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## Choose your tools wisely

Using dialogical architectural pedagogies for sustainable world

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### Abstract

Architectural education's exclusive and hierarchical roots still shape how architecture is taught and practised. To reveal deeply embedded structures of exclusion, the figure of the architect is deconstructed using Hannah Arendt's division of work and labor. The maintenance art of Mierle Laderman Ukeles is used to highlight the importance of process and reproductive labour, as opposed to object-oriented work. The emergence of the new figure of the architect worker is discussed in the context of changes taking place in the profession.

This article delves into the pressing need to evolve architectural education, emphasising the alignment with methods of inquiry to ensure that the resulting projects are rooted in principles of equity, inclusivity, and sustainability. At the heart of this discourse is the innovative framework of "Radical Inclusivity." This concept is anchored in the dialogic philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin and inspired by Paolo Soleri's understanding of buildings as structures in a constant state of becoming and growing through increasing complexity.

Radical Inclusivity, rooted in the dialogic principle of Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy, is positioned as a framework allowing for the redefinition of the figure of the architect and, in consequence, a more inclusive and equitable architectural practice and pedagogy.

**Keywords:** pedagogy, architecture, design, education, radical inclusivity, narrative

*The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.*  
bell hooks

## Introduction

Choose your fighter! On the left, we have Rem Koolhaas, not just an architect but one of the original starchitects: successful, influential, famous. On the right, in a powerful pose as depicted on the poster for the documentary “Koolhaas Houselife”, (dir. Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine, 2008), stands Guadalupe Acedo, a housekeeper. Together with the house in her care, she is the star of the film, and through her experience as a housekeeper we explore the relationship between the architecture of the house designed by Koolhaas and Acedo’s everyday efforts to keep it clean.

In this imaginary duel, Hannah Arendt’s division of work and labor<sup>9</sup> (Arendt, 2013) is represented by these two very different people, only loosely connected by architecture. Before you make your choice, know that Acedo represents labor and Koolhaas work. As Baena explains: “In “The Human Condition”, Arendt described labor as the activity necessary for the survival of the species, reproducible to the extent of satisfying biological needs, which leaves behind nothing in its wake; work, in contrast, is activity that molds and transforms the world, creating human artifacts that persist beyond the span of a human life (...)” (Baena 2020, 86); and as Macready puts it: “Labor transforms nature into products for consumption for the preservation of the species. Worldliness is the necessary provision for work, which Arendt understood as the human activity of creating a durable and enduring human artifice (which includes cultural artifacts like art, religion, poetry, literature, etc.) in which to live.” (Macready 2018, 30)

To summarise, work is creative, individual, public-facing, transcendent to nature and most importantly, producing lasting artefacts building the civilisation. Labour is reproductive, anonymous, following natural cycles and sustaining life, its products ephemeral and disappearing almost instantly. Although Arendt doesn’t directly link women with labor, there is an implicit connection based on the dependence on childbearing abilities of their bodies (Veltman, 2010). Work on the other hand, with its worldmaking ability, is associated with men.

Knowing all this, now you can make your choice. In one corner, world-transforming work and in the other, world-sustaining labor, Koolhaas versus Acedo, architect versus housekeeper. Who did you throw your weight behind? Whose efforts are more valuable to society, and who do we value more as a result?

The imaginary duel between Koolhaas and Acedo serves as an introductory exercise in deconstruction of the figure of the architect aiming to reveal its hidden hierarchies. Using examples of maintenance art of Mierle Laderman Ukeles and applying a feminist perspective on maintenance and care, I examine the figure of the architect through the lens of labor/work dichotomy aiming to dismantle the power structures that define it.<sup>10</sup>

Following Mikhail Bakhtin, I then reconstruct it using a polyphonic narrative leading to a new radically inclusive perspective redefining who the architect is, and what they do.

Using examples of student projects, I illustrate how Radical Inclusivity can be applied to architecture highlighting its potential as an ethical principle

<sup>9</sup> I am using the American spelling of labor when using this word in the meaning of Hannah Arendt’s division.

<sup>10</sup> This text was written parallelly to the article titled “Radical Inclusivity: Architecture of becoming” to be published following my presentation during the UIA World Congress of Architects in Copenhagen *Sustainable Futures, Leave no one behind* in July 2023. Both texts discuss Radical Inclusivity from different perspectives and could be read as complementary to each other.

underpinning the pedagogy practice and a tool applied in design process. Finally, I argue that just architecture is not possible without dismantling the unjust structures embedded in the figure of the architect.

### **Cosplaying the architect**

As demonstrated earlier, architecture in the Arendtian understanding is work, not labor, as it's one of the most prominent areas of human activity producing lasting artefacts sustaining civilisation. By a logical extension, what architects do, is considered work, too: creative, individual, public-facing, and transcendent to nature, and inevitably bearing all the consequences and biases that the work/labor division entails.

When examined through this lens, the figure of the architect appears in a sharper focus allowing us to understand why it stubbornly remains an elite occupation despite the need to open the profession to be more inclusive and, therefore, reflective of the society it is meant to serve.

