



ARCHITECTURES OF REFUSAL

Guest-edited by
Jill Stoner and Ozayr Saloojee



A detailed architectural drawing of a building, likely a mosque or a similar structure with a central dome and minarets. The drawing is overlaid with a large, red 'X' shape, which is composed of two large, solid red triangles meeting at the center. The title 'ARCHITECTURES OF REFUSAL' is printed in large, bold, black capital letters across the middle of the drawing, partially obscured by the red 'X'.

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Jill Stoner and Ozayr Saloojee

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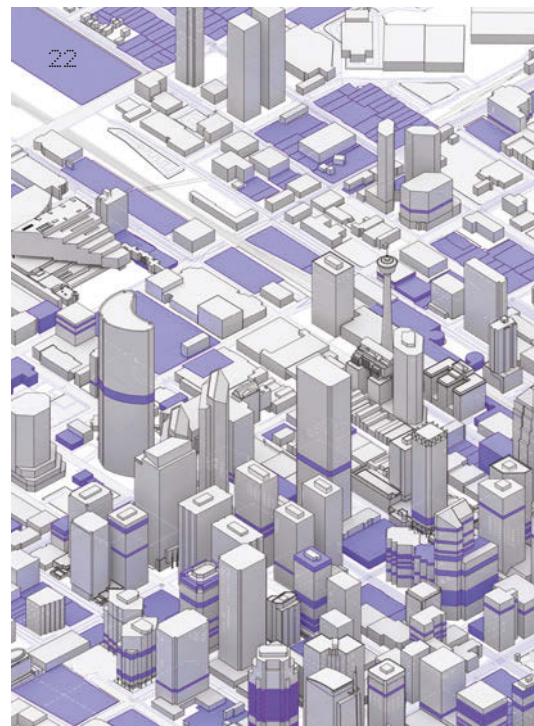
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'For decades, architecture has refused to acknowledge its contributions to social and environmental injustices, instead blithely perpetuating exploitative practices in the name of high art. But now, alternative practices and theorists across the world are refusing to comply.'

—Jill Stoner and Ozayr Saloojee

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Cathy Smith,
Meanwhile Bodies, 2022.
© Cathy Smith

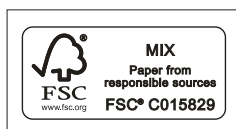
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Ozayr Saloojee, *Sinan's Sokollu Mehmet Paşa, Istanbul (1568)*, 'Drawing an Argument for Refusal' series, 2022.
© Ozayr Saloojee

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ABOUT THE
GUEST-EDITORS

JILL STONER AND OZAYR SALOOJEE



During their six years as academic colleagues, Jill Stoner and Ozayr Saloojee have discovered a shared and deep commitment to expanding architecture's mandate, and to questioning the long-accepted Western canons of the profession. Their collaboration draws upon their complementary networks across six continents, and represents intersections of grass-roots practices, academic experimentation in design studios, and theoretical positions that push the very boundaries of architecture's definitions. Their vision for introducing the theme of this issue began with a refusal to privilege a single work on the cover. In this shared project, they seek to trouble architectural convention in the contexts of common senses, familiar orientations, glib geographies, uncritical histories and modes of perception.

Jill Stoner is Professor at the Graduate School of the University of California, Berkeley, where she taught in the department of architecture for 28 years. She recently completed a term as Director of the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. With a first degree in literature, her work has consistently drawn evidence from both fiction and poetry, insights from outside the field that reveal architecture's problematic narrative. Her project Rubashov's House (1992) drew upon stories of solitary confinement to produce a solo exhibition at the Berkeley Art Museum. Her first book, *Poems for Architects* (William Stout Publishers, 2001) is an anthology of 48 poems that reveal transformations of spatial sensibility throughout the 20th century. A second book, *Toward a Minor Architecture* (MIT Press, 2012) unravels the myths of architecture's colonial history through literary references, and advocates for a more politicised approach to the built environment. Recent writings are focused towards broader audiences, weaving together themes of climate change, the corruption of language and lessons of companion species. Her recent essays 'The End of the Idea of Island' and 'Migrants with Wings' were published on Literary Hub.



