INTRODUCTION

MY SINCERE THANKS TO:

My partner Christopher S. Marshall
My best friend Palmer Marie Foley
My comrade and travel-companion Jim Czysz
My sister Liz Hahn
My father and step-mother Tom and Ann Marie Collier
& all my relations, given or chosen.

The faculty of the IDES department at VCU
Sara Reed, Emily Smith, and Roberto Ventura have been particularly generous with their time & attention.

My recommenders: Professor Melanie Rae Thon & Professor Craig Dworkin at the University of Utah.

And to Ursula K. LeGuin, (wherever she may be). Her books The Dispossessed and Always Coming Home inspired and guided me throughout.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO MY MOTHER, CASSANDRA
A bowl is an object with solidity and heft, but the empty space within it makes it useful. The bowl’s function is to hold: its structured emptiness is what we use (and use up), by filling it.

A house, which is also a container, works in a similar way. It doesn’t properly exist, until it is occupied; it’s a shell, an empty package. Its inhabitants activate it; by using it, they realize its utility; they complete the design.

Clearly, an interior designer’s primary material is empty space. We are sculptors of void: we create spaces... that others will fill with time.

For the sake of planetary ecology, we should seek to derive maximum practical use from a minimum of material resources. But this needn’t be an austerity measure—all we are doing is establishing a particular configuration of emptiness, by surrounding it.

Beauty is important. I have nothing else to say about it.
PROJECT ORIGINS

INTERESTS & CONCERNS

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

GENDER EQUITY IN DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENTS, I.E., WHO DOES THE DISHES?

PLACES OF REFUGE OR RETREAT—WHAT DO THESE LOOK LIKE, TODAY?
This moment of crisis is also a moment of opportunity. If we have to radically reconstruct all our ways of being in the world—climate change seems to demand nothing less—we can, and should, work towards a new society in which the advantages of membership are more evenly distributed than they have been previously.

What choices can we make, as designers, to ensure that our societies collectively succeed in scaling back the consumption of fossil fuels and other limited resources? As we develop new design strategies compatible with ecological stewardship, can we identify and replace elements in the existing built environment that reinforce disparities between different genders, classes, and ethnic groups?

This project represents my engagement with the domestic interior, as I consider ways that residential designs reflect, and affect, their social contexts.

Climate experts around the world agree that anthropogenic climate change threatens the long-term survival of the human species (Scientific Consensus, 2020). Human activity is already correlated with an exponential rise in the rate of extinction among other species, beginning at the time of the industrial revolution.

While climate experts monitor atmospheric carbon levels in parts per million, researchers in other disciplines consider ecological crisis from the vantage points of history and political economy. At this point, the idea that capitalism is bad for the environment is widely accepted. Critics of western capitalist modernity also point to the legacy of human suffering rationalized by these ideologies. Many argue that patriarchy and white supremacy are not accidental derivatives of capitalism. Rather, they are integral mechanisms without which the system as a whole would cease to function.
The 30,000 S.F. Richmond Intermediate Terminal #3 Warehouse was built in 1937. It occupies a strategic position on the Eastern shore of the James River, slightly downriver from the rapids that prevent deep-keeled ships from proceeding further upstream.

The building has a strange, rather forlorn relation to its site—it looks like some huge river-creature, stranded in the sty flood-plain... An amphibious structure, it rests its wide body on slender concrete pylons, like a crab on tip-toe. Wharf street (now out of service) plunges beneath it, and an incongruously-placed streetlight butts its head against the underside of the main level, where ridges of closely-spaced supporting beams increase its resemblance to a crustacean, or a crustacean’s abandoned shell.

The warehouse stands at the merger of two waterways, where tiny, troublesome Gillie Creek (so flood-prone, it was driven underground) flows into the wider James. Gillie Creek Park, a few blocks inland, promises plenty of near-by green space, as well as a BMX track.

Unfortunately that green space is difficult to reach on foot, requiring passage through a high speed arterial corridor with no pedestrian amenities. A proposal to build a foot-bridge connecting Gillie Creek Park to nearby Libbie Hill and Chimborazo Parks offer welcome safe-passage (Gordon, 2020).

