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Poetics in the Architectural Archives: Possibilities for Imagining Pasts and Futures

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Abstract

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This thesis problematizes the production of architectural archives and attempts to transform them from static to creative spaces through poetics. It frames and expands three digital projects on which I collaborated with Seattle Civic Poet and Washington State Poet Laureate Claudia Castro Luna: the *Seattle Poetic Grid* (2017), *Washington Poetic Routes* (2019), and *Poetic Shelters* (2020). In architecture, discussions about what constitutes its archives, who can access them, and how they are to be used are still framed around preserving the facts of the discipline and profession. As such, which spatial truths are missing among architectural records, how do we reproduce the status quo when we fix imaginary, and what might we gain from inspiring imaginary in the archives? This thesis argues that architecture's archives should follow queer archival practices and feminist poetics in order to start constructing more expansive archives of space, and it presents several poems from the *Seattle Poetic Grid*, *Washington Poetic Routes*, and *Poetic Shelters* as spatial records for said archives. These collections of poetry are an archive of the present in and of themselves, while as a practice, poetics enable us to read and imagine traditional archives in new ways.

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My interests in both critical geography and cartographic design were not particularly helpful as I tried to establish a mapping practice just after college. No client ever wanted to hear about how their map reproduced colonial power, nor how it was excluding certain people and their spatial imaginaries through its limited perspective. In 2015, however, I heard Claudia Castro Luna describe an interactive map of poetry written by Seattle's inhabitants, a project I knew would disrupt the typical narratives of cartography and city through documenting many spatial perspectives. Since that time, Claudia, Amrita Mazumdar, and I have released three poetic projects. I am so grateful to have worked with Claudia throughout my past five years in Seattle—her writing, teaching, and spirit continue to inspire and transform my own thought and work. With regard to these projects, we are indebted to everyone who wrote and submitted poems, as well as the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture, Humanities Washington, and ArtsWA. With regard to this thesis, I would also like to thank my reading committee, Nicole Huber and Michelle Habell-Pallán, for their feedback, in addition to Vikramaditya Prakash and our untitled reading group. Finally, thank you to my family, and especially Amrita, for their continuous support.

I further acknowledge that I live, study, and work on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples, and specifically the lands of the Duwamish people, who continue to inhabit this space today. I also want to acknowledge the violences of white supremacy, be it through the way COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting Black, Native, Latinx, and Asian American peoples or the murders of Black people and others by the police. I will continue to work toward the destruction of this system, and I hope these projects and this thesis help shift the power of cartography, architecture, and archive to the people.

Chapter 1

RECORDING SPACE

> You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be.
>
> *Toni Morrison*

In her essay "The Site of Memory," Toni Morrison (1995) describes her work as a "literary archaeology (92)," through which she combines memory and imagination to reconstruct worlds, both "the actual and the possible (97)," and narrate "a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it (93)." Morrison explains, "If I'm trying to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left—to part the veil that was so frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard—then the approach that's most productive and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image (93-94)." In this way, "the act of imagination is bound up with memory," as illustrated by the Mississippi River (98-99). Through this example, Morrison distinguishes the limitations of fact (the straightened river) from the potentials of truths (the meandering rivers), as well as names the process of remembering and imagining (flooding) as "emotional memory," or "what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared." It is through emotional memory that Morrison's writings, such as *Sula* (1973) and *Beloved* (1987), create and reveal truths that facts are actually trying to hide.

Morrison's description of the Mississippi River reminds me of a series of maps, the "Mississippi River Meander Belt," (Figure 1) produced in 1944 by Harold Fisk. "Part of an

Figure 1: Mississippi River Meander Belt by Harold Fisk (Rankin 2018)

otherwise technocratic report for the Army Corps of Engineers, Fisk's maps of the historical traces of the Mississippi River are a wonderful surprise," Bill Rankin writes (2018). The maps show the Mississippi River from Illinois to Louisiana, parts of which have already been straightened by the Army Corps of Engineers, in light tan with a dark outline. Using a palette of reds, blues, greens, and oranges, Fisk also layers the river's wide meanders into the surrounding landscape over time. While I previously appreciated these maps for their cartographic details and graphic design, they take on new meaning with Morrison's example. Fisk documents the facts of the river—that is, where it runs at the time of the survey—likely as part of the Army Corps of Engineers' attempts to control it. However, he also reveals the possible, *other* truths of the river, which previously flowed well beyond its surveyed extents and will flood those areas again in the future.

It is fitting to begin with a cartographic example because this thesis is broadly interested in how space is recorded. Maps are perhaps the clearest effort to document space, but I also recognize architectural design and archival practices as part of this effort. Architectural design is said to reflect its social, cultural, and political contexts, while archives typically use space to represent the significance of preserved records. My interests in the production of space—that is, following Henri Lefebvre (1991), how space is conceived, lived, and imagined, and by whom—have led me through cartography, architecture, and archive. When critically considered together, it becomes apparent that these efforts are less about recording space, but rather about fixing it, limiting the ways space might be imagined and created otherwise. Maps reinscribe and reproduce power through naming, assigning, and ordering. Their view from above provides a mask of neutrality, and they benefit from their relationship to science and fact, the state and capital. Yet maps do have authors, and these authors make decisions on what, who, and where are represented, in addition to how they are represented. In an interview with Sarah Soliman and Erin Newell (2014), Swati Chattopadhyay explains, "Things get excluded, so one must choose what to include and the choices—that's where the politics reside. What are the choices? How do you choose? What is your method? There is no objective map,

there cannot be (120)." Architectural design similarly reinscribes power into the landscape, as built environment practitioners usually reproduce hegemonic categorizations, relations, and hierarchies of the status quo. Like maps, these landscapes "appear to be completely natural, God-given, and therefore neutral ... an unnoticed background to our everyday lives (Harris 2013: 31)." And again like maps, the practice of architecture has almost always been aligned with the state and wealth. Architectural history "amounts to little more than a who's who of architects who commemorated power and wealth; an anthology of buildings of, by, and for the privileged—the houses of true and false gods, of merchant princes and princes of the blood—with never a word about the houses of lesser people," argues Bernard Rudofsky (1964). Finally, archival practices determine what, and consequently who, should be archived, as well as how these records might be more monumentally represented through the construction of space. These are often the records of the powerful made even more significant through the architecture in which they are housed. In this way, archives are "less depositories of documents than themselves historical agents, organized around unwritten logics of inclusion and exclusion, with the power to exalt certain stories, experiences, and events and to bury others," explains Rachel Kunzel (2015: 214). In other words, archives function as an "instituting imaginary" (Mbembe 2002: 22). Following Morrison, I would argue cartography, architecture, and archive all work to create facts of space, and in so doing, limit the spatial truths of *Others*.

In this thesis, I am specifically concerned with problematizing the production of architectural archives and transforming them from static to creative spaces through poetics. The thesis frames and expands three digital projects on which I collaborated with Seattle Civic Poet and Washington State Poet Laureate Claudia Castro Luna: the *Seattle Poetic Grid* (2017), *Washington Poetic Routes* (2019), and *Poetic Shelters* (2020). These projects record space through collecting and presenting poems about spaces, places, architectures, and landscapes, such as an intersection in the city, a river in the state, or simply an author's home. The poems capture the intimacies, feelings, and contestations of spaces, past, present, and future, and many reveal the historical layers of those spaces we

inhabit today. These poems are an archive of the present in and of themselves, while as a practice, poetics enables us to read and imagine traditional archives in new ways. This is not a particularly radical claim based on queer archival practices and feminist poetics, which have transformed archives into spaces for documenting *Others*, writing truths, and imagining futures, for more than half a century. In architecture, however, discussions about what constitutes its archives, who can access them, and how they are to be used are still framed around preserving the facts of the discipline and profession. Consequently, its archives can help maintain architecture's exclusivity. It dismisses the evidence of built, social, and imagined spaces that are produced by non-professionals and instead emphasizes those spaces of a fairly homogeneous group of privileged practitioners. As such, which spatial truths are missing among architectural records, how do we reproduce the status quo when we fix imaginary, and what might we gain from inspiring imaginary in the archives? In this thesis, I argue that architecture's problematic archives should follow queer archival practices and feminist poetics in order to start constructing more expansive archives of space, and I present several poems from the *Seattle Poetic Grid*, *Washington Poetic Routes*, and *Poetic Shelters* as spatial records for said archives.

This argument is perhaps best made through exploring the three projects online. However, I supplement this experience in this document with a theoretical framework and analysis of poems. In Chapter 2, I examine both architectural archives and the architecture of archives in order to critique the ways in which we think about archives in the discipline and profession of architecture. I then present several examples of queer archival practices and feminist poetics in order to reveal *other* ways of constructing and working within archives. In Chapter 3, I analyze poems from the *Seattle Poetic Grid*, *Washington Poetic Routes*, and *Poetic Shelters* for the ways they document spaces of the present, create spatial truths of the past, and imagine spaces of the future. And in Chapter 4, I conclude by considering the architectural possibilities of these poems and spatial archives through a brief look at two works by poet-architect June Jordan.

