Teddy Cruz with

Past / Present
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Institutions
Casa Familiar, Inc.
PARC Foundation
SCI-Arc
Visual Arts Department, University of California San Diego
Woodbury University, San Diego

Diagram on ETC's practice based on research by Dustin Stephens

P f o u A n d a R t i o C n

planning
art
resources
communities

Estudio Teddy Cruz

Practice of Encroachment
From the global border to the border neighborhood

July 10th - October 25th, 2008
Tues-Sat 11am - 6pm

Where is Architectural Practice?

Estudio Teddy Cruz

1. The transformation of our practice in recent years, in terms of our own interests, motivations, and procedures, has been inspired by a feeling of powerlessness, as our institutions of architectural representation and display have lost their socio-political relevance and advocacy. We have been increasingly disappointed at the futility of our design fields, in the context of pressing socio-political realities worldwide, the conditions of conflict that are currently re-defining the territory of intervention. It's been unsettling to witness some of the most 'cutting edge' practices of architecture rush unconditionally to China and The Arab Emirates to build their dream castles, and in the process reducing themselves to mere caricatures of change, camouflaging gentrification with a massive hyper aesthetic and formalist project. We hope that in the context of this euphoria for the 'Dubais' of the world and the limitless horizon of possibilities for architecture these centers of economic power provide, practice can also be inspired by a sense of dissatisfaction, a feeling of "pessimistic optimism" that can provoke us, head on, to also address the sites of conflict that define and will continue to define the cities in the 21st Century.

2. While international urban development in major urban centers have defined the economic and political recipes that architecture practice decorates, new experimental practices of intervention in the collective territory and the territory of collaboration, will emerge from zones of conflict, the margins. It is in the periphery where conditions of social emergency are transforming our ways of thinking about urban matters, and the matters of concern about the city. The radicalization of the local in order to generate new readings of the global will transform the neighborhood-not the city-into the urban laboratory of our time. In this context, the task of architecture practice should not only be to reveal socio-political and economic territorial histories and injustice within our currently ideologically polarized world, but also to generate new forms of sociability and activism.

3. The future of architectural practice depends on the re-definition of the formal and the social, the economic and the political, understanding that environmental degradation is a direct result of social and political degradation. No advances in urban planning can be made without redefining what we mean by infrastructure, density, mixed use, and affordability. No advances in housing design, for example, can be made without advances in housing policy and economic subsidies. As architects, we can be responsible for imagining counter spatial procedures, political and economic structures that can produce new modes of sociability and encounter. Without altering the backward exclusionary policies constructing the territory - the socio-political ground, our profession will continue to be subordinated to the visionless environments defined by the bottom-line urbanism of the developer's spreadsheet.

4. We are interested in a practice of intervention that engages the spatial, territorial and environmental conditions across critical thresholds, whether global border zones or the local sectors of conflict generated by discriminating politics of zoning and economic development in the contemporary city. This suggests operational urban practices that encroach into the privatization of public domain and infrastructure, the rigidity of institutional thinking and the current obsession with an ownership society. This also opens the idea that architects, besides being designers of form, can be designers of political process, economic pro-forma and collaboration across institutions and jurisdictions.

5. Architecture practice needs to engage the re-organization of systems of urban development, challenging the political and economic frameworks that are only benefiting homogenous large-scale interventions managed by private - mega block development. Instead, we believe the future is small, and this implies the dismantling of the LARGE by pixilating it with the micro: an urbanism of retrofit. No intervention into public domain can begin without first exposing political jurisdiction and conditions of ownership. Clearly, this points out the pressing need for architecture practice to re-engage the invisible forces and vectors of power that shape the territory. This is the main topic of conversation and exchange that needs to take place across disciplines, but not from the isolation of the classroom or the design studio.

6. In this exhibition we move from these broad conceptual meditations into the specificity of the San Diego - Tijuana border, where our practice is located. Here, we oscillate back and forth between two radically different ways of constructing city. At no other international juncture in the world one can find some of the wealthiest real state as the one found in the edges of San Diego's sprawl, barely twenty minutes away from some of the poorest settlements in Latin America, manifested by the many slums that dot the new periphery of Tijuana. These two different types of suburbia are emblematic of the incremental division of the contemporary city and the territory between enclaves of mega wealth and the rings of poverty that surround them. We are interested in processes of mediation that can produce critical interfaces between and across these opposites, exposing conflict as an operational devise to transform architectural practice. The critical observation of this locality transforms this border region into our laboratory from which to reflect the current politics of migration, labour and surveillance, the tensions between sprawl and density, formal and informal urbanisms, wealth and poverty, all of which incrementally is characterizing the contemporary city every where.