The Capitol Trail, a recent addition to the landscape, passes within Terminal #3 Warehouse’s shadow. Runners and bikers zoom past on all but the dreariest days. Fishermen chat, smoke, and eat while leaning over the metal railing that separates the building’s concrete yard—its “sugar pad”—from the river’s edge.

Over the course of its working life, the warehouse stored a wide array of cargoes. In its early years, it often held raw sugar imported from Cuba, which was used in the manufacture of tobacco products: hence “sugar pad” (Slipek, 2018).

Warehouse #3’s nearest residential neighborhoods—at least, as the crow flies—spill down the East side of Church Hill. On a map, Montrose Hill looks as if it were just next door. But the distinct character of the riverfront, and the forces that have enforced its physical and social segregation from higher-elevation areas, link the building more closely with historic Shockoe Bottom to the north, and ahistoric Rockett’s Landing (recently developed as a (highly artificial) “destination” for the city’s craft-beer enthusiasts) to the south.

In recent years developers have been generally active in Richmond’s East End, where speculative investment has gathered considerable momentum. The city and state governments welcomed Stone Brewing’s East Coast headquarters to Rockett’s Landing with millions of dollars in tax breaks and other incentives; Stone is now an anchor point for continuing gentrification in the area.

Stone’s original plans included a proposal to renovate Warehouse #3 for operation as a “Global Bistro.” (The building does seem well-suited to hospitality, if only on the basis of its river-front location.) Stone has backed out of the plan, however, for reasons no one has yet managed to discover.

The future of Warehouse #3 is uncertain. Rapid gentrification in the East End suggests that the riverfront land it sits on is rapidly appreciating in value. For the moment, however, the warehouse sits undisturbed except by an occasional graffiti artist, whose work helps to relieve the nearly Soviet plainness of the building’s facades.
SITE PHOTOGRAPHS

SOUTHERN VIEWS
SITE STUDY

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- VIEWS
- PARKING
- NOISE
- COOLER
- WAREHOUSE #3
- PUBLIC TRANSIT ACCESS
- PEDESTRIAN ROUTE

SUN PATH DIAGRAM (SUMMER SOLSTICE)

- SUNRISE
- SUNSET

SECTION TITLE U-L 18

16

17
As previously noted, a distinctive feature of 1938 Intermediate Terminal #2 is that it was one of the first commercial buildings constructed in Richmond to protect from flooding of the James River. This 1939 photograph illustrates the success and importance of this architectural innovation in Richmond. The first floor of Terminal #1 (on the left) is flooded, whereas Terminal #2 (highlighted) is spared water damage.

Intermediate Terminal #2 (highlighted) in 1939 flood. Source: VCU Archives.

Intermediate Terminal #2 (detail) above water during 1979 flood. The elevated bridge connecting Terminal #1 and #2 is also visible. Source: VCU Archives.
Much of the history of Richmond, of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and of the Colonial United States can be tied to the riverfront landscape in which Terminal Warehouse #3 now stands. The site’s current, quasi-abandoned condition belies its centrality to the story of European settlement in North America, and to Richmond’s role in that story.

The geologic fall-line between Virginia’s Piedmont and coastal plain lends its name to the Falls of the James; these rapids prevent ocean-going vessels, with their deep keels, from sailing further inland. British colonial forces were eager to establish a foothold at this location, which promised to serve as a natural terminus for marine shipping routes. The indigenous Powhatan people valued the same river-front for its prime fishing grounds (Otherwise Known, 2014).

Following their initial exposure to European explorers and settlers, however, the Powhatan population—like that of indigenous groups throughout the Americas—was reduced to a fraction of its former size by smallpox and other European microbes, to which they had no immunity. These microbes were often deliberately introduced into their communities by the British (and other Europeans), through the sale or gift of infected blankets (this fact may not immediately seem pertinent to the matter at hand, but I would argue that any historical account of land, in the Americas, should include this sort of contextual information) (Galeano, 2009).

British colonizers were characteristically dismissive of the Powhatan’s prior claim to the territory on which Richmond now stands, and the Powhatan’s efforts to prevent the westward expansion of Britain’s colonial territory, by force or by diplomacy, were ultimately ineffective.

