Instituting Exclusiveness:
Modern Lebanese Architects and their Society

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The number of architects in Lebanon has grown from a handful of foreign educated professionals with exclusive skills known to a few at the first quarter of the twentieth century, to form a sophisticated class of professionals that benefits, together with structural engineers, from exclusive legal rights to the making of buildings. While they became visible on state boards and committees, architects have seen their decision-making power over matters of buildings and the built environment consistently reduced in favor of other actors such as politicians, contractors and state bureaucrats. Architects are today overwhelmed by their shrinking effectiveness on the built environment; however architectural academic institutions still structure their programs and curricula on the assumption that architects have exclusive control over the building process. In fact, the Architectural academic discourse views its field of practice as dominated by the encroachment of others on the building process and rarely assumes a (much-needed) self-critical role. What is considered to be an 'unacceptable' condition of the built environment is viewed as an outcome of the degeneration of 'others' while architects, perceive themselves as outsiders to this 'degenerating' social condition. In this paper, I look back (swiftly) at the evolution of the architecture profession and discipline in Lebanon in order to work towards a re-assessment of the architect's position within the process of making buildings. I propose a critical outlook at the modern architectural practices in Lebanon within their social context in order to explain the current marginal position of the architect.

EXCLUSIVE PRACTICE

The 20th century witnessed the establishment of several modern institutions designed to organize the process of construction in Lebanon as well as the inauguration of academic programs teaching Architecture. The first Lebanese Building and Planning law was instated in 1940; in 1954 the Order of Engineers (and Architects) was established based on a semi-formal 1938 organization, and in 1959 the Ministry of Public Works instituted the Directorate of Town Planning (DGU). In what follows, I will discuss the social disposition of architects within the context of early twentieth century Lebanon in order to better assess their urge to collaborate in the making of the above listed institutions. I propose to read the development of the professional institutions that legitimate the role of the architect in building matters as a direct implication of the academic institutions that produced those architects.

Pierre Bourdieu, in his article "Rite of Institution," argues that credentials, academic or otherwise, are predisposed to act as "symbolic capital," whose accumulation is perceived as a process of accumulating competence. Academic credentials therefore affect the way people perceive the accredited person and what is expected from her. Furthermore, Bourdieu adds, those credentials change the way the accredited person perceives herself and encourage her to adopt certain obligations that conform to people's expectations.[1] These pioneering architects, graduates of architecture schools in the United Kingdom and France, strived to establish an institutional framework for their practice in line with their education; that is a framework that could valuate the 'symbolic capital' they had accumulated in terms of professional credentials earned abroad, be it through their education, training or cultural values. Modern Lebanese architects thus aimed to create the necessary institutions to legitimate and define their role within the Lebanese society. They designed a framework that could recognize 'who they are' and 'what they stand for' within their society.

> The act of institution is thus an act of communication, but of a particular kind: it *signifies* to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone...and thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be.[2]

Working within an institutional frame of reference reduces the possibility of alternative procedures and limits the architects' struggle to a struggle between engineers and professionals, who are all produced and recognized by similar institutions. For example, with the establishment of the Order of Engineers (and Architects)[3] the discourse over building affairs was almost entirely relocated within the space of the Order and limited to its recognized professions, mainly architects and structural engineers, both sharing the same professional title of *muhandes*.[4] These legitimate institutional bodies define the boundaries within which professionals act, resist, or battle; a fact that conceals the possibility of other modes of operation, which could include other 'non-institutionalized' actors that are neither university degreed nor engineers.[5] In a relatively short period of time, architects were able to create spaces and procedures that would make them indispensable, such as building guidelines and construction approvals that were constituted, in form and content, in line with professional norms that followed their own structure of architectural knowledge. Their ability to do so, I believe, is due to the fact that a good number of these architects had familial connections to people in state power position, which brought an authoritative and state-complicit tone to their practices.[6]