To better understand the contemporary figure of the architect, let us look back for clues how it evolved. An important moment for our investigation is in the nineteenth century, when women started entering the profession. They faced a serious backlash with calls for the reduction of their role to the design of the back rooms associated with service – kitchens, nurseries, and leaving the public front of buildings to men (Krasny, 2019). This allocation of design tasks almost directly mirrors the work-labor division, putting men in charge of what is deemed prestigious and public facing and relegating women's role to invisible support mirroring the roles men and women were expected to perform in the society. Elke Krasny named this backlash 'care trouble'. She wrote: "Women, associated with care, domesticity, dependency and reproductive labor, posed an enormous threat to the idea of independence that shaped the concept on which the autonomous modern architect was built." (Krasny 2019, 33-41)

This underlines the danger of dichotomous systems where things are defined not only by what they are but equally by the opposition to the other category, defining what they are not supposed to be. The binary categories allow for definitions to be considered in absolute terms only, rejecting anything falling anywhere in between and not fitting neatly into the binary narrative.

Another interesting moment in the process of the construction of the figure of the architect took place after the First World War in one of the most influential design studios in the history of architecture pedagogy, the Bauhaus. Ruedi Ray writes about the experimentation with gender in the Bauhaus studios: "Women may have worn short skirts, but as students they were trapped within the patriarchal division of labor." (Ray, 2001) She argues that the real legacy of Bauhaus was "the construction of a new disciplinary identity" based on a conservative masculine ideal and which became a template for the figure of the architect persistent to this day (Ray, 2001).

Arguably, the profession has changed since the Bauhaus, but men still dominate not only as architects in the public consciousness but also in the profession. However, the annual Architects Registration Board report from 2019 (ARB, 2020) signals potential changes. Although 71% of architects on the Architects Register in the UK were male and only 29% female, for the younger generation under 30, the gender split was precisely 50/50. The new admissions to the register were slightly out of balance, with 56% of men versus 44% of women demonstrating a shift into a more gender balanced future.

However, when examined from the point of view of ethnicity, the latest data from December 2022 (accounting for 75% of the register) demonstrate that 82% of

*In the Arendtian division of work and labor, architecture is defined as work. It is creative, public-facing, transcendent to nature and produces lasting artefacts building the civilisation.*

registered architects in the UK self-report as white, only 7% as Asian (or Asian British) and 1% as Black (Black British) (ARB, 2022). These statistics reveal the non-inclusive character of the profession. Regarding the equal gender split of young architects under 30, it will be interesting to follow these numbers and see how they change once young architects start families, and how their new circumstances influence their career trajectories.

These statistics demonstrate that gender-based barriers in the profession are shifting. Still, racial lines of division remain stubbornly unmovable, raising wider questions about the openness of the profession, particularly at its entry level, education. Architects Journal student survey from 2022 (Waite, 2022) revealed the impact of the pandemic on architecture students. It showed that over half of female UK-based full-time respondents reported current or past treatments in response to mental health-related issues or stress, compared to 35% of male students. When asked about the impact of the pandemic-related disruptions on their architectural education, 33% of non-white respondents said their progress had been 'massively' hindered, compared with 22% of white students. This further highlights embedded challenges facing female and non-white students in architectural education.

It must be recognised that architectural education does not exist in a vacuum, and other factors influence students' well-being. However, the differences between genders and white and non-white students are too stark to be ignored. Therefore, questions why architectural courses put so much pressure on students, and why certain groups struggle more than others, need to be asked. Therefore, how we construct the figure of the architect is an important problem as it can reveal who feels included and cared for and who regards themselves as out of place and not belonging.

*Is there a way out of the trap of the work/labor dichotomy? An obvious strategy would be to question the work/labor categories themselves, and either to redefine them, or completely reject their polarising power.*

#### **Nobody dreams of labour**

Is there a way out of the trap of the work/labor dichotomy? As demonstrated earlier, cracks start to appear in the figure of the architect constructed along the work/labor fault lines. It is still an excluding model, and remains frustratingly immune to change, but the process of reconstruction has already begun. An obvious strategy would be to question the work/labor categories themselves, and either to redefine them, or completely reject their polarising power.

Artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles used the former strategy and made it the main concern of her art. Following the birth of her first child, as a new mother and artist, she found herself split along the work/labor division, pulling her identity into two mutually exclusive directions. She was frustrated with the impossible choice she felt pressured to make, where her role as a parent was incompatible with her identity as an artist, a dilemma not faced by male artists. In her own words: "(...) I literally was divided in two. Half of my week I was the mother, and the other half the artist. But, I thought to myself, this is ridiculous, I am the one." (Ryan, 2009)