Following failed attempts—beginning in 1609—by other Englishmen to settle near the Falls, William Byrd I encamped there in 1679, and held his position with the support of 50 British soldiers. Colonel Wm. Byrd II established the towns of Richmond and Petersburg on the same day in the year1737, and Major Wm. Mayo drew the original grid for both cities (fig. 1, opposite page). Richmond was incorporated in 1742, with 250 residents, and in 1779 the city became Virginia’s capital (Nomination, 1982).

Improvements to Richmond’s port facilities, and the creation of a canal system—devised by George Washington—that enabled tobacco-
The text of this nomination paperwork is scrupulously attentive to the historic development of the Virginia tobacco industry. For instance, that: "by 1860, Richmond was clearly the biggest industry and provided much of the capital for the built the city of Richmond, the state of Virginia was a jail, and its function was to rupture, rather than record, hereditary lineages stretching back to the sixteenth century." 

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using a computer search confirms that neither the word "slave" nor any of its grammatical variants—slavery, enslaved—appear even once in the NRHP nomination paperwork. 

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had opened consulates in Richmond by this time. This is a terrifying variation on the theme of the "Virginia began to be known as a 'breeder state.'" 

African-American could establish some connection, given better record-keeping (Sacred Ground). The history of Shockoe Bottom, and of Richmond, cannot possibly be understood without reference to the fact that, in the 18th century, slave ships from the West coast of Africa docked in Manchester; unloaded their brutalized human cargo; and marched them on foot—shackled through the same cobblestoned streets that Shockoe Bottom's merchants, residents and visitors walk today. 

A community-generated planning document for an extensive memorial to the experiences of enslaved people trafficked through Richmond proposes a nine-acre park in the Shockoe Valley, encompassing the land where Lumpkin's slave jail stood, as well as the larger parcel where the historic African Burial Ground was, for many years as many as 10,000 women, men and children were marched on foot—shackled through the same cobblestoned streets that Shockoe Bottom's merchants, residents and visitors walk today. 

of Richmond, which many white families yearning to breathe free; but their site of reception was a jail, and its function was to rupture, rather than record, hereditary lineages stretching back across the Atlantic.

After Virginia outlawed the importation of enslaved people from the African continent in 1798, Richmond slave merchants turned towards inter-State commerce. A report by the Sacred Ground Reclamation Project (a non-profit dedicated to the preservation and memorialization of enslaved people's experiences in Shockoe Bottom) calls antebellum Richmond "the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade," and tells us that Shockoe Bottom "included nearly 100 sites associated with that barbaric business: 40-50 auction houses; dozens of slave trader offices, many with holding pens; six to eight slave jails; and many supporting businesses."

Sacred Ground's report goes on to say: "In some sites as many as 10,000 women, men and children were marched on foot—shackled through the same cobblestoned streets that Shockoe Bottom's merchants, residents and visitors walk today."

The nomination issues a caution: "1980 Summer Interns." The nomination is signed by Tucker Hill, the Executive Director of the sponsoring organization, and "Preservation Officer" H. Bryan Michael. The text of this nomination paperwork is scrupulously attentive to the historic development of the Virginia tobacco industry. For instance, that: "by 1860, Richmond was clearly the biggest industry and provided much of the capital for the built the city of Richmond, the state of Virginia was a jail, and its function was to rupture, rather than record, hereditary lineages stretching back to the sixteenth century." 

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The East End of Richmond—including Shockoe Bottom and Church Hill—has gentrified at lightning pace, over the course of the last several years; data from the Richmond300 master plan reveals that home prices in the area jumped 20% from 2013 to 2018 alone, and in the following three those prices have risen at a yet-more rapid rate (Regional Housing, 2020). Private capital, typically, has been the upper hand ever since. We work against his white enslavers (Indelible Roots, 2016).

At Richmond’s currently posh residential neighborhoods were contiguous, and both were once, in this visually dilapidated, but historic and fortress-like, place that even during its decline was home to a family and their neighbors. When walking down the street, you’d come by, clean your yard and everything for Brady. ‘I think we had one neighborhood drunk, you and we would feed him a little bit. All the neighbors helped each other.’ (Indelible Roots, 2016).