Chapter 2

FROM "INSTITUTING IMAGINARY" TO "BUILD[ING] NARRATIVE"

This chapter problematizes architectural archives—the archives of the discipline and profession of architecture—and the architecture of archives—both the tangible and intangible structures for organizing and representing records. In this way, it reveals how architectural archives, in their emphasis on professional documents, follow the exclusions of archival practices in general, as well as how such exclusions can reproduce hegemonic power and a fixed imaginary. Having leveled this critique against archives, I turn to examples from queer archival practices, namely Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Cheryl Dunye's (1997) *The Watermelon Woman*, and a recent discussion in *Radical History Review* on "Queering Archives" (Arondekar et al. 2015), and feminist poetics, namely those of Adrienne Rich and Gloria Anzaldúa, for *other* ways of constructing, working in, and creating from archives.

As with any archive, it is important to continuously question who is included and excluded in its records, which narratives and spaces are preserved and destroyed, and who can access and write from the archive. Such questions are even more significant in architecture, as archives can designate the "precedent buildings" to which contemporary architectural designers turn for inspiration. Preserved in the archives, and promoted through lectures, textbooks, and algorithms, a limited group of architects, buildings, and geographies inform practice today. This is a feedback loop between precedent and building, reinforcing both an exclusive archive and architecture. In the following sections, I explain and illustrate the relationship between archive, architecture, and power in order to critique

this exclusion, and I present how this relationship is being disrupted, and the archive reimagined, through queer and feminist work.

2.1 Architectural Archives / Architecture of Archives

The records preserved in contemporary architectural archives in the United States are heavily informed by the founding of architecture programs by William Robert Ware at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1865 and Columbia University in 1881. With these programs came reference objects, including “casts, models, photographs, and architectural drawings,” as well as the continuous production of similar objects in student and professional work (Willis 1996: 193). These objects are the basis for architectural archives today, as exemplified by the millions of drawings and records now preserved at and indexed by Columbia University’s Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library (Figure 2). Architectural drawings in particular, “formed the nucleus of a now very extensive collection of such items, documenting in many cases entire careers of architectural designing,” describes Alfred Willis (1996: 194). Such collections reveal architectural archives to be more concerned with preserving architecture as it is drawn on paper, as opposed to documenting the ways architecture is physically constructed, changed by its inhabitants’ perceptions or practices, or related to nearby built and social spaces. Willis explains the reasoning for this preference through likening architecture to a composition and the building to a performance: “[T]he building stands as an instance of a (performed, metaphysical) work in so far as its form, shape, colors, materials, etc., comply fairly closely with the requirements given by those plans and specifications (197).” The architectural archive is thus more concerned with the architectural profession than the many productions of space itself.

Architectural historians and theorists have largely defended this position. In his essay “Archiving/Architecture”, Kent Kleinman (2001) calls built work “messy,” “unruly,” and “unrestrained,” with a “troubled relationship to questions of originality,” in order to justify the exclusion of built artifacts and inclusion of representations of said artifacts in architectural archives. (322). “The architectural archive promises to stabilize architecture;

(a) Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library (Columbia Libraries 2017)

(b) Architectural Objects at the Library (Columbia Libraries 2020)

Figure 2: Avery Library and Its Collection, New York

this is the archive's task and gift," Kleinman argues. He continues, "As an institution that arrests temporality, the archive effectively creates a parallel discipline to built architecture, a discipline that has at its center of gravity precisely those attributes that built work can never offer. Noble and heroic, it is the archive that offers the fundamental means of reclaiming architecture's purity." Because built work has many authors and is "subject to contingent forces," the archive should maintain the "fixity, originality, and authorial voice (324)" of architectural records through "deny[ing] touch to "original" archival material (330)." In other words, according to Kleinman, architectural archives should primarily be made up of sketches, models, photographs, and drawings, as well as approached objectively, if scholars are serious about researching an architectural project's "purity". Mark Wigley (2005) is less drastic in his essay "Unleashing the Archive," but similarly conceptualizes the archive as "against time. In fact, the archive is the enemy of time; it is against entropy. Not only are the documents within the archive rescued from destruction, but they then are not allowed to age, even gracefully (11)." Like Kleinman, Wigley conceptualizes architectural archives of drawings and computer files, though built work may be considered in the way historic preservation turns "the entire city into a big filing cabinet (13)." Further, Wigley does concede that changes to the archive are necessary and significant: "[T]he way it is catalogued, who gets in, what the access is, what is being collected, and so on—is to change the direction of thinking." Within these two discussions of architectural archives, however, there are no efforts to document those spaces, built, practiced, or imagined, outside of the architectural profession, nor is there much consideration for how these archives could start to include such spatial productions. This is problematic for a discipline and profession that is fairly homogeneous in demographic composition, and typically work for powerful actors, institutions, and states. By focusing on architectural drawings and other professional objects, architectural archives preserve evidence of a very particular historical narrative of those in power and continue to look to that history for future building.

Through such exclusions, architectural archives are not unlike archives from other disciplines, institutions, and states. Their tangible and intangible structures limit what

(and whose) evidence is preserved, as well as how that evidence is physically represented through the building in which it is housed. As such, Achille Mbembe (2002) describes the archive as an "entanglement of building and documents (19)." Its power lies in this entanglement, and Mbembe identifies a number of ways architecture can express the power of the records it houses: "the physical space of the site of the building, its motifs and columns, the arrangement of the rooms, the organisation of the 'files', the labyrinth of corridors, and that degree of discipline, half-light and austerity that gives the place something of the nature of a temple and a cemetery." In addition to this tangible character, the archive also intangibly connotes a "privileged status," as *archivable* records are distinguished from *unarchivable* records (20). Nevertheless, the archive provides "an illusion of totality and continuity (21)," and in its authoritative position removed from time, the archive can function as "instituting imaginary (22)." This power, status, and imaginary are apparent in the National Archives Building in Washington D.C. (Figure 3). Its massing, arrangement, and ornament present the documents housed within as powerful, perhaps even sacred. Those documents which have been accepted into this archive evidence "proof". Mbembe explains, "It is proof that a life truly existed, that something actually happened, an account of which can be put together (21)." The documents rejected from this space do not carry this status or legitimacy, privileging certain stories and perspectives over others. Through the National Archives Building, the limited pieces of proof are strung together to construct a fixed, national imaginary. According to Mbembe, it is important for the nation to fix the imaginary through "burying" and "assigning" documents, in order to "establish an unquestionable authority over them and to tame the violence and cruelty of which the 'remains' are capable (22)," or the life they can take on.

Mbembe's arguments follow other critiques of the archive by Michel Foucault (1972), Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995), and Jacques Derrida (1996). Their respective writings problematize the making of both archive and history as exclusionary. More recent writings, such as an issue of *Social Text* on the "Question of Recovery" (Helton, Leroy, Mishler, Seeley, & Sweeney 2015), have continued to critique the production of archives and the

(a) National Archives Building, 1935 (National Archives, 7820512)

(b) Stacks at the Building by Earl McDonald (Clark 2006)

Figure 3: National Archives Building and Its Collection, Washington D.C.

practices of scholars within them, as well as considered new ways for confronting their violent exclusions. Regarding architectural archives in particular, the Feminist Art and Architecture Collaborative (FAAC), made up of Ana María León, Tessa Paneth-Pollak, Martina Tanga, and Olga Touloumi, raises a somewhat similar critique in its efforts to change architectural pedagogies and syllabi. FAAC (2017) writes, "[I]nstead of engaging with monuments and masterpieces, reinforcing the centrality of white male authors, we decided to rethink our categories and replaced these iconic "buildings" (masterpieces or monuments) with "space," clearing room, as it were, for vernaculars, interiors, and social spaces (277)." FAAC is most concerned with "contested spaces," like the plantation, prison, kitchen, and closet, and contested narratives, unlike typical historical representations of a building "in its idealized form, put forward on the drawing board, or in its final form upon the completion of the transaction and delivery to the client (278)." Contested spaces and narratives require spatial archives of diverse records. FAAC's critique of architectural history, along with those of archives in general, effectively reveal the exclusions of a professional archive of architectural representations and the necessity of recording spaces and working in archives in new ways.

2.2 Queer Archival Practices

Queer archival practices offer new ways of both constructing and working within archives in a way that disrupts their exclusivity of and violence against *Other* peoples and their truths. There is a growing literature on such practices, like Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell's (2015) recently edited volume *Out of the Close, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories*. In their introduction, they present a similar critique to those outlined in the previous section:

> Archives supposedly create legibility, a tidy organization of records that correspond to the organization of sources into neat boxes and files. This meticulous organization, however, is the product of subjective determinations made by curators, historians, and archivists at different moments and against imprecise standards—emotion-laden struggles and challenges that extend to the researchers handling those materials (5).

Community and counter archives, especially those organized around gender and sexuality or race and ethnicity, challenge these more exclusive archives of disciplines, institutions, and states. Moreover, the creation of and work within these alternative archives reveal "the archival experience [as] not merely intellectual but also emotional, erotic, and embodied (Stone & Cantrell 2015: 9)." This section considers three examples of queer archival practices as precedents for remaking architectural archives into spatial archives, as well as working from these archives in imaginative and creative ways.

In *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Cvetkovich (2003) considers the "formation of a public culture around trauma," particularly the traumas of sexuality and related activism, as well as what this archive would both look and feel like (1). "Trauma puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemorations, giving rise to new genres of expression, such as testimony, and new forms of monuments, rituals, and performances that can call into being collective witnesses and publics," Cvetkovich writes (7). This archive is very much ephemeral, including personal memories, "novels, poems, essays, memoirs, video and film, photography, performance, and interviews (7-8)." Space also serves as both a document and a house for documents, as exemplified in the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York (Figure 4). In sharp contrast to the Avery Library or the National Archives Building, the Lesbian Herstory Archives is "part library, part museum, a community gathering space ... [and] especially welcome[s] the "casual browser," the lesbian who is searching for an image of herself in our past or just wants to find out more about the herstory of our communities (Lesbian Herstory Archives 2017)." Cvetkovich further describes the space:

> The new site [of the Lesbian Herstory Archives] continues to combine private domestic spaces with public, institutional ones, particularly because it occupies a building that was once a home: the downstairs living room serves as a comfortable reading room, the copier sits alongside other appliances in the kitchen, the entryway is an exhibit space, and the top floor houses a collective member who lives there on a permanent basis (241).

