Introduction

Thank you for having me. I am Dr. Craig L. Wilkins and I serve as the director and chief designer at the Detroit Community Design Center. The Center offers professional architectural, planning and urban design services to institutions, NGO’s and non-profit organizations doing work with and in marginalized communities in and around the Detroit Metro area. In addition, I am also on the faculty of the University of Michigan Taubman College of Architecture in Ann Arbor, where I teach in both the architecture and urban planning departments.

Why

So…why music and architecture? What is it about the two that has continued to intrigue us as designers over the decades, if not centuries? Perhaps Claude Fayette Bragdon articulates this as well as anyone when he says of both that:

“They alone of all the arts are purely creative, since in them is presented, not a likeness of some known idea, but a thing-in-itself brought to a distinct and complete expression of its nature. Neither a musical composition nor a work of architecture depends for its effectiveness upon resemblances to natural sounds in the one case, or to natural forms in the other. Of none of the other arts is this to
such a degree true: they are not so much creative as re-creative, for in them all
the artist takes his subject ready made from nature and presents it anew
according to the dictates of his genius. What music is to sound, architecture is to
space.’’

As cultural products, one visual the other aural, both have similar goals. Clearly both try
incredibly hard to move you, both literally and figuratively; to convince you of its worthiness,
perhaps even the very necessity of its existence. Both designers and musicians can appreciate
and empathize with the difficulty of such an endeavor and the rewards if success is achieved. As
creative agents, both architects and musicians work with similar tools. Both buildings and works
of music are composed, each has a form and rhythm and neither is comprehensible without
structure. The difference here is that architecture engages these elements in space, and music
composes these elements in time.

Yet despite the logic of these themes, I would argue that they are only the most obvious, but not
the most salient, explanation one might give when discussing the enduring investigation. In my
opinion, what keeps this relationship alive is not the tangible but the intangible. In short, cultural
workers in both areas recognize a particular quality in each art form that they would like to
possess. Architects would like their composed quantities of space to last for all time, and
musicians would like their exact quantities of time to take up all space.

Still, whatever reason or reasons you choose to believe – and there are many, many more than
those presented here – the relationship between the creation of music and the creation of
architecture remains a constant theme amongst those who study and practice in these fields and I must admit I have, on more than one occasion, have succumb to its seductive invitation. However; my frequent sojourns into this particular topic have been motivated as much, I believe, by my frustration with the superficiality of the explorations that have proceeded before, as much as my interest in the apparent similarities in elements and methods employed by architecture and music in the creation of their respective objects.

Often, I have found that when these two fields are explored or contrasted to produce some kind of analysis, that analysis is frequently superficial at best; ultimately not necessarily work that can inform. That superficiality typically manifests itself in two distinct ways. The first, is that its authors speak of the potential correlation between music and architecture in ways that intentionally obscure, thus, leaving the audience to either tune out or mindlessly hum along simply because they do not wish to seem foolish. For example, here is a quote from an architect about a project he called Bee Bop Architecture, the images of which you see behind me. He speaks of his work and its connection to jazz thusly:

“\textbf{At first sight, this mechanism is a seemingly frozen construct, but it rapidly unfolds as an open-ended experiential phenomenon. The structure develops into a metamorphic labyrinth, as a self-perpetuating continuum. Each composition is a complex work of resultant simplicity derived from an ordered language of constants and variables, constructing and articulating the elements of size, shape, treatment, location, and orientation. The complexity is discernible, traceable back to the original order.}’’

\hspace{1cm}
Not only is this simply inaccessible as a tool to inform any understanding of the work generated by it or for any future investigation along similar lines and it is unnecessarily so. Why didn’t the author simply say the work is an process of improvisation, which is where he eventually goes with this. Yet, we legitimate such self-serving, insular, incestuous obfuscation simple because a) it sounds smart and thus by agreeing, we sound smart also and b) we might want to write like this about our own work someday. This alone…is a prime example why architects should not be allowed to write about their own work.

The second, less rigorous line of reasoning exists on the opposite side of the spectrum from this, where the relationship is so clearly stated as to seem childish – the over-determination of a simple idea: the design of a music shop in the shape of a guitar; a concert hall in the shape of a clef note. Both positions miss the essential fascination and potential richness for all disciplines in the exploration of the nexus of music and architecture. It is one thing to copy a score and make it an architectural object. Yet, it is quite another to look deeply at music itself, find the translatable themes and weave them into architectural form. It is the latter that frequently eludes any attempt to join these art forms in a happy marriage.

