



REFRAMING THE FUTURE

The Medium of Media

Evan Sack (ES) + Emily Hays (EH)

Emily Hays was the student founder and president of Telesis in 2019. Her work began in 2017 studying the architecture journals from universities across the country. Her involvement over the next 2 years developing a course curriculum and acting as the head editor for Telesis: Design Against brought Telesis back to represent student voices for the first time since the 1970s. She is now practicing with BRR Architecture in Philadelphia after graduating with her Master of Architecture in 2019. Evan Sack was a member of the editing team for Telesis: Design Against, and the instructor for the Fall 2019 Telesis course. He graduated with his Master of Architecture in 2019 and is currently practicing with Butzer Architects and Urbanism in Oklahoma City.

ES Welcome to the 2020 edition of *Telesis* entitled “Metamedia” (MM)!

EH Thank you, I am thrilled to be talking with you!

ES We’re very happy to have the chance to speak with you. I wanted to talk a little bit about your role in last year’s edition of *Telesis*, and a bit about how our team has tried to stitch it into the ideology of this year’s topic. Last year you had a significant role in the rebirth of the journal and the new, first edition Design Against (DA). Can you talk a bit about that role and the way DA tried to speak to the spirit of *Telesis*?

EH I can certainly try! *Telesis* was definitely my baby for the 2 years prior to its publication. Through research about other student journals and discussions with colleagues about how we as students consumed our information about architecture, its trends, current

ideologies, and more I just felt that there was a huge disconnect between the student body and architecture journals coming from the schools that produce them. The journals felt blind to the students intended to consume them and there was no representation of any student voice in the journals themselves. I was lucky to work with an amazing team of people at The University of Oklahoma (OU) at large, but specifically within the Gibbs College of Architecture, who believed in me. I still can't believe they gave me the reigns over a project like this, but it was an incredible learning opportunity and made for a really impactful experience.

DA was the perfect topic for a journal aimed specifically at bridging this ownership gap in student journals. OU architecture students — and perhaps college students as a whole — have this rebellious nature and it doesn't really matter what industry you consider, as a population, students are looking to push

the envelope and disrupt the status quo. The university is the perfect environment for this kind of attitude; students learn the history of how things have been done and are given room to explore alternative ideas, compounded with their own youth, which fuels the idea that there is still time to improve and innovate. I think the mentality of DA really resonated with the student body at the time, from within our team of editors, to our college, and even the university beyond.

- ES That's an important point about the foundation of *Telesis* as well, that its origins are found in this desire to get students to take an active role in the journal itself. It's what made *Telesis* a very character heavy sort of social thing in the 1970s.
- EH It really does have a sense of community that you can feel. I believe that a sense of community will always foster creativity. In architecture, too often there can be this competitive drive that sometimes dissolves that sense of community. But *Telesis* gives an opportunity for ideas to be presented and considered in parallel and can give students something to rally around as a collective identity or snapshot of the student body.
- ES As a follow-up to DA, MM is concerned with identifying certain moments or instances where architecture transcends its own media or

format and becomes a cultural or social phenomenon. In that spirit you talked about how your own research of student journals and the early editions of *Telesis* inspired you to take on this project. Was it something about the student journals as a medium that made it valuable as a piece of the dialogue at OU today?

EH The goal was really to give control of the journal to the students themselves; and a consequence of that would be a broader social change where students buy into that platform as part of the culture. We as a student body had a voice, and it was vibrant and exciting and important. But we didn't have a good outlet and we couldn't really experiment with our beliefs and understanding of things in a way that gave meaningful feedback. We were just flooded with knowledge and information from the coursework within the program, and in a sense at that point we were just a vessel for information. It doesn't really have much use, but if you can mold that, and give students a way to internalize the things they're learning and reconcile them with outside knowledge as a basis to form opinions and be creative or innovative that's when you see real growth. The hope was that with the diverse student body we could create a feedback system that would not only help us individually grow, but as a community we could raise the standards of discourse within the college through that collective understanding. It's really about giving that power to the students directly.

ES DA also, as a topic, gave students the opportunity to explore utopias and dystopias alike in a very low-stakes or low-impact environment. Can you talk a little bit about the efforts of the journal to keep that conversation going post-publication?