(a) Architectural Plans (Lesbian Herstory Archives 2017)

(b) Living Room and Subject Files (Lesbian Herstory Archives 2017)

Figure 4: Lesbian Herstory Archives and Its Collection, New York

In this way, the Lesbian Herstory Archives are “both utopian horizon (a place for all lesbians to touch their herstory) and lived reality (a house in Brooklyn filled with all kinds of crazy stuff),” argues Cvetkovich (2015: 219). The space is both “useful” and “emotional,” “intimate and personal,” and most significantly, the Lesbian Herstory Archives do not aim to fix, but actually encourage imaginary (Cvetkovich 2003: 241, 269). Cvetkovich explains, “The importance of fantasy as a way of creating history from absences, so evident in queer documentary and other cultural genres, demands creative and alternative archives (271).” *An Archive of Feelings* makes clear the need for archives of diverse records, while the Lesbian Herstory Archives demonstrate the possibilities of a community contributing to and interacting with said archives.

Cvetkovich cites Dunye’s (1997) *The Watermelon Woman* as one example of a queer documentary that problematizes archives, constructs one anew, and creates a truth from it. The film follows Cheryl—not yet a filmmaker, but “working on becoming a filmmaker”—as she performs archival research (Figure 5) and conducts interviews in order to make a documentary about a Black actress from the 1930s and 1940s, credited only as the “Watermelon Woman” in films. Through her research, Cheryl soon learns this actress’s real name was Fae Richards, who like Cheryl, was a lesbian and in a relationship with a white woman. Cheryl presents her documentary at the end of the film in between credits and includes the statement: “Sometimes you have to create your own history. The Watermelon Woman is fiction.” Much to the audience’s surprise, Dunye created Fae Richards for the film and “collaborated with photographer Zoe Leonard to create archival footage and photographs that mimicked authenticity (Kelsey 2016).” Dunye thus disrupts the making of archives, the writing of history, and the documentary genre through her film. Laura L. Sullivan (2000) writes, “[W]e are shocked to see that the documentary subject matter within the film has been constructed and ... must confront our own ideological investments that led us to misinterpret this aspect of the film (457).” Dunye also rejects the essentialism typical of archives, history, and documentary, as well as the objectivity with which one is expected to work in these areas. *The Watermelon Woman* is filled with lesbian women of

(a) Cheryl Researching in the Archives (Dunye 1997)

(b) *The Fae Richards Photo Archive* (1993-1996) by Zoe Leonard, at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (Jael 2018)

Figure 5: *The Watermelon Woman* and Its Photo Archive

different cultures, histories, and identities, "undermining a heterosexist view that lumps together all gay people (Sullivan 2000: 454)." Moreover, as opposed to an objective or removed position, Cheryl's interest in researching Richards admittedly starts from a place of desire (Richardson 2011: 104)—"she wants to make this film because she has become fascinated with a black actress while watching films (Zimmer 2008: 49)." Dunye uses the film to construct another truth for herself. As Matt Richardson (2011) explains and the film captures, Black lesbians have been excluded from every archive, be it of the public library, Black history, lesbian history, and even gay Black history (100-101). Instead, *The Watermelon Woman* "makes an argument for black women to create and control their own archives and posits the documentary as a form of archival practice (101)." With this statement, Richardson echoes other scholars on the film—Dunye "had to create her own hope, inspiration and possibility through the creation of a history that was not, but could have been, in some ways should have been there (Sullivan 2000: 459)," and "[t]he film encourages us to make our own fictions, fantasies, and histories in the service of producing new molds and new figures of identification (Zimmer 2008: 61)." Without an archive or records from which to work, Dunye constructs a new archive and imagines a narrative from it in order to critique archives, history, and documentary, and more significantly, better reveal a her own truth.

More recently, a group of scholars from across disciplines, specifically Anjali Arondekar, Ann Cvetkovich, Christina B. Hanhardt, Regina Kunzel, Tavia Nyong'o, Juana María Rodríguez, and Susan Stryker (2015), participated in a discussion on "queering archives" in an issue of *Radical History Review*. Here, Cvetkovich provides the helpful distinction between the creation of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) archives, such as the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and "efforts to "queer" the archive, that is, to return to conventional archives from the vantage point of radical and alternative forms of archival practice, research, and exhibition (219)." For example, Nyong'o describes his pedagogy around archives:

> By presenting the archive not as an intimidating, dry-as-dust array of institutions and protocols but rather as a chaotic array of objects that fairly pulse with weirdness and surprise, I tried to sidestep the use of history for salvage purposes. Instead, at the risk of pandering to their narcissism, I encouraged students to enter the archive phenomenologically, to move and be moved by the past as they encountered its sensuous fragments, and to build narrative, speculative, and creative accounts accordingly (216-217).

Both Cvetkovich and Rodríguez echo this creative and interactive approach to archival work. In this way, in addition to queer archives, *queering* archives is about the "transformation of what counts as an archive and innovative approaches to an engage public history that connects the past with the present to create a history of the present," argues Cvetkovich (222). Rodríguez continues, it "needs to be about generating promiscuous forms of knowledge production, responding with activist creativity and intellectual agility rather than efforts to conserve and canonize (223)." These perspectives from Nyong'o, Cvetkovich, and Rodriguez in particular emphasize the interaction and creativity5 involved in queer archival practices, as well as suggest how the archives of other disciplines, institutions, and states could also be queered. Following their lead, archives should not "institute imaginary" or legitimize certain hegemonic facts over many *other* truths, nor should they be removed from the people or approached objectively by privileged scholars alone. Rather, queer archives and queer archival practices present new ways of both constructing and using archives that are inclusive of records, accessible to communities, and productive in their output. What began as a necessity to challenge the violent exclusions of queer peoples, and especially queer women of color, should now radically transform both archives and archival practices in general.

2.3 Feminist Poetics

Like the queer archival practices described above, the writings and archives of feminist poets Adrienne Rich and Gloria Anzaldúa are also helpful for rethinking architectural archives. Their respective poems and practices reveal feminist critiques of traditional archives, as well as construct new archives from which to imagine. Considered together,

Rich and Anzaldúa present the potential of feminist poetics as a method of archiving, through which poems become archival objects or record historical narratives, and a method for navigating the archive, through which archival objects can be reinscribed with feelings or stories.

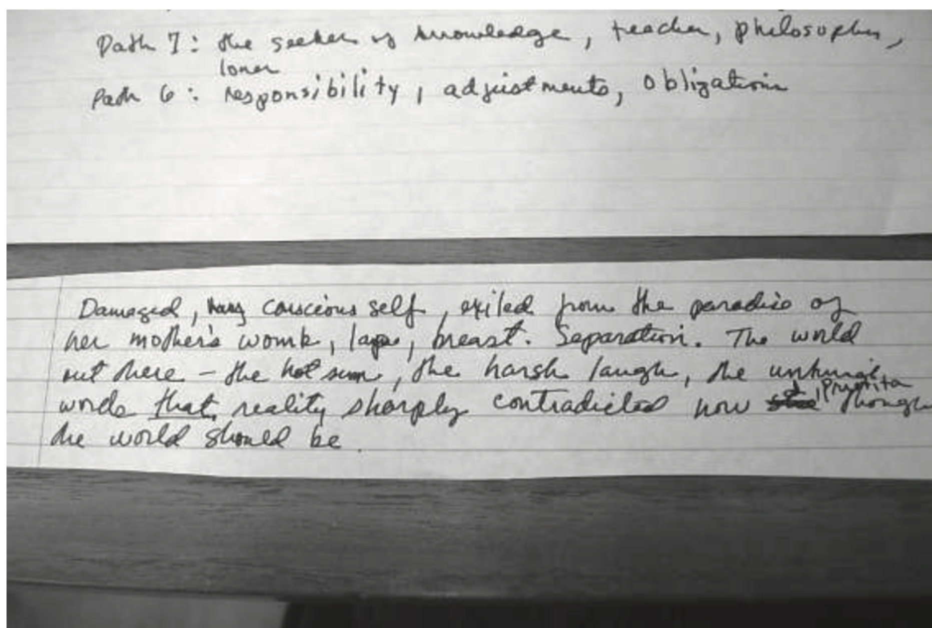
According to Meredith Benjamin (2017), Rich was very much interested in "engaging with the traces of women's lives and being open ... to the new possibilities created through this engagement" in her writing (628). She worked from existing archives, documented her own life through poetry, and encouraged other women to record, imagine, and create. Through a close reading of "Diving into the Wreck," (1973) "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law," (1963) and *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978), Benjamin traces the different ways Rich considered and transformed archives. For example, Rich challenged the absolute, universal, and comprehensive claims of traditional archives through dating her poems and presenting her stanzas as "snapshots." Benjamin explains, "When the snapshot is used as poetic method, there is never a pretence that we can see through to the entire reality of a life, only to isolated and loosely connected moments or images (632)." More significantly, Rich's poetry also suggests "an active process of creation, or reconstitution" from the archives (638). "In mining archives of the past and creating materials for future archives, Rich situates herself within previous traditions while imagining the possibilities inherent in new arrangements of those traditions; it is through this poetics of "being in time and history differently" that she presents possibilities for reconstituting the world," argues Benjamin (644). Like queer archival practices, Rich's feminist archives are marked by both recovery *and* reconstitution. In this way, "Rich develops a poetics of the archive in which archives are a site of knowledge production (630)."