Ozayr Saloojee is Associate Editor of Design for the *Journal of Architectural Education (JAE)*, faculty in architecture at Carleton University, where he is also cross-appointed at the Institute for African Studies and affiliate faculty at the Carleton Center for the Study of Islam. He received his BArch and post-professional MArch II (Theory + Culture) from Carleton, and his PhD from the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London (UCL). He has been shortlisted twice to curate the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale, with the collectives Fluid Boundaries in 2018, and with HiLo/YOW+ in 2022. Born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa, his teaching and creative practice focuses on the spatial implications of contested political landscapes, geo-imaginaries and design justice, and he maintains research interests in the art and architecture of the Islamic worlds. Recent publications include collaborative writings with Dr Zoe Todd and Émélie Desrochers-Turgeon theorising on the notion of the Kerosphere (University of Toronto Press) and 'Kerogenic relations' (*Transmediale*, 2022) to foreground ethical and reciliatory relations with land and kin. ▢

Daniel Effah,
The Shadow as an Episteme,
'Between This Space and Me:
Tracing the Shadow as an Episteme',
MArch thesis,
Carleton University, Ottawa,
2022

Using the Photoshop image manipulation tools of 'Dodge' and 'Burn', this image is a meditation on the shadow as an episteme, and its entanglements with racialisation, inequality and the built environment. The shadow becomes a world-building, world-knowing and world-seeking exercise of emancipatory visual and spatial practice, akin to the pole shadows cast by Dream The Combine's *Columbus Columbia Colombo Colón* installation, in Indiana (2021) – see pp 68–77.

REPAIR, REWORLD

**THE MANY WAYS
OF SAYING 'NO'**

INTRODUCTION

JILL STONER AND
OZAYR SALOOJEE

We begin with three avatars of refusal. The first is Herman Melville's hapless anti-hero Bartleby, a scrivener who one day simply refuses to work.¹ 'I prefer not to' is his response when given his daily task by the narrator. Self-effacing and nearly mute, Bartleby embodies passive resistance taken to an extreme. Eventually, he refuses even to eat, and slowly wastes away.

In our own time, in 2018, a young schoolgirl in Sweden began by refusing to attend school, spending days holding up a simple sign as she sat on the public pavement: 'School Strike for Climate'. Her initial, relatively polite resistance quickly gained recognition, and the ensuing momentum progressively gave Greta Thunberg a public, international platform. 'How dare you!?' she famously challenged world leaders at the UN climate conference in 2019, after refusing to burn carbon on a flight from Stockholm to New York, and instead making her way across the Atlantic on a boat.²

But an even more exemplary voice for refusal may be Juliet's plea from the balcony: 'O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo? / Deny thy father and refuse thy name.'³ She is asking him, in refusing the Montague name, to honour his love for her over any social or familial obligations. Refusal here is much more than a symbolic spurn. It goes to the very core of authenticity, with absolute commitment and commitment's alter ego: risk.

REVERSING THE NATURE OF REFUSAL

In the 14th century, English usage of the word 'refuse' swerved towards the negative connotation of rejection and avoidance. But before that, the Vulgar Latin '*refusare*' was a direct descendant of the Proto Indo European root *gheu*, meaning 'to pour'. To refuse was to pour back, to flow back, to give back, to restore and return. There is nothing nostalgic here. In the domain of architecture, to return or flow again is simply to refuse all the calcifying, paralysing, limiting structures of patriarchal, colonial, binary spatial practices to which architecture has been held captive.

For decades, architecture has refused to acknowledge its contributions to social and environmental injustices, instead blithely perpetuating exploitative practices in the name of high art. But now, alternative practices and theorists across the world are refusing to comply. This issue is dedicated to some of those counter-refusals, critiquing a wide range of past canons and patterns that include privileging colonial ruling classes, exploiting labour, privatising public space and excluding of other species.

The opening article 'Drawing An Argument for Refusal' challenges the drawing convention of the analytique as a means of understanding the complex life of a building, through a drawing project that world-builds from the temporalities of architecture, history and the colonial sleight-of-hand of drafted lines and drawing conventions. Here, the practice of refusal is both method, memory and meaning, and a deliberate counter to the universalism of drawing practice. Here, drawings are not a ruse of knowing, but a reparative claiming of time, space and place, always from the so-called architectural centre of the Mediterranean world. This is a project of flowing back, with drawing as its fluid medium.

