzy recollections of the architects, and what role they played. Fundamentally the project is the people's, they made it, they understand it, they know how it works. Somewhat ironically, this absence of recognition is the greatest proof of CASE's success.

Open questions.
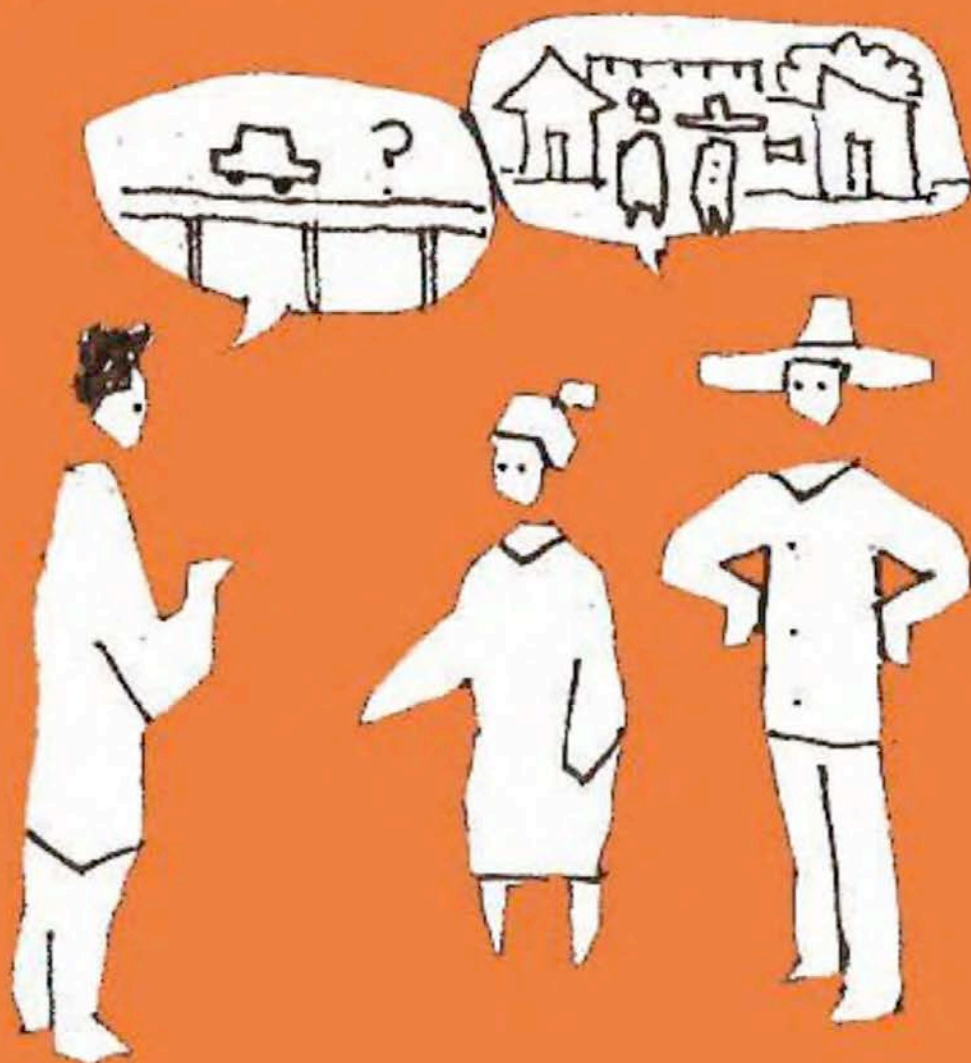
The project rarely ends up being what was imagined initially. This is testament to the genuine collaboration being practised. The process is constantly shifting to reflect the wishes of the people. For example, in Akarn Songkroa (see chapter 3) CASE was brought in to undertake the 'participative design' of a relocation plan for a community being evicted to build a new road. Upon meeting with the community it became very clear that they had no desire to be relocated, and therefore no interest in designing a relocation plan 'participative' or not. Rather than blindly pushing ahead, CASE changed tack. By focusing on the existing housing situation the pathways were soon identified as the major common concern. So CASE demonstrated how, by pooling resources and labour, the community could build a new pathway. Once the walkway was done, the residents began upgrading their own houses, a spontaneous self-managed upgrade proved to the authorities the capabilities of the residents and the plans for the new road were dropped.

Participation for CASE is never simply a matter of taking people through a standard set of tasks to get them to a pre ordained result. It must be a discussion, an open question: 'What is the situation? What is really needed?' In this way too the community's participation in the design is never seen as a barrier to the architect's creative process, on the contrary, it is the central tool, vital to understanding and responding to the multiplicity of problems faced by different communities.

Drawing the dream. {The role of the architect}.

Architects have the skills to represent another person's imagined reality, how they would like things to be. By working with architects, communities can add weight to their claims and proof of an alternative. No longer are communitie stuck saying "we don't want to be evicted, don't evict us". With the help of the architect they can say "we don't want to be evicted, we want to live like this, with paths here, and a mosque there and a fisherman coop, and we will build our houses together and we can manage the finances, and..." When this is also backed up by actions, small though they may be, it proves the peoples capacity and makes for powerful advocacy.

Protest and pop music. {Expanding the network and getting people talking}.

CASE is always looking to make links, and increase understanding. During the 'Under Bridge' Model House exhibition (see chapter 3), the NGO asks what musicians to get, CASE suggests pop music, the NGO thinks some protest folk is more appropriate, but CASE disagrees: aren't we just speaking to the same people, how can we get the information out further? The NGOs work so hard, do so many surveys, gather so much data, they can prove that the city relies on the slum for all its service workers but they just sit on the

information, not engaging with those who do not understand in the middle and upper classes, simply chiding them and demanding rights. But the upper classes just shrug and say 'what rights, you pay no tax, live for free on someone else's land, what rights do you have?' They do not realise that the slums are where all their cleaners, maids, drivers, builders and labourers come from. The city would fall apart without the places where these people live. CASE believes that this situation must be shown to those who do not understand. CASE believes this must be done in a very gentle way, no-one reacts well to being accused of wrong-doing. They make films which show the situation of the city, the connections between groups and then begin to suggest ways people can get involved. This is one of the key motivations in starting up CONCASE. They envisage a place where the different clients, rich and poor, will mix. A client who is renovating their house could donate their old windows to a client who needs to build a new house.

The architecture of music videos.

If the people are too stressed to work together, hold a photo exhibition, if the groups don't get along, make a music video. These kind of problems often become major obstacles to projects, preventing them from starting or unravelling them as they go. Accepting these problems as part of the job and approaching them creatively, often from an unlikely angle, is one of the greatest strengths of CASE's work. But when architects are making music videos to advertise a market and strengthen community ties, is this still architecture? Perhaps it requires a redefinition of what architecture really is. For CASE it is simply about working creatively with people and place. And perhaps beyond architecture, their work becomes active on the world. The variety of tools used by CASE, and the openness with which they invent new ones, speaks of their originality and success. CASE's model in fact takes architecture beyond it's traditional limits: the architects are no longer beholden to a single client, they are working for multiple actors at once and through that gain an independence to explore what they are themselves interested in.

For the fun of it. The art of enjoying work. {Against a community architecture of martyrdom}.

One particularly refreshing aspect of CASE's approach is that they do not bang on about how good and worthwhile it is to work for the poor. There is absolutely no sense of anyone at CASE working in the way they do out of a dour sense of morality or duty as one find sometimes in the offices of NGOs. The CASE architects have a deep interest in the work they are doing and take great enjoyment in the challenges it presents. Above and beyond that, every effort is made to bring a bit of *sanook* (fun, enjoyment - something which permeates most aspects of Thai life) into all the work. The CASE architects stick to a very informal structure, they describe themselves as a kind of grown-up student club, a loose association of friends with common interests more than a traditional company.

The eyes and ears of the guava. Some personal lessons learned:

Soon after arriving in Thailand I discovered, much to my surprise, that I had become a guava. In Thai the word ฝรั่ง (fa-rang) has the double meaning of both guava and caucasian foreigner and is the source of much good natured joking. This was the first of many eye-opening lessons about Thailand, its culture and society and how I, as a foreigner, could could operate within it.

Nothing was more apparent to me in all my experience in Thailand than the central importance of language. I had spent some time in Sydney learning some basic Thai but on arrival I still felt woefully deficient. Luckily for me Ploy, Wan, Patama and Nad all spoke fantastic English and were able make their world accessible to me. Perhaps equally lucky was the fact that many of the others at the office and in the communities spoke very little English, but were incredibly patient and helpful in giving me a wonderful oppurtunity to practice my Thai. As the level of my Thai increased (with the help of my colleagues, some private tutors and the wonderful world of Thai cinema) more and more of the truly amazingThailand was opened up to me. Through language I was able to understand what was going on around me, and able to give much more in return.

The concern of how much I was 'giving back' was also one of key importance for me. Many times during my work with CASE I wondered what I was really contributing to the situation, especially in the early days when my language was so poor. I spoke to Nad about this when commencing the *On Another People's Land* survey trip. He himself had experience working in the foriegn context of Nepal and was able to give me some useful advice. Put simply he said 'the eyes of the foreigner often see things which the eyes of the local does not'. This was not to say that the foreigner knew better than the local, but rather that the foreigner may notice things which the local has become acostomed to and so no longer sees. Although I wondered how much use the foriegner could be without the use of his ears, over time the truth of Nad's word became evident. I was able to contribute in many amusing and unexpected ways: from using my height to reach

tall places to using my cartoons to organise work groups for the playground or visually communicate the situations faced by the various communities we visited for the *On Another People's Land* project publication. I remember well the satisfaction I felt when my efforts began to pay off: when the kids of the Min Buri Old Market began calling me *Pi* Hugo (*Pi*, literally meaning 'older sibling', is a title of respect) and when my friends noted that i was not like the other *fa-rang* who had passed through CASE, more eager to tell than to listen. They were impressed by my genuinely open approach and the effort I put in to seeking to really understand. They gave me the ultimate compliment a Thai could give, that I was really a Thai at heart.

Interestingly this integration with the CASE team was achieved by practicing many of CASE's own methods for integrating with communities: spending time, being patient, observing, looking for opportunities, keeping an open mind and above all taking enjoyment in the process.

I am deeply grateful for the time I spent with CASE and in the communities and for all I learned with them. It was an experience I will continue to draw lessons and inspiration from.
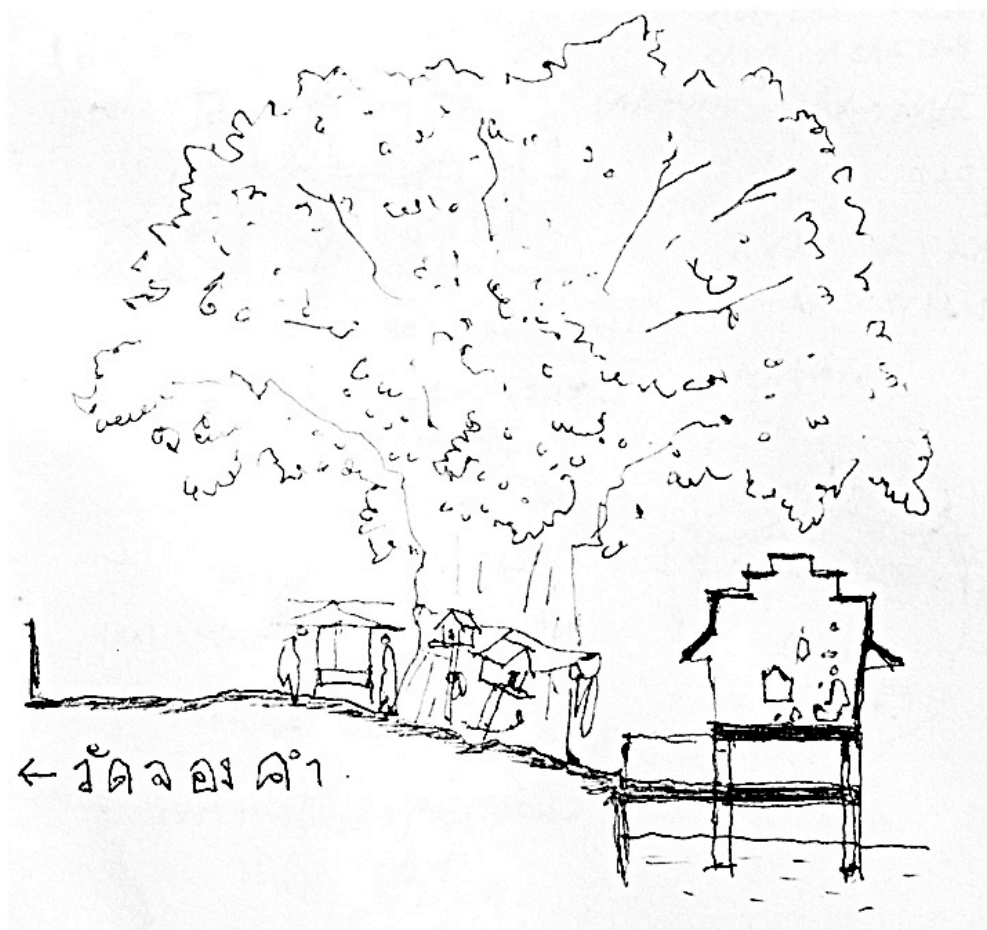
Acknowledgements.

Please visit http://www.informalism.net for updates on the ongoing work of the *working with the informal, learning form the informal* project.

← วัดจองคำ.

SOUTH-NORTH. Intersecting Borders & Emerging Forms of Activist Architecture in the Americas.

In the second part of *Working with the Informal, Learning from the Informal* the exploration of ways that architects engage with and learn from communities broadens to encompass case studies from three very different contexts accross South, Central and North America. What is interesting is that despite the very different approaches taken by the practices described here, common threads emerge. Despite being situated on different ends of the old first world/third world, formal/informal spectrum of 'development', they are able to influence and inform one another · often not as one would expect.

Venezuela, particularly its capital Caracas, provides a clear example of the forces which give rise to informal settlements and which perpetuate the dynamic of simultaneous neglect and exploitation which take place in almost any city, made more potent by the fact that more than half the population are housing themselves informally in the precarious, self-built settlements know locally as *barrios*. This ongoing situation has given rise to two concurrent movements which are resetting the way residents of the *barrios* relate to their city. On one hand architects are

becoming more interested in the *barrios*, in the way they form and operate and in the way that architecture can be used to provide a better living situation for their residents. On the other hand the residents of the *barrios* themselves, through collective organisation and with the support of government reforms, are taking a central role in how their communities develop and relate to the rest of the city. These two movements have produced an wealth of ideas and models of participation, becoming particularly interesting where they intersect.

The divided city of **Tijuana/San Diego** is split by the border of Mexico and the USA. As such it is a microcosm of the unequal exchange which occurs between the nations more generally of North and South. It is also the site of a much more fruitful exchange: between individuals and communities coming from very different contexts but sharing the same physical landscape. On one side of the border waves of Latino immigrants are transforming mundane Anglo-American suburbia into something more dense, lively and communal. On the other side, the exploitative practices of transnational corporations are being used to fuel new, pre-fabricated housing solutions. Perhaps most interesting is the way tactics are drawn from the informal settlements of Tijuana to inform proposals for the improvement of San Diego, a reversal of the traditional 'knowledge flows'. Architects and artists such as Teddy Cruz working in this bi-polar context have developed some very potent tactics for revealing the contradictions of their context and harnessing them to create proposals for change. The nature of the city is such that by commenting on local conditions they are simultaneously commenting on much broader, global concerns.