According to Suzanne Bost (2015), Anzaldúa had a similar interest in archives, as evidenced by the personal archive of materials she left behind, which are now organized as the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers at the University of Texas at Austin. As opposed to Bost's "encounters with the bodies and signatures of patriarchal authority, encounters with thick-walled buildings and pyramids (616)," the "Anzaldúa papers taught me that the

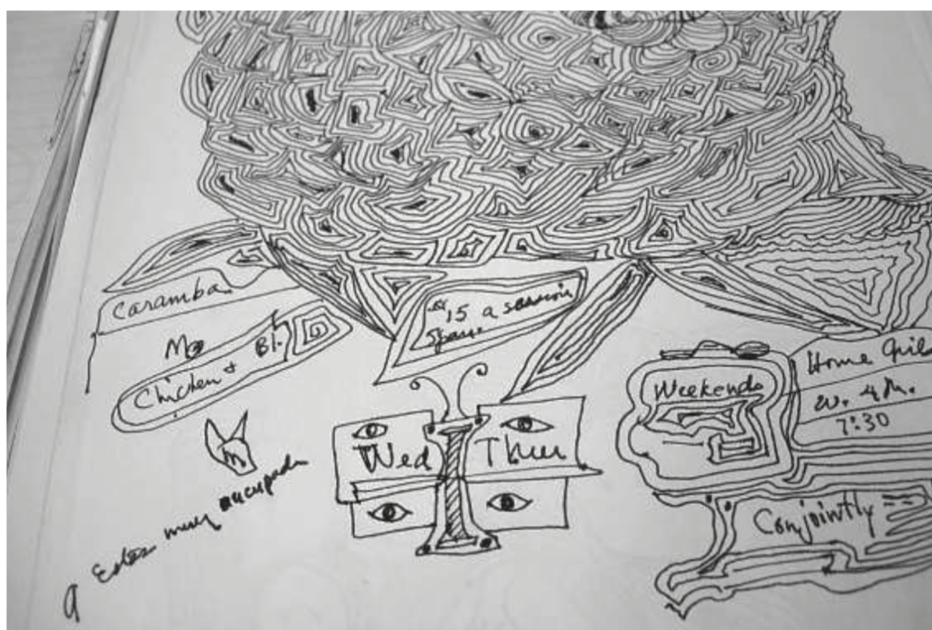
archive is not a passive storehouse of history for scholars to explore; it is a setting that ignites a variety of processes (617).” Anzaldúa’s archive is a “destabilizing heteroglossia (618)” of writings, drafts, “doorknob placards, ticket stubs, appointment cards, fliers, [and] doodles (616),” as well as affirmation disks and notes on strips of paper (Figure 6). These materials are not particularly organized, and they can be reordered by whomever is working with them. Bost explains, “Strips of paper are taped to some pages in an order apparently imposed by the author. Other folders contain loose strips that fell out onto the table when I opened them, allowing me to position the strips in front of me however I wanted ... What sort of order is this (622)?” Such materials and experiences lead Bost to reflect on the archives and her experiences within them. She writes, “Convention would seem to suggest that archival research strengthens our perception of an author as a person of note, one whose background, presumably exerts a linear, casual influence on his or her writing (624).” However, Bost continues,

> One of the primary goals of feminist research has been to debunk the gender-biased authority that has eclipsed the achievements of women, to question the reality and the neutrality of what has passed as history, literary or otherwise. All truths are contextual. The author of the Anzaldúa archive signs her name “contigo Gloria,” drawing attention not to her individual import but to communal embeddedness in the informal “contigo” (“with you”) ... Her writing is shaped by friends and roommates, professors, writing *comadres*, and critics. Her literary stature is not substantiated by the archive but, rather, complicated, muddied, and sometimes dismantled by it. The authority of this author is mediated by an open-ended, communal process (624).

In this way, Anzaldúa’s archive is not a “passageway toward the author,” but an “open circuit full of mirrors and rabbit holes. Instead of finding Anzaldúa, we find ourselves, amid many other surprising materials, boundaries, and weird actants, and then we lose our train of thought (628).” This archive reveals the significance of preserving diverse materials and openness on the part of researchers, in addition to recognizing the archive as a place to “produce, reproduce, and coproduce knowledge (615),” as Rich also shows in her work.



(a) Notes on Strips of Paper (Bost 2015: 622)



(b) Sketches and Notes (Bost 2015: 620)

Figure 6: Materials from the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers

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This chapter critiqued architectural archives and the architecture of archives, both tangible and intangible, as exclusive sites through which the power of those in dominant or privileged positions is maintained. As these actors, disciplines, institutions, and states control which and whose records are preserved, the arrangement and representation of said evidence, and the resulting historical narrative, they are "instituting imaginary." This is certainly the case in architectural archives, which emphasize a narrative of buildings as they are drawn by architects in professional records. This already limits the archives to the "precedent buildings" of significant architects. Moreover, it completely excludes other ways of producing space, such as the renovations and reimaginings of inhabitants. In contrast to such architectural archives, I am interested in constructing spatial archives of diverse records which encourage imaginary and knowledge production. As such, I turned to several examples of queer archival practices (Cvetkovich 2003; Dunye 1997; Arondekar et al. 2015) and the feminist poetics of Rich and Anzaldúa to outline different approaches to producing new archives and producing knowledge from the archives. Following their lead, I envision a "destabilizing heteroglossia" of "contested spaces," which do not reproduce the imaginary of the status quo, but enable people to imagine anew. Recalling Morrison, these archives would not be a collection of facts, but places in which to preserve and from which to write *other* truths. In the next chapter, I turn to three online collections of spatial poems, the *Seattle Poetic Grid*, *Washington Poetic Routes*, and *Poetic Shelters*, to show how spaces can be archived through poetry, as well as how poetics can expand archives and transform them into creative sites.

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Chapter 3

POETICS IN THE ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES

I was largely unaware of these critiques of archives, queer archival practices, and feminist poetics when I heard Seattle Civic Poet Claudia Castro Luna propose a digital cartography project in 2015. “Imagine Seattle’s map and on top of that, we layer a grid of poems, written by kids in schools, written by senior citizens, written by people in P-Patches, written by youth in high schools,” Castro Luna told KUOW (Reynolds & Pagano 2015). As a cartographer, however, I appreciated the project for the ways it could disrupt the power of maps. In contrast to the top-down, all-knowing perspective and alleged objectivity and neutrality that are typical of maps, the addition of poems could reveal the particularities and intimacies of spaces through representing personal feelings, experiences, stories, and histories. Following Donna Haraway (1991), this is a shift from “objectivity” to “embodied objectivity” (188). Simone Browne (2015) cites Haraway to describe “the “conquering gaze from nowhere,” a gaze that is always unmarked and therefore already markedly white and male, and one that claims a power to represent while escaping representation (49).” Instead, Haraway (1991) continues, “I would like a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges* (188).” As opposed to a representing how space is organized by those in power, a map of poems could reveal how it is both imagined and lived by inhabitants. Castro Luna (2017) captures this new kind of map in her short poem, “A City to Love”: “Maps of this city \ number in the thousands \ unique and folded \ neatly inside each citizen’s \ heart. We live in the city \ and the city lives in us.” Rather than reproduce spatial fact from the City, this map had the potential to reveal a multiplicity of spatial truths from different inhabitants.

In addition to redefining the map, a collection of spatial poems could also reconfigure the archive, especially architectural archives. As I examined in Chapter 2, architectural archives are marked by their preference for the original records of architectural professionals. They are less interested in how spaces are built, imagined, and lived, and more generally contested, by their inhabitants. I argue this is a dangerous limitation of the discipline, as it fails to record, learn from, and engage with how people inhabit space. The inclusion of such perspectives could open up new ways of thinking about and doing architecture that does not violently exclude *Others* from a hegemonic position, but rather acknowledges different truths and works for spatial justice. For example, consider this excerpt from “Seattle’s Poem,” which Castro Luna published in her chapbook *This City* (2016: 27-29):

> Nevertheless before
> I postcard and gloss
> and more sunsets
> and more trees
> find their way into my lines
> I must confess
> the house’s foundation
> is in places brittle
> and many rooms are dark
> for windows lack
>
> Plenty have I been
> on the receiving end
> of rehearsed indifference
> heard enough shallow
> arguments on who belongs here
> to wake up scooping
> ocean water with a spoon
> we are all here
> that need to be
>
> The city is concrete and steel
> plus the sum of its people
> every day we destroy
> our house

then race to remake it
those narrow windows
block future's view
mute voices
that need to be heard
muffle the sound
of the falling tree limb
heavy with ripe plums

Every day we tread
over Chief Sealth's legacy
his prophetic words,
"At night, when the streets
... will be silent and you think
them deserted,
they will throng
with the returning hosts
that once filled them
and still love this beautiful land."

