



## INFORMAL CITIES

### International Research Studio

University of Cincinnati College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning  
School of Architecture and Interior Design

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*Informal Cities* is a multi-year, trans-scalar—urbanism-architecture-preservation-adaptive reuse-interiors—investigation of informal settlements in Latin America and the broader Global South. This study expands on research in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, and Argentina undertaken by Dr. Gregory Marinic and Dr. Pablo Meninato. Marinic and Meninato are currently developing a book prospectus focused on formal design interventions built within informal settlements across Latin America. They intend to pursue a high-quality university press to disseminate their research and studio inquiries.

Investing their research into the classroom, Marinic and Meninato will co-lead a University of Cincinnati DAAP-based graduate architecture-urban design studio using Mexico City as a laboratory for metropolitan futures. In February 2020, eight graduate students will travel to Mexico City with Marinic and Meninato for on-site field work. Enhancing the interdisciplinary nature of the project, PhD students Debanjali Banerjee (Architecture) and Alican Yildiz (Planning) will serve as research collaborators supporting student learning via geographic information systems (GIS), spatial analysis, and energy modeling. The speculative student projects developed in this studio will be incorporated in a book and exhibited at a forthcoming urban design symposium hosted by the University of Cincinnati College of Design, Architecture, Art, and Planning (DAAP).

## INTENT

Theory offers the potential to inform the design of the built environment, yet architectural discourse is often characterized by those concentrating on *theory* versus those dedicated to the *practice* of architecture. While the divide between theory and practice largely defines our current paradigm, several Latin American architects have situated their practices through an alternative lens. In the (incipient) field of informal urbanism, architects Teddy Cruz, Tatiana Bilbao, Alejandro Echeverri, Jorge Jáuregui, and Flavio Janches work through community engagement, writing, workshops, and academic studios that shape a multi-disciplinary field where theory and practice are inherently intermingled.

*Informal Cities* introduces such thinking into the academic design studio. This studio series situates itself on the premise of establishing an ecology of research, production, and dissemination of scholarship surrounding emerging forms of urbanism. *Informal Cities* seeks to invest students and faculty of the University of Cincinnati and Temple University in the worldwide discourse of informal urbanism across Latin America and the Global South. Furthermore, these efforts contribute to the current expansion goals of UC International in the Americas.

Together, Marinic and Meninato have a proven record of nationally-awarded professional and student work recognized by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA)—the two most significant academic and professional bodies in the discipline. In 2020, they will co-chair a session on Informal Urbanism at the 2020 Urban Affairs Association conference in Washington, DC, will co-chair a session on Informal Urbanism at the ACSA national conference, and will present teaching pedagogies at the University of Oklahoma 'Schools of Thought' conference.

Research produced in *Informal Cities* will contribute to Urbania, a funded research lab led by Gregory Marinic speculating on metropolitan futures through multi-scalar projects ranging from urban design to public interior spaces. Current research focuses on informal settlements and tactical urbanism in Latin America and the US-Mexico Borderlands, as well as broader urban correspondences between the Global South and North America. This research is leveraged through international field work, symposia, peer-reviewed publications, traveling studios, and books.

## INFORMAL CITIES: Mexico City

Considering informal settlements a sustainable form of urbanism appears to be a contradiction. On the one hand, informally urbanized zones are most often characterized by what they lack—infrastructure, housing, public transit, green spaces—rather than their valuable attributes. On the other, aspects such as high-density, walkability, modest levels of consumption, and a vibrant mercantile culture demonstrate that informal settlements are fundamentally positive. The low-carbon footprint of individual households, for example, confirms that the consumptive performance of informal urbanism is remarkably sustainable.

The *Informal Cities* architecture-urban design research studio argues that informal settlements constitute an organic condition in Latin American cities that should be enhanced rather than erased. The first studio, *Informal Cities: Mexico City*, will identify, document, analyze, and speculate on mechanisms for improving the quality of life in informal settlements of Mexico City. Environmental catalysts—water,

air quality, food security, ecology—will serve as provocations for advancing resilience and social justice via incremental improvements to the built environment.

Working in the manner of architect and urban theorist Ignasi de Solà-Morales, graduate architecture students will use GIS to collectively map metropolitan spatial characteristics, socio-economic conditions, and urban flows to propose tactical, neighborhood-wide play spaces and deployable ‘incremental’ housing. Aldo Van Eyck’s post-war playgrounds in Amsterdam and Tatiana Bilbao’s more recent social housing in Ciudad Acuña, Mexico will be studied—among other precedents—to lens and critique design strategies for informal settlements. Hybridity, affordability, density, heat island effect, and energy efficiency will be among several intersectional issues students will employ to rethink the socio-ecological performance of informal urbanism, as well as how architects, designers, planners, stakeholders, and municipalities can collaborate. Students will collectively network multiple sites and then focus on individual playground-social housing interventions to enhance movement and equity—‘play/performance’—across the city.

## **STUDY ABROAD**

*Informal Cities* embeds a study abroad component to enhance the learning experience for students. The first studio will embark for Mexico City in February 2020 for an 8-day journey. Marinic and Meninato are currently working to nurture connections with university faculty and professional architecture practices in Mexico City. Future urban field research bases are planned for Medellín, Guayaquil, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago de Chile, and Buenos Aires.