If Caracas is the archetypal informal city then **New York City** is perhaps the archetypal formal city. Yet architects in both contexts are working with local communities toward strikingly similar aims. In fact the questions of 'how-to-engage' become even more pressing in a context where the majority of people live out their lives without having the smallest involvement in how their environment is created around them. In this context the tactics of participatory design, developed and refined by practitioners working mainly in informal settlements worldwide, take on a new flavour as they are imported into the very different context of the formal city. As such they are another interesting example of the reversal of the traditional view of knowledge flows between the 'developing' and the 'developed' worlds. The practices working in New York are also interesting in that, through their determination to pass maximum autonomy to the ordinary citizen, that they have shifted their role from the design of physical places into the design of the tools-of-change themselves.

Although superficially employing very different strategies to address very different problems, all these practices can be regarded as examples of a new kind of 'activist architecture'. A way of practicing architecture which takes the whole city as a client. A practice which pairs the skills and resources of architects, artists and designers with the motivation and drive of strong community organisations to change the places we live our lives, working towards better cities for all.

**CHAPTER 1.
CARACAS +
PUNTO
FIJO.**

View to *Barrio San Agustín* from *Parque Central* in the centre of Caracas.

1* BUILDING THE CITY TWICE. AN INTRODUCTION TO VENEZUELA'S BARRIOS

2* THE ARCHITECT COMES TO THE BARRIO:
     Informal Inventories: the tactics of Frederico Villanueva
     Urban Acupuncture: Chacao's Vertical Gymnasium

3* THE BARRIO BECOMES THE ARCHITECT:
     Los Comités de Tierra Urbana
     The Permanent Workshop for Participatory Design, Hoyo de la Puerta
     12 de Octubre, Punto Fijo

1* Building the City Twice: An Introduction to Venezuela's *Barrios*.

In Venezuela more than 50% of the population lives in the *barrios*, those sectors of the city built by residents themselves without official rights or provision of services, on unstable land, under constant threat of eviction and with no legal rights to the homes which they have, in many cases, occupied for generations.[6]

Barrio Mamera as seen from the Metro station.

The *barrios* are the spatial expression of a deep segregation within Venezuelan society. They contain within them many other types of exclusion; unemployment, lack of access to medical services and education, exposure to crime and violence.

The official city has always had an ambiguous relationship with the barrios. The *barrios* are home to the builders, drivers, nurses, teachers, cooks and cleaners on which the official city depends. It is a vast pool of cheap labour. Yet the official city refuses to recognise the crucial function of the *barrio*, referring to it only as a problem, a source of crime, an eyesore, and an urban blight. On most official maps the *barrios* do not exist at all, they are depicted as blank 'green zones'.

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[6] Andres Antillano, Los Comités de Tierra Urbana, unpublished.

A view from central Caracas towards the surrounding *barrio*

In Caracas they say the residents of the *barrios* had to build the city two times. First, brought into the city as cheap labour, they came as the construction workers who built the highways, stadiums and apartment buildings of the official city. Secondly, on finding no place for themselves in that city, they also worked by night, in solidarity, with rough materials and much imagination, to make their own city - the *barrios*.

In such a way the *barrios* are on one hand the expression of segregation and on the other the expression of the fight against that segregation. The residents of the *barrios* have had to fight over many generations to claim their right to occupy land, their rights to clean water, sewerage and electricity, their rights to medical care, to affordable, good quality food, to education and employment. This struggle continues in Venezuela today with growing support from the government as well as many urban professionals, including architects.

2* The Architect comes to the *Barrios*.

The architects of Venezuela have had a growing fascination with their nation's *barrios* and have sought out engagement with this powerful 'other' urbanism. During my time in Venezuela I was able to investigate some examples of this engagement.

Informal Inventories: the tactics of Frederico Villanueva:

Frederico Villanueva is an architect, educator and activist. Together with his partner, Josefina Baldo, he has been researching and working on projects in the *barrios* for over 30 years. Together they oversaw CONAVI (*Consejo Nacional de la Vivienda* - National Housing Council) from 1999-2002.

The following is a summary of Villanueva's ideas and tactics for architects working in the *barrios.* It is based on an interview with Frederico Villanueva at his home in Caracas. Through our conversation I was able to learn some of the knowledge and tactics which he has developed through his long experience.

The barrio is more common, more successful and more efficient: The *barrio* is often viewed as an aberration, but it is the *barrios* where more than half the people of Venezuela live. In reality it is the formal city which is strange. The *barrios* are also much more productive. Over the last 20 years the *barrios* have grown each year by an average of 3.1% almost double the growth rate of housing in the formal city of 1.6%!
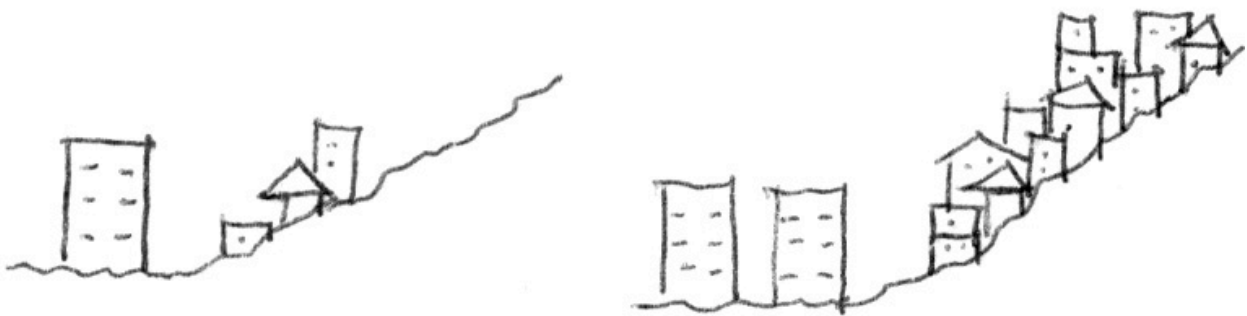
Getting many horses to run together: The key to successful projects is to get government, community movements and trained professions such as architects to all go in the same direction at the same time. This requires delicate negotiation and careful combining of often very different agendas.

The Architect and the Community: The architect brings the knowledge of alternative structures, materials and processes and the skills to analyse technical factors, manage multiple agendas, to see the big picture and coordinate individual actions. The community brings the knowledge of local conditions and relationships as well as the skills derived from constantly reconstructing their homes and facilities. Neither of these should be underestimated.

Architects at invasion: If it is possible the best time for the architect to get involved is during the initial land invasion. If the architect can have input at this initial stage then things will not need to be redone later.

Counting the stairs: The basis of any work must be a detailed study. Analyse the area, record the dimensions of every house, the slope of every road and path, the number of streetlights and stairs, the width and length of all the drainage channels. Then, when proposing improvements everything can be calculated and budgeted for: the length of electric cable required for new street lights, the amount of concrete to pave new pathways and so on.

Starting small: After the detailed study, begin with a small project: one house, one day-care centre. The people may be dubious at first but once they begin to see results they will be much more open to get involved. A successful small project can create an explosion in community participation.

Staying separate: When working with a community is it important to remain professional, don't try to become part of the community. Treat them as you would any other client, explain the alternatives then leave the room. If you get too involved you may start to influence the outcome.

Build before you demolish: If relocation or rehousing is unavoidable, make sure you build the substitution house before you tear the old one down.
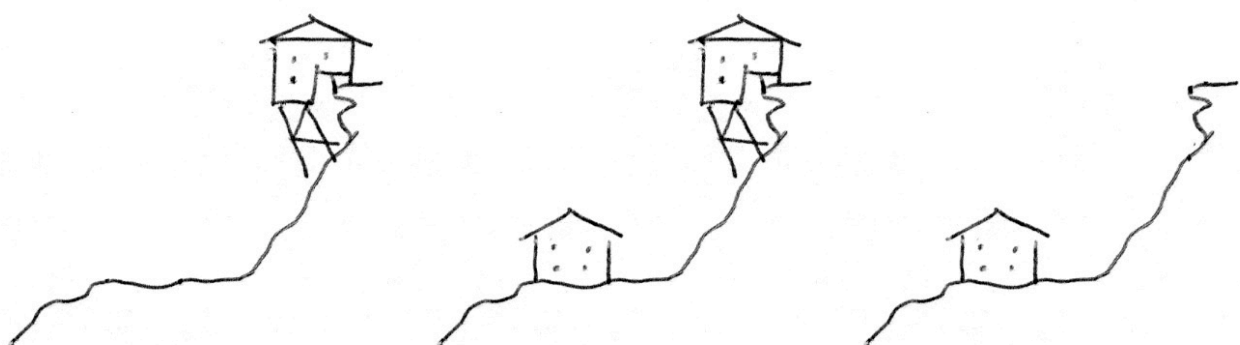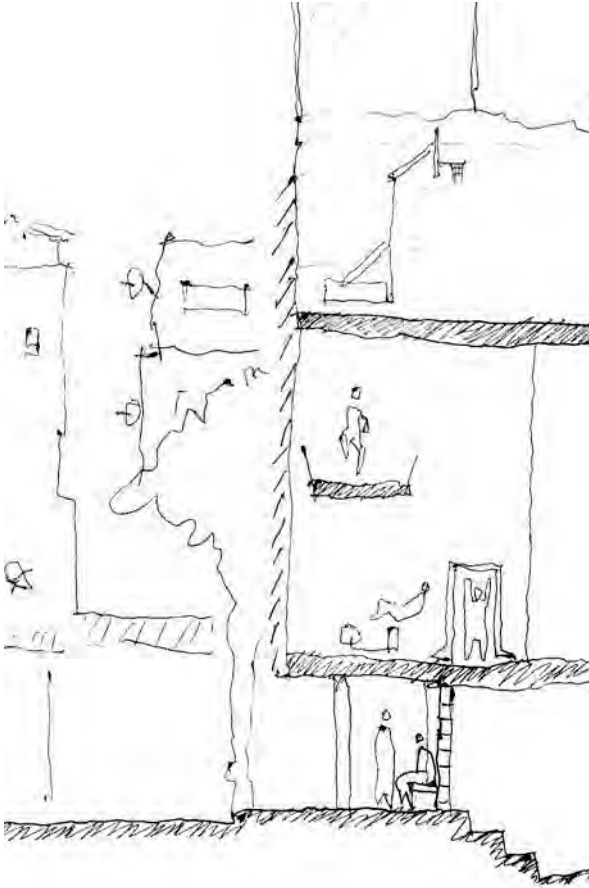
Urban Acupuncture: Chacao's Vertical Gymnasium.

One of Villanueva's former students and long-time collaborators is Mateo Pinto. Together with his brother Matias and Austrian architect Hubert Klumpner, Mateo designed the Vertical Gymnasium, built on the edge of the small inner-city Barrio Santa Cruz by the municipality of Chacao.

The Vertical Gymnasium draws on the *barrio* practice of maximising the available resources by taking a single open air basketball court and raising it to the roof thereby creating 3 levels for multiple overlapping programs below. These include: a judo area, an indoor basketball court, an indoor running track, a weights gym, a medical centre, meeting rooms and a rooftop basketball court.

The intention of the Vertical Gymnasium is to provide a dense bundle of services and recreational opportunities to the residents of Barrio Santa Cruz. The centre is used by local schools and sporting teams and even those not actively engaging with the centre are accommodated by the undercroft seating where motorcycle couriers congregate and local men gather to read newspapers shaded from the heat of the midday sun.

The Vertical Gymnasium could be seen in a number of ways. On one hand it is the generous gesture of the formal city stepping into the *barrio* to provide it with services. On the other hand, given that Barrio Santa Cruz is a relatively small *barrio* completely surrounded by formal development and that the Vertical Gymnasium presents a hard wall and opaque screens to the *barrio*, opening to and connecting more strongly with the formal street, it could equally be seen as the formal city encroaching on the *barrio* as providing services for it.

This raises questions more generally about the often non-participatory projects of 'urban acupuncture', which aim to connect the informal city more strongly with the formal city by inserting formal elements into it. But is it a connection or an invasion? Is it acupuncture or just a jab with a pin?
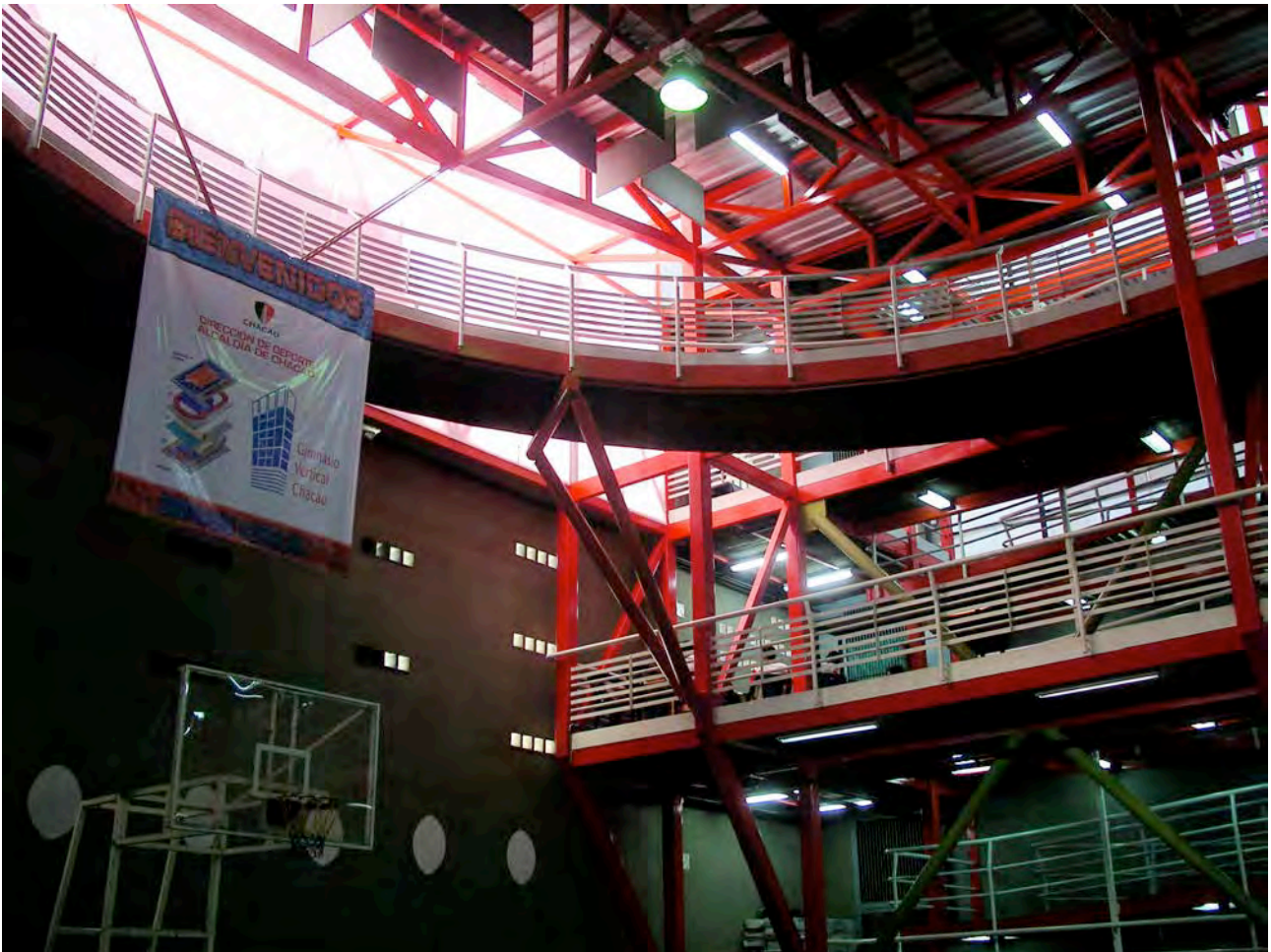
The interior of Chacao's Vertical Gymnasium.
Taken from the interior basketball court looking towards the running track and meeting rooms

The rooftop basketball court (left) and the view from the street (right).