These four stanzas of "Seattle's Poem" reveal the contemporary and historical racism and xenophobia beneath the city's water and sunsets, bridges and streets. It disrupts these spatial facts represented by the City with another spatial truth lived by Castro Luna. Moreover, the poem connects the contemporary landscape to the colonialism on which the city was founded using an architectural metaphor—a house with a brittle foundation. It immediately reminds me of the violent infrastructure projects of built environment practitioners, like deforesting, regrading, and straightening, through which these lands were colonized and Seattle founded. In traditional archives, such projects are recorded as inevitable in city-making, perhaps even worthy of celebration, but these records are clearly problematized when read in conjunction with the lines of this poem. Finally, the poem concludes by imagining the city differently: "Seattle is a house \ we all need to afford." The poem records a spatial truth of today, challenges hegemonic representations of the city and its history, and imagines Seattle anew.

About two years after she proposed the project, Castro Luna, Amrita Mazumdar, and I launched the Seattle Poetic Grid (www.seattlepoeticgrid.com) in 2017. This map features

poems from people across the city, of different levels of writing experience, different ages, and different languages. The poems represent a collection of personal geographies that are so often lost through the production of cartography, architecture, and archive. After Claudia became Washington State Poet Laureate, we expanded the concept to the state with *Washington Poetic Routes* (www.washingtonpoeticroutes.com) in 2019. Contributors are again of varying experiences, ages, and geographies; notably, there are a number of poems by students. They inscribe topographies and landscapes with their own personal understandings of and experiences in those spaces. Most recently, we continue to work on *Poetic Shelters* (www.poeticshelters.com), through which we hope to document changing relationships to home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considered together, these three projects reveal spaces at different scales, from the landscape to the urban to the home. They capture the intimacies, feelings, and contestations of spaces, past, present, and future, that might otherwise go unrecorded. They are an archive in and of themselves, allow traditional archives to be read in new ways, and imagine from the archive. In the sections below, I present several examples from each project to further reveal how the poems reconfigure static, architectural archives into creative, spatial archives.

3.1 *Seattle Poetic Grid* (2017)

The poems of the *Seattle Poetic Grid* (Figure 7), most of which were collected by Castro Luna between 2015 and 2017, record a city that is very much changing. In an interview on *PBS Newshour* (2017), she describes, “Some of the poems express very well what it feels like to not recognize the place you grew up in, because the buildings that you had so much attachment and were meaningful to you are no longer there, and the sense of this location, of turning a corner and the building that was there is no longer there.” This sense of dislocation, an architectural issue that goes undocumented in its archives, is particularly apparent in Rachel Kessler’s “Another “Rehab” in the CD,” Jaqueline Ware’s “Starbucks at Rainier and Edmunds,” and Bang Nguyen’s “Strange Homecoming.” Their poems respectively trace gentrification in the Central District, Columbia City, and Capitol Hill.

Figure 7: *Seattle Poetic Grid* (2017)

In "Another "Rehab" in the CD," Kessler writes from 26th Avenue South and East Yesler Way in the Central District of the "old houses" and their spatial particularities as they increasingly give way to new constructions and residents. Kessler writes,

> Let the old houses be.
> Let the long lawn wave in quiet defiance
> Let the red, restless maw of new construction be silent
> Let werewolf mutter along rafters, gnawing these "good bones"
> Let the porch slope
> Let the screen door creak open to cracked street
> Let the damp air blow through
> Let the old houses sing
> Let their rooms rattle, full of grandmas and aunties and kids and cousins
> Let needle touch black pool of vinyl
> Let bass bottom out, speakers shiver floorboards
> Let broke down cars bloom dandelions like they did in our youth
> Let the blue tarp fray in the rain
> Let the old houses be.

Such everyday homes are absent in architectural archives, despite the personal significance they hold for their inhabitants and communities. While photographs record similar homes along 26th Avenue South in another archive, the Seattle Municipal Archive, they are only documented as part of an improvement project and labled as "dilapidated". In other words, they only exist in the archive to justify the "renewal" or "redevelopment" that followed their destruction. As Kessler describes them, such houses are not "dilapidated," but well-lived by their occupants. Moreover, the vignettes that Kessler presents, such as the sloped porch, creaking screen door, and rattling rooms, suggest a different value system than that imagined by architects. It is not the "purity" of the architecture that is significant, but the ways the space is a home for its inhabitants.

In "Starbucks at Rainier and Edmunds," Ware writes from Rainier Avenue South and South Edmunds Street in Columbia City of gentrification in both the neighborhood and across the South End. If Kessler's poem records some of those spaces and memories that are being destroyed, Ware's poem captures her feelings amid redevelopment. She writes,

My oldest was thirteen
when Starbucks took a risk,
Magic hanging in the air,
believing in Columbia City,
serving coffee with a cultural flair.
Delivering respectability,
betting on the odds,
like a good neighbor,
Starbucks was there,
with a wink and a nod.
While other well-heeled retailers
turned their back and heads,
disregarding the South End's value and worth,
Starbucks fertilized, blended into the landscape,
giving life, a natural and organic re-birth.
Settled here, well before the ravenous
hunger of contractors
in search of new territory
to conquer and control.
Settled here, before builders swarmed
Columbia City, notorious locusts
with an insatiable appetite;
always chewing, always nibbling
at a neighborhoods character and soul.
Starbucks at Rainier and Edmunds
remains a historic, holistic site,
amid the carnage, devastation;
devouring lives to the last bite

With this poem, Ware records a history of gentrification in Columbia City, from the opening of Starbucks to the contractors and builders who "[nibble] at a neighborhoods character and soul" and "[devour] lives to the last bite." As architects actively take part in this process, Ware protests the ways in which they approach the neighborhood as a "territory to conquer and control". Such lines capture the colonial logic of redevelopment and gentrification, adding a critical perspective and personal feelings of loss into the archives.

In "Strange Homecoming," Nguyen writes from Linda's Tavern on Capitol Hill on what it is like to encounter this landscape after it has been completely remade. Nguyen writes,

"That was the Bauhaus Cafe! See, the front door frame
still looks like it sorta ... I know, it's gone
And that used to be...I know, it's gone too.

"Oh, that's the block that used to be Tugs gay bar
next to King Cobra the Irish bar. I know, it's gone.
And that was Bill's Pizza... well, that huge
        Hole used to be Bill's.
You can still tell because next door is Linda's Tavern,
the only place still there."

"Whoa! You don't recognize anything?"

"No, man! It's just terraformed and replaced,
an alien urban landscape."

You can live your life growing up in a neighborhood,
intimate with every street corner and alley.
Then you leave, like Jason and the Argonauts,
off on a fantastic journey to explore the world beyond.
An epic adventure to breathe adventure into your life,
like wind into sails, all of it taking you further
and further away from home and that young man
who was once "from around the way."

Many lives later, you return to the port of your youth,
a world-weary traveler, counting on the familiar old hood
to be there, waiting patiently for you,
like a loyal pet, unflinching and unfazed by time.

Then whoa! The shock of so much change!
Your familiar stomping grounds now unrecognizable
with you a stranger in a strange land.

Ok, so it's time to reflect on your own self,
like taking a deep look into a pool,
except, the deeper you look the stranger it gets.

"Hey stranger, you from around here?"

"No, not anymore. I'm just visiting."

Nguyen's poem presents the "terraformed and replaced" landscape, after the "old houses" were knocked down and the "builders swarmed," as Kessler and Ware present in the previous two examples. The poem records what was on a few blocks of Pike and Pine Streets, namely the Bauhaus Cafe, Tugs, King Cobra, and Bill's Pizza, as well as the strange sense of dislocation in a space with which you were previously so familiar. Moreover, Nguyen reveals how we continue to remember and imagine spaces, even if they have not been preserved in the landscape. Again, this is not the focus of architectural archives, which are more likely to show how the new construction was an improvement over the old. The addition of a poem like this into the archives disrupts such narratives and indexes that which has changed.

3.2 *Washington Poetic Routes* (2019)

The poems of *Washington Poetic Routes* (Figure 8), a collection to which people could submit writing throughout 2019, represent the state's terrain in more personal terms. Castro Luna (2019) states, "The green routes take us physically from Point A to Point B. Depending on how the reader clicks on them, the dots will create a new constellation of routes: emotional, spiritual routes that tap into memory, into history, into joy, into our desires and frustrations, into land, trees, fish and bird song." Lesson plans were added to encourage students in particular to look out their window and write of the "landscape, the physical terrain that makes a place distinctive" or recall a significant person, "the individuals who make a particular place unique and meaningful to those who inhabit it." While most of the poems capture the significance of the larger landscape, several poems record various built environments throughout the state in ways that architectural archives cannot. These include "The Drowning of Waitsburg" by Linda Andrews and "Drift Wood and Rental Houses and Things That Don't Stay" by Callan Foster.