EH The hope is certainly — as I talked a little bit about before the interview, that companies that have adapted to the change in technology and media are managing the best in our current situation [the COVID-19 pandemic]. In researching the efforts of other journals, very few were engaged in social media or other digital formats. That presence with our readership outside the bound copies is central to the goal of ownership and engagement within the student body. It's something that will continue to grow and develop with every edition. We are trying to build this sort of evolving identity that faces a mirror to the current happenings at the college. Even in its print form, the intent was for the journal to change

and adapt over time as people interact with and imprint the pages with their own ideas. Literally taking notes and making marks on its pages. It's essentially a snapshot, trying to represent the zeitgeist of that student body. But all of us are changing constantly so the topics and opinions then are not necessarily going to resonate with your student body or team. As people interact with and change copies of DA, that should start to change into something that is more relevant in a way that our team couldn't have predicted. It builds on itself as the student body builds.

ES That was something that I think our team found most interesting about the first edition: this snapshot in time; each copy is then like this parallel discussion representing one of the infinitely many directions that the original articles could have sent the direction of discourse among the student body. Depending on which copy you pick up, you may get an entirely different set of discussions that have

been catalogued by people taking notes in the margins, or leaving drawings and sketches over certain graphics on the built-in trace paper pages.

EH The other part of that is the wider authorship than those we could directly include in the journal. Our original pool of included works was limited within the actual student body, so this allows students who were not included initially to still contribute and feel that sense of ownership over the voice. That was the really beautiful thing: even those who felt they didn't have something to contribute in the initial submission or didn't feel they had anything to say under the initial prompt, once they saw something to react to, there was still an opportunity to engage and be heard as part of the movement.

ES I think that's a new kind of level of ownership for a print publication that can often be this really stagnant thing after it's printed. It gives the opportunity to view each edition of *Telesis* that follows as a more formalized version of that response without invalidating all the other voices and directions that could have been explored. MM is just one of the hundreds of conversations that has happened as a result of DA, but many are still catalogued in libraries or personal bookshelves nation-wide.

EH That's exactly it. It began as this solid form, and everything that follows is an offshoot or continuation

ES Something DA talked about was how the architect's role and by extension how every architecture student's role could and should be more active. The prompt of DA was the best call to action at the time for the student body. With MM our goal was to strengthen that hypothesis by exploring the breadth of formats that architecture can take and how that choice of format extends the reach of architecture at times to become a social vector. In essence the architecture itself is the backdrop that allows cultural development and innovation to take place.

Our understanding of this term came from a 2009 paper called "Opening the Metaverse" by Julian and Marilyn Lombardi which outlines a metamedium as a "...socially enabled extension... which has degrees of freedom for representation and expression never before encountered and as yet barely investigated." The term and concept alone were intriguing, but the article draws the term and its definition from an early 1977 article titled "Personal Dynamic Media" by Alan Kay and Adele Goldberg. The work describes "dyna-books" in detail and outlines many of the functions and portability features of laptops today when the most revolutionary computer at the time was the Apple II.¹ This was the aspiration we had for exploring what an architecture

of metmedia could look like, particularly given our own position as a unique media format.

EH It's a really interesting topic I think especially because I'm having trouble separating it from the pandemic that we're dealing with, just because it has such widespread implications for technology and its integration or collision with architecture is really similar. I think it will be shaped tremendously by what we are seeing right now. Something that has been on my mind with how COVID-19 relates to the realm of architecture is how the virus will begin to affect our view of third spaces. In this time, those who are extroverted or enjoy spending time with friends and family at all are facing a whole new challenge. Across the board, loneliness has been a problem for our current population that I think is just compounded by a quarantine situation. Third places are useless right now. This MUST adapt moving forward and it will take a new

conglomerate of architecture, technology, and community to make that happen.

ES It reminds me of the call to action in DA of going beyond dichotomies. There has always been this traditional view of urbanization vs. isolation where either architecture is about separation of space and community, or it is a way to congregate and bring people together. Ultimately what the virus has highlighted is that it must have the ability to serve both or society completely shuts down. There really isn't the infrastructure yet to support this dual purpose because it was never designed that way.

When I was speaking to our team this past week, it was interesting to us how last year's launch was punctuated by Notre Dame Cathedral burning and this year we have the COVID-19 pandemic. It's strange to imagine how that will become the backdrop for next year's journal.

EH Yeah, it feels like the world IS changing in front of our eyes. We don't know exactly what is going to come out of it and how it might shape us, but it's very clear that change is happening. So many people are working remotely, and companies haven't really prepared for this. But, because technology has grown to be such an integrated part of business, staying up to date has made it possible to still work through this time. I never realized what a blessing that could be.