3* The *Barrio* becomes the Architect.

Los Comités de Tierra Urbana:

The *Comités de Tierra Urbana* (Urban Land Councils, CTUs) are self-organising federations of families living in the *barrios*. The CTUs, officially enabled by a presidential decree in 2002, are a direct continuation of the struggle by groups which began to form in the late 1980s around the campaign for rights to water and land.

These CTUs, enabled by government land reforms, gain collective ownership of the land they occupy for housing. By granting security of tenure and removing the threat of eviction a fertile situation is created where incremental improvements of the barrios can occur under the guidance of the communities themselves and with the assistance of a wide range of urban professionals, including architects. The CTUs also form around the creation of new settlements (*Campamentos de Pioneros)*. These settlements offer the chance to create new, customised living environments driven by the ideas and desires of people themselves.

Auto-diagnosis and collective action: The Permanent Workshop for Participatory Design.

Crucial to the development of the new settlements is the fundamental participation of the community members at every level of the development of the place. The *Taller permanente de Diseño Participativo* (Permanent Workshop for Participatory Design) are a group of architects and planners drawn from universities and the public sector who are committed to providing communities with the resources they need to collectively develop their new homes.

A group of *pioneros* visit the site of their future community at Hoyo de La Puerta. Image courtesy of *Taller Permanente de Diseño Participativo*

At Hoyo de la Puerta, a new settlement being developed on the southern outskirts of Caracas, the process of designing new houses for 200 families has expanded to encompass a survey of all aspects of community life. The *Taller* describes this process as Auto-diagnosis, where the community members themselves research their own problems and situation and generate solutions from that understanding.

At Hoyo de la Puerta the auto-diagnosis began with a thorough analysis of the site, its connections to other parts of the city, as well as its local connections and

characteristics (water, slope, orientation, access etc). The participants then began to ask many questions of themselves: How will we move around the new community? what areas do we need? what services? what kinds of production? how will we look after children? What emerged was a complex and richly layered vision for the community, a dense programmatic brief detailing all the requirements for the new community including housing, gas-lines, hostels for visitors, community childcare, workshops, clinics, orchards, chicken-houses, hairdressers, pathways, places for playing dominos and many other things. From this brief they then discussed how much of the site should be used for each purpose, how programs could be combined and spaces shared.

The group then returned to the site to begin to plan how these various functions could be applied to the specific piece of land. During multiple site visits and through the process of constructing a contour model of the land they identified the best locations for building (with low slope and without environmental protection constraints). With the use of the model they then began to arrange the various programs on the site, considering which programs needed to be physically linked, centrally located, public or private and in proximity to transport and services.

Participants plan where the specific parts of their new community will be located. Image courtesy of *Taller Permanente de Diseño Participativo*

With the large scale vision for the entire community now sketched out the workshop shifted focus to the micro-scale, that of the individual house. Continuing with the

process of auto-diagnosis the participants began with an analysis of their current living situation. They compiled the demographics of who was in each house, studied what activities those people did, recorded the sizes and characteristics of spaces in which those activities took place and commented on the quality and practicality of those spaces. After this they discussed ways in which things could be done better and what they would change in their houses and surrounding areas. From these exercises the group was able to produce some model house designs drawn from the needs identified by the people themselves.

Participants use an analysis of their existing houses to create plans for some new house types.
Images courtesy of *Taller Permanente de Diseño Participativo*

The project is still in its early stages, waiting for approvals and funding to come through complicated bureaucratic channels, but the community now has a concrete plan for the development of their land. It is a plan which they own and understand inside-out because they created it, making it a powerful tool for argument. One participant mentioned to me that through the process she had learned to question everything about her situation. Not just the physical conditions but also social and political ones: "Why are we living in tiny shacks on the edge of a crumbly mountain when others have more than they could possibly use?"

Creating the conditions for communal life: *Comunidad 12 de Octubre,* Punto Fijo.

Oil refineries in Punto Fijo. Much of the government's reform agenda, which has enabled the work of the CTUs, has been funded by oil

In Punto Fijo, a coastal city in the North-West of Venezuela and home to its largest oil refineries, I visited a CTU which has now almost completed the construction of their new houses. The community, *Comunidad 12 de Octubre*, is now home to a group who have spent the last 15 years fighting for their rights to land and housing. In 1992 they enlisted the help of the local technical university to help them make plans for a new community on a vacant piece of land on the periphery of town. The results of that collaboration are just now being constructed on the land.

Members of *Comunidad 12 de Octubre* work during the weekend on finishing their new homes.

When the new government signed the decree which officially sanctioned the creation of the CTUs in 2002, Yuraima 'Tiki' Fingal and her association of *Los Sin Techo* 'those without roofs' were quick to become registered as the 35th CTU in Venezuela. The administration took special interest in the association and assisted them to get communal title over the land they had been occupying. The communal title grants all the members of the CTU permanent and secure land tenure, which cannot be bought or sold and remains the property of all members in perpetuity. The funding for the construction of the dwellings has been provided by the Ministry of Housing. The community manages the entire process and each family contributes a minimum

of 20 'community hours' a week, creating a form of sweat equity in the project. In the early stages this time is taken up with finishing off the buildings, doing tiling and painting. Once the buildings are complete the work will focus more on maintaining gardens as well as child care, book-keeping and other necessary tasks. Currently most families are far exceeding the minimum required hours in an effort to finish their homes and move in.

Reinaldo and his daughter take a break from painting and tiling. Reinaldo works in the refinery and joined the CTU 'for the energy of the people'

On first seeing the buildings I was stuck by their unusual 'space-age' form, lack of sun shading and the fact that every house was identical, with no apparent consideration of family size or solar orientation. I questioned the residents about why they had opted for this design. Their justifications were interesting. They saw themselves as doing something very new and exciting, the pioneers of a new form of socialism. As such they did not want traditional workers' homes, rather they wanted something which would symbolise their attitude to community and equality. This also went some way to explaining the homogeneity of design, as the residents were adamant that everyone in the community was equal and thus should get the same house, if the family got too large they could simply get a second house. In this way the design which at first glance had seemed highly inappropriate was now beginning to make sense. For the community of *12 de octubre* the symbolism of their houses was at least as important as their basic functionality.
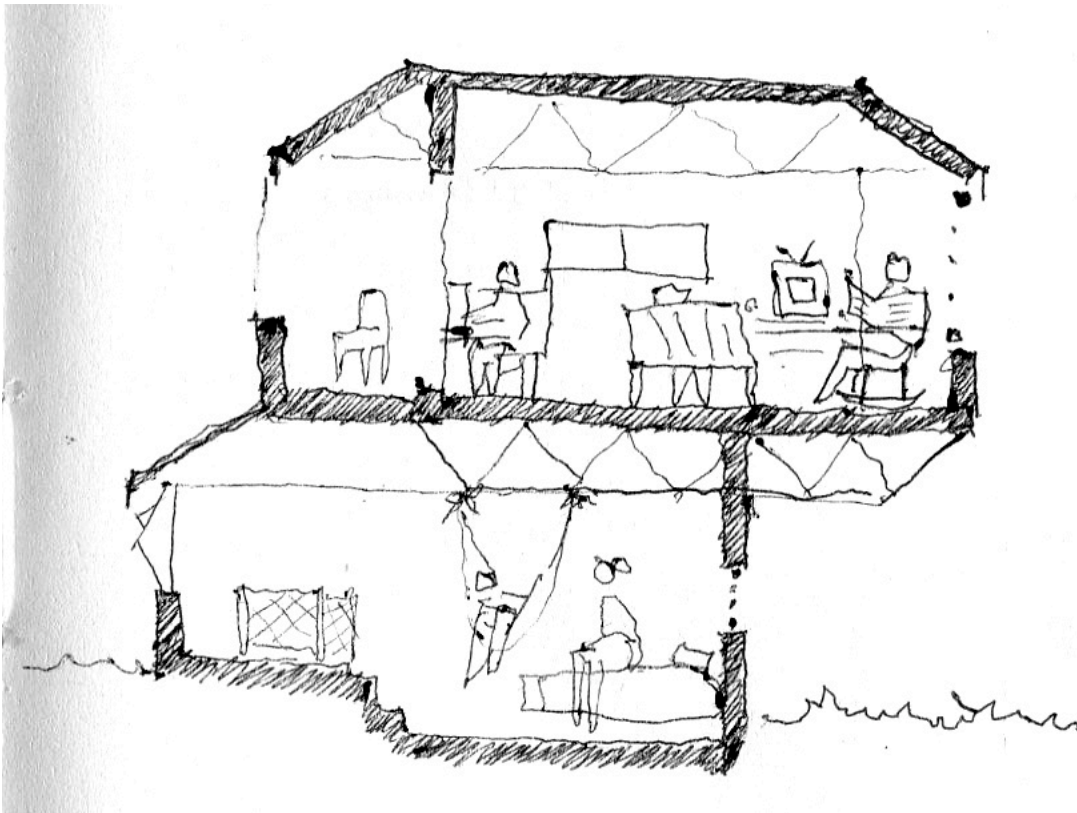
Sketch of 'Tiki' Fingal's new home. She lives upstairs with her husband and 3 children while her elderly mother lives in the ground floor.

The houses are arranged in small clusters, referred to as *manzanas* (apples). Each *manzana* consists of four '*mico-manzanas*'. Within each *micro-manzana* the neighbours share a central garden and playground

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about the work currently being done in Venezuela's informal settlements through the CTUs is the people's perceptions of what is possible. For the first time residents of the *barrios* are being supported to decide their own future. Emboldened by the political change occurring throughout Venezuela, people are not limiting themselves to making incremental improvements. They are questioning the very basis of the way of their society operates and houses itself. Through this questioning the CTUs are beginning to imagine and work towards entirely new models of community living. Although these new models are highly utopian it is difficult to dismiss them given that the major force driving them is coming from the people themselves.

Given the scale of the problems and history of manipulation and oppression the work will take a long time and already many are frustrated with the slowness of change. However if projects such as *Hoyo de la Puerta* and *Comunidad 12 de Octubre* are successful and people's determination can remain, Venezuela is a place where wonderful things could happen.

Children fly kites from the rooftops of a house in the *barrio* of Antímano

↓ TIJUANA ↓ SAN DIEGO 81

CHAPTER 2
TIJUANA/SAN
DIEGO

1* THE DIVIDED CITY OF TIJUANA/SAN DIEGO

2* TIJUANA AND THE BORDER CROSSERS.

3* SAN DIEGO AND THE BORDER NEIGHBOURHOOD.

↓ TIJUANA ↓ SAN DIEGO

1* The Divided City of Tijuana/San Diego.

In few places is the inequality of global wealth distribution made so clear as it is when standing on the border of the divided territory of Tijuana and San Diego. To the North, hugging the coast and separated from the border by large swathes of desert and military compounds lies San Diego, a city which describes itself as 'America's Finest'. To the South, built hard against the 4 metre high border wall is Tijuana, a city once famously described as 'The Armpit of Mexico'.

The seeming duality of the two cities is a misapprehension. Tijuana contains beachside suburbs of extreme wealth and luxury while San Diego is home to an enormous population of homeless people, reportedly bused down from the cold North during the Reagan years, who live in the shadows of high-rise condominiums which have occupancy rates of less than 50%.

The overarching narrative of the two cities, however, is of co-dependence and unequal exchange. Of the slow extraction of cheap products, cheap drugs, cheap sex, and especially cheap labour from Mexico in exchange for cash and a variety of hand-me-down products from the United States.

Snack vendor on *las playas* inspects the border wall

2* Tijuana and the Border Crossers.

Maquiladoras in Tijuana

César Favela, from Estudio Teddy Cruz, took me on a tour of Tijuana. From the ramp leading over the border wall we could see the now-closed Tijuana hostel where people would stay while waiting to use the tunnel which went from the house across the road through a concealed hole in the fireplace, along a tiny tunnel under the border wall to a stormwater grate in the San Diego parking lot over which an open bottom van would park to collect the new immigrants and take them deeper into the US.

We pass over the cars streaming freely into Mexico and waiting bumper-to-bumper to get into the USA. There are no passport checks or metal detectors entering Mexico. Just a metal turnstile which lets people in but not out. Passing back over requires passports, visas, security checks and waiting in line for typically 2-3 hours.

We walk to Fernando's house. Fernando grew up in San Diego after he and his parents crossed over illegally when he was five years old. Two years ago, during his 3rd year of Architecture School, Fernando and his class went on a field trip to Rome. Fernando bought a ticket from Guadalajara via Chicago. During the Chicago stopover Fernando was pulled aside, questioned and officially deported. He is now living in Tijuana, working odd jobs and trying to get back to his family and finish his degree.

Fernando is driving us to visit a very different kind of border crosser, the *maquiladoras*, multinational companies such as Sony, Hyundai and Walmart, which have moved their manual assembly plants across the border to take advantage of

the low wages and lax labor laws in Mexico. Since the signing of NAFTA[7] the *maquiladoras* have swarmed to the border cities of Mexico's North, an area which provides them with their ideal habitat: a combination of of drastically lower running costs and close proximity to their customers in the USA.

The *maquiladoras* have created a radically altered landscape: dust, barbed wire, huge warehouses and assembly plants on flattened land, incredibly small housing units of incredible number line the ridges. Signs in spanish advertise rooms to rent, provided you have no children. The signs on the buses translate to: *PERIPHERY - WORKPLACE.*

We drive past the dense, lively neighbourhoods, the big freeways, the mega stores and *maquiladoras*, the squatted settlements climbing up the dusty hillsides. Smoke billows from a tree on fire by the road in a dense neighbourhood. We turn off the highway and drive up the mountain to the informal settlements, home to much of the *maquiladora* workforce.

Retaining walls of old tyres filled with dirt, timber garage doors used as walls, reinforcing cages reaching out of concrete frames, ready to extend (I recall that the same strategy also common in the Philippines and Thailand and wonder if it is a globalised idea or a case of convergent evolution). Estudio Teddy Cruz (ETC) has

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[7] North American Free Trade Agreement

studied the processes of invading, settling and acquiring land in Tijuana, paying particular attention to the ways in which used materials (ranging from tyres, pallets and garage doors to entire houses) are trucked from the US to Mexico for reuse.