The city’s enthusiasm for the wholesale destruction of Fulton would be less surprising in the context of a hostile municipal force’s salutary—Urban Renewal plan in 1970. This plan authorized the relocation (with de facto paltry compensation, if any) of the neighborhoods’ residents—who lost their homes for the use and benefit of its previous occupants were broken, with apparent impunity. (Indelible Roots, 2016).
row houses, with congenial porches where elders kept watchful eyes on children playing outdoors, the city has constructed scrofulous patches of ranch-style and split-level housing, whose ample garages emphasize the area’s car-reliant layout.

It is difficult to perceive the City’s actions, in regard to historic Fulton, as anything less than the cynical repossession and sequestration of land occupied by African-Americans, in anticipation of higher-income white Richmonders’ desire to recolonize the city’s Eastern neighborhoods. There may not, in fact, be any conspiratorial organization behind the city’s approach to “revitalizing” Fulton, but—based on its results—that process might as well have been carried out by a conspiracy of racist real estate profiteers; such has been its concrete effect on the area’s demographic profile, economy, and culture.

Having committed itself wholeheartedly to a financially cock-eyed sweetheart deal with Stone Brewing, the city now seems determined—its stated objectives notwithstanding—to reengineer Fulton in the image of Scott’s Addition, Tobacco Row, et al. (Rolett, 2014), as if any city, anywhere, needed yet another bland, beery playground for the suburban-bred youth contingent of America’s white bourgeoisie.
1. TERMINAL #3 WAREHOUSE BUILDING

2. FULTON NEIGHBORHOOD (PRESENT AND ABSENT)

A COMPARISON OF MAPS FROM 1934 AND 2019 ILLUSTRATES THE THOROUGHNESS OF THE FULTON NEIGHBORHOOD’S REMOVAL.
On the island of Cypress, a hermitage built into the side of a mountain (1) looks out on a forested valley below (2). Dramatic shafts of light in the dome of a Byzantine church (3) resemble sunlight pouring in through the narrow cave’s narrow mouth.

Cloisters—a defining feature of Christian monastic architecture—also have a subterranean quality. From within their shadow, the landscape outside looks blindingly bright. Roughly-hewn stone in a early-Medieval, Romanesque style French monastery (4) reinforces the impression of a cave.

**MONK, MONASTERY:** FROM ANCIENT GREEK “MONOS” (ALONE)

**MODES OF WITHDRAWAL**

**EREMITIC** (SOLITARY)

**CENOBITIC** (COMMUNAL)
UNLIKELY RELATIONS

LE THORONET

LE THORONET’S DISTINCTIVE FEATURES INCLUDE PILLARS SUPPORTING COMPLEX VAULTED CEILINGS (TOP LEFT)

DESIGN PRECEDENTS

LE THORONET

TEXT FRAME

• 12TH CENTURY CISTERCIAN ABBEY
  • Admired by Le Corbusier, cited by him as an inspiration for his own foray into monastic residential architecture, Couvent La Tourette
• The abbey’s sublime proportions are readily apparent, thanks to the structure’s unornamented planes of close-set stone
• A paragon of early medieval architecture, which illustrates European modernism’s debt to that period

• The church was built in the form of a cross, as was typical—see plan above illustrates
• The protected yard is surrounded by cloisters on four sides

• The church was built in the form of a cross, as was typical—see plan above illustrates
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In literary theory, worldbuilding describes the evocation of whole environments: from the parlors and bedrooms of realistic fiction to the possible futures of life on planet earth to the imagined universes of science fiction and fantasy.

—Melanie Rae Thon

Managing climate change, experts said, will require rethinking virtually every aspect of daily life—how and where homes are built, how power grids are designed, how people plan for the future with the collective good in mind. It will require an epochal shift in politics in a country that has, on the whole, ignored climate change.

—ny times

For any difficult endeavor to be undertaken with a reasonable hope of success, that success—its possibility—first has to be conceivable, that is, imaginable. If we want to achieve “an epochal shift,” we must accustom ourselves to the idea of an economy, a politics, and a culture anchored by commitments to ecological repair and reintegration, above all.