Still, today, I will attempt yet another in the long line of diatribes on this topic, to provide us all with something substantive; something that will resist the ease of appliqué and focus on what lies beneath. This is not to say I will be entirely successful, nor to imply that any connection between music and architecture is inherently tangible, but simply to say that like architecture, music is a
performance best read on multiple levels and again, like architecture, to predetermine the primacy of one or the other often cheapens both the product and the experience.

What I plan to do in this talk

Thus, my talk will look at not one, but three levels in which I believe these art forms communicate with their audiences and, in turn, with each other – the literal, the abstract and the metaphorical. In this exploration, I hope to clearly convey that the nexus between music and architecture is a complex and multi-layered relationship that cannot, and should not, be reduced to simply producing a building in the shape of a note or a floor plan based on the sway of a woman’s hips. This is not to say that such cannot be part of the physical manifestation of that nexus, but that alone, such is not enough. And while it is clear that the art forms themselves, one auditory and the other visual, have many elements in common as mentioned previously, for the sake of our brief time together and to avoid the more ethereal and deleterious descriptions that so populate this area of study, I will simply focus on the production of both music and architecture and what we might glean from them concerning their influence on what we do, and can do, as professional in this field.
JAZZ – THE LITERAL

“Architecture is frozen music”
Goethe, poet

The oldest, and perhaps, best known of the three genres of music to be discussed here today, jazz is often referred to as the art of expression set to music. Jazz was born in the Crescent City of New Orleans in southern portion of the US where the mouth of the Mississippi River drops into the Gulf of Mexico, where centuries old African rhythms merged with musics from France, Spain, Cuba, North and South America.

Now, being neither musician nor musicologist, I would hesitate to argue for one definitive definition of the art form we know as jazz. As with architecture, there seems to be as many definitions as there are performers and fans. And, one might argue that this is as it should be – that any art form, once it is singularly defined, ceases to grow – its boundaries concretized, its innovation stifled, its creativity fettered. It is only a matter of time before it will cease to exist as it has come to be known.

However; there is relatively little argument about its origins or at least, its formative elements of jazz. Jazz emerged out of the back alleys and cathouses of Storyville – New Orleans’ legendary red-light district, itself a place of cross-cultural exploration of the best and worse kind. The French, Spanish, English and eventually the Americans, not to mention the enslaved African and native Indian population, have all found themselves in possession of the place at one time or
another and each have left their mark. However, this is neither a history nor cultural geography class. Suffice it to say that that area of Louisiana that would eventually give birth to the genre was like no other on the continent and I dare say, the world. It was a kind of patois (pat-twa) that was all of the above, and neither. The place of jazz – both musically and physically – was a place where the bounds of the social order were transgressed; a place where chaos was welcomed and embraced. Where the degree of “proper” were tested, both musically and of course, socially. Only a place like that would even consider combining such disparate sounds as ragtime, opera, blues, brass band music, hymns, spirituals, minstrel music, in addition to fieldwork, French and Spanish songs as well. Jazz was a place where Whites and Creoles equipped with the formal knowledge of European music, precise technique and delicate tone collaborated with newly freed blacks schooled in blues, gospel and work songs performed mostly by ear. Its practitioners were pioneers, altering the way of things forever. However, this was a byproduct of their exploration. As there was no road map for this cultural moment, they made it up on the fly and thus improvisation became a, if not the, essential element in the music. There was no guarantee that the rules of this night would be the same as the night before, so you had to be ready and able to adapt. There were few rules and fewer endings, and almost no one could navigate the moment alone. In fact, to initiate the moment, one had to have at least one other and frequently several other willing participants. There was no solo jazz; its very nature railed against it. Whatever jazz was to become, it was going to do so as a result of a collective body of thought and practices – no one person was going to define it unilaterally. Of course, jazz had its early pioneers and stars and of course, some were better at this open-ended improvisation than others, but a collective
give and take, a call and response, a friendly competition was, and is still, the order of the day. If there was anything one could be sure of night in and night out, it was this.