ES Right, I think that's a good point that while the economic impacts could be really widespread and even incredibly damaging, ultimately they could have been so much worse if this were really something that shut down all business. It's interesting that the way we work and how it isn't tied to space has become a way to cushion the blow.

EH I just imagine that this can only breed more innovation. We have experienced instances of smaller scale outbreaks like this and in such a globalized society these things are bound to happen. The degree will always vary, but companies and workers alike will now have to prepare for this kind of scenario in ways that we couldn't fully understand or appreciate before.

ES It's interesting to me seeing that some of the most streamed movies and TV shows right now are those quarantine/end of the world titles.

EH Right, what was that one? 2012? That end of the world movie.

ES Exactly, those movies! A local architect was talking about how their family had been watching them right now because it's actually really helpful not just for strategies on how to prevent the spread of disease, but also as an insight into how architects might have a role to help as things get worse. Part of me wanted to tell him to take a day off, but it is the perfect opportunity to act.

EH It's an interesting form of education. Scientists and doctors, as a community at large, have expressed how unprepared we are as a species for a pandemic. An article back in 2017 in *Time* magazine highlighted how under-prepared the United States, specifically, and the world at large is for an outbreak of this scale, essentially because there has been no pre-emptive investment in that kind of infrastructure. There is knowledge out there to help combat this, to some extent, but it's not being disseminated properly at all. You can watch the current administration deliver information in what feels like a flustered or haphazard manner. It all seems so reactionary rather than preventative. And it's not to say that these movies are not interesting, but I'm also not sure that they're the best way to think about dealing with this kind of pandemic. I do think it's a really interesting idea that entertainment has become a huge source of information for an equally

large cross-section of the population. If that's a way we can start to leverage that media to circumvent some of the communication problems we should absolutely take advantage. Because EVERYBODY is watching something right now! All of my news feeds, that aren't terrifying, are just "Top 10 Movies to Binge-Watch During the COVID-19 Outbreak."

ES Yeah! Forget the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, they need a mini docu-series on the best social-distancing practices or something. It's so similar to the questions being posed by MM where we wanted to explore the effect that the format in which you present information — the form that architecture takes more specifically — has a real impact on our ability to use it as a platform for social interaction and social change. With that in mind, it's terrifying that these quarantine movies and shows could be having tremendous social impact and were never designed or intended as such.

EH I don't think it's necessarily a new thing. Most of how information is communicated and how we do most of our learning about the world is through some medium other than direct observation. It's especially apparent in the era of "fake news." Journalism is so valuable to how people gain information, but I just wonder how well it has adapted to the needs of the public it's meant to serve. I don't know what the solution might be, but people don't trust journalism as fully once the full breadth of information is available. We can start to see the effects that a capitalist business model has on impartiality. I think entertainment media has started to fill these gaps for better or for worse and if we start to recognize this ability and use it as a tool for education it could have really powerful effects.

ES It is a good question to ask because it is that reality of the "fake news" narrative and the mistrust of traditional news media that has been sewn. So naturally people are looking

to other outlets whether that is celebrities, entertainment, etc. which is why we see this influencer culture becoming so important. In this environment where that digital realm really is your only form of social interaction, I think individuals become far more relatable than a news outlet, as well. With all physical forms of socialization basically rendered obsolete media outlets that run on entertainment become the closest substitution. Perhaps the current climate makes this trend far more obvious.

EH You can also think about video games where you have an avatar and walk around with your friends. You don't get the same sense of socialization from that experience. You don't get the same physical or emotional benefits that you do if you are really in the same space and sharing that full experience. Somehow, we have to use the ability of architecture to marry both experiences into one built environment. It's a complicated question at best.

ES And perhaps one for the next edition of *Telesis* to try and sort out!

EH Exactly.

ES Emily, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us about *Telesis* as a platform beyond its physical existence as a student journal.

We look forward to watching everything you continue to do in your career and in the realm of academia!

EH Thank you, it was wonderful to talk to you. Hopefully we can chat again soon!

1. Kay, A., and A. Goldberg. "Personal Dynamic Media." *Computer*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1977, pp. 31-41., doi:10.1109/c-m.1977.217672.
2. Lombardi, Julian & Lombardi, Marilyn. (2009). Opening the Metaverse. 10.1007/978-1-84882-825-4_9.