In her "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!" (Ukeles, 1969) Ukeles proposed two categories, Development and Maintenance. In parallel to Hannah Arendt's division of work and labor, she defined Development as free creation and Maintenance as the everyday, repetitive, tedious, and never-ending tasks. She focussed on the art's fixation on the object at the expense of the process of its production. She positioned art as contextual, not merely a product of the individual talent of the artist, but as dependent on culture, knowledge and craft creating a necessary context for it to emerge. In an interview from 2009, she described how she felt about Richard Serra's and Donald Judd's works: "So Serra was this steel worker without the work, without the workers. And Judd was this carpenter without workers. They didn't have workers, they didn't have people, they had objects — or they had results." (Ryan, 2009)

In contrast to the object focussed paradigm, Ukeles' work was radically process-oriented, highlighting Maintenance (labor) itself. As an artist-mother, she demonstrated a unified identity and elevated the labour of childcare to a work of art, highlighting its most prosaic aspects in works such as "Rinsing a B.M. Diaper," from *Private Performances of Personal Maintenance as Art* (1970) and "Dressing to Go Out/Undressing to Go In" (1973).

Her answer to the rift between object-oriented work and process-oriented labor was to reframe Maintenance (labor) as Development (work). In her performance "Washing/Tracks/Maintenance: Outside" (1973), documented in a series of black and white photographs, she washed the steps of the Wadsworth Atheneum. In an epic work titled "Touch Sanitation Performance" (1979–80), Ukeles spent 11 months immersed in the daily routines of New York's "sanmen", sanitary workers whom she met and shook hands with, thanking them personally for their work. She documented meeting all 8500 of "sanmen", making visible both their work and themselves. (Steinhauer, 2017)

There are multiple layers of interpretation that can help us appreciate how this performance not only highlights, but also elevates maintenance (labor). There is the obvious appreciation of the work and workers that are usually invisible and unnoticed, but also the visibility of the artist's emotional labour as a by-product of engaging with so many people personally, and the act of care towards male workers performed by a woman.

In a new layer added by the recent experience of the pandemic, the handshake becomes an intimate gesture, more affecting not only because of its personal dimension but also because the workers engaged with the work perceived as an unclean, unhygienic, therefore potentially hazardous occupation. Ukeles' works highlight not only the work/labor division but also how it runs along the gender and racial divisions, reinforcing the socio-economical structures that celebrate some and render others, together with their efforts, invisible.

More recently, an interesting attempt to use the strategy of redefining the work and labor, emerged at the very same point where Ukeles first tried to reconfigure the system trying to reconcile the impossible intersection of the role of the carer (parent) and the artist. Peggy Deamer, a co-founder of the Architecture Lobby, an organisation advocating for ethical labour practices, defines work as "(...) what we all do in our individual lives (i.e., we go to work every day), and labor as what is monetised by our economic system." (Levinson, 2020) This realignment of work/labor to fit the context of the economic system allows for the exposure of the exploitative practices rooted in the perception of how architects themselves define what they do.

This position rejects the romanticised idea of the architect following a calling, therefore often working for free. The opening statement of the Architecture Lobby manifesto (The Architecture Lobby, 2022) inserts the figure of the architect right in the middle of the economic framework: "We are precarious workers" and further challenges the gender and race-based barriers in the profession. The Manifesto also demands inclusive design practices and links sustainable labour practices with climate justice and sustainable architecture: "Climate justice as the basis of all architectural work. There can be no sustainable future without sustainable labor practices." Interestingly, it also demands a different attribution of value to architecture, where the value of architects' work lies not in buildings marketed as products but in the value emerging from architects' spatial practice, echoing the Ukele's disdain for object-oriented art and appreciation of process.

This is a radical shift in the understanding of what architecture is and what architects do, a rejection of the outcome focussed work/labor dichotomy

*The positioning of work/labor division in the economic context allows for the exposure of the exploitative practices rooted in the perception of how architects themselves define what they do.*

*The rejection of the outcome focussed work/labor dichotomy allows for the emergence of a new template: the architect worker.*



informing the figure of the architect as constructed in the past and proposing a new template: the architect worker. Its importance cannot be underestimated as it has already entered the discourse with the election of Muyiwa Oki, the new President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), who used the figure of the architect worker to seek support from early career architects. His election campaign was supported by a grassroots coalition of activist groups such as the Architects Climate Action Network, Future Architects Front and the Architecture Lobby itself. In the open letter signed by Oki's supporters (Architecture Social, 2022), they expressed the need for "(...) a president who will break the cycle of mental health and labour extortion, perpetuated in architectural education and practice, (...)".

The shift in understanding what constitutes work and labor in the architectural profession, and perhaps in other creative fields, may have far-reaching consequences. When labor is defined as a part of the economic system, a commodity we are paid to do, it makes it easier to protect workers' rights and makes a strong case for unionisation and alternative modes of practice ownership. But more importantly, it opens the perspective to show a bigger picture of who we are as workers, parents, carers, neighbours, community members and human beings. From this point of view, we are all interconnected, juggling multiple roles and responsibilities, adjusting the picture to include the richness of our lives. The picture becomes fuller, more complex, and richer in connections. It suddenly becomes evident, the harm of culture of long hours and unpaid internships, damaging the relationships formed beyond work and severing the ties needed for them to flourish. The pandemic strengthened this understanding as "Covid-19 has compelled many of us to adopt new forms of taking care – from mutual aid to social distancing and self-isolation." (Chatzidakis, et al. 2022, 2)

This interconnected vision topples the figure of the lone genius from his pedestal and recalibrates our understanding of how architecture is produced. It accounts for the collective efforts of designers but also extends our awareness of the process to building workers and their working conditions. It allows architects to reject the romanticised but ultimately exploitative notion of architecture as a calling, where sleepless nights are badges of honour for architecture students, later enabling exploitative working conditions for architects.