Used tyres and garage doors from the USA are common construction materials in Tijuana's informal settlements

The road is falling apart from erosion. We stop at the fringes of the settlements and walk: small gardens between parked cars, a dirt football field with chairs for goalposts and a carpet for the goalkeeper, sofas under the shade of eucalypt trees. Electricity lines are added to, bendy PVC shoots out from pumped header tanks. Rainwater tanks are also common, but unconnected.

A garden in the street.

We chat to a lady who owns a small store: not much business up there at the top of the hill. She tells us that most people in the area work for the *maquiladoras*, the international factories which have moved across the border to take advantage of the low wages and lax labor laws in Mexico. The relationship between the *maquiladoras* and the communities who work for them is the grounds for ETC's project 'Manufactured Sites'.

After a good lunch of *baja california* fish tacos we cruise down Avenida De La Revolucion, the major tourist strip dotted with bars, discount pharmacies, donkeys painted as zebras to pose with etc. Around the corner we enter Tijuana's red light district: girls young and old stand out the front of short-stay hotels in miniskirts and stilettos. Pig-tails, plaid skirts and white socks were particularly common. They work from the hotels and are protected by pimps or 'owned' by the police. It is not hard to see why many Mexicans are not proud of Tijuana. Mexican actor Gael Garcia Bernal summed up this attitude by describing the city as 'the armpit of Mexico', an attitude shared by many Mexicans further south.

Avenida de la Revolucíon

We head to *Las Playas de Tijuana*. The border wall rolls with the mountains and into the sea. At 'Friendship Park' (near impossible to find from the US side due to the large armed forces bases all along the coast) César tells me about families of illegal immigrants meeting them at the fence, ribbons and sticky tape remain on the fence reminders of old messages and mementos.

The fence at Friendship Park.

The tide is out so the water does not reach the end of the barrier, made of old railway track driven into the sand. The fence is largely symbolic due to the seamless surveillance camera network and heavy border guard presence. It would be impossible to cross even with no fence at all. Border guards in jeeps are speeding up and down the beach on the San Diego side, tyre tracks on one side, footprints on the other.

We head to see *La Mona* in an older *colonia* near the Tijuana airport. We follow Fernando's directions and ask locals as we get closer, we drive along the highway then through a well kept and lively neighbourhood, down an eroded road to a canyon were the houses become looser and more ramshackle, looming above one such house we see the magnificent concrete head of *La Mona*, the doll.

La Mona, or Tijuana III Millenium, is a 17 metre high sculpture built by Armando Muñoz Garcia in his backyard in Colonia Aeropuerto as a tribute to his city on the occasion of Tijuana's first centenary in 1989, and as a tribute to the strength and beauty of Tijuana's women.

We are taking pictures when Armando Garcia Muñoz, the 'common hero' himself steps out of his house to greet us, eating take-away Chinese food. He invites us to wander through his basement to get to know *La Mona* up close.

La Mona.

She towers above us. She has strong legs and full breasts but the protruding ribs of one who has seen tough times. Garcia Muñoz explains to us that if La Mona is Mexico, then her raised little finger is Tijuana. Garcia Muñoz, a builder by trade with no art training beyond elementary school, developed his own system of chicken-wire reinforced concrete to create La Mona. Inside she is mostly hollow, doubling as an extension of Garcia Muñoz's house, containing a small apartment in her chest, complete with bathroom and kitchenette.

He is building another, larger torso down the coast. He invites us to the opening. This one will house his studio as well as a restaurant. He is getting some fame now with media from both sides of the border courting him.

Waiting in the car for 2 hours to cross back into San Diego. *Churros*, sawn-off shopping trolley drink carts, mothers and blind men, legless people on rollers, sellers of rugs, ceramic tortoises, juggling boys. The police tax these people I am

told. Little girls and big trucks, negotiating a relationship. The electronic billboard fixed to the border wall details the success of the Border Guards, apprehending 1200 wanted felons in San Ysidro, alternating between English and Spanish. *KEEP AMERICA SAFE*, safe from what exactly? The border guard is surly, questioning my friend's motives for being in San Diego and chiding him for not registering his car in California. I have to stand in front of the truck while the guard searches at my feet.


↓ TO TIJUANA   ↑ TO SAN DIEGO
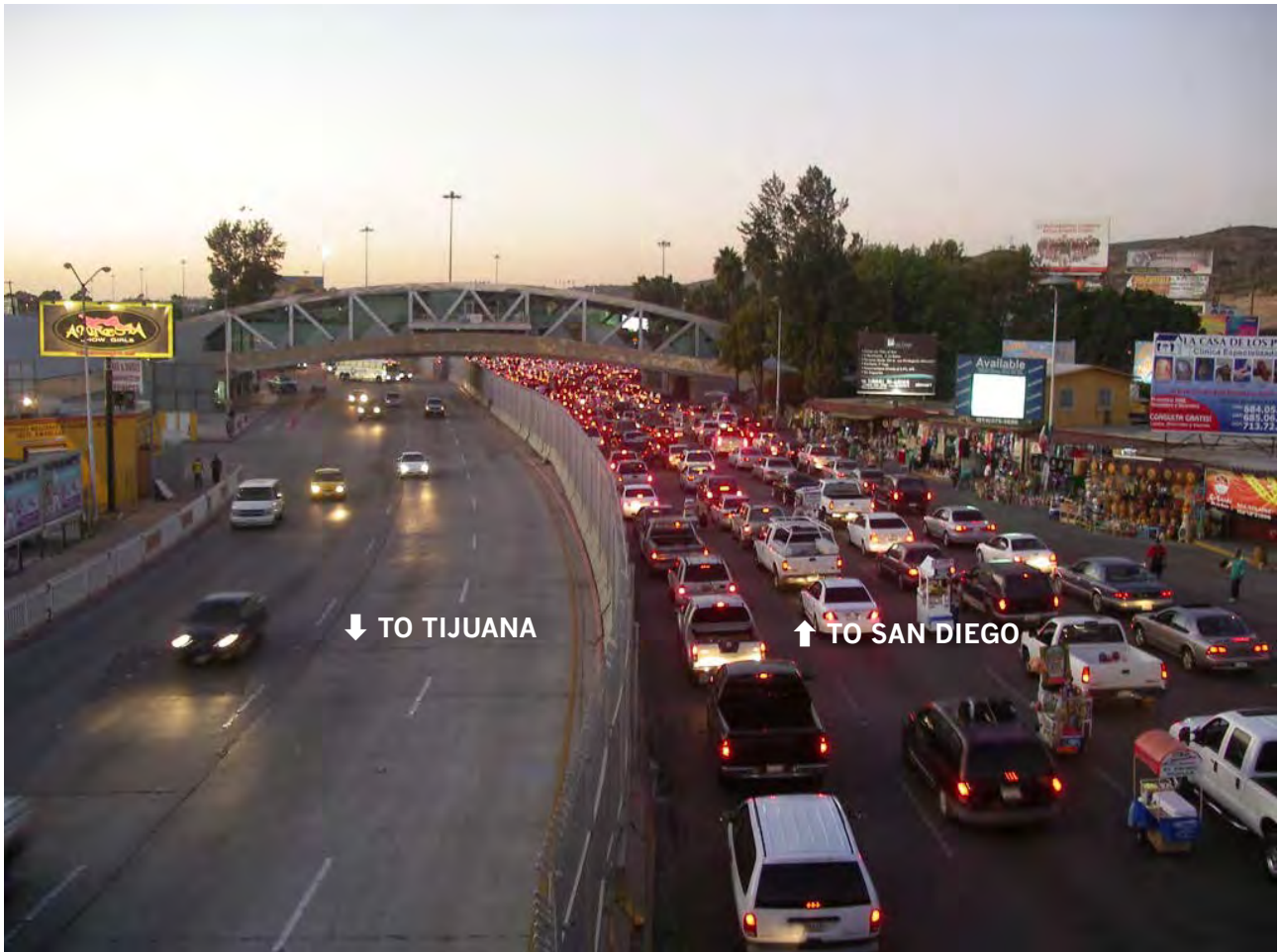
TIJUANA PROJECTS:

1.Estudio Teddy Cruz. *Manufactured Sites.*

The role of architecture in exploring and exposing the politics of space is key to the work of Estudio Teddy Cruz, a research-based architecture studio located in the borderland of San Diego/Tijuana. From this site of conflict he instigates projects which reveal, critique and suggest alternatives to discriminatory spatial practices ranging from uneven global border flows to biased neighbourhood zoning laws.

Through these projects new building typologies are invented, new financial and political relationships are created, new tactics for subverting existing regulations and institutions are explored. Where others see problems Cruz finds opportunities. How can the exploitative labour practices of global corporations in post NAFTA Tijuana be used to support housing for the workers they rely on? How can the massive influx of Latin Americans into San Diego be harnessed to reinvent stultifying Anglo-American suburbia?

In Tijuana, Cruz has chosen to engage with the relationship between the *maquiladoras* and their workers in a highly innovative way, proposing a system whereby the very processes which exploit the workers can be reconfigured to provide them with housing.

Among the *maquiladoras*, Cruz identified Mecalux, a manufacturer of modular industrial shelving. Using their components, Cruz has designed a structural system which he proposes could be donated by the *maquiladora* to its workers, ensuring structural soundness while leaving all decision of spatial configuration and cladding to the occupant/builder.
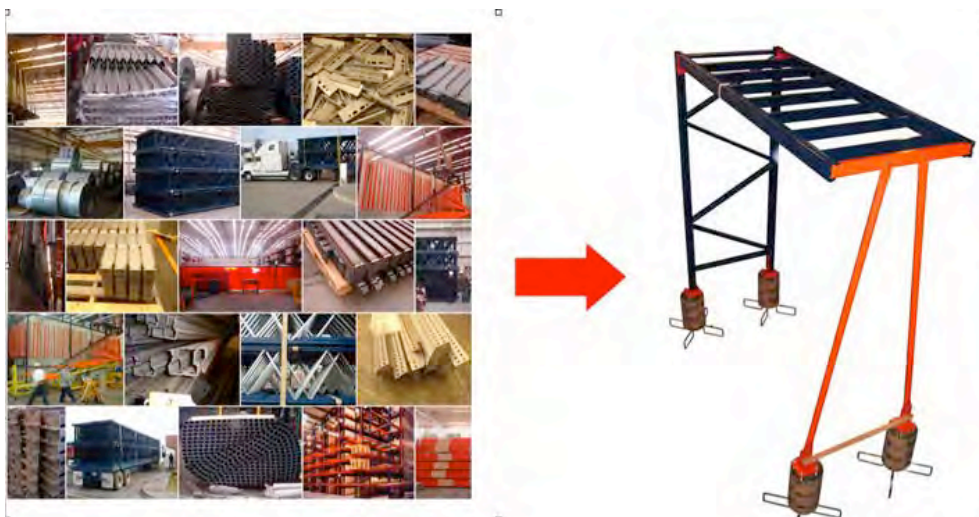
The Mecalux system, reconfigured to become a standardised 'piece', which Cruz refers to as a 'manufactured site'. ie. the site for an improvised dwelling to be built around. Image courtesy of ETC

Diagram by ETC explaining the process by which the Mecalux frames can be delivered and appropriated by the people. Image courtesy of ETC
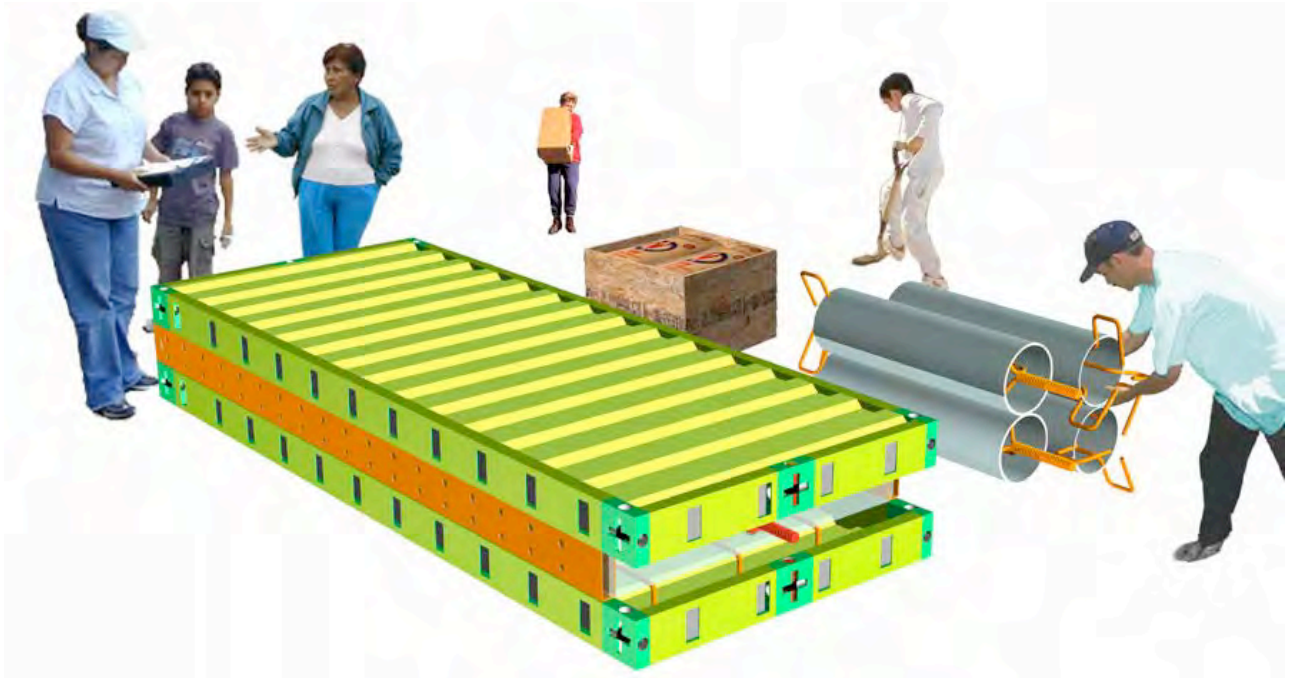
The system arrives on site

The system is used as a base for further construction

An impression of how the finished product could look.

Perhaps Cruz's greatest strength is his highly tactical approach. The project exposes and explores the enormous exploitation at play in the *maquiladora* industry while simultaneously providing the *maquiladoras* with a readily achievable way to begin to redeem themselves. He never simply presents a critique; it is always folded into a detailed and realistic solution.

In such a way the project is ambiguous. It can function equally as a 'paper architecture' critique, pointing the finger at the *maquiladoras* and their wicked ways, and as a genuine blueprint for change, a solution for both the *maquiladoras* and their workers.