The establishment of the architectural profession along institutional lines has proved over time to contribute to the subjugation of the architect's voice rather then its empowerment. I will discuss in the following paragraphs three ways in which this is happening. First, working from within state institutions and agencies, which implied legitimizing the profession by aligning with the power positions of the state, placed a social mark for the profession as a whole. Architects as designers or planners are now often perceived as state agents who are used to consecrate large planning schemes at the disadvantage (at best irrelevance) of other social factions. As such, the whole 'class of professionals' is seen as affiliated to state institutions by outsiders to the state and its agencies. This is specifically important because architects, as a 'class,' aspired but never got to control the decision-making of the urban (physical) planning boards and committees. I am using here Bourdieu's understanding of social classes where

> [t]he 'real class'... is nothing but the realized class, that is, the mobilized class, a result of the *struggle of classifications*, which is a properly symbolic ... struggle to impose a vision of the social world...[7]

For Bourdieu social class is a class-in-the-making that marks difference within social space, which is constituted in the present by affiliating to certain "goods and practices." In adopting exclusive practices that are not historically webbed within the local social context, the class of architects differentiated itself from other non-professionals and formulated an introverted class. The class of architects reproduces itself within the space of the new institutions and through the credentials

and modes of practice that the institution prescribes. Architects at best are looked at with suspicion both by the empowered and the powerless. While the former perceives the architect as an ambiguous prospective hindrance for the dissemination of his power, the latter suspects the architect to be the hand of the former in the materialization of his power in space.

Second, achieving centrality of decision-making power over the whole built environment through a single institution, (the DGU),[8] further alienated decision makers from the population affected by their decisions. The DGU's mechanisms of operation depend on developing master plans, within executive meeting rooms, using various modes of representations (personal, figurative, political, statistical) that eliminate the participation of any actor other than politicians and their professional agents. It is a mechanism that serves state authorities by providing them with tools of better control and further separation from the social affairs of the built environment. The failures of these master plans are numerous. One example is the concentric zoning law of Beirut (approved in 1964) that assigned higher exploitation factors to the center thus encouraging new development in the historical center and creating less incentive for development on the empty periphery.[9] A more recent example is SOLIDERE, the company responsible for the reconstruction project of Downtown Beirut, after the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990. The SOLIDERE project transformed property rights in war-torn downtown Beirut into public shares administered by a single real estate company. The company then initiated a project, which cleared entire neighborhoods and their historical fabric and preserved only few structures. This resulted in a colossal project of gentrification where the historical downtown was made into an "emporia of mass consumption"[10] targeting local elite and foreign tourism. The entire project was conceived, drawn and produced behind closed doors in SOLIDERE's headquarters and in the offices of their consultant Dar al Handasah, seeking the approval of the state figures that commissioned them in the first place. Such projects follow the whims of political leaders of the time with virtually no mechanisms or space for others to contribute or to resist, including the community of architects themselves. The space of the architect is invisible in the process. To the general public, the role of the architect in shaping their spaces remains ambiguous because it is practically "behind the scenes." Master plan architects are can only be seen in their own offices and the offices of the state institutions that they have helped establish.

Third, the establishment of the profession along institutional processes embodied in objective structures, such as planning and building laws, has contributed to handing over building matters to bureaucrats, state agents, and politicians. The text, figures and numbers that constitute the building law empower bureaucrats with objective criteria according to which they can assess the legality and the value of the architectural project. The scope of the process of building permit assessment and approval is limited to ensuring that the design meets legal

well-financed American-based land developers are waiting impatiently in the wings.

DEPARTURE

Of what use is Havana's historical residue for the next generation of builders? Can Havana's long building tradition be acknowledged only superficially, or can we salute precedent by extending, amending and even contradicting? What is our professional responsibility as designers and architects to those living in the newly "reborn" 21st century city of Havana?

This project is to be approached as if working on a drawing originally produced by someone else. It is not sacrosanct, so you may erase, smudge and cut, but it is impossible to remove it all and start over. So, what stays? What goes?

"You may not be interested in politics, but politics is certainly interested in you."
Trotsky, paraphrased

Proposal 1:
A home for the old man
Jason Putnal

Thesis

How can a well designed and constructed (no matter how simply) home improve an individual's life? If a person has a place they might call *home*, they will have a stronger sense of personal identity and subsequently be able to live a fuller, richer life. A home that is designed thoughtfully and specifically for an individual can instill a strong sense of well-being. This sense of well-being will promote personal confidence, despite the uncertainties that may exist beyond the front door.