Considering the statistics showing the deeply running injustice in architectural education and profession, the importance of the definition of the architect becomes even more urgent. As educators, how are we constructing the figure of the architect? How much are we aware of this process, and do we understand the underlying biases historically embedded in it? The lack of understanding of how the figure of the architect is constructed has far-reaching consequences for all involved in the profession, starting from students, architectural educators and finally, professionals. We are all involved in this process, and without understanding who that figure is, we find ourselves cosplaying the architect, desperately trying to lean into, or worse, mould and change ourselves to reflect the figure we are not even fully able to describe.

When new students enter an architecture school, they are expected to form themselves in the architect's image as understood and projected by the school's culture and as performed by staff and other students. This mechanism, first described as hidden curriculum by Phillip Jackson in 1968 (Margolis, 2001) is the tacit set of requirements and behaviours emerging from the social relationships between students and tutors. As Dutton explains<sup>11</sup>: "In comparison to the formal

<sup>11</sup> Ahrentzen and Groat considered systematic sexism of the architectural education from the feminist perspective. They identified "the dominance of the star system and gendering of genius" and "a hidden

curriculum with its emphasis on knowledge (i.e., course content: what should be "covered" and its place in the curriculum), the concept of the hidden curriculum brings into focus questions concerning the ideology of such knowledge, and the social practices which structure the experiences of students and teacher." (Dutton, 1987)

In my pedagogical practice, I am looking for a principle, a framework that would inform both what is "covered" in the curriculum, and how it is delivered to ensure a constant reassessment of studio practices and underpinning ideologies influencing students' thinking and design decisions.

### **From Polyphony through Radical Inclusivity to Post Humanism**

Here I call upon two thinkers whose thoughts converge in an exciting starting point that we will use to plot our way out of the maze created by the binary choice enforced by the work/labor dichotomy and the limitations it imposes.

I will start with Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic (1895–1975) and his idea of polyphony, a term he borrowed from music and based on his reading of Fyodor Dostoevsky's literary works as containing multiple voices and perspectives, each capable of speaking for themselves "even against the author" (Robinson, 2011). In Bakhtin's own words, polyphony is: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices." (Bakhtin 1984, 6)

Another helpful idea connected to polyphony is a dialogic versus monologic novel, where Bakhtin proposes two types of narrative. In a monologic novel, the author uses the characters to communicate his opinions, whereas, in a dialogic novel, the characters speak for themselves, and the world is constructed through their individual point of view. From this perspective, each voice is important, there is no one vision of the world; it must be constantly negotiated and constructed through dialogue.

The second thinker, very different to the first, echoes the idea of polyphony and applies it in the educational setting, thus describing conditions of a transformative education environment: "To begin, the professor must genuinely value everyone's presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes. These contributions are resources." (hooks 1994, 8)

*Polyphony:  
A plurality of  
independent and  
unmerged voices  
and  
consciousnesses, a  
genuine polyphony  
of fully valid voices.  
Mikhail Bakhtin  
(1896-1975)*

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curriculum of educational rituals which support hierarchy, power and competitiveness" to be among the main factors contributing to the marginalisation of women in architectural education. (Ahrentzen and Groat, 1992)



*A dialogic, polyphonic approach embraces multitudes and tensions and invalidates binary systems, including the work/labor dichotomy.*

*The opening beyond a binary choice offers seemingly limitless possibilities and permutations, mirroring the infinitely complex world.*

bell hooks demonstrates how to apply polyphony in an educational setting emphasising the flattened hierarchy, allowing for the free flow of knowledge in all directions and positioning all participants of the process as valuable and impactful. A dialogic, polyphonic approach embraces multitudes and tensions and invalidates binary systems, including the work/labor dichotomy. The opening beyond a binary choice offers seemingly limitless possibilities and permutations, mirroring the infinitely complex world.

Here I propose a theoretical framework that can be used in the production of architecture, including architectural education: Radical Inclusivity (RI) (Nawratek and Nawratek 2015, 13-23). It is a theoretical framework with an ethical core focussing on relationships, and as such, it can be helpful in reconstructing the figure of the architect as attempted here. More broadly, Radical Inclusivity situates the process of architecture production in the context of the relationships required for architecture to emerge using a temporal perspective and a polyphonic approach.

RI is inspired by the ideas of architect Paolo Soleri (1919-2013), who proposed the idea of growth in architecture defined as not as addition, but an inward process of increasing density and complexity, where space and matter fold into themselves, creating a rich and interconnected environment multiplying interactions on the way to higher consciousness echoing Bergson's ideas of the conscious evolution (Busbea, 2013).