While working with ETC I explored the potential for making the project real, mapping out a potential process for taking the project from the gallery to the community.
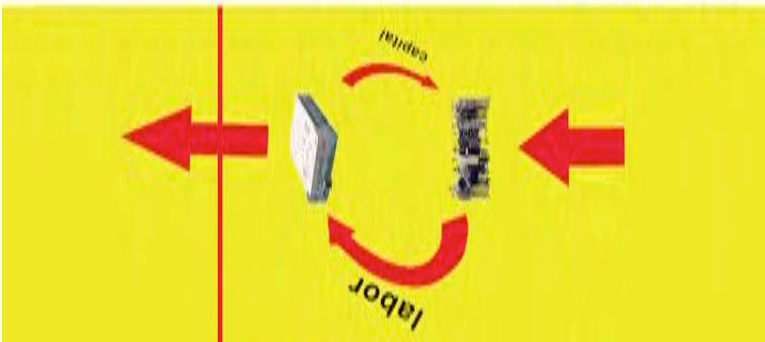
Diagram exploring the relationships which could result in the implementation of the manufactured sites project. On the left is the current paradigm of labour extracted from Mexico being converted to capital which crosses back over the border. On the right the diagram shows how a new paradigm could emerge, one which uses the exhibition to simulate market forces of good 'P.R' (ie. the public seeing the maquiladora look after its workers and the increased business which results) to encourage other maquiladoras to follow suit. Simultaneously the exhibition creates political forces, amongst the networks of workers and labour organisations, to push for increased regulatory incentives from the government in Tijuana.
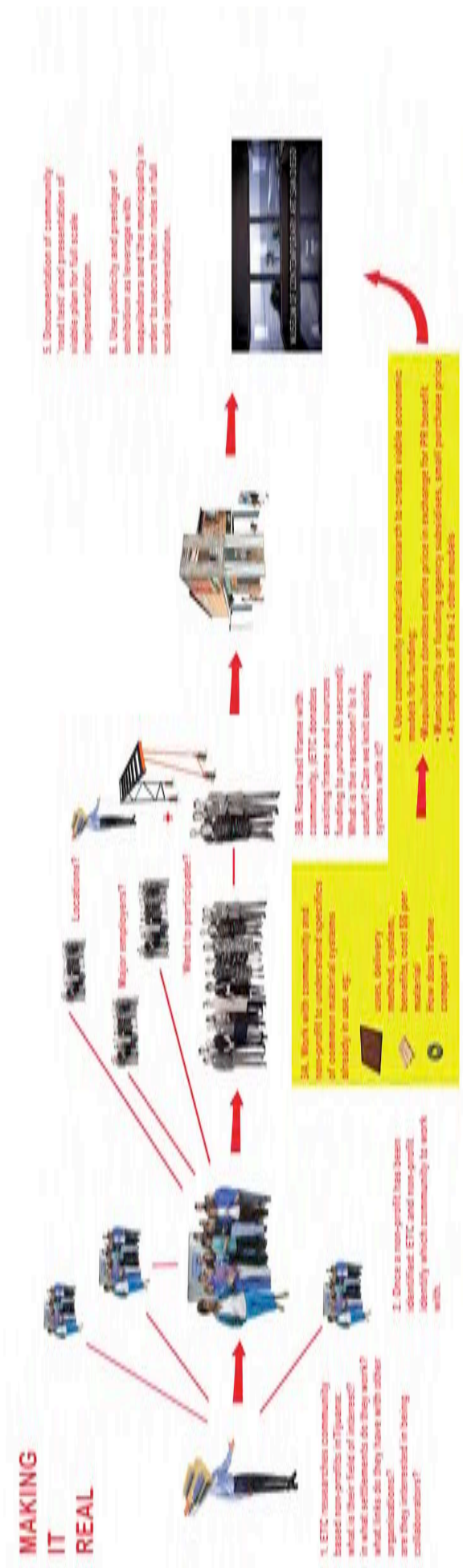
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Diagram exploring the steps which could result in the implementation of the manufactured sites project with a real community on a real site.

2.Estudio GERMEN. Micro·urbanism in Tijuana

Giacomo Gastagnola is a Peruvian architect/artist who came up to San Diego to work with ETC. He eventually settled in Tijuana, and launched his own studio, GERMEN. Estudio GERMEN works in a similar way to ETC, creating projects which highlight and respond to spatial injustice.

After returning from the USA, Giacomo explored the informal in his native city of Lima, photographing and cataloguing the street vendors, transport networks and informal housing. What emerged was an understanding of how these informal processes develop and grow, incrementally. For example: tracing how an attendant (only a person) can become a vendor (person carrying goods) can become a cart (person with vehicle) can become a stall (person inside vehicle) can become a small store (vehicle becomes immobile) and so on, there is a development in scale but also a formation of networks of peers and relationships between scales.

This led to an interest in DNA, geological processes, the philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari and the internet as models of self organising systems, ones in which the part is never separate from the whole and where hierarchic control structures and pre·planning are impossible.

This in turn led to the development of his own design studio GERMEN (germ in Spanish) and his practice of micro·urbanism in Tijuana such as the portable bench for those waiting for family on the Mexican side of the border.

The waiting bench...   ..and those who wait

The micro·park is another example of this approach. Originating in a convergence of lack of public space, lack of green space and abundant waste: a tree, planted in a recycled tractor tire, becomes a unit to be arranged and painted through a process of community involvement. The process included handing out flyers to communities and enrolment forms for those who wanted to get involved. He tells of how the dream hit political reality as one community wanted a massive project of soccer fields and water infrastructure and another wanted their political party to be credited for the project while excluding access to a rival section of the community. Such is the complex nature of working with communities.

3* San Diego & the border neighbourhood.

I took the Blue Line trolley from San Diego Old Town to Beyer Blvd in San Ysidro, one stop before the international border. I was going to meet with Casa Familiar, South San Diego's most important community-based organisation and one of Estudio Teddy Cruz's longest standing collaborators.
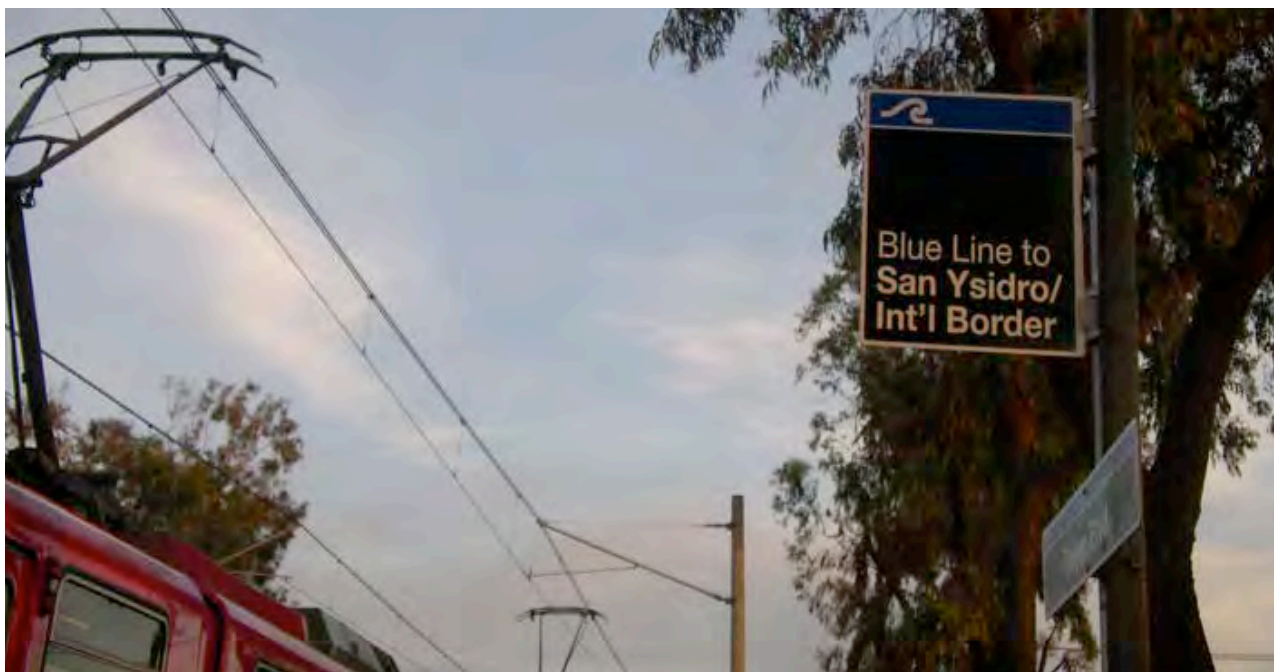
Casa Familiar officially began in 1973, serving the monolingual Spanish-speaking residents of San Ysidro. It has since expanded to serve all of South San Diego's residents, regardless of their background, although the demographics of the area guarantee that their clientele is overwhelmingly Hispanic. Casa Familiar provides a wide variety of services to the community, from assistance with immigration, tax preparation, financial and family counselling to computer literacy, aerobics-for-seniors and Aztec dance classes.

Tonight Casa Familiar is holding a Thanksgiving dinner for the community of San Ysidro. Andrea Skorepa, Casa Familiar's heart and CEO, tells me that the Anglo tradition, with its rather dubious mythology of native-pilgrim friendship, is a kind of 'exotic cultural experience' for the mainly Hispanic attendees. It is an impressive sight, over 1200 people will be fed tonight, in over 4 sittings, served by an army of volunteers.

The volunteer waiters include a large presence from the local border patrol. I wonder how the community here feels about close proximity of the force whose illuminated sign at the Mexican border 2km away boasts of 1200 'wanted felons' apprehended in their neighbourhood, coincidentally the same number of people they are helping to feed tonight.

Andrea Skorepa welcomes the guests at one of the sittings for Thanksgiving dinner

The volunteers serving food include members of the local border patrol

Tonight is also a celebration of the centenary of San Ysidro's founding in 1908. Today San Ysidro is probably known best for being home to the world's busiest border crossing.

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Andrea welcomes me heartily and when I mention my association with ETC she responds 'Teddy Cruz! We made Teddy Cruz!'. We discuss Casa Familiar's housing program in the community hall kitchen while volunteers scoop cranberry sauce into tiny plastic cups.

She uses the story of the of the Casitas de las Florecitas, a complex of 8 affordable houses for first time home owners, to illustrate the discriminatory anti-logic of many official housing regulations. A common feature in many Latin American homes are the *pillas,* a kind of ground level sink, built next to the back door for use in mopping, washing feet after the beach and party ice-buckets. The San Diego City Council (SDCC) had not seen such an item before and labelled it illegal. After some negotiation the SDCC agreed to recognise the legitimacy of such an item (now referred to as a 'janitorial sink') but still refused to allow its construction, flagging it as a potential problem of mixing sewage and storm water. Accordingly the architect, David Flores, designed a movable rain cover for the sink. The SDCC also rejected this, as it could be left open during rain. Finally Flores designed a fixed awning for the entire area, which met with the SDCC's approval despite Flores' own contention that rain rarely falls straight down. 'As we get more civilised, sometimes we don't get any smarter' Andrea concludes.

Later I continue the discussions with Flores himself. Flores became involved with Casa Familiar in 2001 by being awarded the Rose Fellowship to fund his work with the organisation. He outlines the numerous mismatches between the planning regulations, the structures of grants and subsidies for affordable housing and the reality of people on the ground.

Such issues have also been central to ETC's collaboration with Casa Familiar. ETC has also been working with the organisation since 2001 and the results are two highly innovative projects currently in the pipeline: *Living Rooms at the Border* and *Abuelitos*.

SAN DIEGO PROJECTS:

1.Estudio Teddy Cruz. *Living Rooms at the Border*, *Abuelitos* and *McMansion Retrofitted*.

San Ysidro, the neighbourhood at the world's busiest border crossing and home to many of the Latin American immigrants who have settled in San Diego, is the site for *Living Rooms at the Border* and *Abuelitos,* two affordable housing collaborations with Casa Familiar, a local, non-profit social service provider.

The typically suburban environment of San Ysidro has been progressively changing through its appropriation by Latino immigrants. Unofficial house extensions have densified the area and brought life to back alleys. Informal garage industries and businesses have created livelier, mixed use streets. Drawing from these phenomena Cruz and Casa Familiar have created a new kind of housing project, one which interweaves multiple social and economic programs while opening up specifically ambiguous spaces for people to appropriate and make their own. In doing so the project challenges those planning regulations which are antithetical to the creation of affordable housing and functional, living neighbourhoods. The process began with a solid base of community consultation.

Community Consultation as Critical Exchange:

For Teddy Cruz community consultation should never be a one-way flow. As firmly as he rejects the outdated model of architects designing 'what's best' for voiceless communities, he also rejects the model where architects replicate uncritically the first ideas which pop into participants heads.

Cruz notes that people at first will often get trapped by the politics of style, opting for either symbols of progress (imitations of Starbucks and Walmart) or symbols of identity (colonial ranches or Aztec temples).

He advocates a process of critical exchange, where nothing is predetermined from either side and ideas emerge from an dialogue in which commonly held notions of density and identity are challenged.

In this way a new area for design emerges: the design of workshops, games and questions which are targeted at opening up discussion and eliciting new realisations from the participants.

The Density Game/ Selfish Houses:

Cruz gives the example of a workshop he held at one of Casa Familiar's *San Ysidro Sin Limites* (San Ysidro Unlimited) forums. The focus for the activity was on what level of density would be acceptable. A common perception is that the higher density, the more unpleasant. A perception ETC seeks to challenge. ETC had

prepared a game board representing a suburban block with its typical lot sizes and wooden blocks representing housing units, as well as wooden trees and cars. When asked to set up the blocks in a way they would like to see their future community, no one moved, until an elderly lady stepped up and began placing a single block in each lot, replicating the existing condition. Teddy then asked what she thought it would be like if they placed two of the houses against each other creating a larger space on the other side which could be shared between neighbours, perhaps forming a link between the street an the alley. The lady liked this kind of talk and, with others now joining her, the block was soon full of wood. 'I can't believe it, these houses are selfish!' she told Teddy in Spanish, referring to the lot hogging status quo. The new approach of higher density, mixed use, activated streets, spaces shared between neighbours reminded her of the vibrant living environment of her youth in Guadalajara.

The density game at *San Ysidro Sin Limites.* Image courtesy of ETC.

Stealth Architecture and the Tactics of Sharing.