Project

Due to political and economic conditions in Havana, there is little room for a person to separate themselves from the press of the public sphere. The program of this project is the design of a 280 square foot *room for two*. The inhabitants of the room are Santiago (Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man*), and Manolin, Santiago's young friend. The design of the room is intended to provide personal, tangible meaningful spaces and details in much the same way Hemingway develops and describes his characters. Hemingway's care and meticulous attention to detail becomes the measure of the qualities of the designed space.
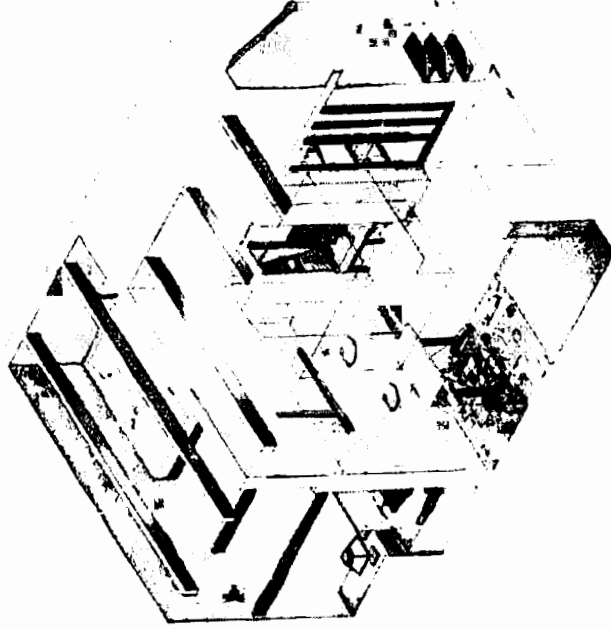

Fig. 1. A home for the old man.

Program

The program includes separate sleeping arrangements for both Santiago and Manolin, a desk for Manolin (who is still school age), a place to listen to baseball games on the radio, a place to clean small fish, a place to read the newspaper, and a place to sit and talk to the neighbors while overlooking the children playing in the plaza below. There is access onto the exterior balcony as well as into the core of the building where the shared kitchen and bath are located. Toilet facilities are provided within the room.

*"It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact.
Then when luck comes you are ready."*
Santiago, in Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea

Proposal 2:
Relation Through Separation
Nicole Bradley

"We must first get a spiritual hold on the merely indifferent being of the two banks in their separated-ness, in order to go and link them with a bridge...."
George Simmel, Bridge and Door

Thesis

Without a truly *public* realm, the concept of community cannot exist. For common ground within a community to be defined, we must establish a public realm through means that both separates and relates *simultaneously*.
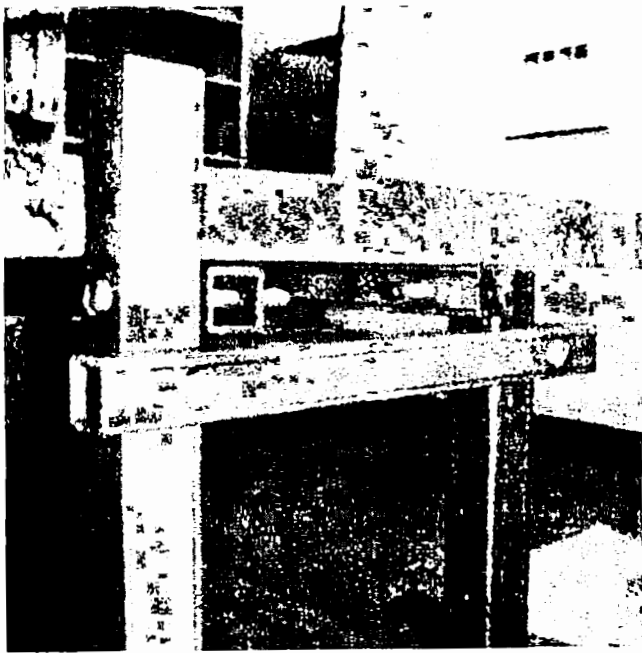
Fig. 2. Relation through seperation.