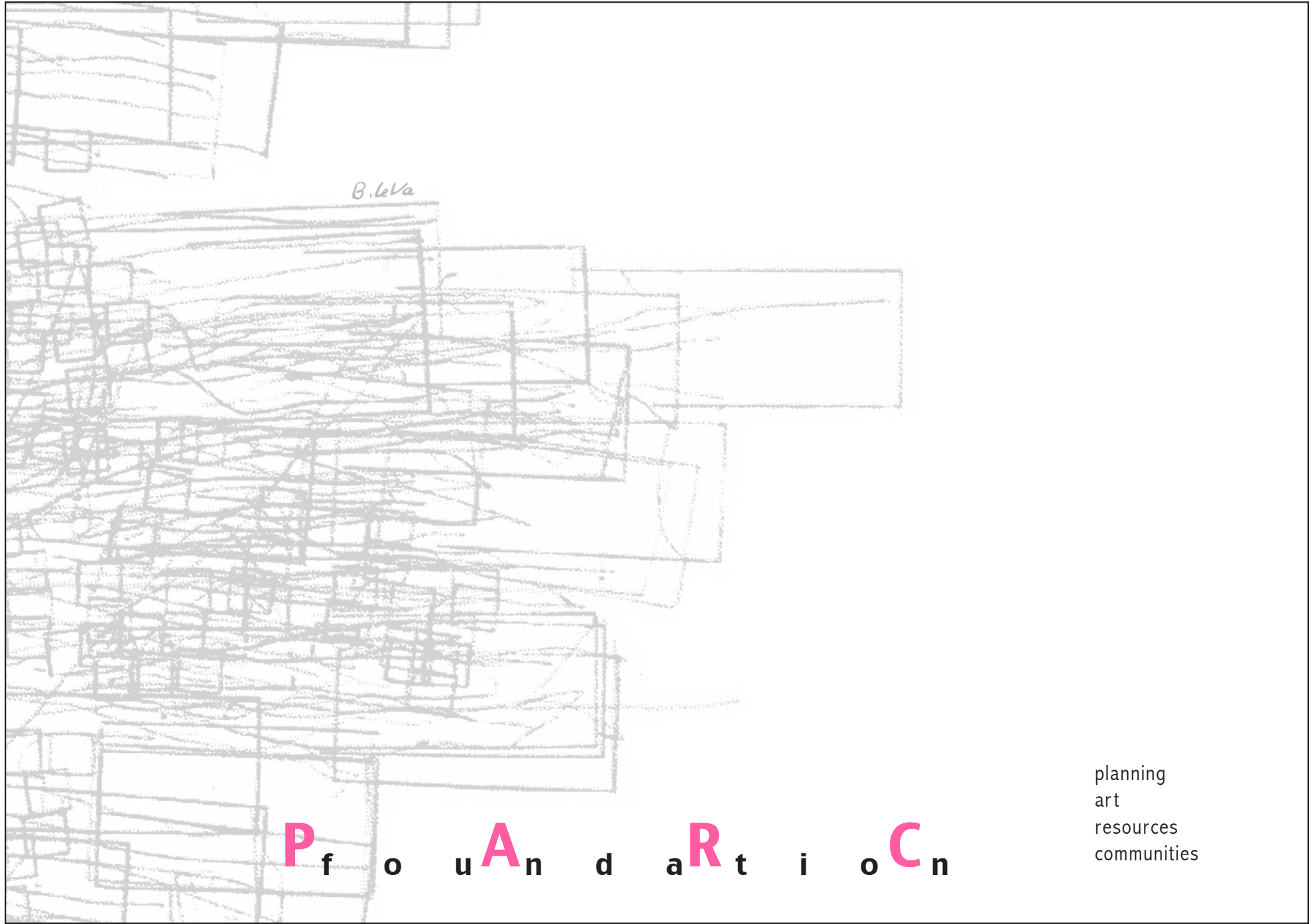crisis of environmental sustainability

crisis of public infrastructure

crisis of institutional collaborations

CONFLICT

crisis of socio-economic sustainability

crisis of housing affordability

crisis of political engagement

PRACTICE AND RESEARCH
exposing conflict as operational tool

TACTICS OF TRANSLATION

exposure of territorial power

CONDITIONS
OF OWNERSHIP

who owns the resources?

POLITICAL
JURISDICTION

whose territory is it?

FRAGMENTED INSTITUTIONS

POLICIES ⟷ RESOURCES ⟷ BUDGETS

DESIGNING REDISTRIBUTION OF
RESOURCES AND COLLABORATIONS

ALTERNATIVE:

ECONOMIC PRO FORMAS ⟷ POLICY FRAMEWORKS ⟷ SPATIAL TACTICS

can a neighborhood be a developer?   can density be understood as an amount of social exchanges per acre?   can form anticipate social encounter?

EXPANDED MODEL OF PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

TOP DOWN/FORMAL/ECONOMIC CAPITAL ← MEDIATION → BOTTOM UP/INFORMAL/SOCIAL CAPITAL

CAPTURING HIDDEN VALUE