Two designs emerged from the *San Ysidro Sin Limites* forums, *Living Rooms at the Border* and *Abuelitos*. The first, *Living Rooms at the Border*, takes the old church and grounds purchased by Casa Familiar as its site. The proposal is a rich interweaving of affordable housing and complementary social services. The church will be converted to a community centre with offices for Casa Familiar in its new attic. To the sides and back of the church will be built new affordable housing.
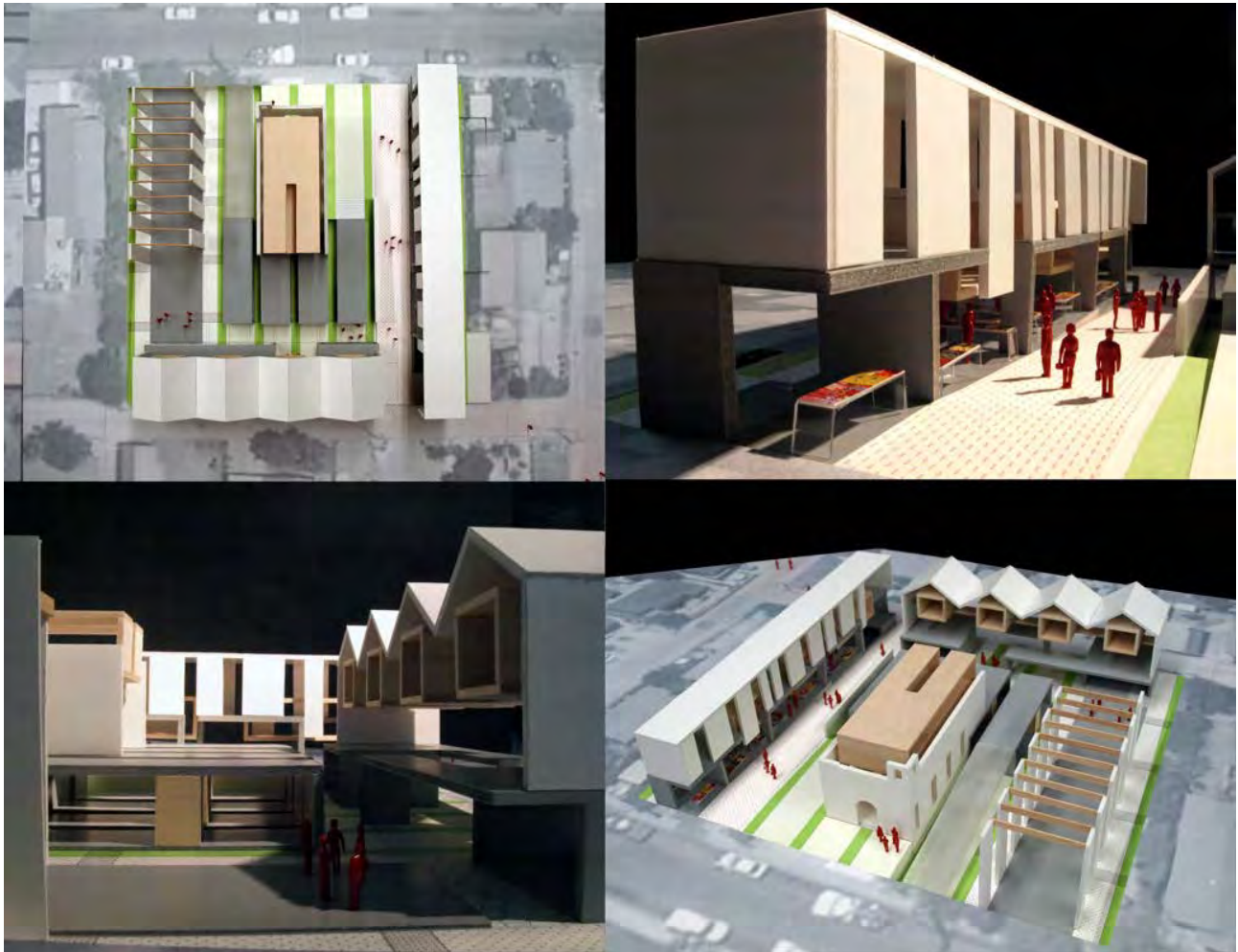
Living Rooms at the Border. Images courtesy of ETC

As the planning codes only allow for 3 units to be built on the site some unusual tactics had to be employed in order to obtain Casa Familiar's desired level of density. The housing is presented as a series of 3 'barns', large scale structures which can be considered 'units' by the code but which can be broken up into 4 units each. This is achieved by devices such as sharing kitchens between families, a tactic gleaned from existing patterns of use in the neighbourhood.

Through such stealth architecture 12 units can built be where only 3 are permitted. This is not density for its own sake, Cruz and Casa Familiar share a view that density must be re-imagined, not as units per acre but as levels of socio-economic exchange per acre. As such the proposals take seriously the social and economic infrastructure which are necessary to support such levels of density. In *Abuelitos*

housing for seniors is specifically designed to incorporate child care, kindergarten and day care functions for the community, encouraging a situation where seniors become a resource rather than a burden. In *Living Rooms at the Border* the housing is situated in a highly articulated overlapping of community services, social space and space for micro enterprises.

Abuelitos. Image courtesy of ETC

Specific Ambiguity/ Learning from Tijuana:

Cruz has long been intrigued by the practice of certain Tijuana developers who uproot outmoded bungalows from southern california and truck them into Tijuana where they are set up on steel stilts, creating an open ground storey. Which over time is filled in and utilised for a variety of functions: garage, workshop, restaurant or store.

Stemming from this model is the unique approach to open space taken in *Living Rooms at the Border.* On the ground level the structural concrete walls which support the housing units above form a row of semi-enclosed spaces. These seemingly empty spaces are in fact highly articulated and the result of close observation of how spaces are appropriated and added-to in the neighbourhood. The spaces, while unprogrammed, are located along the central path and are packed with services: light, water, electricity, making them ripe for use as workshops, markets,

kindergartens and a myriad of other social and economic uses. For Cruz such detailed design of open space is crucial. Uses are not prescribed but anticipated resulting in a very specific ambiguity. They are spaces of opportunity which, by laying the fertile ground of spatial relationships and services, the residents can truly make their own. Cruz emphasises that designing space for a variety of activities is not an excuse to 'design nothing'. In fact such 'specifically ambiguous' spaces must be even more rigorously designed.

Specifically ambiguous space. the semi-enclosed spaces flanking the central walkway are designed to be re-appropriated and used as the residents see fit. Image courtesy of ETC

The affordable housing Catch 22:

It is hoped that both projects will act as catalysts to confront, expose and change the discriminatory planning regulations of San Diego. Already the San Diego City Council is trialling a system of Affordable Housing Overlay Zones, which offer exemptions for sites being developed for affordable housing.

Through their projects Cruz and Casa are combating the affordable housing financing system which, due to a *Catch 22* with planning regulations, are actually preventing any affordable housing from being developed in San Ysidro. The problem is that projects must have more than fifty units to be eligible for government loans and subsidies, however projects with more than fifty units are expressly forbidden by local planning regulations. Cruz and Casa propose a model where fifty individual households collectively receive the funds and then split them up into numerous projects, perhaps five smaller developments or even fifty backyard granny-flats, providing density and income distributed throughout the neighbourhood. These loans could be paid back at least partially through sweat equity, with the beneficiaries becoming labourers in the construction process or contributing hours to the community's social services.
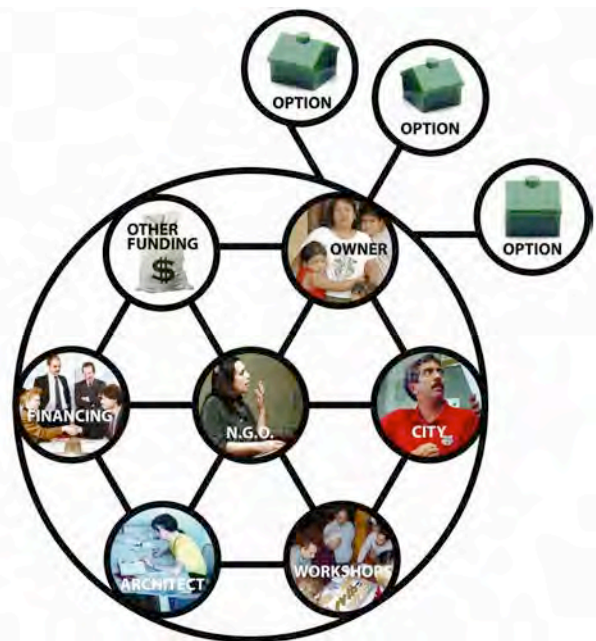

Diagram by ETC explaining their strategy for splitting up loans to enable affordable housing development to be driven by local residents themselves. Image courtesy of ETC

McMansion Retrofitted.

Cruz's projects have a polemic value uncommon in architecture. Another project, *McMansion Retrofitted*, critiques the new wave of highly wasteful and inward-looking suburban mega housing by projecting its future reappropriation by immigrants. Cruz conducted interviews with Latino immigrants, including his Guatemalan mother, inside various "model homes". The suggestions which emerged from these interviews became the basis for a series of proposals for how a single family home could be altered to house three families and a variety of rotating social and economic programs.

McMansion Retrofitted. Image courtesy of ETC

Estudio Teddy Cruz uses the design of architectural interventions as a way of commenting on much larger, systematic injustices ranging in scale from the neighbourhood to the nation state. Throughout all their work one finds an appreciation for the spontaneous way people make their own places, from the hillsides of Tijuana to the suburbs of San Diego. On both sides of the border their projects seek to encourage and enable people to shape their space in whatever way they see fit. In such a way their work exemplifies the practice of *learning from the Informal.*

CHAPTER 3.
NEW YORK CITY

1* INFORMAL NEW YORK

2* THE HESTER STREET COLLABORATIVE

3* THE CENTRE FOR URBAN PEDAGOGY

1* Informal New York. Designing the tools for change.

New York City with its rigid grid and formidable high rise development may seem an odd choice for a study on the informal city. Its inclusion in this study seeks to illustrate that the work of involving ordinary people in the way their city operates and how it could change is universally useful, not something that is somehow uniquely applicable to working with communities in informal settlements or third world cities.

In a context like New York it becomes even more important to develop ways of engaging people in the creation of their cities. This is because in New York, as in most 'formal' cities, the majority of people have, for a long time, had little or no involvement in the design and construction of places in which they live out their lives. The New York housing 'projects' are in some ways the antithesis of the informal settlement. While people settling a hillside in Caracas have to do everything for themselves, the people settling in the 'projects' cannot do anything, even if they want to, resulting in a profound disengagement from the physical and the spatial.

In such a context the methods of how to get people involved become critical. Hester Street Collaborative (HSC) and The Centre for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) are two groups of designers who, in pursuit of a greater involvement of ordinary people in the way their city is made, have shifted their work from the design of physical spaces to the design of 'ways to engage'.

Street corner in Alphabet City. Photo courtesy of Heidi Axelsen

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2* The Hester Street Collaborative.

Meeting at the Hester Street Collaborative, bringing together a great diversity of experts, officials and community leaders to discuss the *People make Parks* project.

The Hester Street Collaborative (HSC) is a small studio of designers who work to engage the multiple overlapping communities of New York City's Lower East Side in the creation of better public spaces.

People make parks: In collaboration with the Parks Department, HSC has spent the last few years developing a range of tools to assist people in getting involved in the way New York's parks are used, developed and maintained. Where the city has plans to improve a park, HSC has formed coalitions with local organisations to engage local citizens and park-users in what those improvements should be. Not having a single definable community to work with, HSC employs a multitude of different strategies and tools to inform people, get their ideas and get them involved.

While spending time with HSC, I assisted is the creation of 'How-to' guides for setting up a process of involving local people in the design of their local park. The guides are drawn mostly from the tools HSC has developed through their previous projects and are intended to equip small local organisations with the knowledge and tools required to initiate and run a public space project on their own. The tool-sets can be roughly divided into three categories: **Informational** (tools for education and understanding, giving background on a place or explaining the complex nature of a government funded parks project), **Input Gathering** (tools to encourage and collect people's ideas for the park, how it works, how it could work better, as well as feedback on other ideas) and **Hands-on** (tools to get directly involved in the making and ongoing care of the park)

These 'How-to' guides can be found on the following pages together with selected examples. The guides are intended to become freely available, to be used by community organisations when they are seeking to initiate a consultative process of their own. They contain information outlining how and why particular tools may be useful for particular tasks.

Informational Tools

Tool Types

DEMYSTIFYING THE PROCESS

Unpacking and explaining the complex processes involved in park design and construction.

HOW-TO GUIDES

Step-by-step guides for getting involved at each stage of the park making process.

SHARING AND EXCHANGE

Create platforms for exchanging stories, lessons, strategies and inspirations.

Examples

→ roadmap the capital process
→ timelines for a typical capital project
→ mapping the costs
→ opportunities for community involvement.
→ who to contact
→ case studies

→ how to advocate for funding
→ how to plan events, from collecting input on It's My Park! Day to holding a community design meeting
→ how to report back to Parks on the input you've gathered
→how to involve the people you gathered the input from in the park for the long term

→ People Make Parks interactive website that allows for user-generated content
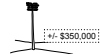
What is a Capital Project?

A capital project costs more than $35,000 and is durable for at least 5 years

A capital project is an improvement in a park that costs more than $35,000 and is expected to endure at least five years of use before requiring another renovation. The New York City Department of Parks & Recreation's Capital Projects Division is responsible for the design and construction of new parks and the renovation and renewal of the city's existing 29,000 acres of parkland. In addition to parks and playgrounds, this encompasses bike paths, sea walls, boardwalks, beaches, swimming pools, basketball courts, baseball fields, recreation centers, and natural areas. The Capital Division is housed at the Olmsted Center in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Queens.

Your elected officials provide funding for capital projects in parks. Every year, the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) seeks funding for its capital budget from the City Council, the Borough Presidents, and the Mayor. These funds are usually earmarked for specific projects. You can help ensure that New York City's parks continue to be expanded and enhanced by telling your elected officials that public green spaces are a priority for you and your community. Capital projects can also be funded by grants from the state and federal governments.

+/- $350,000

Capital Projects range in scale and cost

Capital projects range from modest renovations to the expansion of huge regional parks, which costs many millions of dollars. For example, restoring and reopening the High Bridge, between the Bronx and Manhattan, will cost $65 million or more. While capital costs vary dramatically according to the scale of the project, community members following the construction or renovation of parks of all sizes are often surprised and even taken aback by the expense. It can be startling to learn that it can cost around $350,000 to install one pole of sports lighting for a field with all of its underground equipment and wiring, or up to $2 million to build a soccer field.

~$65,000,000

Invisible Costs

At least (1/3) of a capital budget is spent on invisible costs.

There's a lot more that goes into a capital project than the workers you see during construction and the new park features you enjoy once the park reopens. Understanding all of the INVISIBLE costs that go into renovating a park helps illuminate how costs add up.

> Design

One invisible cost is DESIGN. About 10% of the budget for a capital project is spent on design. Designers analyze the park site and consult with park users at the scope meeting to determine what kinds of facilities are suited to the landscape and needed by the community. They then create conceptual plans that lay out the equipment, buildings, and plantings to be included in the new park, and they turn those plans into blueprints, which are construction documents that tell the contractor what to build.

There are two primary types of designers who work on capital projects in parks, ARCHITECTS and LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS. Architects design buildings and landscape architects design outdoor spaces, but in the DPR Capital Division, architects and landscape architects work together to create unified designs where buildings, structures like playgrounds and benches, and plantings all add up to a beautiful, functional park. Parks has architects and landscape architects on staff, and sometimes outside designers are brought in as consultants. One benefit of hiring consultants is that they are often able to complete the design faster, but they also cost more than using in-house designers.

> Construction Management

Other invisible costs include CONSTRUCTION management and contingencies, for which approximately 20% of the budget for a capital project is allocated. Construction projects are overseen by professional engineers who coordinate the many ingredients (materials, labor, permits) that go into building or renovating a park. Because urban construction often involves unexpected challenges, money must also be set aside for construction contingencies so that a surprise stumbling block, like unknown site conditions, changes to the design during construction, or an increase in the cost of materials, does not cause the entire project to be delayed.