Project

The future of Havana relies on the cooperation and healing of a rift between two halves of its community, the *Island Cubans*, and the expatriated *Cuban-American Exiles*. This project proposes two installations. one in Havana. the other in Miami. The installations consist of table-like apparatus' that demands interaction and speaks of the relationship between Cubans and their exiled countrymen. The apparatus' are deigned for no other – they concern themselves with how we sometimes must be separated to become related. and the healing powers of remembering.

"To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it: the world. like every in-between. relates and separates at the same time. The public realm. as the common world gathers us together and yet prevents us from falling over each other. so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved... but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together. to relate and separate them. The weirdness of the situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly. through some magic trick. see the table vanish from their midst. so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but would also be unrelated by anything tangible...."

Hannah Arendt

Proposal 3:
Interstitial Space:
The making of private space within a public environment
Heather Brantly

> pri-vate (prī´-vit)adj. |L. *privus*. separate| **1.** of or concerning a particular person or group **2.** not open or controlled by the public (a *private* school) **3.** for an individual person (a *private* room) **4.** not holding public office (a *private* citizen) **5.** secret (a *private* matter)

Thesis

Despite our innate need for social interaction. humans also have a need for privacy. The degree of this necessity may vary according to the individual or the situation: its presence determines not only *where* we live. but more importantly. *how* we live.

Within cities the issue of privacy becomes increasingly complex. In an urban context humans are continuously bombarded with stimuli to which they must respond. If this level becomes too great. they experience a high amount of stress. what many psychologists refer to as *overload*. The inhabitants of the city must constantly readjust their degree of social interaction through the use of *screening devices*. In cases where these devices fail to be implemented. individuals find themselves unable to control their personal level of interaction and often even begin to withdraw from society completely.
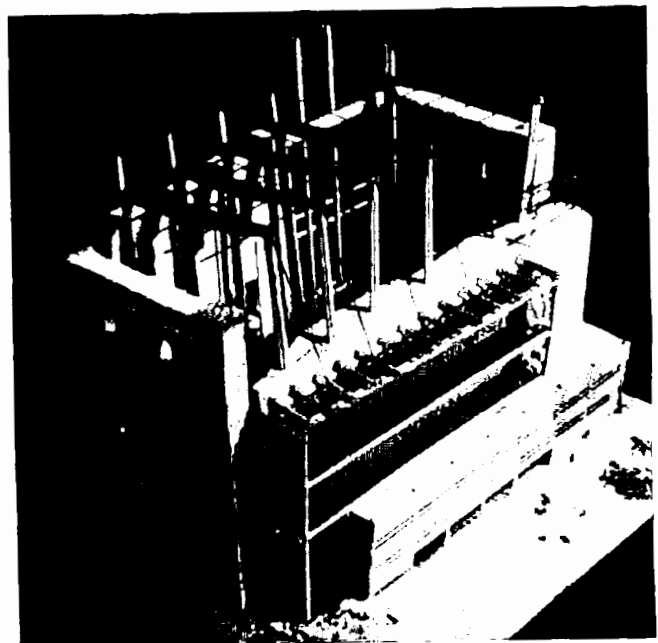

Fig. 3. Interstitial space.

Project

As urban communities in Havana become increasingly public, architecture must respond by adjusting the levels of privacy and interaction it provides. One method to moderate (or even mediate) interaction is through control of the built environment. Architecture often represents the physical manifestation of this psychic need of screening devices. Walls, gates and doors are examples of such architectural devices. In contrast, windows often are used to maintain physical separation while maintaining visual contact. The built environment, through the use of visual and textural cues, may both prevent and encourage interaction. Within the urban context, due to density and crowding, social conventions often fail to provide the levels of interaction and privacy desired. In this realm, *architecture must articulate the various levels of social interaction and privacy that simple behavioral patterns cannot.*

This project proposes an *interstitial space*, a space "in-between" public and private, where tourist to Havana and residents may share a healthy co-existence. The site is located at 267 Mercaderes, Habana Vieja, which is on the well traveled tourist route between the historic sites of the *Plaza de la Catedral* and the *Plaza Vieja*.

