

As we work to understand the role of architecture in 2020, there are so many pressing questions that many are eager to answer. However, before architecture looks outwardly to change the world, it must first look within itself -address itself as a discipline. More specifically, that architecture, "too often imitates or caricatures the discourse of power, and that it suffers from the delusion that 'objective' knowledge of reality can be attained by means of graphic representation"¹.

The idea that there exists good or bad architecture buys into the flawed idea of an "objective reality." While engineering flaws that threaten structural integrity and safety of people are clear examples of bad architecture, there is an open debate regarding the idea of cladding - including one perspective that compares ornament to a criminal offense (Loos)².

Loos' idea of "ornament as crime" is a perfect example of architecture that "caricatures the discourse of power". In the context of 2020 and the societal reevaluation of the role of policing and punishment by the Black Lives Matter Movement, this

¹ Lefebvre, H. (2016). *The production of space*. Pg 4 Malden, MA: Blackwell.

² Loos, A. (2019). *Ornament and crime: Thoughts on design and materials*. S.l.: PENGUIN Books.

comparison to crime demonstrates an antiquated (and egoistic) belief system that influences our modes of evaluating architecture.

This is not to say that there have not been shifts in the architectural world. The recent news from The American Institute of Architects established new rules that “(prohibits) members from knowingly designing spaces intended for execution or torture, including for prolonged periods of solitary confinement”³. This is a direct reaction to what may be the largest protest in US history that has ignited a major cultural shift.

It’s clear that architecture as an academic discipline alone can’t save itself. It took activists and organizers focusing national attention on what it truly means to be Black in the United States for architects to stop building one type of structure that reinforces systemic racism.

As Farshid Moussavi explained, “Architecture needs mechanisms that allow it to become connected to culture.”⁴ Architecture must

³ Jacobs, J. (2020, December 11). Prominent Architects Group Prohibits Design of Death Chambers. Retrieved December 17, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/11/arts/design/american-institute-of-architects-execution.html>

⁴ Moussavi, F. (2009). *Function of ornament*. Harvard Press: Actar/birkhauser.

continue to respond to the cultural shifts that are occurring in the moment, and hopefully help to lead them.

However, as Sylvia Lavin described, "architecture has always considered itself the most intellectual of the visual arts and substantiated this claim... in a body of theoretical literature" (Lavin, 114)⁵. Its validity (or lack thereof) aside, claiming to be "the most intellectual discipline" results in barriers to participating in and being acknowledged by the architectural community.

At the same time, the "intellectual" characteristic of architecture as a discipline makes space for many different more esoteric disciplines to influence architectural thought.

Buckminster Fuller exemplifies the breaking down of the disciplinary boundaries of architecture, breaking through to new discoveries and executions.

Therefore what seems to be a possible solution to the problem of public involvement and subsequent appreciation of architecture could be in part a matter of if and how architects allow people into the architectural, the way it does across academic disciplines.

⁵ Lavin, Sylvia "The Uses and Abuses of Theory." (1990) *Progressive Architecture*, August: 179- 181.

There are great examples of architects stepping out of their architectural practice to participate in artistic mediums that resonate with popular culture; like Zaha Hadid, who said she likes working in fashion because "it contains the mood of the moment, like music, literature, and art, whereas architecture is a very long process."⁶ By using fashion as a mechanism to connect to culture, Hadid shares her work and vision far beyond her regular audience. Her Adidas collaboration is this openness in action, where she reimagined the iconic Superstar - a sneaker that holds immense cultural value in the world of fashion and music. In looking at it, Hadid maintains most of the shoe's core elements, while introducing some of her iconic curvilinear style on the toe.⁷



⁶ Staff, C. (2012, August 30). Zaha Hadid and Rem D. Koolhaas On Designing A Shoe For The 21st Century. Retrieved December 17, 2020, from <https://www.fastcompany.com/1670683/hadid-koolhaas-conversation>

⁷ Hadid & Adidas "Superstar Supershell"
<https://www.zaha-hadid.com/design/adidas-originals-superstar-supershell-in-collaboration-with-pharrell-williams/>

If architecture is to begin to earnestly address “this period of history,” for it to begin to touch climate change, economic inequities, and so many other complex issues, there is an unquestionable need for collaboration and participation with and in culture. It also requires an openness to new and novel solutions architects may not have uncovered on their own, or from within their discipline alone.. The door must be opened to more people, to spark broader interest and participation in architecture.. While the Hadid x Adidas sneaker does not solve any societal problems by any measure, it is an expression of the spirit of collaboration necessary for us to move forward. It inspires, and provides a door into Hadid’s architectural practice. As she explained, “Architecture is how the person places herself in the space, whereas fashion is about how you place the object on the person. You could say that the fashion collaborations are fragments of what could occur in architecture.”^{8 9}



These examples of architecture opening itself to larger cultural conversations (in this case via art or fashion) led to my

⁸ *idib*

⁹ Run DMC & Adidas Collaboration (2020),
<https://www.adidas.com/us/superstar-run-dmc-shoes/FX7616.html>

development of my jewelry line, CLADDING. This on-the-nose reference to the architectural concept of cladding as a piece of ornamental jewelry was my attempt to take architecture out of the box of its own creation.

The "CLADDING" jewelry line (german "kleidung" or "to dress") is also an intentional critique of the concept of "ornament as crime," through the use of raw building material for non-functional accessories. Moreover by using steel rather than a more "precious" metal like silver or gold, I suggest the question of how and why we clad ourselves and our environment.¹⁰

The equation $A + B = C$ is a way to understand the process of welding. By taking two metal parts (A and B) and blending them together atomically, a new object is created (C).

However, this non-functional project begins and is processed with only one object, A. What remains of the equation is $A + = C$. This equation is mathematically nonsensical, but the notable absence of a second component centralizes the process, the "+," of adding or joining. The reduction of scale to the size of the jewelry turns joinery itself into an appreciable art form.

¹⁰ Cladding Accessory Range, photography by Mahdi Gransberry (2020)

While there is no way to measure the degree to which these theoretical backings translate in the public realm, it is an attempt to participate in the cultural moment, to bridge industrial processes and culture. If the outputs of architecture are designed for public participation, the discipline *must* open itself to broader avenues of participation, at different moments in the process.

Though of course the subject of this paper, and the class on the whole, privileging Architectural history, theory and criticism as a change agent runs the risk of implying that can work alone. This is all to say I do not practice architecture nor do I have a clear definition of what architecture. I hope it will strive to be a masterful collaborator, a conductor of disparate melodies and a translator of culture. All of these rolls, however, are messy, sometimes superfluous, and involve organic and inconsistent ornamentation. CLADDING is my attempt to honor this understanding of architecture: nothing on its own, a means of incredible beauty as a way to shape the world.