**Trans elements**

Now, on the face of it, it would seem that jazz has little in common with architecture. In fact, one might argue that it is indeed the antithesis of architecture. Where architecture wants to be a closed system, full of planned precision and anticipated results, jazz revels in its open-endedness. Where architects abhor and perhaps would find offensive the gleaning onto their creation by another architect with a different interpretation of the object and its aesthetic and functional moment, the jazz performer has no such hang up. If jazz can be broadly described as a “rigorous collective improvisation” then architecture can be similarly defined as a “rigorous personal introspection”, its philosophical and methodological opposite. But that is at first glance. Further exploration reveals perhaps some rich possibilities, in particular in the area of jazz’s most consistent variable, if you will, and that is the application of improvisation.

Broadly understood, improvisation is the art of acting and reacting, in the moment, to one's surroundings; actions that often result in the invention of new thought patterns and/or new ways to act. Improvisation exists within a framework of communication that is reciprocally transformed; where the elements of communication are consistently chosen, appropriated, adapted and uniquely employed in a specific space and time. In music, the elements of improvisation – movement, harmony, rhythm, counterpoints, dynamics, articulation – are all aspects of composition, a concept that architecture and music both share. Viewing the
composition process as scaffolds on which to construct something new, musician Greg Sinibaldi employs an architectural example to explain his improvisational process: “All buildings have structural elements that keep them standing, and many of these elements are similar no matter what the façade looks like. Two buildings may look completely different, yet both have similar structural elements that are necessary for them to remain standing”. In composing a piece, he builds the structural elements necessary for the piece to “remain standing,” but the façade, in all its richness and immediacy, is up to the individuals. What if the profession took on this notion of open-endedness and improvisation? How might we benefit? Two areas specifically come to mind; one physical, the other professional.

**Arch manifestation – Open-ended, variable education, practice and design**

In the realm of the physical, like the improvisation moment in jazz, there is no beginning or end to architecture, thus actors are free to wander about willy-nilly in any direction, following whatever path is available at the time with little to no damage to the overall architectural objective. However, to what end should an audience be persuaded to do this? One can become bored with such wanderings if there is no payoff to them, and often, because of the static nature of time in architecture, the last journey through a space is often like the first. If architecture were to take this improvisational cue from its sister discipline and imbue its spatial qualities with a more dynamic notion of time, what would this be like? To be able to wander about and find something different upon each journey, or better yet, to make something different upon each journey would seem to employ the improvisational nature that jazz so readily suggests. Considering architecture as an object that exists within a framework of communication that is
reciprocally transformed; where the elements of communication are consistently chosen, appropriated, adapted and uniquely employed in a specific space and time, is a radically different notion of architecture as the fixed entity that is commonly held. Such an approach might manifest itself in opportunities for both architect and audience to encounter something different, even if ever so slightly in their repeated journeys through the building – like the nuanced dissimilarity of a piece when performed by Colman Hawkins or John Coltrane. Such wandering about my actually increase one’s understanding of architecture. Given the multiple levels on which architecture exists, not the least being financial and functional, perhaps the best we can hope for here is not full improvisation but unexpected and surprising variation – which, while similar, is not exactly synonymous, yet both reintroduce the concept of immediate time into our work. In this manner, the altering patterns in architecture are like improvised patterns in music. That variation might be as simple as employing the traveling daylight as a tool to create radically different spaces over the course of a day, week or season in an ever-changing public space or as complex as homes that open and close depending on how its audience interprets the day.

As to its professional implications, in order to improvise, one must be well versed in the idiom of several musical styles - blues, rock, folk, jazz - and be able to work within that idiom to express ideas with creativity, originality and clarity. Jazz itself is made up of several genres of music and thus its practitioners have access to, and are expected to, perform in any one of them. The education of the jazz artist, and thus the production of their work, is both broad and deep. Which brings me to how a hefty dose of improvisation might influence the profession. Our definition of architect is too limiting. What we bring to the table – “design expertise” – has become the end all
and be all of how we, and consequently, the world views our contributions. Improvisation presents the artist with not just one, but several outlets for his or her creativity by which to influence the work. Architecture and architects might take some note of this. We have become narrow and deep. We should be looking to broaden our area of influence; broaden the definition of the architect – to create a multi-layered, the open-ended definition of what we are and do. This is both at the academic and professional levels.