My orientation towards these issues is deliberately optimistic. Optimism feels like a duty to me—in times like these, I want to say, but there haven’t been any times like this one. Imaginative engagement with the betterment of our collective circumstances will not replace the active work of producing those changes, but it can inspire and direct them. The value of optimism—I suspect—is inversely proportional to its difficulty. I’ve chosen to approach my thesis project as if it were a work of speculative fiction—an exercise in worldbuilding.

My guiding light is the science fiction writer Ursula K. LeGuin, whose novel The Dispossessed has been an important reference-point for me in a variety of contexts. LeGuin understood that people, alone or collected into cultures, are formed—“determined in the last instance,” is a phrase that occurs—by their surrounding environmental. The natural environments she establishes shape her characters’ thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Plots, when they appear, arise organically from the behavior of people doing whatever is necessary to survive, within the limits of their natural and built environments.

I am following her lead, or trying to, by envisioning a residential community shaped by social and economic factors entirely unlike our own. I admit that this program would not be pragmatically achievable in current circumstances.
HOW WE LIVE, NOW

Residential communities in which individuals and families share resources, grow food, and produce as many of their own household items as possible are now the norm. These collectives vary in structure and function, depending on the context in which they develop. All take ecological stewardship as their primary imperative (remember Global Warming? that was a nightmare).

The process of transforming socio-economic and political systems worldwide in response to climate crisis demanded, as a pre-condition, the comprehensive eradication of the systemic architecture of patriarchy, white supremacy, and owning-vs-working class domination. The idea of a Commons that everyone can access, but that no one has the right to damage, deplete, or restrict now supercedes the right to private ownership in regard to land, industrial infrastructure, and other critical resources.

Wealth has been redistributed; governing bodies have been reconfigured as councils tasked with ensuring that every member of society is housed, fed, and clothed—and that this occurs equitably, without harm to any affected party, and without harm to the local or global environment.

Productive capacity world-wide has been redirected towards meeting human need, which are easily accounted for in even the poorest regions once use-value is a higher priority than exchange-value. Therefore, the residents of this project “work” very little, in current parlance. These premises sound radical, but they shouldn’t. I contend that they should describe a minimum standard for any society that deserves to survive the delayed impact of its predecessors’ disastrous errors in judgment.
A residential community on the banks of the James River offers various dwelling configurations appropriate for a variety of non-nuclear family structures. Housework (including cleaning, cooking, maintenance and repair work, gardening, laundry, and sourcing food and other goods) is collectively-organized; all residents participate in these activities to the degree they are able, under the administration of rotating volunteer coordinators. The community cooks and eats together in the evenings, and residents undertake a variety of self-directed projects for individual or collective benefit and enjoyment. Members of the collective spend most of their time on-site or in the vicinity, as the use of motor vehicles has been drastically reduced.
Soapstone is non-porous, stain resistant and soft enough to be carved allowing the designer of this country kitchen (above photo) to add modern farmhouse details like a sink carved from a single block of soapstone. The natural, honed soapstone countertop also features a low profile carved drainboard.

Here (photo right) a carved drain board maintains the minimalist look of this waxed soapstone kitchen with white apron sink. The designer integrated a soapstone backsplash and window sill for a continuous look. Porcelain accents on the fixtures and the black and white color scheme give this space a retro vibe.
FLOATING HOME CELEBRATES RHYTHM

Floating Home celebrates rhythm. Warehouse #3's column grid establishes spatial order and regularity through repeating patterns—like a drum-beat, setting the rhythm of a song with a pattern of alternating beats and rests.

Cyclical rhythms also come to mind: seasons and life-cycles, planetary orbits and circadian rhythms. The latter regulate our 24-hour sleep-wake cycles and our energy levels throughout each day. In a residential context, rhythmic patterns of human action and interaction establish layers of syncopation within shared spaces.
CONCEPT WORK

DRAWINGS AND MODELS
CONCEPT WORK
SECOND FLOOR

PRIVATE LIVING SPACES & COMMUNAL AMENITIES

OPPOSITE: SUN PORCH