REDEFINING DEFINITIONS, REFUSING BOUNDARIES

Alberto de Salvatierra, in his piece 'Centring Civilisation: Now and *After* the Apocalypse', extends this un-centring to the scale of the civilisational, both in the politics of a name – at the Center for Civilization at the University of Calgary's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape which he directs – and in the urgency of climate catastrophe. Drawing on the work of Bruno Latour, Vaclav Smil, Alexander von Humboldt and Design Earth, de Salvatierra argues for a refusal of 'skewed systems' and the reifying of a 'darker, techno-enabled totalitarian dystopia'.

Lucía Jalón Oyarzun shifts the scale of refusal to the minor and questions the (major) computational hegemony of Autodesk, IBM and Alphabet, arguing for the 'open repertoire of spatial practices and know-hows attentive to the differentiating agency of the real'. Oyarzun resists 'proprietary algorithms', in order to reach practices of the incomputable, the uncertain, and 'material fuzziness'. The minor, as a praxis of refusal, is a type of learning keyed to the no-mean-feat of survival.

Quilian Riano brings the practice of refusal to teaching through design studios in Canada and the US. With the improvisational work of landscape architect Walter J Hood and Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' as conceptual frameworks, he asks students to challenge the very notion of the generic body. Riano, at Kent State College of Architecture and Environmental Design, and with Jenn Low (as a faculty teaching pair from the Dark Matter University) at Carleton University's Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism, explore – with students – the collaborative practice of design, challenging students to re-imagine subjectivity as intersectional bodies.

REFUSING THE COLONIAL

The following series of texts bring us to South Africa, and to the critical practice of architects and teachers Threshen Govender and Hannah le Roux in Egoli (Johannesburg), and to the Mother City of Cape Town, through the work of Ilze Wolff of Wolff Architects. Govender's article explores deviance as refusal in the dynamic and sites of South African shebeens – drinking establishments that have significant agency as a formal and architectural typology to challenge static and still profoundly oppressive urban legal constraints. Shebeens, as agents of refusal and as commons of resistance, are investigated, documented, drawn and theorised as vital urban imaginaries.

From the pub to the soccer field. Hannah le Roux's text looks to the township football fields in the Witwatersrand region, and how football pitches serve as temporal claims to space in the *terrain vague* of buffer zones, and in response to the 2010 FIFA World Cup's failed promise of 'legacy projects' in Johannesburg's townships. Le Roux's 'open fields' serve as mediating agents upon the formal gesture of the white line drawn upon the earth to mark the extent of the field. They expose the power of appropriation, the refusals of 'enclosure, resurfacing ... and exclusion', as she writes, to confront elites and to support community.

