

INTRODUCING CRITICALPRODUCTIVE

Does the world really need another academic journal? I asked this question when I founded CriticalProductive in 2008 and produced two pilot issues of *CriticalProductive Journal*—a publication dedicated to urbanism, space, and culture. The intention was to build a community of scholars, designers, and activists whose core belief in the social power of design and cities could change the trajectory of the fields of urbanism / urban design, architecture, and landscape architecture. Subsequent experimentation and careful curation of topics, texts, and works of architecture, art, and design led to two exploratory issues—V1.1 (2011): *Theoretic Action* and V2.1 (2013): *Post-Capitalist City*—that contemplated the possibilities of publishing at the intersection of academia and popular culture.

The (re)launch of *CriticalProductive Journal*, with our distribution partner MIT Press, comes at a moment both perilous and crucial. Today, some ten years after those pilot issues, the ground beneath us has shifted substantially. The delineation of built form, natural form, and ecology has grown increasingly blurred, as have the boundaries between legacies of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning. Social and political concerns, having leaped to the

foreground, now present these design disciplines with the challenge of disrupting normative postures and an assumed apolitical stance toward the contemporary world in professional design practice. Resistance to democratic and egalitarian ideals, evidenced by the global turn toward authoritarianism and fascist movements, has reshaped the entire notion of what it means to be a citizen. Likewise, the rapidly evolving nature of technology, from extension of human activity to extension of human consciousness, bears with it related questions of what it means to be a person.

CriticalProductive is a platform for the production of new knowledge, co-created by improvisational thinkers and cultural workers from a variety of disciplines, who are united by a core investment in advancing radical ideas, on arts, culture, spatial practices, and cities. CriticalProductive is committed to disseminating experimental scholarship and creative work to a broad audience, through: *CriticalProductive Journal*—a peer-reviewed print and digital academic journal / magazine; CriticalProductive Media—an online media content platform; CriticalProductive Dialogues + Events—public symposia and events; and CriticalProductive Collabs—designer collaborations, spatial installations, internships, and fellowships. Ours is an

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SOVEREIGNTY, POPULISM, DEMOCRATIC SPACE

ambitious agenda, at a time that is ripe not only for manifestos but for pragmatic and tactical resources for enacting change at a massive scale.

CriticalProductive Journal is an Americas-based publication with a global mission. Our multifaceted Editorial Collective possesses a wide scope of expertise across spatial practice, urbanism, cultural arts, and the humanities. Recognizing the unique ways in which imperialism, capitalism, egalitarianism, and democratic ideals are circumscribed in the Americas, the Journal owns up to these conditions, while problematizing notions of nationalism and national exceptionalism, Eurocentrism, and other forms of ethnocentrism. Leveraging the unfinished projects of egalitarianism, feminism, critical race theory, and postcolonialism, the Journal becomes a site of rupture within the normative neoliberal logics of architectural and urban discourse. The urban cannot be flattened to demarcate yet another domain for capital to opportunistically mine for labor, resources, and services, nor should it be construed within a schema of pure real estate finance. The city, as an instrumentalization of the urban, must work for all its subjects—not just the dominant, wealthy, and privileged. I hope that the pages of the Journal provide a space for seasoned debate that evades simplistic political or ideological silos—and that you, our readers and community, embrace the challenge to not only read but also participate in our expanded array of online interactions and events, intended to build an intellectual community.

CriticalProductive is very much a collaborative project! I have an exceptional team—including editorial assistant Grace Teresa

Cillo, graphic designers Commonwealth Projects, our Editorial Collective, and global distributor the MIT Press. I want to thank Nick Lindsay, director of Journals and Open Access, and Amy Brand, director and publisher, at the MIT Press for believing in and supporting our vision and for providing cogent feedback toward realizing this ambitious project.

The first three *CriticalProductive Journal* issues will attend to select facets of the logics underlying our contemporary political, social, and aesthetic world conditions. Issue 1 focuses on Sovereignty/Populism.

The concepts of sovereignty and populism are vital to “democratic space.” Democratic space can be found within the most autocratic nations, and conversely, autocratic tendencies can be found within the most democratic nations. Democratic space is both aspirational and actual, demonstrating the capacity of the public to enact its democratic ideals in ways that make demands on the state visible to fellow citizens. Democratic space is also a metric by which we can measure the capacity of public, civic, and even privately owned public space, to accommodate dissent and displays of dissent as protest and activist performative activities. How do sovereignty and populism coexist theoretically and pragmatically in today’s interconnected global landscape, as



Front cover of *CriticalProductive Journal* V1.1 (Autumn 2011).