A decade or so ago, Aga Khan award recipient Jimmy Lim proposed a reorganization of the architectural discipline’s educational and professional arenas to expand the current definition of “Architect” to include several interconnected areas of praxis, primarily based on the premise that architecture is increasingly a collective effort which requires the profession to value not only the designers, but the technicians and economist as well. His argument has merit, for while the legal profession encourages and markets practice in such diverse areas as family law, corporate law, tax law, criminal law – at the very base of what they do and are is the term lawyer. Similarly, the areas of obstetrics, surgery, pediatrics, etc., are all unquestionably under the well-recognized and respected moniker of doctor. Why is it then that, for example, to practice construction management, specification systems, write on or critique architectural work, develop public policy, etc., one must relinquish being recognized by colleges and the public alike as an architect? A truly sustainable professional model will cultivate improvisational careers that integrate architecture, art, graphic art, furniture, interior, industrial and urban design, even areas of public policy, planning, private, public and community development, architectural performance analysis, aesthetic criticism and academia for its members. All those performers are
necessary to produce the best work possible. Such a perspective could serve as a catalyst and constant influence in the development of the profession and create broad thinkers that are capable of taking on leadership roles in a variety of areas creating, what Lim defines as a complete, if not indispensable, practitioner under the broad and diverse title of architect. In addition, Lim’s proposal would allow for more diversity, as there would be more areas of influence in the public realm and therefore more areas for entry and advancement, increase the cross-disciplinary interaction of architecture, presumably beginning to loosen the hardened boundaries that are often constructed around the discipline.

**SALSA — THE ABSTRACT**

“Writing about music is like dancing about architecture – it’s a really stupid thing to want to do”

Elvis Costello, musician

From the *mariachi* and *tejano* sounds of northern Mexico, the melodic wind panpipes and *quenas* of the southern Chilean Andes, the haunting Ecuadorian *marimba* tunes from the west and the socially aware fusion of Cuba’s *nueva trova* and *son*, the essential elemental essence of *salsa*, Latin music has a long and magnificently diverse history that is still growing, causing people to publicly suggest things with their hips that, if it weren’t for the music, would most assuredly get them arrested. Salsa is prodigiously, voraciously consumed, especially in the Latin America, where both the music and dance reign supreme.
According to the essayist Jaime Andrés Pretell, the salsa sound is the result of the most sublime applications of musical alchemy. It is a unexpected, highly creative collage of Latin, African and Caribbean influences; a happy accident of sounds and styles where *Contra-Danse* — a blending of English and French country dances later referred to simply as *Danzón* — combines with African *Rhumbas* and the *Sons* of Cuba to give birth to the salsa we know today. Its primary identifying sound is the infectious Clave beat; the five note syncopated rhythmic cell of African origin that is the basic sound of the Son. It has been argued that it is this particular sound, which makes the listener have to move. Son was so creative and convincing a sound that it produced its own instruments, interpreters, authors and finally, its own original choreography, the Salsa dance.

It is just about the coolest dance a mere two mortals can do together. The high-speed precision and synchronization required between partners just to keep from snapping a wrist or putting an eye out, not to mention actually dancing and looking good doing it, can give each participant a new perspective about the possibilities of life off the floor. At once chivalrously graceful and wildly energetic, salsa is a hot, hunka-hunka burnin’ exercise in pure, unadulterated, chill-to-the-max sexy cool. And who wouldn’t want that to be said about their design, huh? So, how that might happen?

**Trans elements**

Architecture is concerned about the body’s relationship to space and salsa is nothing if not the exploration of the relationship between body and space, as facilitated by the medium of music.
Salsa is designed not to be listened to, but to be reacted to, to be engaged. It is designed to provoke movement, but not just any movement, but movement in tune to the musical experience, the musical language. It isn’t designed to decenter you, to disturb and disrupt, but to ground you, bring you into the moment and make you an irresistibly active player in the construction of your own experience. It invites the dance and it doesn’t want you to dance alone, thus salsa yearns to be your partner, an active participant. “Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. In short, space is a practiced place, produced by bodies (people) interacting” according to Michel de Certeau. Thus, expectations based on the knowledge of the multiple possibilities of the body in motion. These are not arbitrary movements, but the legible framework by which the dancers understand each other, where the ultimate goal is to collaborate on creating within that framework something new, ultimately providing new additions to the vocabulary.