In "The Drowning of Waitsburg," Andrews writes from Waitsburg about the flooding of the Touchet River, which has repeatedly and significantly affected the city throughout the past sixty years, including the particularly notable floods of 1964 and 1996. She writes,

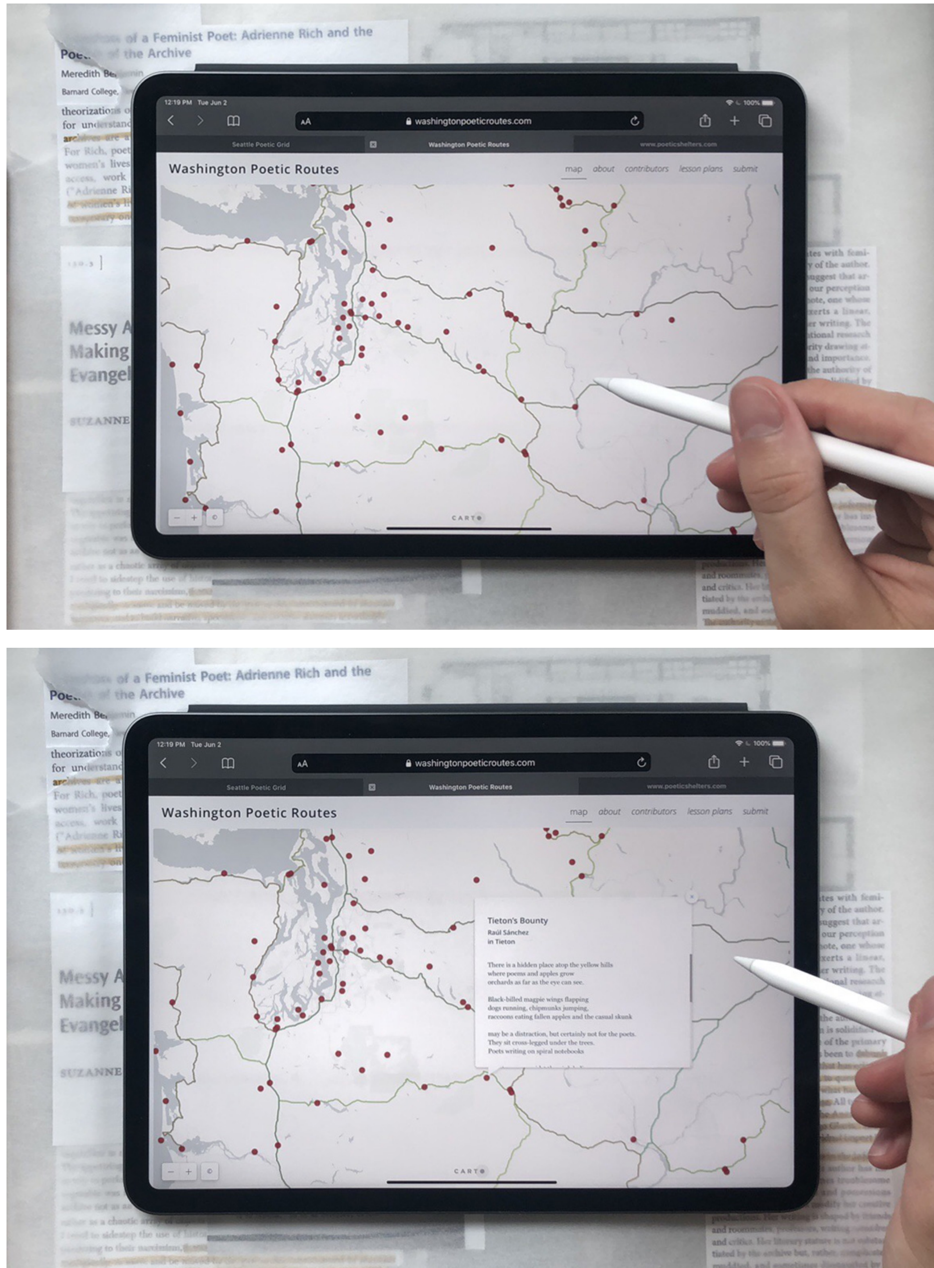


Figure 8: *Washington Poetic Routes* (2019)

In the dark they wade across the road—
a woman lit by the white bundle
in her arms, the man visible
by the tip of his cigarette.

Behind them, their house is turning
unrecognizable. The back porch tips
into the flood, stairs go soft and surrender,
and a slurry of mud whispers across
their blue floor and says, Take your baby
and your habits and get out.

So it has said, house by house,
each high ground temporary and futile.
Leave because the flood has work to do.
There are floor boards to be buckled
and mud to be driven into every seam,
light sockets silted full. By the time you return,
there will be fish under your bed and you see
that the water has pressed itself against your walls,

the way you measured your son every birthday
to see how he'd grown. In two days the flood grew
six years. How long does it take to scrub the silt
from the skin of a family? Your daughter
will never stop saying that her room
smelled like mushrooms and

her doll buggy must have floated away.
Still now, the streets have forgotten
where they came from, and point neither
east nor west, but simply downstream.

While flooding in Waitsburg is represented in some archives through maps and photographs, such records do not reveal the intimacies of Andrews's poem. There is a significant difference between seeing flooded streets and homes in records and hearing about how quickly the flood covered the markings with which a child was measured or the smells that remained long after the floodwaters subsided. Further, while the maps and photographs from this event are set to the scale of the city, neighborhood, or street, the poem is able to focus in on the home and

its details, such as the floor boards and light sockets. Unlike those other records, Andrews is not attempting to record everything or evidence the facts of the flood. Rather, through her personal writing, she is able to capture some truths of the flood, to which readers can better relate.

In "Drift Wood and Rental Houses and Things That Don't Stay," Foster writes from Bellingham on her "momma's home" and its precarious relationship to the surrounding landscape. She writes,

> My momma's home was a house on stilts
> against the backdrop of a forest.
> A borrowed space
> teetering like baby's breath or late-spring deer—
> It could have walked over me
> if it wanted to.
> Stuffed behind a little door with bloated wood
> I'd sit quiet on my quilted bed and watch fat drops of rain
> hit my window, trail down and fall
> off the thin lip of the awning,
> dissolving into the gravel potholes
> we collected like something we knew
> would disappear.
> In the fall I'd dig up the spider leg roots of young cedars and
> place them in jelly jars under my bed.
> I wanted to tell my momma
> about the condensation that clung to the glass,
> but I wasn't allowed to have dirt in the house
> so my trees were gnarled secrets,
> twisted and winding from time spent without sun.

This relationship between structure and environment is not typical of architectural records. Whereas Foster describes her momma's home as a "borrowed space," architectural documents usually present their designs as fixed structures in the landscape, as if the designer or builder owns and controls the environment. Foster also finds significance in the home that would likely go unnoticed by professionals, such as "the little door with bloated wood" or the way rain falls from the window to the awning to the pothole. These are observations that are most

clear to and best described by inhabitants, those who have closely lived the space. The details captured in Foster's poem suggest some of the many spatial knowledges of inhabitants.

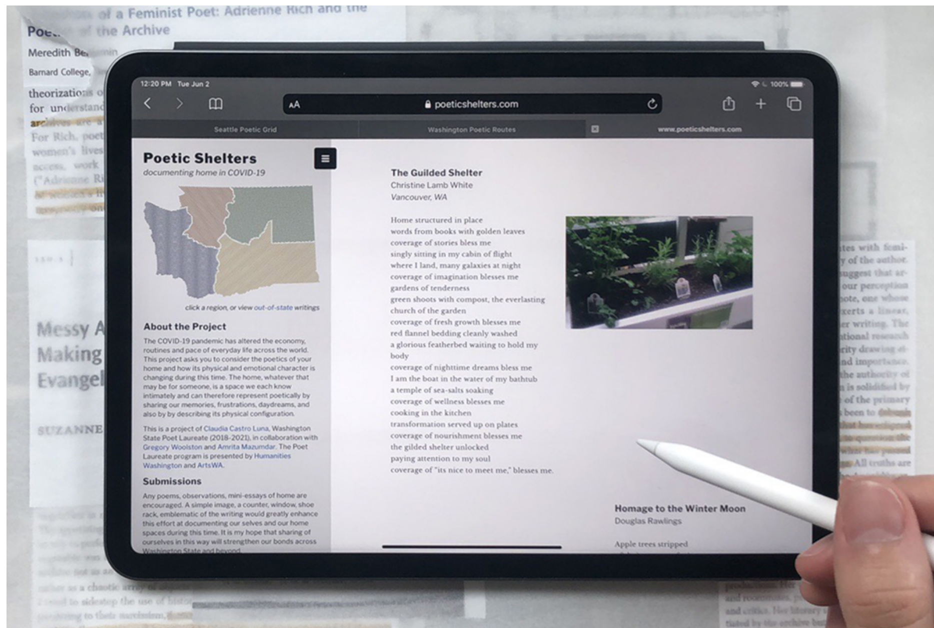
3.3 *Poetic Shelters* (2020)

The poems of *Poetic Shelters* (Figure 9), an ongoing project for which we continue to collect poems, observations, and mini-essays, document how the home is changing due to the COVID-19 pandemic of the past four months. "This project asks you to consider the poetics of your home and how its physical and emotional character is changing during this time. The home, whatever that may be for someone, is a space we each know intimately and can therefore represent poetically by sharing our memories, frustrations, daydreams, and also by describing its physical configuration," writes Castro Luna (2020). Writing prompts ask writers to think about important spaces in their home, changes to their living spaces, the affects of technologies like Skype and Zoom, and the memories of specific spaces and objects. This collection continues to grow, but several poems are particularly effective in recording the changes to and feelings of home in this moment; these are Samantha Dehal's "My Bedroom," Jacque Larrainzar's "Flicker," and Kelli Russell Agodon's "During the Pandemic, I Turn Our Shed \ Into a Writing Studio."

In "My Bedroom," Dehal writes from Seattle on the changing feelings of her bedroom during the pandemic. She writes,

> A place to relax
> Now it is a place of work
> How can I go back?