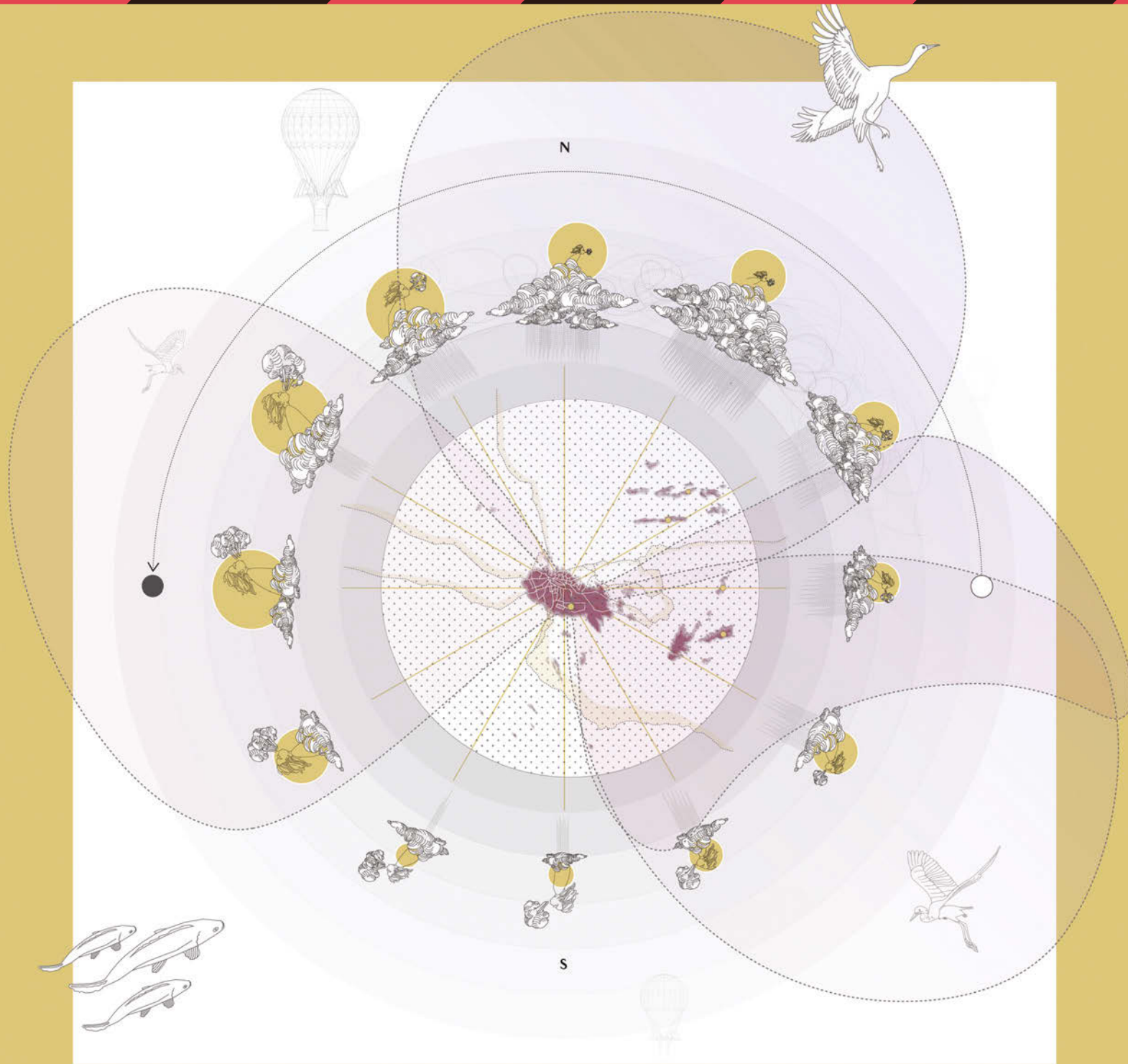
Ilze Wolff's article on the holiday home of Cecil John Rhodes – the British mining magnate and politician who served as the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in the late 19th century – begins with an epigraph by South African author and freedom



Gabrielle Argent,
Return to District Six, Cape Town,
 'Mobility, Voice and View: Unpacking
 the Future of Cape Town's District Six',
 MArch thesis, Carleton University,
 Ottawa,
 2020

On the site of the old Cape Town called District Six, abandoned since its residents were banished to townships in the hinterlands, Argent's project imagines a return to this ground. It is refusal made visible through stories, and accessible through the design of a new aerial public transit system. Like the shebeens discussed in Thireshen Govender's article, the remaking of District Six is generated by narrative licence and ambiguous edges.

**IN THE DOMAIN OF
 ARCHITECTURE, TO RETURN
 OR FLOW AGAIN IS SIMPLY
 TO REFUSE ALL THE
 CALCIFYING, PARALYSING,
 LIMITING STRUCTURES OF
 PATRIARCHAL, COLONIAL,
 BINARY SPATIAL PRACTICES
 TO WHICH ARCHITECTURE
 HAS BEEN HELD CAPTIVE**



Rudo Mpisaunga,
A New Map of Zambia,
 'Towing the Line: Unravelling and Reconstructing
 Identity Along the Zambezi River',
 MARCH thesis, Carleton University,
 Ottawa,
 2022

Picking up where Namwali Serpell's novel *The Old Drift* (2019) ends, this image is a speculation on a new map of Lusaka, following catastrophic infrastructural failure. It investigates new modalities of mapping and *placing*, as part of a local reckoning with colonial history and future possibility. Mpisaunga's drawing is seen here as an analogue to Wolff Architects' proposal to reconsider the Rhodes Cottage in Cape Town.

advocate Bessie Head, where she notes of Rhodes that ‘You look across the land as a black person and you feel choked.’ Here, Wolff connects back to Oyarzun’s earlier piece and her citing of Frantz Fanon, bell hooks and the tragic death of Eric Garner. Her text reflects on Wolff Architects’ conservation management plan, appointed through a public tender process by the City of Cape Town, to develop a site management, educational, research and conservation plan for the house of the man who noted in 1896 that ‘I have taken everything from them but the air.’