The student travel component of *Informal Cities* is partially supported by funds procured on an ongoing basis by Edward Mitchell, Director of the University of Cincinnati School of Architecture and Interior Design; and Gregory Marinic. This funding has made the Mexico City trip considerably more affordable for students with fees reduced by over %50 of actual cost.

## **STUDIO LEADERSHIP**

*Informal Cities: Mexico City* is being collaboratively led by Gregory Marinic, an associate professor in the University of Cincinnati DAAP School of Architecture and Interior Design, and Pablo Meninato, an associate Professor in the Temple University Tyler School of Art and Architecture. Two DAAP PhD students will support student learning in the studio. Debanjali Banerjee, a PhD student in the School of Architecture and Interior Design, will be working on a teaching practicum in the studio by employing GIS, heat island, and energy modeling research to incremental residential design. Alican Yildiz, a PhD student in Regional Development Planning in the School of Planning will contribute as a researcher and studio collaborator with GIS experience. Marinic serves on the PhD committee of Alican Yildiz. This endeavor will enhance the learning experience of Ms. Banerjee and Mr. Yildiz while they research their dissertations. Together, Marinic, Meninato, Banerjee, and Yildiz bring significant and recognized expertise in urban design and architecture with a transnational perspective. Both Marinic and Meninato have taught at the Universidad de Monterrey.

## BIOS

### **Gregory Marinic, PhD | Associate Professor, University of Cincinnati**

Gregory Marinic, PhD is an architectural theorist, scholar, educator, and practitioner whose research operates at the intersection of architecture, urbanism, obsolescence, and social justice. He is Associate Professor in the University of Cincinnati DAAP School of Architecture and Interior Design and leads Urbania, a funded research lab speculating on metropolitan futures with multi-scalar projects ranging from urban design to public interior spaces. His current research focuses on informal urbanism in Latin America, as well as emerging transnational urban correspondences between the Global South and North America. He has been widely published in peer-reviewed journals and books. His teaching has been recognized with national awards including the ACSA Diversity Achievement Award and the AIA/ACSA Housing Design Education Award. Marinic holds over twenty years of experience in professional practice. Prior to entering academia, he worked in architecture firms in New York and London including Rafael Viñoly Architects, Gensler, Tsao & McKown Architects, and ABS Architects. At Viñoly, he contributed to RIBA and AIA award-winning projects and by-invitation international competition design teams. He leads Arquipelago, a New York and Cincinnati-based multidisciplinary design practice that has been awarded by the Seoul Metropolitan Government, American Institute of Architects, and Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, as well as exhibited in the AIA Center for Architecture in New York, Center for Architecture and Design in Philadelphia, Estonian Architecture Museum in Tallinn, Dongdaemun Design Plaza in Seoul, TSMD Architecture Center in Ankara, National Building Museum in Washington, and elsewhere.

### **Pablo Meninato, PhD | Associate Professor, Temple University**

Pablo Meninato, PhD is an architect, architectural critic, and educator whose research focuses on the conception and development of the architectural project. He is the author of *Unexpected Affinities* (Routledge, 2018), a book that proposes a historical reassessment of the concept of architectural ‘type’ and its impact on the design process. The book examines affinities between tactics of the readymade—as conceived by the artist Marcel Duchamp—and typological displacement, a question that reassesses correspondences between contemporary art and architecture. In his current research, Meninato investigates how various contemporary architects are developing new and original urban design tactics that enhance the quality of life in informal settlements across Latin America. A native of Argentina, Meninato has taught and practiced architecture in Philadelphia, Buenos Aires, and Monterrey. Prior to joining Temple University as Associate Professor, Meninato taught at various academic institutions including the University of Pennsylvania, Thomas Jefferson University, University of Maryland, Universidad de Monterrey, Universidad de Palermo, and Universidad de Buenos Aires. Meninato’s essays have been published in various magazines, journals, and books. Most recently, he published “Ledoux – Analogías Inauditas” in *Summa+* (September 2018), and “Spatial Seductions - The Everyday Interiorities of Marcel Duchamp, Eduard Kienholz, and Pepon Osorio” in *The Interior Architecture Theory Reader*, Taylor & Francis (January 2018).

### **Debanjali Banerjee | PhD Student, University of Cincinnati**

Debanjali Banerjee is a PhD student in the University of Cincinnati DAAP School of Architecture and Interior Design. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on architecture, architectural engineering, and urban design at the intersection of heat island effect, building energy use, and fuel poverty. Using GIS and eQUEST energy modeling software, she investigates how heat islands (UHI) contribute to inequity

within an urban context. Banerjee is a LEED GA and has collaborated on energy efficient buildings in India with renowned architect Chitra Viswanath. In addition to her PhD studies, Banerjee works with Brock Hudgins Architects, an Atlanta-based multi-family residential design firm. She holds an undergraduate degree from India and professional Master of Architecture degree from the Savannah College of Art and Design.

**Alican Yildiz | PhD Student, University of Cincinnati**

Alican Yildiz is a PhD student in the University of Cincinnati DAAP School of Planning. He is an interdisciplinary researcher, practitioner, and doctoral student working across urbanism, public space, and architecture. Dedicated to increasing and sustaining the performative qualities of spatial environments, he pursues research-based, social and applied projects at various scales and mediums. His creative work engages innovative design and planning practices via urban analysis and geographic information systems (Arc GIS). Yildiz holds an undergraduate degree in Urban Design/Planning from Istanbul Technical University and a professional Master's degree in Urban Design/Planning from the University of Cincinnati.