Through this brief haiku about a bedroom, Dehal summarizes so much of the pandemic. Since March, there has not been a space or time to relax. Bedrooms have been remade into offices, while living rooms have been remade into schools. There is also a continuous sense of worry about ourselves and others, preventing any sort of moment of peace. As notable in other poems, Dehal records a spatial feeling that is unavailable through visual materials



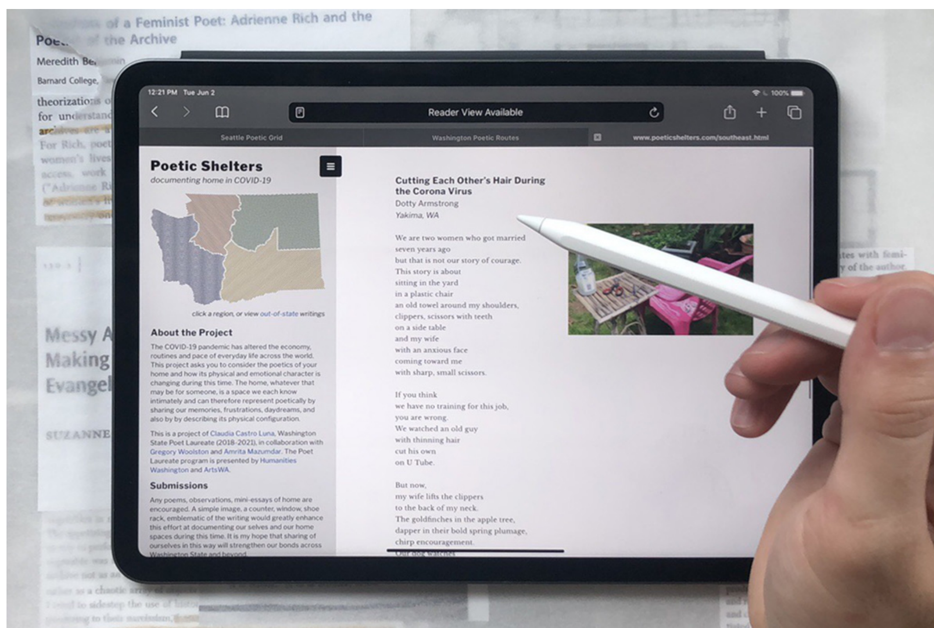


Figure 9: *Poetic Shelters* (2020)

alone. Moreover, Dehal documents how she, like so many others, have transformed the spaces of their homes in ways that architects never considered or imagined in their drawings.

In “Flicker,” Larrainzar writes from Oakland on her own experience sheltering during the pandemic, in addition to considering the shelter provided by a tree. She writes,

> Where would you go
> If nothing could bind you?
> A flicker whispers in my ear.
> I listen to the rain
> Falling,
>   falling,
>   falling
> It takes me to where I want to be
> outside these four walls.
> I become a tree.
> Standing still in place
> Branches up, reaching out
> Trunk, and leaves growing
> Touching the clouds
> Standing in place, not moving.
> And yet,
> Sheltering all kinds of life in body
> Hugging the earth with my roots
> In this confinement,
> I find the path;
> I am alive
> A witness to these trying times
> and all is good
> Inside.

Like Dehal, Larrainzar also captures the spatial confinement of the pandemic in her poem, but she uses it to imagine an escape “outside these four walls.” There, she becomes a different type of shelter, a tree, with the freedom to both dig into the earth and reach toward the sky, a significantly different sensation than the feelings of home at this time. In this poem, the physical space of the home is not as important as the space imagined by Larrainzar. It is only through poetics that readers can be so easily transferred between real and imaginary.

In "During the Pandemic, I Turn Our Shed \ Into a Writing Studio," Agodon writes from Seattle on her creation of a writing space during this time. She writes,

> Because space. Because the universe
> of my family was burning nebulas
> onto my paper and every poem
> was unwritten and pulled into a blackhole
> I never saw coming. Because
> coffee cups on my poetry books,
> not on coasters. Because television, radio,
> a conversation about breakfast, French toast
> or eggs. Because those I love are loud
> and happy and want to tell me a story
> about our cats. Because lawnmowers
> can live elsewhere. Because a neighbor
> gave me an old desk. Because I added
> a window for light. Because a little insulation,
> a space heater, and a long extension cord
> from the house. Because sometimes we need
> to sit with quiet. Because I know how to
> paint, tile the floors, make space for art.

Through her poem, Agodon captures the distractions and frustrations of staying home and attempting to work while living with family or roommates, an environment to which many can now relate. As opposed to an architectural representation, Agodon describes the space through these distractions and frustrations, such that readers can feel the space rather than just see it. This description also provides the rationale for the physical production of another space, a writing studio. Readers again feel this new space—it is quiet—but they also learn of its piecemeal construction with a used desk, new window, and extension cord.

*

There are almost 200 spatial poems between the *Seattle Poetic Grid* and *Washington Poetic Routes*, while the collection of poems on *Poetic Shelters* continues to grow with the

ongoing pandemic. All of these poems are organized by geography, inscribing city streets, rural landscapes, and rooms in homes with poetic details. While these perspectives certainly transform the maps over which they are laid, I argue they also record spaces in ways that are very much missing in architectural archives. Whereas architectural archives preserve professional records and document the profession's narrative, spatial poems reveal how people are inhabiting, imagining, and changing spaces, both through their writing and in the physical landscape. For example, the poems analyzed here contest spaces of gentrification in Seattle, relate architectural spaces to their environment in Waitsburg and Bellingham, and document the spatial changes of a pandemic in three homes in Washington and California. Moreover, these poems capture the personal feelings of those spaces in a way that is not accessible through the drawings or photographs of architectural archives alone. Spatial archives of diverse records, including poems, enable different truths of the built environment to be preserved, while poetics as a method encourages imagination and creation from the archives.

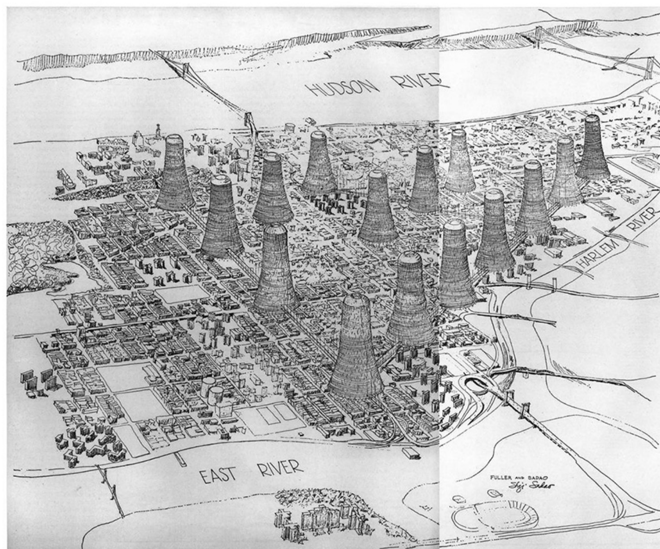
Chapter 4

"ARCHITEXTURAL" POSSIBILITIES

The poems of the *Seattle Poetic Grid*, *Washington Poetic Routes*, and *Poetic Shelters* remind me in some ways of the writings of poet and architect June Jordan, such as the *Esquire* article "Skyrise for Harlem" (1965) and the young adult novel *His Own Where* (1971). I follow Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2012) in stating that "Jordan was an architect," for she documented and imagined built spaces through her various writings. Charles Davis (2014) explains, "Despite the apparent lack of legal and professional credentials, Jordan's literature is filled with the techniques, strategies and suppositions of the progressive postwar architect. In light of this situation, it would be more fruitful to consider her literary output a synthetic hybridization of her poetic and architectural talents (336)." Cheryl Fish (2007) calls this hybridization "architextural" in order "to emphasize architecture as text and text as thickly descriptive, multidimensional ... serving as a scaffold on which to build a vision of hope and embodied environments (331)." This is particularly apparent in the essay and drawings for "Skyrise for Harlem," (Figure 10) in which Jordan collaborated with R. Buckminster Fuller on a redesign of Harlem with

> elevated, conical towers supported by central masts with one hundred levels built over existing housing units containing new dwelling space, parking ramps, and suspension bridges cutting through the towers and creating a connecting road. The plan also included an expansion of green space, more leisure areas, and new thoroughfares. It aimed to keep residents and community intact and to take into account the psychological state of living in an area deemed a ghetto. This architexture challenged typical urban planning schemes of the time and the practice and rhetoric of "slum clearnace" (Fish 2007: 332).

Such architexture is also present in *His Own Where*, in which teenagers Buddy and Angela transform a New York brownstone to create a space of their own. "In contrast to Le Corbusier



Instant Slum Clearance

by June Meyer

R. Buckminster Fuller designs a total solution to an American dilemma: here, for instance, is how it would work for Harlem

Harlem is life dying inside a closet, an excrescence beginning where a green park ends, a self-perpetuating disintegration of walls, ceilings, doorways, lives. It is also, of course, a political embarrassment for which no political solution is adequate. A housing project planted in the middle of a slum is not an answer. Harlem has been much lamented, but these statistics may be less familiar than others:

1. A typical Harlem child will score *lower* on an I.Q. test in the sixth grade than he scored three years earlier in the third grade.
2. Nine-tenths of its housing units are more than thirty years old.
3. Half the youngsters live with one parent or with none.
4. Harlem has a population of a quarter of a million, but it doesn't contain a high school.
5. Traffic deaths for Harlem youths appreciably exceed the rate plaguing the whole island of Manhattan.

