

# Urban Dislocations and the Architecture of Diasporas (1900–present)

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Cities tend to be chronicled by the achievements of the dominant cultures that were responsible for their rise. Often lost in these narratives, however, are the manifold contributions of non-native newcomers, immigrants, refugees, outsiders, and expatriates who played a formative role in shaping and re-purposing urban environments. Neighbourhoods like San Francisco's Chinatown, or New York's Loisaida, for example, were refashioned by century-long migrations from Asia and Latin America. They are as much spaces of global exchange and cohabitation as they are discontinuous enclaves; cities within cities. To study these urban enclaves is to challenge what traditional discourses on the city tend to privilege: the continuity between architectural objects and the local contexts within which they are situated.

This session brings to light the paradoxical nature and hybridity of cities, drawing attention to both the economic, cultural, and technological connections and exchanges, while also uncovering the 'disjuncture' of these urban conditions. It delineates the formal and informal processes by which displaced groups have occupied and reshaped existing structures or territories and those that describe the transglobal networks that have facilitated these transformations. Papers in this session pay special attention to the critical role that individuals, community groups, and activist collectives play in the appropriation, spatial transformation, and re-signification of existing structures and environments.

## Speakers and Abstracts

### **Chinatowns and Socio-Spatial Identities: Gentrification on a planetary scale**

*Abhinand Krishnashankar (Indian Institute of Technology-Madras)*

*Yogeeswari Chandrasekaran (Parsons School for Design)*

Chinatowns across the world exude global city characteristics, marked by global material and capital flows producing specific local geographies. Despite glorifying narratives, Chinatowns need to be seen in the light of their spatial histories, and the processes of urban and social transformation of their traditional user-groups and residents.

This paper attempts to contribute to existing literature on planetary urbanisation and its responses by way of delineating the nature of Chinatowns as both the urban and the constitutive outside (Brenner, 2014) (Lees, Shin, & Lopez-Morales, 2016). It attempts to offer a brief spatial history of Kolkata's Chinatown, India's only region with ethnic Chinese, now Indo-Chinese residents, and contextualises the mushrooming of restaurants owned by local Bengali entrepreneurs in the wake of a Court judgment ordering the shutdown of tanneries in the region. The judgement is significant, particularly because it has led to the rapid development of restaurants, catering to middle- and upper-class residents of Kolkata, while altering the socio-spatial relations of its 'authentic' (Zukin, 2011) residents. While such claims and patterns may seem obvious, this paper locates itself in emerging literature that calls for the foregrounding of everyday spatial practices, negotiations and struggles in discussions about urbanisation. In addition, this paper captures similar processes of gentrification, leading to articulations of concern and uncertainty by immigrants in the case of New York's Chinatown, thereby offering a comparative perspective, given the spatial, economic and cultural idiosyncrasies of the two Chinatowns, despite their location in transnational circuits.

## **Postscript from Domeland**

*Nandini Bagchee (Spitzer School of Architecture, City College, CUNY)*

It was 1968 and Buckminster Fuller was flying around spaceship earth lecturing audiences to join a global grassroots movement to eliminate poverty and design a sustainable future. A talk to a Puerto Rican youth collective (CHARAS) in the New York City made a lasting impression on the young people in the audience. Fuller's call for a new world order outside the established political system fired the imagination of a group whose own experiences of poverty and criminalisation made them mistrustful of city and state. The project of building lightweight geodesic domes in abandoned city lots grew out of these young men's desire to directly, physically change the environment in which they lived. The incongruous cardboard dome on the desolate edge of a city was a defiant act of grassroots activism to educate, inform and empower the Puerto Rican community. In the 70s, CHARAS began producing these domes through their port-a-dome initiative. For the next 20 years, the domes built by CHARAS appeared on rooftops, gardens, and street fairs in New York City. The domes were adapted as canopies during protests, as aquaponic sheds, and as prefab housing in rural Puerto Rico. Fuller's domes, typically associated with a disenfranchised suburban white middleclass in the United States, fortuitously found a different constituency in the aspirations of a young, welfare weary, Puerto Rican urban community. The port-a-dome initiative symbolised the self-sufficiency of CHARAS locally and was a sign of their autonomous participation in a larger global-environmental movement.

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## **Biohazard Architecture: The Haitian diaspora at Bellevue Hospital, New York during the HIV/AIDS crisis**

*Ivan L Munuera (Princeton University)*

Since its first diagnosis in 1981 in the United States, and having escalated into public consciousness by the '4H' moniker – Homosexuals, Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, and Haitians, those considered the most at-risk groups – HIV/AIDS emerged as a new urban mode that overflowed and reinvented the limits of buildings, cities, frontiers, and communities. HIV/AIDS carriers embodied the regulations on borders and international mobility agreements through their treatments and through the epidemic itself. Both ideas affected, in particular, Haitians. Access for Haitians to the American healthcare system was predominantly difficult since they could not obtain legal immigration status in the early 1980s. Bellevue Hospital in New York City was one of the few medical facilities that attended this transnational community during the HIV/AIDS crisis. This paper analyses the architectural configuration of Bellevue Hospital as it closely relates to the definition of HIV/AIDS carriers' identity, in particular the Haitian diaspora in New York.