Program

While the relationships such interstitial spaces foster between public and private may serve as developmental prototypes for the city of Havana, this particular study is simply a close examination of how the following relationship might be achieved architecturally:

1) The transformation of an existing building shell into a semi-private exterior space.

2) The provision of a "buffer zone" between public and private for the adjacent apartment buildings.

3) Preservation of the existing façade of the structure, maintaining the street wall outside, and privacy within.

Proposal 4:
Context / Contents
Jeremy Bagents

Thesis

During the period of time before the Renaissance began, privacy as we know failed to exist. Rooms were non-existent; people relied on furniture to keep their important possessions safe from harm. Ultimately, as personal privacy began to be an issue, the need for defined private spaces arose.
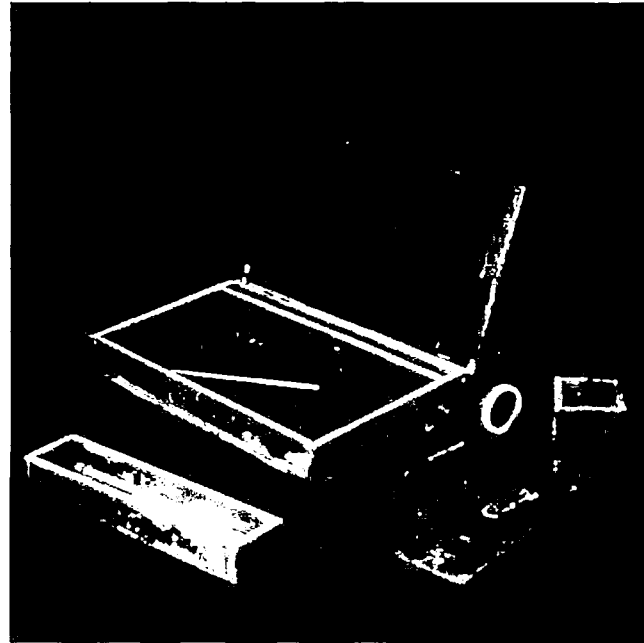

Fig. 1. Context / contents.

In Havana, numerous families crowd houses that were intended for only one; physical boundaries between individuals are often non-existent. As a response to this loss of privacy, a place must be created that allows the individual to have control, a place to experience the privacy and security that architecture no longer provides. This place is not in the form of a room or a house, as these would simply deteriorate over time. Belongings must once again be house in something *more substantial* than architecture.

Project

This project is such a container: an easily transportable box in which all that is important dwells. The items that it houses are dominos, a journal, photographs, correspondence received (or yet to be sent) and a candle.

The dominos are the most public item contained within the box. By being visible to the public, they promote social interaction with others who must face similar realities. Only the most precious photographs of times past (times to come?) are stored — they are carefully hidden beneath the envelopes for delivering correspondence. The journal and the letters are the most intimately personal belongings housed within the box; they allow the owner to share their innermost thoughts with themselves. The letters are hidden below the journal at the narrowest end of the box — almost nothing is found visible within. The candle, used as a source of light while writing, reading or playing dominos at night or during a blackout, is housed within a hollowed out half cylinder located at the carrying end of the box.

Proposal 5:
Communication: Information
Dena Womack

> "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press: or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.*"
> Amendment 1, United States Constitution

Thesis

Information and communication are important to the building and maintaining of a civilization. A society without either stagnates. The exchange of ideas is necessary for any society to prosper.

From pony express to email, "instant" communication has developed rapidly in the United States. The image of the public mailbox and telephone are symbols of our freedom of communication, while in Havana, only twenty-one people out of every thousand have regular access to a working telephone.