Skyrise for Harlem is a proposal to rescue a quarter million lives by completely transforming their environment. New Harlem will encompass a half million people by removing old limits in exchange for natural boundaries. Harlem will widen from river to river across the island. Its new space will accommodate an additional quarter million residents—everyone willing to participate in the integrated transformation of a ghetto.

Skyrise for Harlem can be completed in thirty-six months. The first year will be spent in what R. Buckminster Fuller describes as "tooling up": organizing the mass production of structural parts and utility units, including all basic furniture.

Redevelopment generally means the *removal* of slum residents

Before and After. In the photograph below, Harlem today. In Buckminster Fuller's rendering at left, the same area as it would be re-created. Central Park ends at the extreme left, the George Washington Bridge is at the upper right. Traffic will flow over a new bridge to be built at 125th Street into the system of elevated, interconnected highways connecting all fifteen towers. These highways will handle through traffic in all directions and permit exit into the buildings themselves.

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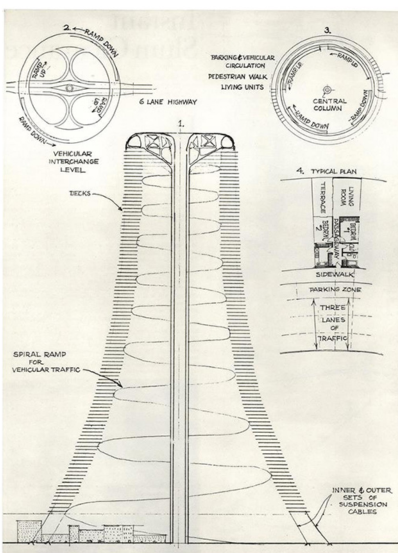
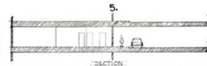


Utopian Details. On the opposite page: **1.** A cross section of one tower showing the spiraling, three-lane ramp reaching from ground level to top of tower; the ramp is edged with walks and parking areas. **2.** An overhead view of a tower at the tenth-story level showing the interconnecting elevated highway and the system of interchanges. **3.** A cross section showing the relation of the living units at perimeter of tower to the internal roadways. **4.** Floor plan of a typical apartment.



Above: 5. Cross section of an apartment with adjacent parking area; exterior wall of tower is at left, center of column at right.

while land is cleared for new buildings and new purposes. In fact, "redevelopment" is frequently a pretext for the permanent expulsion of Negro populations. Fuller's design permits all residents to remain on site while new and vastly improved dwelling facilities rise directly above the old. No one will move anywhere but up. New Harlem will be supported by columns driven into the backyards of the slum, and once the elevated replacement is complete and inhabited, the lower depths will be cleared for roadways and park space. The design will obliterate a valley of shadows: Skyrise for Harlem means literal elevation of Harlem to the level of Morningside Heights. Partial renovation is not enough. Piecemeal healing provides temporary relief at best and may create as many problems as it cures. A half century of despair requires exorcism.

The devastating effects of negligence become easier to understand—if more difficult to forgive—when you consider that New York City itself has been guided by nothing that resembles a master plan since 1811. The city is a model of design by accident, of construction in response to critical demand, high-level payoffs and tax expediencies. Following the Harlem riots of 1964 a profusion of remedies for what was at last accepted as a critical situation appeared everywhere; nowhere, however, was environmental redesign given prime emphasis. Yet it is architecture, conceived of in its fullest meaning as the creation of environment, which may actually determine the pace, pattern and quality of living experience.

An aerial view of New Harlem will disclose a radical landscape: vast, cleared ranges of space with fifteen peaks rising into the sky. These fifteen widely separated conical structures will house a half million people. A cross section of these structures resembles abstract, stylized Christmas trees evenly broadening toward their base with central, supporting trunks. Each tree town is one hundred circular decks high. The lowest level begins ten stories aboveground, above dust level and major cloverleaf-highway systems.

Fuller's circular decked towers are fireproof (concrete and steel cables) and may be delivered in large sections by helicopter. A central supporting mast also functions as the distributing tube for power, light, heat and disposal facilities independent of municipal utilities. The mast is compressional while the decks hang inside a tensional web (i.e., steel supporting cables). Open space between decks avoids a sense of impenetrable mass. From the masthead, lenses capture the light and heat of the sun.

Circling the central mast is a parking system of ramps that never cross. The huge interior space next permits a circling of shops, supermarkets, game rooms and workshops on every deck, plus, on some levels, a cross view of four hundred feet. The penultimate circling of the central mast contains dwelling units which provide an average of 1200 square feet per family as against an average of 720 in today's public housing. This 1200 square feet does not include the parking space given each family nor the balconies which constitute the perimeter of these great wheels of life. Every room has a view. From these hanging gardens, both rivers will be visible.

A comprehensive designer must conserve natural resources and yet control their effects. One of Fuller's solutions for this design problem will be seen in the sky. Protective watersheds will enclose the sky of Harlem like overlapping umbrellas. Rain may cascade visibly from these watersheds to be piped into New York reservoirs. The watersheds float on the strength of transparent truss systems.

Rather than the commonly known sidewalk, there will be wide walkways entirely separate from the cloverleaf ribbonry that will divide the high-speed through traffic from local traffic. Normal grid layout of city blocks will not stifle the reconstructed Harlem. Roughly, eight square city blocks will equal one of the new towering trees of life. Ordinary grid design with its parallel building produces a rigid confrontation of mass-against-mass and rectangular patterns deaden space into a monotonous experience. The circular-decked towers provide tension supports for roads and walkways.

Reconstructed Harlem will increase connections to other communities: 125th Street, as the overloaded thoroughfare of city bus, private car, commercial truck, railroad and subway traffic, now disappears into a coherent organization of goals and rates of approach to these goals. For instance, high-speed traffic from the Triborough Bridge will be separately routed over an arterial system similar to that of the Pulaski Skyway in New Jersey. Various peel-offs into Manhattan give option to the driver. Now it becomes possible to travel from the Triborough nonstop over Manhattan Island and onto a newly created Riverspan Bridge at 125th Street into New Jersey. This bridge multiplies functional reasons for Harlem residents and the other island inhabitants to commingle and cooperate. The inconvenience of having "to go down into the city" in order to leave it will no longer paralyze northern islanders.

Last year, New York City's Planning Commissioner Ballard and Mayor Wagner agreed on a proposal to domesticate the shoreline of New York to permit human beings a share of the river's edge. With Skyrise for Harlem, two marinas will provide recreation and supplement transportation via the river.

Skyrise for Harlem creates cultural centers docked into the sky: cultural centers offering practice studios for musicians, concert halls, theatres, workshops, forums for symposia, dancing pavilions, and athletic fields as well as pathways for strolling under trees. Contemporary sculpture will enrich the open spaces of elevated Harlem. Space will be reserved for the construction of major city institutions such as a Family Court. This accords with the five-year plan promoted by Manhattan Borough President Edward R. Dudley. As Dudley told this writer, the introduction of city institutions into Harlem "would serve to show that their area has not been specifically designed to be set apart."

During the last five years, New York City's Housing Authority has spent $561,407,000 to shelter 30,915 families. Skyrise for Harlem will shelter about 110,000 families at a cost to be determined once the assembly-line manufacturing of all its parts is undertaken by an industry willing to convert, for example, from the furnishings of war to the furnishings of peace. The enormous sum of units entailed by this design assumes the pioneer, belated establishment of housing on a thoroughly industrial basis. One need only consider the economics of mass production and its cost saving per unit (per consumer) in the manufacture of automobiles to realize that the organization of a housing industry is incredibly overdue.

Private financing of Skyrise for Harlem should regard this undertaking as an obvious, regenerative investment. It well might prove possible for private finance to receive government assistance in the form of tax abatement (taxing property at the original value) and deficit subsidy comparable to that enjoyed by public housing.

Where we are physically is enmeshed with our deepest consciousness of self. There is no evading architecture, no meaningful denial of our position. You can build to defend the endurance of man, to protect his existence, to illuminate it. But you cannot build for these purposes merely in spasmodic response to past and present crises, for then crisis, like the poor, will be with us always. If man is to have not only a future but a destiny, it must be consciously and deliberately designed. ■

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Figure 10: June Jordan and R. Buckminster Fuller's "Skyrise for Harlem" (1965)

and CIAM's efforts to position the professional architect as the regulator of physical space, Jordan has placed these tools within the hands of a fifteen year-old boy. He has no teacher besides his father and his own mind, and yet these are enough for him to gain control over his own space," explains Davis (337). This space includes "non-conventional door openings and shelves that were flush with wall finishes and lit by bright primary colors (mostly blues, reds, and oranges) to segregate the internal functions of the home." In this way, Jordan's spatial representations are not found in typical architectural documents, but in essays, writings, and poems which expand possibilities for and accessibility to imagining spaces.

It is through such architextural representations, like those of Jordan or found in the *Seattle Poetic Grid*, *Washington Poetic Routes*, and *Poetic Shelters*, that we can transform architectural archives into spatial archives—that is, from professional records and facts to the truths of inhabitants about their homes, cities, and landscapes. In addition to architectural drawings, spatial archives might include poems, songs, essays, novels, and oral histories about space, and perhaps even the space itself. Such archives could capture the many ways we experience, imagine, and create spaces, as well as inspire future imaginings in a way that breaks the traditional relationship between architecture and power. Just as queer archival practices and feminist poetics have transformed the archive from an exclusive site with a fixed narrative into and inclusive site of creative possibility, architectural archives must open to diverse representations of different spaces and *other* truths.

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