Bellevue improvised spatial solutions to confine HIV/AIDS patients. These policies stated that HIV/AIDS patients could not be admitted to shared rooms, and that they had to be held in the ER when the limited number of isolation rooms filled up. The containment policy was approved in part because applications for residencies from top medical schools had lagged. The result was the building of different entrances for med applicants and for patients, with the latter architecture organised through other regimes of circulation – all of which created an urbanism based on epidemiology, and infection as a state-making practice.

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## **The Jewish Settlement of Hebron: An architectural history of dislocations**

*Noam Shoked (Princeton University)*

In academic accounts we often hear about the ways in which immigrant groups, through ephemeral everyday practices and design interventions, are able to co-author the city. These accounts show how these practices facilitate the fight of immigrant groups over their right to the city, which, in turn, endows them with a sense of active citizenship. Common to almost all these accounts is the understanding that these practices make space more inclusive. But what happens when newcomers develop a sense of hostility towards the hosting population and their design interventions transform the city in unexpected ways?

This paper explores this question by focusing on the Jewish settlement of Hebron. Shortly after Israel conquered Hebron from Jordan in the Six-Day War from 1967, a number of civilian groups in Israel began advocating for settlement plans in Hebron. With time, their activism paid off, and the government commissioned a number of housing compounds for Jewish Israelis in the heart of Hebron. Shortly after they moved-in, however, fights between the settlers and the Palestinians erupted. To limit the interaction between the two, these compounds were fenced off with physical barriers and military checkpoints. In this paper I will concentrate on two settler compounds and ask how architecture intervenes in the conflict between the two groups. In so doing, I wish to explore the relationship between architecture and politics, and ask if the much-lauded triumph of the user is always a good thing.

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### **The Paradox of Urban Dislocations in Luanda, Angola**

*Paulo Moreira (London Metropolitan University)*

Luanda, Angola's capital, has a long history of evictions and displacements of entire neighbourhoods. In 1864, an outbreak of smallpox caused a great number of deaths in the city. The Portuguese colonial authorities used this fatality as an excuse to clear the areas in which the illness would most easily spread. The evictions had ethnic undertones – they affected mostly the musseques, or informal neighbourhoods, where most native Angolans lived.

The systematic rejection of those deemed economically weak had begun. From that point on, the musseques have been constantly volatile, moving progressively further away from the city centre. During the 20th century, despite these 'clearing' actions, the musseques were expanding and the city was already acquiring many of the features it would retain in decades to come. In contemporary Luanda, the will to eradicate the informal neighbourhoods is stronger than ever. As the expansion of the city continues, the formation of peripheral informal neighbourhoods and resettlement camps corresponds with the removal of the population from a particular area.

This paper pays special attention to Luanda's long history of evictions of entire neighbourhoods. Urban dislocations are often interlinked with violent actions, inextricably connected to the booming real-estate market, both formal and informal. But not all of the displaced people have been victimised by insensitive urban policies; indeed, some have profited from such attempts at segregation. This paper will reflect on how the complexity of these mechanisms of survival, profit and power is yet another layer in Luanda's hybrid, nuanced postcolonial urban order.

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### **'Vertical Neighbourhoods in the Sky': Picturing segregation and urban renewal in Chicago**

*Emma Stein Lewis (University of New Mexico)*

In building massive housing structures along miles of South State Street and other locations during the second half of the 20th century, Mayor Richard J Daley was able to simultaneously control African American votes, maintain the city's historical racial boundaries of segregation, and make a profit for his supporters. The buildings were to be permanently neglected with no attempts at effective maintenance and eventually torn down so the newly valuable land could be sold to developers, displacing the residents. By looking at photographs of Chicago public housing projects using a theoretical understanding of urban space as produced by social relations, this paper presents a different history than the official one put forth by the city and the press, one that is more community focused. The ideological view, often promoted by press images, posits that the buildings were empty spaces filled with criminal bodies who were responsible for the violence that took place within the neutral bricks and mortar of these spaces. Another view, one informed by history and theories of space that contradict the notion of space as autonomous, acknowledges that both the building and demolition of Chicago high-rise projects are two episodes in a long history of restricting the mobility and access of African Americans in order to maintain segregation. These diverging histories are examined in the work of contemporary photographer David Schalliol, as he documents the process of destroying housing projects, often by showing the cyclical aspects of 'clearing slums' and land returning to nature.