This interpretation of growth as increased complexity is key for Radical Inclusivity as it positions buildings as dynamic entities, that are never complete and perpetually changed by their users and the environment. The temporal perspective forces the radical rejection of waste, making it imperative to account for all energy used in the construction process, during maintenance and finally tracing it to the final stage when the building is dismantled and fed back to the circular processes of reuse and recycling. In the building's lifecycle, nothing can be banished to the landfill or forgotten, and this applies to materials, resources, and energy, but also people. The temporal perspective allows for a better understanding of the architecture production and asks to consider working conditions of all involved in the process.

Following the polyphonic principle, radically inclusive architecture does not subscribe to dichotomic or binary systems; it is never this or that; it is always this and that. It is multifunctional and multifaceted, adjusting its elements to serve various purposes in response to different needs. It is many things to many users at different times. It is dialogic in its relationship to the world and, therefore, highly responsive to context. It reacts to existing connections, weaving itself into the fabric of relationships and facilitating the formation of new bonds.

Radically inclusive architecture is never idle; it is perpetually active in its support of life. It is in a never-ending process of becoming, and after completion, it merely shifts its focus to maintenance and care.

When extended to the maintenance and care of buildings, Radical Inclusivity converges with the feminist methodology of care. It opens new lines of enquiry investigating the best ways of co-existing with others in the world threatened by the ongoing climate crisis and repairing the relationships damaged by the lack of care: "On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web." (Tronto and Fisher, 1990)

*From a radically inclusive perspective, unjust working conditions can only produce unjust architecture, and we cannot expect non-inclusive pedagogies to be somehow different.*

From a radically inclusive perspective, unjust working conditions can only produce unjust architecture, and we cannot expect non-inclusive pedagogies to be somehow different. Therefore, the hidden curriculum of architecture schools cannot stand in opposition to the explicit values expressed by staff and students.

The ethical core of Radical Inclusivity combined with the urgency of the climate emergency makes my efforts to communicate its meaning in an objective, emotionless and detached manner increasingly difficult. Echoing Ukeles' "Manifesto for Maintenance Art 1969!" (Ukeles, 1969) I find myself using the emotive manifesto form, despite multiple efforts to distance myself, and use an objective, academic manner of communication. I sense the internalised figure of the seemingly objective, emotionally unentangled architect or in this case, academic, looking down on the manifesto form and demanding a more detached argument. And yet, my pedagogical practice requires different tools. Facing anxious students in the design studio, when discussing the impact of the climate emergency I am no longer afforded the comfort of the speculative "if", as it turns into an inevitable "when".<sup>12</sup> The language reflects the urgency of the message.

### **Radical Inclusivity in architectural pedagogy**

The ideas shaping my pedagogical practice have their roots in the dialogic principle using polyphonic narratives. I first tested them in the Master of Architecture studio at Sheffield School of Architecture (Ecosystem City studio, 2019/2020), which explored a link between the polyphonic narratives in design and the inclusion of non-humans (Nawratek, 2021). While working in this studio, I opened my perspective to posthumanism. I further explored these ideas at Manchester School of Architecture, where I co-founded a new atelier (Some Kind of Nature, 2020 - ongoing) focusing on responding to the climate crisis from a posthuman perspective using a polyphonic approach.

The Some Kind of Nature atelier is a vertical teaching structure involving final year undergraduate students (year 3), Master of Architecture students (years 5 and 6) and Master of Landscape Architecture students. The atelier's focus is on the climate crisis response from a posthuman perspective, using polyphony and dialogic approach to decentre humans in the design process and allow for a more inclusive approach involving non-humans in response to the biodiversity crisis. The atelier's theoretical foundation is rooted in Donna Haraway's posthuman thought repositioning humans in a web of life (Haraway, 2016).

The challenge I face each academic year is to communicate these ideas to students effectively so that they become a theoretical foundation of their projects and find their expression in architecture. Every year, the studio starts with a task aiming to open a creative field and allow students to connect with the issues set out by the brief and the studio agenda, distilling the ideas and approaches that resonated with them the most.

For the last two years, the vehicle for this process has been a short assignment titled "Timescapes", in which students are tasked with creating a visual piece of work in response to the site in the context of the atelier agenda. The key element of the task is the representation of time, its various cycles, and patterns. From the instructions in the brief (Nawratek, 2022):

*Think about time: Consider different time cycles like deep time, geologic time, historical events and processes, life cycles, seasons, and other time patterns.*

*Think about space: How is the site connected to the city? What is its relationship with the spaces next to it? How is it connected to/ isolated from the city?*

<sup>12</sup> The latest IPCC report states: "Limiting warming to 1.5°C and 2°C involves rapid, deep and in most cases immediate greenhouse gas emission reductions" which means that the global warming of at least 1.5°C is the reality with unpredictable consequences. (IPCC 2023, 22).