Project

This project concerns the design of an iconic *public communications portal*, proposed to be installed in all public places. It contains all of the means of contemporary information and communications deployment: internet access, telephone, and radio. Daily newspapers from around the world are distributed
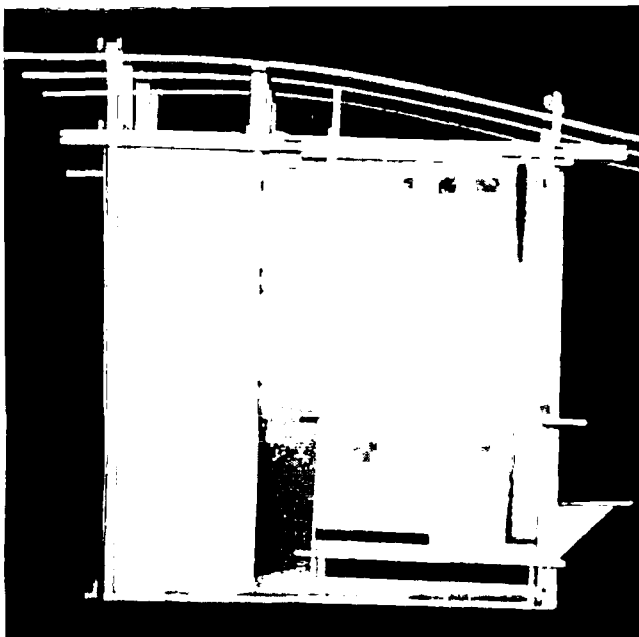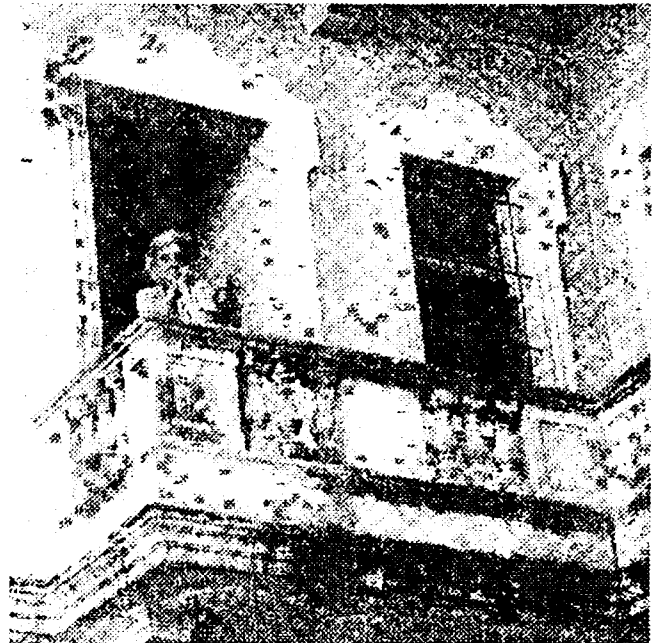

Fig. 5. Communication: information.

Fig. 6. Dona Natica.

from the device. The installation for the prototype of the device is in the plaza of the main building of the University of Havana.

Proposal 6:
Dona Natica's Place of Experience
Carolyn Hodges

Thesis

I insist on the importance of details, as they create spaces for clarity and serenity. It is the complete experience of details (that which is *seen, heard, tasted, smelled and touched*), not distant visual observation, that provides a deeper understanding of where and who one is.

Project

By providing a sense of place (a state in which one is in their own element; in harmony) may the design of details quantify their importance to those who have mentally fled contemporary Havana, yet still physically there reside?

The project, in general, is the design of a portion of hallway in a residential building in Old Havana. The area of focus in the hallway is the distance from the inhabitant's front door (or actual entry into the hallway), to the entrance onto the balcony overlooking an old Jewish market.

The inhabitant is Dona Natica, a real-life figure from Wendy Gimble's *Havana Dreams*, which chronicles the effects of Castro's revolution on four generations of related women. Dona Natica is the eldest, and suffers most. She is a materialistic

woman in her upper nineties. She is a victim of time and circumstance, growing up a bourgeois that expected to be taken care of by her husband. Her parents raised her to become a lady, not a woman. They never thought she would see a time when her social status would become meaningless. As a result, Dona Natica always believed her value to be found in her beauty and social status. The revolution is against everything she believes and understands.

> *"Of necessity, Dona Natica has retreated into her remembered world, where she has found a means for survival. Outside the magic circle, there's nothing but a harsh and unfamiliar place. Dona Natica is exiled there – isolated, fractured, unanchored – even though she never left Havana."*
>
> *Wendy Gimbel,* Havana Dreams

The details change the hallway from a space of passage to a place of experience. They also serve as Dona Natica's guide to the balcony so that she may recuperate from the built-up tension with her daughter, with whom she must live, and bring her temporarily out of exile.