Arch manifestation – re-centering the body as participant

Architecturally, this intense engagement with the body in space might manifest itself in the manner in which we think about those whom inhabit in our work. You’ll notice that I did not employ the term “user” to describe an audience, as is so commonly is the case. The term user flows from an unfortunate, by perhaps necessary distinction between those that may inhabit the space but not pay for its construction, and those that often don’t inhabit the space, but do. Still, the term user conjures up images of a paternalistic nature, not necessarily conducive to thinking in terms of equal participants on the dance floor. Thinking about the audience as the partner in the creation of space might open up a different kind of design. At least, it might foster an
alternative way of approaching design, one that recognizes the delicate balance between partners, the need for clear signals on intent and the place of the body in space, as well as the trust and comfort inherent in a partnership, whether short or long term. Few people want to be with a partner that makes them feel uncomfortable, clumsy, stupid or less than worthy and similarly, few people want to be in a space that does the same. However, on the flip side, there is a certain level of renewable excitement when engaged with a supportive partner; someone who is made for you, someone who feels for you, someone who delights in your presence. Architecture, like salsa, must delight in the presence of its audience. The French Situationist Guy Debord has argued as much, saying that “Architecture must advance by taking emotionally moving situations, rather than emotionally moving forms, as the material it works with.” Architecture might then become the emergence – in form – of the base and the beat, the flow and the rupture, the call and response, providing the stage (backdrop) and privileging (inviting) the performance where space is produced through the conjunction of people within it.

HIP HOP – THE METAPHORICAL

“There are two things you can’t ever win writing about: jazz, and architecture. Those will bring out all the kooks all the time.”

Carolyn See, author

Derived from a need to be validated, hip hop emerged as a way for marginalized people to connect, to rejoice and to simply affirm their existence. The music and culture that flowed from this effort, while significantly altered, is still spreading and shows no sign of dissipation. What
was once an act of almost provocative desperation by a small group of city-bound youth is now a borderless global phenomenon. Today, you can find rappers in such diverse and heretofore-unlikely places as Japan, Brazil, Denmark and of course Germany.

What has allowed this musical force to spread is the same thing that allowed to grow initially: everywhere there is someone, some group, that feels marginalized, alienated. Hip hop is an art form that speaks to them about their condition and allows them to speak as well. Built on the shattered remains of discarded materials by discarded people, hip hop, as its name implies, is a music – a culture, if you will – that inspires. As a way of life, it requires one to make use of materials as you find them and to use them creatively, perhaps not in the manner for which they were originally intended, but in a manner that allows for survival and expression. Thus, turntables become not passive objects, but active instruments that provides the high pitch sounds of a trumpet for those who have never known, or would ever know, the cold brass of an actual one. Music and lyrics of existing compositions are raided for bits and pieces of sound and fury to be used in a new composition, organized in a new way to create something entirely different with the same elements. In fact, the ability of the musical production to manipulate particular sounds, breaks, ruptures in continuity and flow – recalling their existence by their absence – and the use of what is termed “sampling” – the digitally enhanced process of transferring a sound, or series of sounds, from one source to another source, mix several disparate sources of sonic pleasure into the listening experience is the core of rap music. Hip hop requires one to become a survivalist – to use what is available to make your presence felt, to be noticed, to survive. It requires one to become a designer in the most basic sense – recycling and organizing the
materials of life in any order necessary to sustain life; the ultimate design. The hip hop world lives in sound defined spaces where it is both work and product. The spaces of hip hop are constructed by the intersections of mobile elements – people (bodies) – but often includes objects of material culture (debris, monster speakers, cars) as well. It is a reciprocal space; it at once recognizes, shapes and affirms the people that shape, produce and reproduce it. In this manner, hip hop recalls Churchill’s classic observation that, “First we shape our buildings, then they shape us”. So, what might we glean from this, the most recent, and perhaps the most dynamic, of the three?

**Trans elements**

The primary principle here is transformative adaptation. Hip hop architecture is nothing if not adaptive. It has to be. The sites that are available for the emergence of hip hop forms necessitate it; the people for whom the structures will be built will demand it; the availability of materials for this (these) project(s) requires it; the assemblage of these structures compels it. Hip hop architecture is committed to using and reusing materials transformatively and creatively, creating an “‘architecture of the site’ as opposed to the architectural ideal of ‘an architecture on the site’” and adding yet another layer to the construction of individual and communal identity.