> Layers of History and Infrastructure

Often, improvements must be made to the park that are necessary, but are not as perceptible as a new playground or comfort station. Especially in a dense urban setting where public spaces are built on top of layers of history and infrastructure (like the remnants of old buildings, water pipes and electrical cables, and subway lines), a lot of money can be spent simply making the park safe and stable. Jobs like leveling the ground, building retaining walls, creating drainage to prevent flooding, and cleaning up contaminated brownfields are expensive and may be invisible even to the observant park user, but they are just as important as adding the kinds of new facilities that are more enthusiastically enjoyed.

So if your park receives $1 million for a capital improvement, you should not expect to see $1 million worth of new park features and equipment; at least one third of the capital allocation will be spent on invisible costs.

Materials and Labor

Both materials and labor are very expensive. The remaining 2/3 of the budget will be spent on purchasing materials and equipment and paying workers to build the new park.

Since capital projects are required to last for five years, and ideally will last much longer, DPR invests in high-quality, durable park improvements. DPR must also demand the most rugged equipment because it has to withstand being used by thousands of people. It can also cost more to purchase equipment covered by warranty, but a warranty is necessary to ensure that the manufacturer and not the taxpayer pays if the equipment breaks. While this investment in durability is more expensive up front, it saves money on maintenance costs later. Labor costs also add up because DPR requires contractors to pay prevailing union wages to workers, which are higher than the wages paid for private construction jobs, and to offer apprenticeship programs and work with minority- and women-owned business. These requirements drive up costs, but they provide job opportunities and help stimulate the economy.

Capital Projects are an investment in our city's future

Capital projects in parks are an essential investment in maintaining, expanding, and improving our city's public green spaces. Understanding the expenses associated with each step of a capital project, from design to groundbreaking to ribbon cutting, helps park users develop realistic expectations for what a capital allocation for their park can accomplish.

PARTNERSHIPS for PARKS   City Parks Foundation

This document was created by Partnerships for Parks and Hester Street Collaborative as part of the **People Make Parks** project, a joint effort to involve communities in the design of their parks.

hester street collaborative

An example of an informational tool outlining the process of 'how to get something done' in the parks and public spaces of New York.

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hester street collaborative

NEIGHBORHOOD WISH LANTERNS

Pick a place!

Your Park Your Playground Your School Your Street

Think about the places in your neighborhood you go to often. They can be inside or outside!
Pick one that you think should look or feel different.

Where is your place?

Put a sticker on the big map of New York City next to your neighborhood, and write what place you picked next to it.

Make a wish for your place!

Should there be more places to sit down? Should it be brighter? Should there be more plants and trees? Should it be more quiet? Should there be more places to play? Should it be more colorful?

How would you change your place to make it better or more fun to be in?
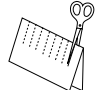
Draw or Write your Wish

Use the back of this paper, or use a second sheet to draw and write your wish. Make sure to write the place your wish is for! Try using different color markers or crayons to decorate and fill your paper.

Now you're ready to Make your Lantern!
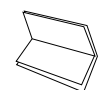
1. Fold your paper in half. Try layering two different colored sheets!

2. Make cuts at the fold, along the dotted lines

3. Unfold the paper and curl it into a cylinder. Attach the two short ends together with staples.

4. You can add strips of paper to decorate your lantern or create a handle to hang with at the top!

Draw or write your wishes here!

1: fold along solid line

2: cut along dotted lines

A 'how-to' guide for one of the 'input gathering' tools, the reverse side of the guide can become the lantern itself!

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Input Gathering Tools

KEY:

MEMORY:
collects oral history, stories and emotional context of park

EDUCATION:
tool gives participants info on history, context, etc.

OPINION:
evaluation on proposals and possible precedents

AGE RANGE:
green = intended age range of participants.

ANALYSIS:
for the current park: what's great? what's a problem?

VISIONING:
ideas for program, use and organisation of new park

LINGUAL/NON LINGUAL:
red = % lingual (verbal, reading, writing)
orange = % non-lingual (visual, tactile)

Tool: What it does: Who it's for:

SURVEYS
Written questionnaires for park users; capture local knowledge about the existing park and goals for the new park.

INTERVIEWS
Recorded conversations with park users to document their stories, issues and visions for the future.
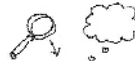
EXHIBITION BOARDS
Interactive informational displays of potential solutions & precedents with sticker voting and room for to write-in comments and ideas.

INTERACTIVE WALKING TOURS
Pamphlet that guides participants through the park providing information and soliciting input about specific locations.
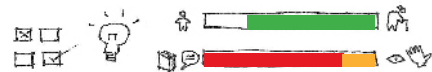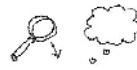
MODEL MAKING
Participants make models of their dream park using craft materials; providing non-verbal feedback on programming and design.

INTERACTIVE MAPS

Large maps where park users write-in their memories, stories, problem areas, beloved areas, and suggestions.
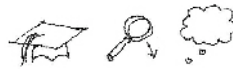
BAD DESIGN DARTS

Participants place stickers or post-it notes to identify the useful and problematic features of the park

SCAVENGER HUNT

An activity where kids point out favorite and problematic areas of the park that can be coupled with explorations of textures or local ecology.
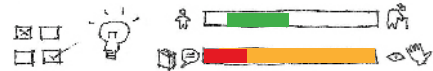
WISH LANTERNS

Participants write or draw wishes for the park on paper lanterns that are hung as a temporary public art installation
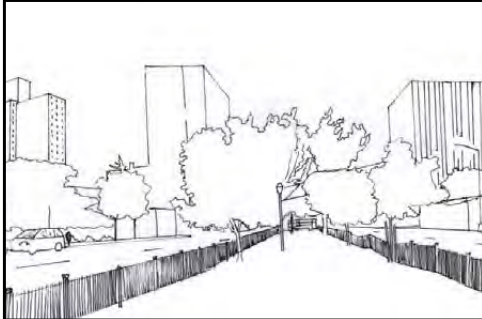
DESIGN HOOPS

Participants bounce balls into hoops marked with proposals for the new park to vote for their priorities.
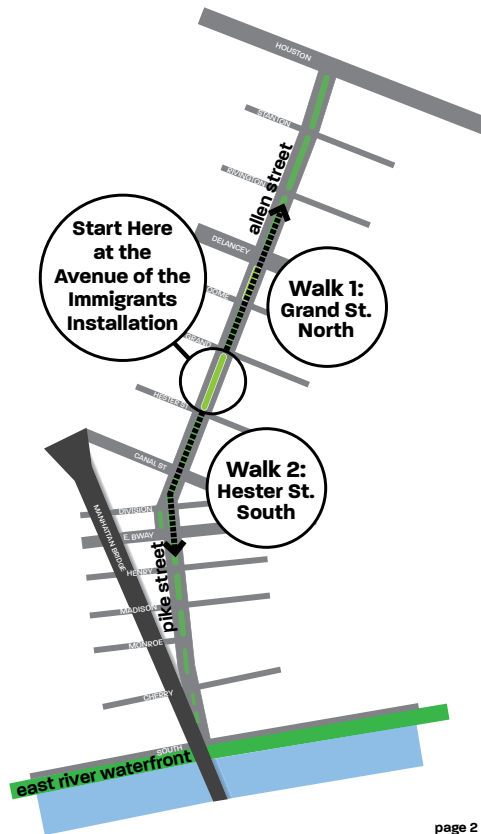
TAKE BACK YOUR PARK!
Allen & Pike Street Malls
Self-Guided Walking Tour

Name: ———————————————————

Contact Info: ———————————————————

Please return your tour book once you've completed to your tour guide.

HOUSTON

STANTON

RIVINGTON

allen street

DELANCEY

Start Here at the Avenue of the Immigrants Installation

Walk 1: Grand St. North

HESTER ST.

CANAL ST.

LIVINGSTON

E. BWAY

MANHATTAN BRIDGE

HENRY

Walk 2: Hester St. South

pike street

MADISON

MONROE

CHERRY

SOUTH

east river waterfront

HISTORY OF ALLEN STREET
Starting in 1878, the Second Avenue elevated train ran over Allen Street. The overhead train made the street dirty and loud, but Lower East Side Life bustled underneath it. The El was removed in 1942, but now cars have replaced trains as the street's air and noise polluter.

How could this story and the multitude of others that make up the history of this neighborhood be told through the malls?
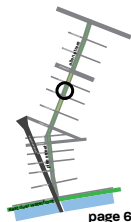
If the mall was widened, what other activities and features could be accommodated?

Look across Delancey Street at the comfort station building. How could the building be reused? Circle or write in your choice, or draw over the image of the building to show us your vision.
- ◯ Community meeting space
- ◯ Visitors center / gateway to Chinatown and the Lower East Side
- ◯ Food vendor / restaurant
- ◯ Gallery
- ◯ Open up a pathway through the building so it does not obstruct the mall
- ◯ Leave it as a comfort station and reopen the bathrooms
- ◯ Other ———————————————
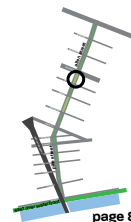
Some pages from the interactive walking tour of Allen and Park St Malls, a disused series of mid-street public spaces in the Lower East Side. The booklet guides and gives information at the same time as soliciting ideas and input from the participant.

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Hands-on Tools

Tool Types

Lifespan / Benefits

TEMPORARY INSTALLATIONS

Ephemeral works that may be in place for a few days to a few weeks:
eg. Lantern making for Lunar New Year

Although the installation's physical presence may be for a short time, temporary installations are easily repeatable and create opportunities to plan annual or seasonal events within the park. Temporary art does not require extensive maintenance, but the community must be vigilant about installing and removing.

SEMI-PERMANENT INSTALLATIONS

Installations which may be in place for several months to a few years:
eg. Avenue of the Immigrants signage project

These works are a good opportunity to begin to engage with sites slated for substantial remodelling. They can also be renewable, increasing the relevance of the work and numbers of participants involved over time.

PERMANENT INSTALLATIONS

Installation that is incorporated into a capital project.
eg. Mosaic wall at Hester St Playground.

Opportunity for participants to make a permanent contribution to the park. This requires close coordination with the designer and the Parks Capital Division so that it can be incorporated into the design and pass through a series of approvals. Creating something permanent makes participants feel connected to the park in a profound way.

HORTICULTURE

Activities ranging from one-day bulb planting workshops to tree care and creating 'garden stewardship' roles for local schools and organizations.
eg. Community gardens within SDR Park

Organized groups of community members can cultivate their own section of the park as a community garden, plant flowers or remove invasives, or planting & caring for trees, all of which create long-term relationships through observing and nurturing. These community efforts require ongoing involvement in maintenance.

(Note : Hands-on projects in parks require different types of approvals depending upon lifespan, and all require working closely with maintenance and operations staff.)

HSC worked with kids from the local high school to create a temporary installation of lanterns made from recycled plastic bags in celebration of Lunar New Year at Sarah D Roosevelt Park. The installation is repeated annually. Images courtesy of HSC and Heidi Axelsen.

HSC engage strongly with the local design community, organising casual friday-night sessions to experiment and brainstorm new ideas and systems for their current projects, such as potential templates for lantern making from discarded materials or mosaics using tangrams. They are also strongly assisted by Leroy Street Studio, a commercially run architecture studio who assist by lending HSC space, equipment and expertise.

3* The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)
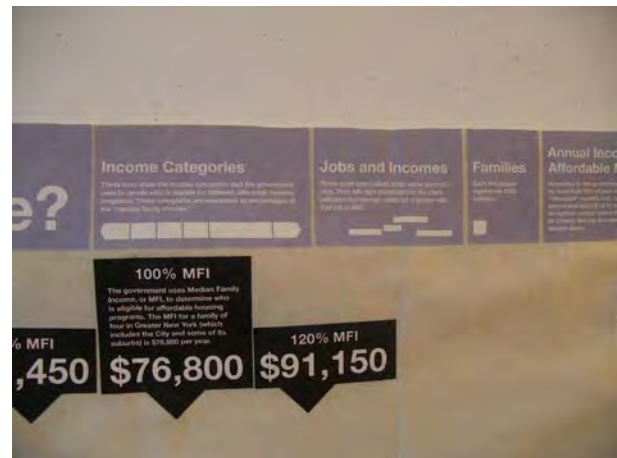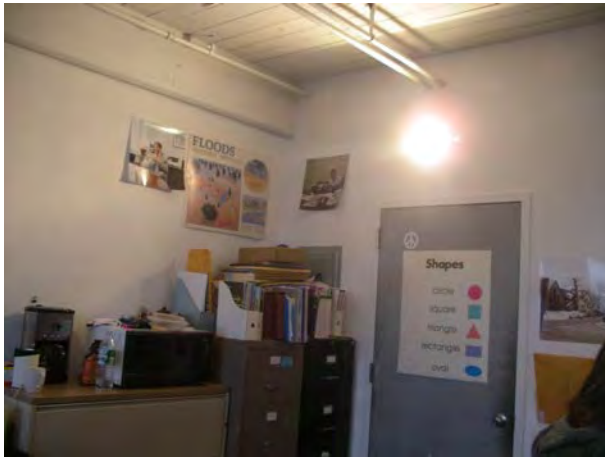
Design the Tools not the Product:

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), based in Brooklyn, acts as a hinge between underserviced communities and designers who can assist them. For CUP the practice of effecting change in cities is less about the design of buildings than the design of educational tools, ways for people to understand and navigate the physical, social, political and economic systems in which urban life operates. By facilitating collaborations between a diverse range of actors CUP has produced 'teaching tools' ranging from a two metre long interactive fabric graph to help people understand the complexities of housing affordability, income brackets and available support programs to a map of cargo routes to assist the coordination of striking dock workers and "What's up with Public Housing, a Guide to Participation", a community produced TV show using skits, animation and documentary to spread awareness of how residents could impact the decisions on how public housing funds are spent.

One of CUP's teaching tools, participants use the pieces on the left to construct a map of housing affordability for different occupations and income brackets, making visible the socio-economic divisions in housing and what housing assistance programs they may have access to.

The Cargo Chain: Choke-points in a Fragile Network , a publication which explains the complexities of international cargo routes to assist the coordination of striking dockworkers. It is part of CUP's *Making Policy Public* series, which teams up independent graphic designers with community organisations and activist groups who have a particular need to communicate. Other titles in this series have been: *Vendor Power, a guide to street vending in New York City* (explaining the rights and regulations to which street vendors are bound) , *Predatory Equity, the survival guide* and *Social Security Risk Machine.* Photos courtesy of CUP.