The award-winning architectural practice Dream The Combine – led by Jennifer Newsom and Tom Carruthers – reflects on the local and global legacy of Christopher Columbus in the Midwest modern ‘mecca of Columbus’. Their article explores his extractivist, genocidal legacy through an installation of vertical markers in Mill Race Park, Columbus, Indiana as a practice of attunement to the ‘silences of loss’ that connect us. Their work constructs a spatial imaginary of the so-called city-on-a-hill. Etched with narratives from other places named after the same man, and laid out through Mercator projections, this is an architecture of discursive refusal and of accountability.

(NEARLY) INVISIBLE LINES OF REFUSAL

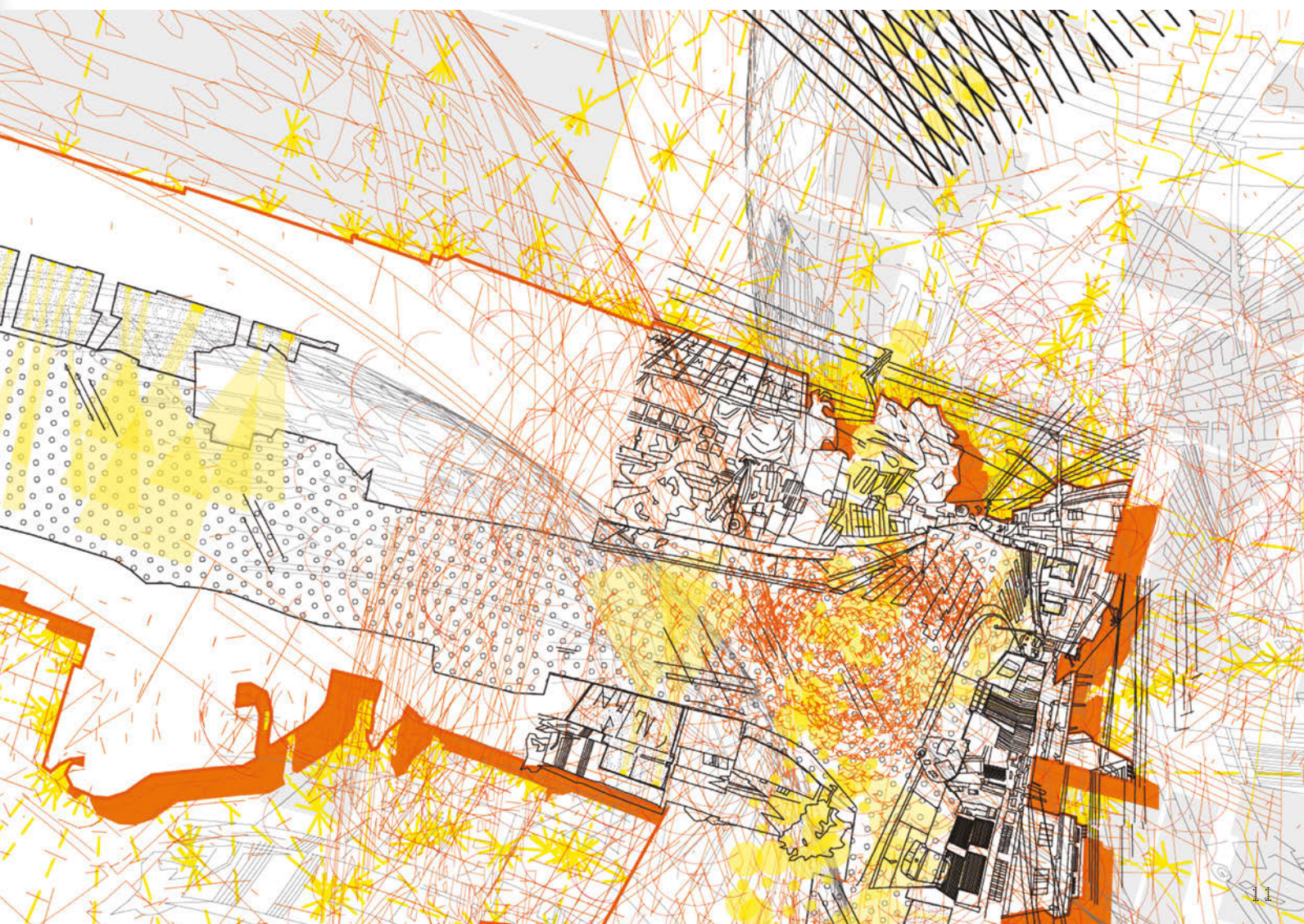
Piper Bernbaum’s piece on the Jewish eruv complements these narratives of contemporary spatial politics with a practice that is centuries old. Essentially, eruvim (plural) refuse the conventional