*Think about narratives and stories: Narratives are big and powerful and can span years, decades, or centuries (or longer!). Stories are embedded in narratives driven by them and highlight their impact locally. For example, Industrial Revolution is a narrative, and the closure of a coalmine is a story that can be traced through changes in space and an impact on people and the environment. Think about different voices telling the stories: Consider polyphony and the idea that opposing voices (conflict) can reveal something interesting.*

The “Timescapes” task is introduced with a short presentation discussing the representation of time, referencing ancient Chinese handscrolls and tapestries, and introducing narrative as a tool to understand and engage with the temporality of the site. The task allows students to engage with information found in the site analysis process and synthesise it into a creative response. During this process, students make a significant emotional investment in their work and position themselves within the field of theoretical exploration defined by the atelier. This allows them to start their design process with a good grasp of the studio agenda and a sense of direction.

At the beginning of this academic year (2022/2023), I tried to summarise the key ideas informing the design studio. In a presentation to students of the Some Kind of Nature atelier at Manchester School of Architecture, I described the design studio principles as follows:

- Contextual;
- Care-ful;
- Listening to multiple, often conflicting voices;
- Understanding relationships (Entanglements).

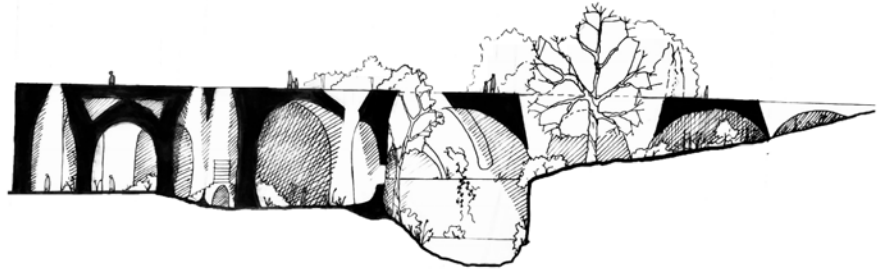
All these ideas fit under the umbrella of Radical Inclusivity and form the basis of the studio practice, both as guidelines for the design process and a template for shaping relationships in the studio. As discussed below, students find their own way of engaging with, and interpreting the ideas introduced in the studio, taking the discussion in often unexpected directions.

For student Niya Lijo Kankapadan (year 3 undergraduate, 2022/2023), the “Timescapes” task plotted the direction of her design explorations. The site, located in the Bradford area of Manchester in proximity to the Etihad Stadium, was once an active coal mining area. In her “Timescapes” piece (Figure 1), Niya recognised the site's history reaching deep down into the ground bringing forward the understanding of the site not as a surface but as a three-dimensional entity, where depth represents the physical reality of the exploitation of the geological strata, layers of history and the understanding of the importance of soil. The project brief formulated by the student is a research facility focussing on soil remediation.



**Figure 1. Timescapes.** Student project. Niya Lijo Kankapadan, Manchester School of Architecture, year 3 undergraduate, 2022/2023.

Laura Popa (year 3 undergraduate, 2022/2023) responded to the same site by covering it with a mycelium structure (Figure 2). The project is inspired by a symbiotic relationship between termites and fungi and aims to create a space hosting various human-centred functions (exhibition spaces, cafes) but its primary purpose is to challenge the human perception in an encounter with mycelium, an organism fundamental to the survival of life on Earth and yet profoundly alien. By creating an immersive environment constructed with mycelium and echoing the non-human forms of termite moulds, the structure becomes a landscape-sized sculpture where humans are exposed to the worlds constructed by non-human Others.



**Figure 2. Section through the mycelium structure.** Student project. Laura Popa, Manchester School of Architecture, year 3 undergraduate, 2022/2023.

The ideas discussed in the studio resonate with students in unpredictable ways, resulting in projects exploring as different ideas as sustainable death practices, ethics of food production, and encounters with non-human Others. “XenoInstitute, Research Institute for Alien Life”, is a project attempting to employ a non-human co-designer in the design process. Brad Foster (year 3 undergraduate, 2021/2022) grew slime mould (*Physarum Polycephalum*) and used its decision-making abilities to aid his design process (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. XenoInstitute.** Research Institute for Alien Life, plan. Student project. A structure “growing” around and through the building and landscape was generated using a non-human designer, slime mould. Brad Foster, Manchester School of Architecture, year 3 undergraduate, 2021/2022.

The non-human designer was tasked with developing a connection between the building and the landscape. The process started with placing a petri dish with agar jelly on top of a site plan and then placing oats (food for the slime mould) in strategic circulation nodes. The slime mould grew and moved around the petri dish, creating connections between sources of food. This pattern was then used as a basis for a layout of a timber structure weaving in and out of the building, creating sculptural and functional intervention in space (Figure 4).





**Figure 4. XenolInstitute.** Research Institute for Alien Life, section demonstrating the timber structure co-designed with a non-human designer (slime mould) penetrating the building and landscape around it. Student project. Brad Foster, Manchester School of Architecture, year 3 undergraduate, 2021/2022.