Back cover of *CriticalProductive Journal* V1.1 (Autumn 2011).

democracies are in peril and autocratic movements are on the rise? Even in the most democratic societies, cultural power—to control language and contemporary and historic narratives—is conferred onto social groups. From community activism and insurgent discourses to structural and systemic reformations, are there tangible activities that can scale? Do land claims, rights to the city, and forms of informal settlement impede or catalyze new urban formations to serve the 99 percent?

In the texts and creative works that comprise this inaugural issue of *CriticalProductive Journal*, we have assembled a diverse group of thinkers offering multiple vantage points from which to approach these disparate yet converging concepts. The photographs on the front and back covers of this issue present paradoxes of freedom as it is today conceived. We see the freedom to protest and the freedom to consume, in two societies both grappling with the twin challenges of state policing authority and basic human rights. (Front: US protests of the police murder of George Floyd, pictured in Seattle. Back: Luxury and wealth displayed on a Hong Kong shopping street. Photographs by Ulysses Curry.)

I

The Editor / Editorial Collective section continues with Editorial Collective members Fernando Luiz Lara and Arturo Ortiz Struck, opening the issue with reflection and observations on the concepts of interest, namely, sovereignty. Observing the destructive nature of “spatial abstraction,” which Lara identifies as an historically integral underpinning of colonialist and imperialist mindsets, he raises the potential of design to reimagine sovereignty in oppositionally relational terms. Lara asks, “Given that architecture as a praxis is deeply entangled with this process [of drawing lines that define boundaries and thus abstracting space into domains], could we reverse the gaze and use the power of design to achieve an inclusive sovereignty—in opposition to the five-hundred-year-old modern/colonial sovereignty of exclusion? Could we incorporate non-abstract variables into the design process to open a wedge toward less exclusionary results?” Struck extends to us his deeply personal

approach to understanding places, employing photography—the act itself and the documentation, of refuse and seemingly ubiquitous aesthetic objects—as a means of mediating the city and its inhabitants. How does the government see its territories if not face-to-face? Does a place need to be known, in all its history and hiding places, to be governed?

II

In the following section, Conversation + Criticism, three discussions, between scholars and designers from across multiple disciplinary silos, highlight tensions between concepts of sovereignty, populism, social practice, and race. In the conversation “Sovereignty and Populism,” moderated by Professor Peter Gilgen, a thorough examination of the historical tensions between populism and fascism takes place, as well as an exploration of the role of aesthetics and the city in contemporary political expression, particularly protest and activism. The conversation “Sovereignty and Social Practice,” moderated by architect Hansy Better Barraza, gives way to wide-ranging consideration for the tools and approaches with which architects, urbanists, and designers can utilize their expertise toward ideating new social formations, spotlighting a desire for bottom-up, community participation in the conceptualization and construction of new forms of housing and public space. In my conversation with Professor Hortense J. Spillers, we discuss sovereignty and populism as concepts seen through the lens of the Black subject, and we consider how the agency of Blackness and race can play a role in conceptualizing new spatial conditions.

III

Black Cities Americas combines archival material



Front cover of *CriticalProductive Journal* V2.1 (Winter 2015).



Back cover of *CriticalProductive Journal* V2.1 (Winter 2015).

with contemporary issues and illustrations, beginning with images of the Black Lives Matter / George Floyd murder protests in US city streets. The evolving image and role of the retail storefront is investigated, as the photographic image of Black life in Los Angeles is also mined for meaning. A transcript of a 1974 episode of the television show *Firing Line* (from the Hoover Institution Archives) illuminates the section’s visual and intellectual offerings with discussion and debate from prominent voices of the US civil rights movement, John Lewis and Julian Bond.

IV

Finally, within the Global Briefing section, international perspectives inform discourse around public housing, urbanism, urban development, and cultural and material production, in featured work from scholars and a Hong Kong real estate developer. Texts trace the memories embedded in Brasilia’s metropolitan region as they find translation across space, culture, sight, and sound in cinematic expression; investigate material culture, material possibilities, and material sovereignty in the western Amazon; and examine development around public housing estates in Hong Kong, looking to the estates’ past, present, and future.

In this and future issues, the Journal is meant to inspire cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural dialogue—not to insist on rigid ideologies. On behalf of the CriticalProductive editorial team and Editorial Collective, we hope the Journal compels you to continue the dialogue, to bring yourself to it and to keep it alive, both offline and using our digital resources to participate in this dynamic new intellectual community.