Proposal 7:
Plank 9: Coffee Roast House and Emporium
Justin Patwin

> *"...a combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; a gradual abolition between town and country..."*
>
> *Karl Marx,* A Communist Manifesto, Plank Nine

Thesis

The Capitol city of Havana is going to be the stage for yet another revolution over the course of the next decade. While at the same time political and social, it will be driven by the economic forces that are sweeping of Cuba. It will signal the economic conversion to a capitalist and free market system.

This decision to move from Communism to Capitalism parallels the pursuit of individual liberty in lieu of guaranteed personal security. In a communist society, the surroundings are secure, the government dictates what people do and in return everyone is provided for and shares equally. Alternatively, the capitalist system sets guidelines that everyone must follow, but future successes are neither predetermined nor guaranteed.

Once again, the beliefs of an existing political system will serve as the foundation for the rebuilding of Havana: capitalism will grow from the remains of communism, as was intended by Marx in his *Manifesto*. As Havana rebuilds, so will the individuals that live there. They will undergo a revolution in the way they think about their position in the world. Individuals will begin to examine the new system and find ways to fit in; they will look to

Fig. 7. Plank 9.

the traditional and explore how to create new opportunities for themselves. This new environment will be intrinsically connected to the old. It will involve a regeneration of the existing political philosophy and yet provide for the pursuit of individual liberty.

Project

The project is a forum to educate the consumer of the coffee industry by integrating the production of industry with the capital market of retail. The basis of the project is born directly from the nature of revolution, specifically how Communism might spawn new ideas in Capitalism. The project is a regeneration of one of the primary tenets of Marx's *Communist Manifesto,* the combination of agriculture and manufacturing industries, leading to abolition between town and country.

The site is located amongst the large, stretching warehouses of the San Francisco Pier, once a thriving area of international commerce, but now, primarily through the embargo by the United States, lies abandoned.

Proposal 8:
Action / Reaction Chair
David Austin

> *"The light of nature teaches each of us in his private life to maintain relations with his neighbors because as their near presence enables them to injure, so it also enables them to do us service".*
>
> Cardinal De Richelieu

Thesis

The coming re-birth of tourism in Havana promises to bring more capital to a capitol whose government is desperately trying to fund its declining communist regime. Before the Castro regime, the tourist industry was a major contributor to the Cuban economy, and the need for a national industry today is more desperate than ever. We currently find Havana in a severe state of disrepair and decline. It is estimated that 11-17 buildings in the city collapse every month due to natural causes. A tourist industry requires some level of infrastructure, and even though some of that exists from the pre-Castro era, hotels and condominiums are soon to be built in and around the city. These $200-$300 million projects represent the first building of this scale to happen in Havana in decades, and their relation to the people of Havana will, most likely, be overlooked. The introduction of foreign speculation into the city further decreases the likelihood of building that will address the overwhelming needs of the people of Havana. More likely is the presentation of a glamorized segment of Havana in the "Tropicana" style. A new era for Cuba means a new architectural layer for the city that has not seen any meaningful development in decades. This layer, like the others before it, must promise a future for the people of Cuba.

Because of the unique nature of Havana's predicament, the citizens of Havana are in danger of being completely overrun by the industry to which they look to save them. As we move into an era of increasing global trade, sensitivity to cultural differences is imperative to the development and maintenance of lasting local and global relationships. The relationship between the individual tourist and the resident is the direct result of, and represents a microcosm of this predicament. It is rare for the tourist industry to have any positive effect on the resident of a place, and vice-versa. Many of the Americans who do make their way into the realm of another civilization restrict their visit to the areas that cater to their presence, never opening themselves up to the opportunities of inter-cultural interaction. It is essential to the future of Cuban-American relations (as well as their relationships with the rest of the world) that those involved in the rebuilding of Havana be mindful of the possibilities that international interaction may have on the formation of the reconstituted Cuban identity.