In this process, the non-human designer's contribution is overruled by the human designer whenever the solution contravenes regulatory, structural, or aesthetic considerations, in fact reducing it to a role of a biological algorithm generator. It would be valid to question this process and the agency of the non-human designer, or even if it should be named as one, but making space for a non-human perspective in the design process brings up some interesting questions about the decision-making processes and the autonomy of the designer. The exploration of living organisms as generating alien decision-making paths is a fascinating opportunity, questioning the role of parametric design tools and the future of the design process itself, with the involvement of other non-human – artificial and biological – intelligences.

Simona Drabužinskaitė's project "Posthumus" (year 3 undergraduate, 2020/2021) started with a sculpture created in response to the ideas discussed in the studio. To represent Donna Haraway's notion of becoming-with, (Haraway, 2016) Simona kept mass-produced and highly processed bread slices in her bathroom for three weeks, waiting for mould to grow on the bread pieces. Once it appeared, she encased the mouldy bread pieces in transparent resin, entombing it in sleek transparent cubes (Figure 5).

Following this exercise, decay became the central theme of her project, which proposed a funeral home and cemetery using sustainable burial techniques where graves are marked with memorial trees nourished by the nutrients from bodies composted in biodegradable coffins. The project's site was the disused Manchester Abattoir, a 1960s industrial complex connected to a railway line where cattle arrived by train, was slaughtered, and finally sold as meat. The gruesome history of the building was an inspiration to embrace death and decay and become-with as the last acts of human existence. Architecturally, the project sought minimum intervention in the abattoir's existing fabric, allowing decay to become a part of the experience. The fact that this work was developed during the Covid-19 pandemic reveals a deeper, more poignant meaning, revealing the need to come to terms with the experienced loss.

Another project reinterpreting the abattoir dealt with the realities of mass meat production. "The transparent abattoir" by Serena Ahmad Faizal (year 3 undergraduate, 2020-2021) adopted a radically inclusive perspective and



**Figure 5. Posthumus.** Sculptures inspired by Donna Haraway's notion of living and dying well with each other in a thick present. (Haraway, 2016)

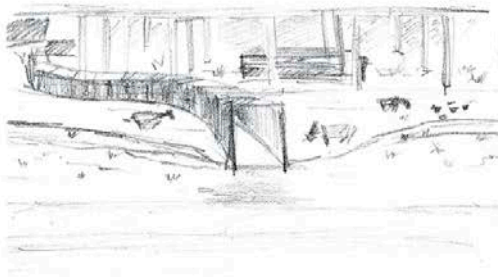
Student project. Bread, mould, resin. Simona Drabužinskaitė, Manchester School of Architecture, year 3 undergraduate, 2020/2021.



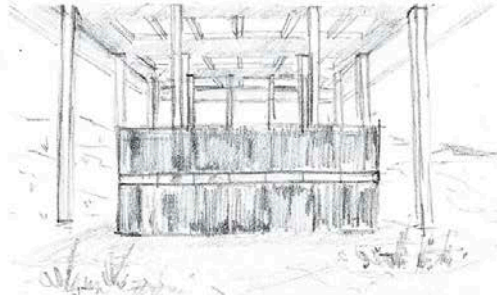
explored the process of meat production from the point of view of animals. Serena imagined multiple points of contact between the customers purchasing meat and enjoying a meal in a restaurant and animals awaiting slaughter (Figure 6), creating a subtle, yet challenging meditation on the realities of meat production and its consumption. Although this project doesn't seek to shock the users, it uses architecture to subtly expose the reality of meat production through a series of indirect and direct encounters between people and animals. A stark, black-and-white palette and sensitive hand drawings sent deliberately mixed messages putting the responsibility to engage with the realities of meat production and consumption on viewers without confrontational imagery. The project is a subtle but poignant exploration of the realities of meat production, quietly disconcerting and probing our conscience without ever lecturing but leaving a lingering discomfort.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Posthumus" by Simona Drabužinskaitė and "The transparent abattoir" by Serena Ahmad Faizal were developed in the &rchitecture atelier at Manchester School of Architecture, and followed the same dialogic and posthuman principles underpinning later work developed in the Some Kind of Nature atelier.

*Human Perspective*

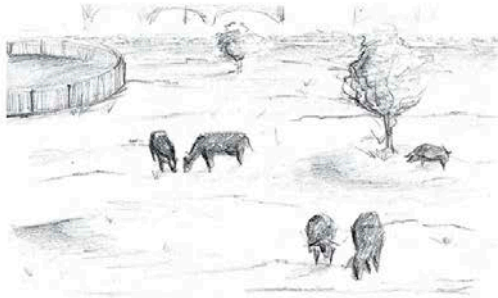
The visitors are confronted with a singular path that leads through a livestock pasture.



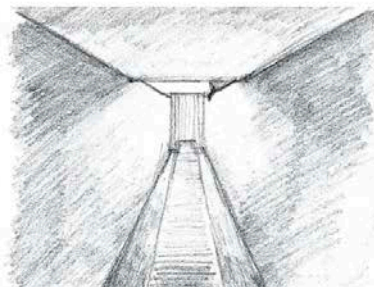
The slaughterhouse is a monolith, nested within the structural skeleton of the existing abattoir. A strip of glazing permits a view inside.