definition of domestic territory, as a way of negotiating between Orthodox Sabbath law and the necessities of daily life. As a barely visible line through neighbourhoods around the world, the eruv serves as a model for subtle resistances that define space without occupying it.

Carwil Bjork-James’s study of recent urban developments in Bolivia brings to light a lesser-known case of indigenous leadership and of collective resistance to colonial assumptions about hierarchy, infrastructure and convention. It is the most ‘active’ example of refusal in this collection, as both a violent deconstruction of a former transit system and a political tour de force of innovative replacement: the *teleferico*.

Kirsten Larson,
Roda de Samba,
São Paulo, Brazil,
‘City of Bridges: Performative
Urbanisms of the Everyday’,
MARCH thesis,
University of California,
Berkeley,
2015

Larson’s proposal for a bridge in São Paulo traces in dynamic lines and patterns an architecture that refuses substance in favour of motion. Instead of walls, the beating of *cuicos*, the engagement with *buteocos*, the dizzying choreography of *sambistas* on a typical Sunday, as ‘meanwhile’ as the bodies in Cathy Smith’s article.



RULES OF REFUSAL

The next cluster of three articles are entangled with the knotty problems of rules, identity and property. The artist, urbanist and designer Chat Travieso confronts the notion of refusal by removal – which becomes part of the lexicon in his piece where he argues for strategies of strategic disregard, appropriation, circumvention and abolition in aid of ethical architectural futures, noting: ‘If architecture is a form of regulation, its refusal is a form of civil disobedience.’

MArch graduate Thompson Cong Nguyen explores the construction of alterior bodies through the architecture of offering for queer Vietnamese kin, in the shape of three altars designed at the scale of the room, the street and the club. Nguyen aims, as he writes, to ‘develop a spatial practice that deeply considers the dimensional tolerances and (in)visible infrastructures as well as the shared joy and loss of my community and family.’

Architect and educator Cathy Smith extends this refusal into the needs of ‘meanwhile bodies’ and their tenuous relationships with the built environment. Like Travieso’s strategies for refusal, for Smith, the precarity of the ‘meanwhile body’ shows the tension of positive images of, in her words, ‘tactical urbanism, artisanal and creative enterprise, and “pop-up” retail’, in contrast to the lived world of ‘indeterminate accommodation’. How can the nomadic’s embrace of otherness through feminist, post-structuralist and post-humanist discourse enable new spaces, types and figurations?

The final article, ‘To Not Refuse a Ravaged World’, reminds us that we must face forward, acknowledging all we have already built, and by building, all that we have obliterated. This is our context. In refusing architecture’s exhausted and destructive spatial myths – of tabula rasa, wasted resources, anthropocentrism, boundaries, award-winning objects, heroic achievements, binary exclusions, permanence and growth – we accept the ravaged world we have made, as we have made it, as our point of departure. Feminist philosopher Donna Haraway calls it ‘staying with the trouble’.⁴ Geographer AM Kanngieser calls it ‘refusal as return’,⁵ which returns us to the very root of refusal – a ‘pouring back’ into the vessel of a ravaged landscape of all that we feel and care about, recognising architecture not as a noun but as a verb, defined by action, perpetually unfinished and messily contingent.

Ozayr Saloojee,
Maqluba, Olive, Watermelon
(fragment),
‘Street/Food’ series, 2021

The image is a fragment of a drawing on food as resistance and refusal in Palestine. Here, textures of olives, watermelons and a traditional Palestinian dish (*maqluba*) become part of a constantly fragmenting and re-assembling map of Palestinian pasts, through a drawing practice that riffs on the Vitruvian Man and Le Corbusier’s Modulor – as Quilian Riano writes about in his article in this issue.