Project

This is an investigation into the possibilities of relation, and of separation of people and the formation of international community. We are necessarily involved in a continuous interchange with our surroundings. Our behavior can be characterized as a dynamic sequence of adjustments and readjustments to our physical and social environment. For many vacationers, the world in which they find themselves exists for their entertainment. They are removed from the day-to-day struggle for survival, and are often unaware of that
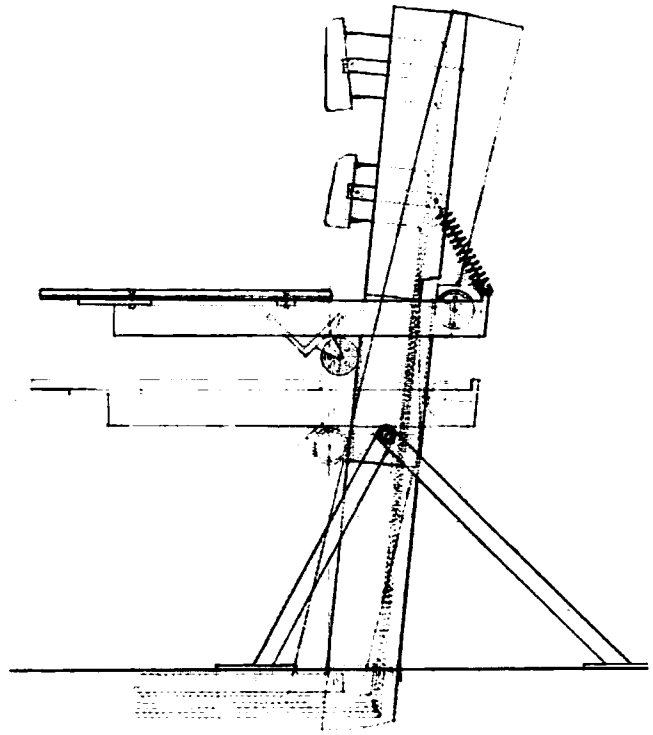

Fig. 8. Action / reaction chair.

struggle as it exists around them. In addition, they bring with them preconceived notions of the places they visit, and project them on the landscape and people they come in contact with. This places the local in the terribly awkward position of having to cater to the tourist, leaving both with an equally prejudiced view of the other. The rich possibilities of interaction are not realized. The proposed chairs are an attempt to articulate the existence of behavioral differences that are encountered by the tourist. They represent a physical manifestation of the conditions brought about by clashing modes of dwelling of the local and the tourist. The intention is that the amplification of behavioral differences will make the tourist, and possibly the local, more sensitive to the thought, feelings, and behavior of the other.

CONCLUSIONS

The word *enclosure* implies a boundary. This implied boundary is generally set up from the inside, either to keep something in or the outsider out. It exists for the purpose of separation. An enclosure traditionally defines the limits of a domain.

/prototype:enclosure/ postulates a new type of enclosure, proposing that boundaries may do more to actually connect than to divide. The eight proposals outlined in this paper foreground these new connective boundaries, resolutely insisting that it is *architecture* that performs the vital role of

maintaining the necessarily unresolved relationship between resident and visitor; between local and tourist; between public and private. In these disparate investigations we have found that these boundaries are rarely physical: they exist subtly as language differences, differences in ideology, differences in social behavior and even differences in modes of dwelling and inhabitation. These differences are sometimes encountered singly, but more often than not they exist in complex combination.

It continues to be the challenge of the architect to mold the realm of social intercourse. /prototype:enclosure/ proposes that this "public realm" has migrated from the spaces that were once intentionally constructed and set aside for that purpose. As space and time have become more compressed, and privatized through commodification, these inter-cultural interactions have seeped into more private locations, including the realm of the media.

The eight projects that embody /prototype:enclosure/ optimistically propose that the work of today's "Global Architect" centers on recognizing and bolstering the compressed boundaries of the activities and institutions that we hope will bind cultures together, as well as the enclosures that make up the boundaries of our private realms. It is the mission of these projects to layer into the sensitive boundaries of intercultural interaction and exclusion the apparatus' that may act as a bridge to the former, without destroying the latter.