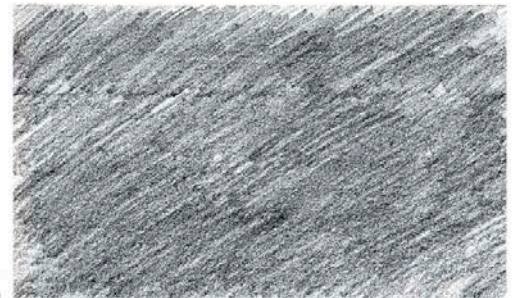
The livestock graze and roam freely.

*Livestock Perspective*

The pasture is wide and unrestricted, allowing livestock to feel at home within a bucolic landscape.



Safe from distractions and ignorant to what awaits them, the animal is led to the stunning area.



In an instant, the animal is dead.

**Figure 6. The Transparent Abattoir.**

Traceability, transparency, and accountability of meat production. Student project. Serena Ahmad Faizal, Manchester School of Architecture, year 3 undergraduate, 2020/2021.

Each of the discussed projects takes a different direction and offers a unique interpretation of the underlying inclusive principle. This is enabled by the breadth of radically inclusive framework, allowing students to explore and connect multiple strands of inquiry it opens.

The inclusion of non-human others is an important direction of exploration changing the human centred design process and opening the opportunities to imagine a more inclusive, but also unfamiliar and perhaps challenging world. These projects point in the direction of a new architecture, slowly revealing how it might evolve to respond to the challenges of the climate crisis.

### Conclusion: Choose your tools wisely

This paper started with an imaginary duel between two very different people loosely connected by architecture. I chose them to reveal embedded prejudices in the figure of the architect using Hanna Arendt's division of work and labor. It allowed for the exposure of division lines running along gender, racial and social class differences, still shaping the understanding of who architects are and what they do. Through the maintenance art of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, I traced the critique of the figure of the artist, following a very similar trajectory that questioned what work we value as a society and how it impacts the way we construct and

perform the figure of other figures in the creative field, like architects. A new figure entered the conversation, calling for the reform of the working conditions of architects and reformatted the work/labor division to shift the understanding of what architects do by positioning their role in the context of the economic system. By situating the production of architecture in the economic context the new figure of the architect worker adds a political dimension to the figure of the architect.

The idea of Radical Inclusivity chimes with these perspectives offering a framework where the process of architecture production follows the dialogic principle, bypassing the dichotomous work/labor division, allowing for the emergence of the figure of the architect defined as a node in the complex web of relationships equipped with the agency to create new bonds, and functioning in recognition of, and in tune with the complexity of the world.

As a part of a network of relationships, a radically inclusive architect is not the lone genius at the helm of the process because this new figure is not built on individuality and her decisions are always the results of complex negotiations engaging with the vast web of relationships facilitating the process.

With this image in mind, we can move more consciously in a new direction. To close, I want to call upon one more voice coming from beyond the profession but giving us the most useful tool of all: a method to tell that new story we desperately need.

In her seminal essay "The carrier bag theory of fiction", Ursula K. Le Guin disputed the origins of humanity as a conquering, blood-thirsty species represented by its earliest tool, the spear, and proposed that the earliest human tool must have been, in fact, a receptacle: the carrier bag, the gourd, or the sling (Le Guin, 2019). An indispensable object for early humans, whose daily diet consisted of ingredients that were mainly gathered than hunted for. The carrier bag is a metaphor for a narrative of human origins and how they shape our understanding of who we are and what we value about ourselves. It is also a story about the method we use to tell our stories. In contrast to a narrative told with a spear, a linear story of conflict where an arrow traces its trajectory from a hero to his prey, the narrative of the carrier bag is messy. It is, in fact, many stories entangled in the vast sack of the universe where nothing is held in separation, and everything and everybody is connected. Ursula Le Guin writes: "Conflict, competition, stress, struggle, etc., within the narrative conceived as carrier bag/belly/box/house/medicine bundle, may be seen as necessary elements of a whole which itself cannot be characterised either as conflict or as harmony, since its purpose is neither resolution nor stasis but continuing process."

The never-ending process, the polyphonic and multi-voiced narrative, the entanglement as one of the main principles organising the universe, the carrier bag narrative could be a valuable tool for radically inclusive architecture.

It is, however, a daunting perspective to do things differently, get rid of the spear and use the carrier bag instead. It is complicated and painstaking work, all that weaving in and out of the fabric of the world, creating new bonds, negotiating, and mending, caring for and repairing what is torn and damaged. On the other hand, we are already doing it by constantly questioning what we do and how. Echoing the words of bell hooks, our classrooms and design studios can become the academy's most radical space of possibility.

*The never-ending process, the polyphonic and multi-voiced narrative, the entanglement as one of the main principles organising the universe, the carrier bag narrative could be a valuable tool for radically inclusive architecture.*

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