Public Housing Television (PHTV), a collaboration between CUP, housing rights groups and public housing tenants shown on public access television and in living room screenings. The project uses skits, animation and documentary to inform public housing tenants of ways they can influence the decisions made about public housing in New York. Stills courtesy of CUP.
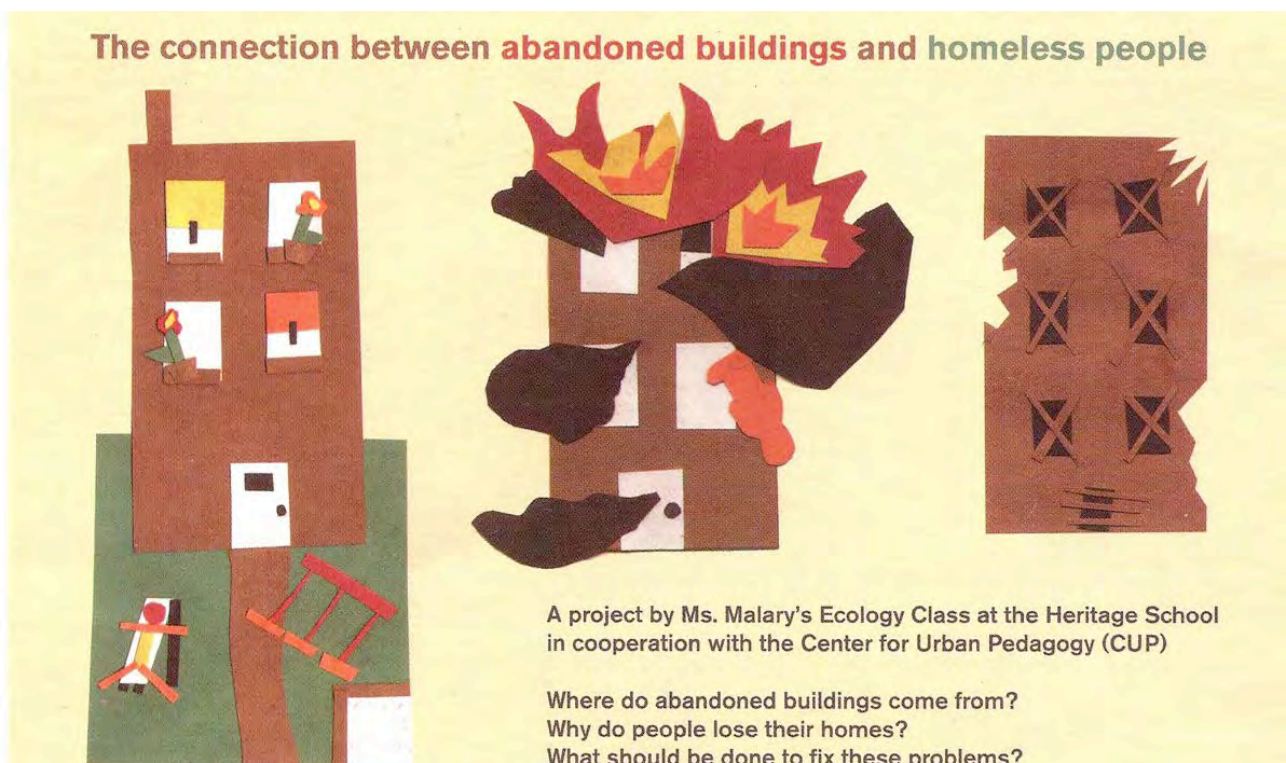
The City as Classroom

A large part of CUP's work takes place in inner city high schools. Taking the "City as a Classroom" concept, resident teaching-artists guide the students through an intensive, six-month investigation on subjects as diverse as: *what happens to the city's garbage*? *the demographics of incarceration* and *the links between vacant buildings and homelessness in New York City.*

Through the process the students interview the major players in the issue, make films and create proposals. From these proposals the teaching artist re-presents the work. This creates a back-and forth dynamic resulting in a product which makes the viewer wonder 'who did this?' This results in far more potent and broad-reaching work which cannot easily be dismissed as 'just student work'.

These projects, while enabling young people to engage in the issues of their city, also often reach far beyond the classroom, with works featuring in exhibitions, festivals, the media, and even turning into teaching tools in their own right.

The Water Machine. Developed by high school students investigating the way sewage and stormwater can get mixed up. The water with glitter represents the sewage going down from the apartment building (bottle). The Water Board is now interested in making *The Water Machine* into a teaching tool of their own.

The connection between **abandoned buildings** and **homeless people**

A project by Ms. Malary's Ecology Class at the Heritage School in cooperation with the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)

Where do abandoned buildings come from?
Why do people lose their homes?
What should be done to fix these problems?

Welcome to Garbage City: an investigation into what happens to New York's waste. The project was done at the same time as New York's government was closing down the Fresh Kills Landfill. Images Courtesy of CUP.

A great strength of CUP's practice is engagement with the entire design community. It does not operate as a self-contained design house, which jealously guards its projects from outside influence. Rather it acts as the meeting point for a great variety of different players to collaborate. The *making policy public* series are always put out to competition, ensuring that the community organisation who creates the initial brief gets the best possible collaborator to work with.

Fundamentally CUP's work questions the nature of participation, representation and empowerment. Unlike many of the other groups practicing 'community design', CUP does not seek to 'speak for' people, represent their ideas or 'empower' them. The educational tools that they develop are simply intended to clarify the situation in which people are operating. These are disarmingly humble aims which result in highly effective, diverse and and even radical work.

CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSION:

SO YOU WANT TO BE AN ACTIVIST ARCHITECT...
LESSONS, REFLECTIONS AND POLEMIC.

Diagram by Estudio Teddy Cruz for *Living Rooms at the Border* showing the rich interactive dialogue between the community and the architect. Image courtesy of ETC.

Notes on participation.

While it is clear that involving people in the creation of the places that they live their lives is essential, what is less clear is how to ensure that this 'involvement' genuinely enables people to control the process and results in a better and more democratic city. 'Participatory design' can so often become a token exercise, a rubber stamp of 'community consultation' for what was always a predetermined outcome. At times the architect controls the process so closely that the result is largely dictated by their expectations. At other times the architect is so hands-off and afraid to add their own input, that they really add very little to the conversation.

The best results come from a dialogue between the architect and the community in which no-one really knows what is going to come out the other end.

CASE Studio architects working with communities encouraging debate and resulting in mutual learning. Images courtesy of CASE Studio.

An essential ingredient to this is a community who is informed about their situation and what they can do about it. *CASE Studio* spends much of the collaborative process asking open questions of the community about the land, the connections and relationships, the tasks and activities which make up their 'community'. This assists the architects in their work but also the community themselves as it enables them to see their own situation objectively. In the case of the *Permanent Workshop for Participatory Design* this

'auto-diagnosis' can result in insights which reach far beyond the physical and spatial. For the **Center for Urban Pedagogy** this stage of questioning-and-informing becomes the entire task of the designer, to make clear the situation and create the best conditions for autonomous participation, without requiring the constant and often overbearing 'facilitation' of an architect or designer.

It is also crucial that the architect's critical and imaginative facilities remain active in this dialogue. The questions need not always be gentle, they should also be challenging, encouraging people to think outside what they have always known and expected. This is the advantage of the architect's training and perspective, they are able to imagine, borrow and experiment with many different possibilities. **Estudio Teddy Cruz** often takes this approach, proposing wild ideas, utopian visions grounded firmly in a rigorous analysis of the situation.

Another important element to this dialogue is that it should always be an equal exchange. The architect who is pursuing such work out of a sense of moral duty always has a side agenda, seeking gratitude from the people they are 'helping'. The practices which are pursuing such work out of their own interest are gaining as much from the process as the communities with which they work. If fact by choosing their clients and the issues on which they work, these architects are enjoying a freedom and independence rare amongst their profession.

Getting Paid.

Working outside the interests of capital and bureaucracy is not easy. Finding funding and support for such projects is a creative challenge in itself. Each practice finds its own way, each with their own advantages and limitations.

CASE has set up a private design-construction company (CONCASE) to subsidise their community projects. While this creates a situation of independence from the major governmental and Non-Profit funding agencies (who always have their own agenda) it has also caused some difficulty as more and more of their time needs to be taken up by 'paying clients'.

The Comités de Tierra Urbana are fortunate to be fully funded by the government as part of its mission to create participative democracy in Venezuela. While this is a situation rarely enjoyed by such practices it also places them firmly on one side of a widening political divide, limiting the extent to which they can work for the entire society, regardless of political affiliation.

Estudio Teddy Cruz works out of his university office and relies heavily on philanthropy. This again is both a liberation and and a constraint. Some philanthropists have begun to expect more for their money, setting agendas for ETC to follow.

CUP patches together funding from teaching work, cultural grants and private donations. While this maintains their independence, writing grants and organising donation drives can also be time consuming activities.

But where does the money come from?

Comités de Tierra Urbana:

government

CASE Studio:

design + construct work	community organisations

Estudio Teddy Cruz:

university	philanthropy

Center for Urban Pedagogy:

| teaching work	cultural grants	private donations

Bringing it home.

On returning to Australia my firm intention is to translate the knowledge and experience I have gained though this study to the local context. I have been fortunate to have been given opportunities to to begin developing this practice consecutively with this research.

Through my own practice *the Milkcrate Unlimited, People's Architecture Workshop* I have been working on a new housing development by Kapit-bahayan, a Filipino housing cooperative based in Auburn. Originally tenants of the Department of Housing, Kapit-Bahayan has been so successful in managing and maintaining their property that they have acrued a rental surplus sufficient to expand the cooperative by building some units of their own. I have been working with Kapit-bahayan on the design of this new housing in Canley Vale. The cooperative members have been constant partners in the design and throughout the process we have worked to create generous, high quality affordable housing with a rich interweaving of private and communal space specifically tailored to their cultural needs.
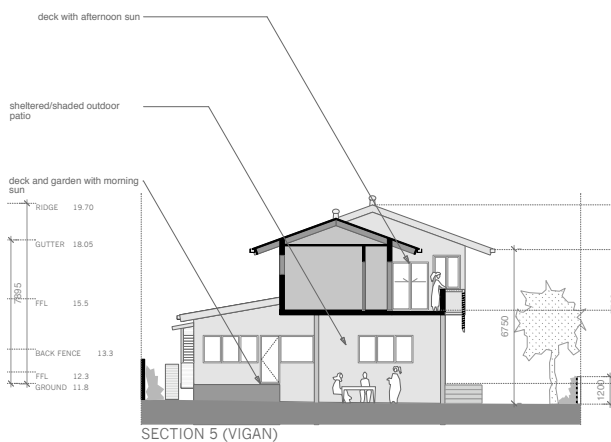
Kapit-bahayan Housing Cooperative, Canley Vale

Through a collaboration between Parramatta City Council and the University of Western Sydney's Urban Research Centre, *the Milkcrate* was commissioned to design an affordable housing prototype for Granville mixing low cost housing with artists' studios, community facilities, accessible housing for the elderly, urban agriculture and community run child care.
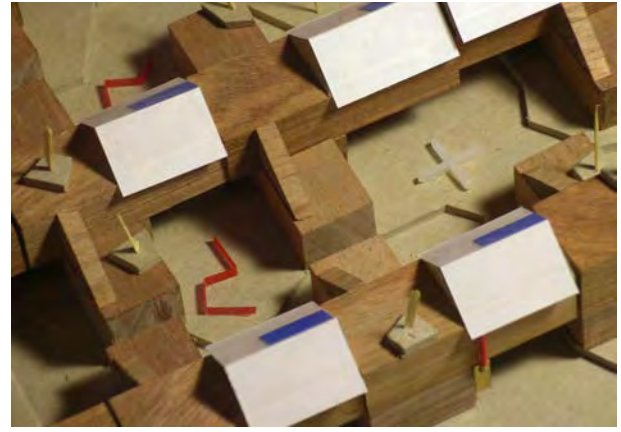
Affordable Housing, Granville

Sydney presents enormous opportunities and challenges for this type of architecture. The city's sprawling investor-led development has left a crippling lack of affordable housing and meaningful public space. Western Sydney particularly with its strong community organisations and rich mix of immigrant cultures are constantly redefining and recreating themselves, providing an extremely dynamic and exciting situation for architects in which I hope to continue to engage.

Some other ideas drawn from the research which I plan to explore in Sydney include:

Mobile Studio: A studio-on-wheels which can be taken to specific sites of contention within sydney to work on, exhibit and get feedback on alternative proposals generated in dialogue with local residents.

City as Classroom: Working with high school students to examine issues of the city as design problems, simultaneously exposing the problems and generating alternative solutions. Topics could include: Food, Transport and Housing within Sydney.

Smashing up the Furniture.

The practices of architecture, planning and design, through the formal production of space, have forever been used to reinforce the interests of the economically and politically powerful. As the work of architects literally makes concrete the desires of those with the means to buy, build and hire, we are simultaneously building out all those who do not. We measure out space, detailing precisely what goes where, who gets what, uncritically making physical the social and economic divisions of the society in which we build. So for all the developments in aesthetics and technology, we move the city nowhere, we change nothing, stuck in a game of endlessly rearranging the furniture, making noise but changing nothing.

But from Bangkok to Caracas, from Tijuana to Brooklyn, innovative, alternative practices are emerging. Architects who have chosen instead to smash up the furniture and invite local people to help make something better from the pieces. These practices have rejected the old mercenary paradigm, of reinforcing the spatial will of the few who can pay, and by doing so have regained their own independence and the power to change the way our cities are produced.

Crucially these practices seek out collaborations with the people who actually use the places they design. They join with community organisations, activist groups and people in the street to pursue interests outside of the existing power structure. They use architecture as a vehicle to explore and expose entrenched socio-spatial injustice and to create concrete alternatives. They continue to learn and innovate, becoming ever more rigorous, open and effective. These practices are as diverse as the highly specific geo-political contexts in which they work. CASE Studio of Thailand, Estudio Teddy Cruz and GERMEN of the San Diego/Tijuana Border region, the Center for Urban Pedagogy and Hester Street Collaborative in New York, and the Permanent Workshop for Participatory Design in Caracas represent just a few of the diverse approaches to reinventing the way we make our cities.

These are still small movements, brief moments of resistance, peripheral happenings. But they are slowly, surely changing the way people see their city, not as a mute, generally oppressive background, but as a malleable object, a responsive environment, and potentially the physical manifestation of our lives and desires. Through their diverse work all these groups are demonstrating that through organisation, ingenuity and collective action it is possible to change our built landscape, that no matter who we are, the city is ours.

La Mona overlooking Colonia Aeropuerto, Tijuana, Mexico.

Sharing the experience.

Apart from this report the knowledge and experiences gained through *Working with the Informal, Learning from the Informal* has, to date, been shared in a number of ways:

The Blog:

www.informalism.net has been an invaluable tool in recording the experience and sharing it with others. Through the blog I have been able to assist dozens of architects and students who have contacted me looking for more information on getting involved in this kind of work. I plan to continue to use the blog as a platform to discuss ideas and projects relating to *architecture working with and learning from the spontaneous city.*

Public Talk:

TAKE THE CITY: The Do-It-Yourself City, The Politics of Fear, and Emergent Forms of Activist Architecture. Together with Katie Hepworth, I was invited to speak in the *RAIA Thursday Night Talks: Autumn Series*. The talk covered the work of CASE Studio, The permanent Workshop for Participatory Design, Estudio Teddy Cruz and the Center for Urban Pedagogy.

Article:

Smashing up the Furniture: Adventures in Activist Architecture. For the publication *There goes the Neighbourhood: Redfern and the Politics of Urban Space* compiled by Zanny Begg and Keg de Souza. The article placed the work of CASE Studio, The Permanent Workshop for Participatory Design, Estudio Teddy Cruz and the Center for Urban Pedagogy in the broader context of activist architecture worldwide.

Interview:

Activist Architecture. On FBI Radio's *In The Works.* http://www.fbiradio.com/content.php/703.html

Acknowledgements

NSW
Architects
Registration
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A