**Arch manifestation - Transformed disposable instruments/materials, inclusiveness**

Currently, sustainable architecture, green architecture is all the rage. It is commonly argued that we are using or resources far faster than they can be replaced and that the process of replacement isn’t all together beneficial to future sustainability. Some progressive thinkers have argued for a
much saner approach to material consumption. I for one agree, and architecturally, we have much to learn from hip hop. Hip hop architecture is engaged in taking existing materials and deploying them in transformative ways. These materials can be of the manufactured or natural kind. Hip Hop has taken dated technology and devalued material from the trashheap and made a global community out of the discarded parts of a post-industrial urban environment. It has made the dispensable, indispensable. This was no small task. It is my contention that there is a lesson to be learned here. As designers faced with the problem of dispensable space and perhaps disposable buildings, there is a similar task awaiting us. This is not necessarily a new idea; however, it is an idea whose time has come.

Finally – and I might argue most importantly – hip-hop shows is that there is little to be gained by pejorative thinking. Part of the social context of the inner city – particularly in predominantly poorer African-American communities – is one of disarray and decay. Everyday, intentionally unclaimed, naturally deconstructivist structures are allowed to fall away piece by piece in unattended lots that are typically appropriated by the local residents as places for sundry and nefarious activities. These are the available – and appropriate – sites for the construction of hip hop spaces. Hip hop has shown that the ability to create is not the privilege of a particular type of education, gender, economic status or culture. It should cause us to pause and reconsider the make up of the profession itself. The world is becoming smaller, our access to it greater and thus, our actual and potential client base more likely to be more diverse than ever before. Such pejorative thoughts concerning worth and contribution will only leave one as a relic.
CLOSING

“Architecture [is the] art of bounding space.”

Kirsten Harries, philosopher

Architecture is about bounding space; capturing that most ethereal of concepts and creating from it that most concrete of things and there is much we can learn from music to assist us in this task.

From jazz, understanding and employing our own version of improvisation providing for varying experience within the same space. Although improvisation operates within the environmental design tradition, it involves a unique design process. In the context of improvisation, traditional forms are shaped into new and unique forms through the transfer of ideas to provide familiar objects in unfamiliar ways. Thus perhaps foreshadowing an architecture that anticipates the inevitable change in people and places and prepares to adapt along with it. That perhaps by providing the framework for various adaptations and moments can be created by the audience, architecture can be a constant catalyst for change as well, perhaps suggesting something as radical as homes that grow and shrink with the size of a family, allowing communities to once again become places where not one, but several generations live, love and learn.

From salsa, we can learn to balance the individual with, if not the collective, at least the partnership. Place less of the individual mind and more of the collective body as the center of our work so that it becomes less about how one thinks about the space, but how one feels about it. Not how one is decentered by space as an extension of the alienation of urban living, but as
perhaps an oasis in that very environment. If what Churchill claims is true – that first we shape building and then they shape us – then the alienation that we so abhor and continue to comment on is one of our own making. Salsa reminds us, through its focus on the body in space, that we can change that.

Incorporating hip hop into architecture would allow us to explore the advantages of collaboration without fear of product delusion or lack of credit. Hip hop has shown that no one has a monopoly on creativity and that there is a certain kind excitement that comes from not rejecting, but embracing that kind of professional alchemy. Disciplinary boundaries not only keep people out, they also keep people in. Hip hop suggests that architecture, being one of the first interdisciplinary areas of study and practice, should return to those philosophical foundations, in practice, product and at last, people. Increasingly, the production of the architectural object is becoming more and more accessible to more and more people, and not necessarily those in the design professions, in particular, architects. This has lead to a reaction by architecture and architects to rally the troops and secure the disciplinary boundaries. This attitude, in turn, only further removes the architect from the society that they are licensed to serve, which in turn, makes us less relevant in their daily lives. No one in their right mind would proceed to operate on him or herself. One goes to a doctor. Similarly, few people would represent themselves in a criminal court case. One retains a lawyer. However, few people think twice about proceeding with design or construction without the services of an architect. This…must change. Architecture inherently wants to be a closed system for a variety of reasons. Architects also want it to be a closed system, for their own reasons, However, music, specifically jazz, hip hop and salsa are, by
their very nature, open systems. I would argue that instead of reacting and reacting in the bunker mentality, that architecture takes a cue from jazz, salsa and hip hop and welcome collaboration. In this manner, we can show why what we do is integral in various and important ways, and we can subsequently influence more of the built environment and broaden the definition – and the opportunities for work – of the architect.

Perhaps this is less than enlightening to you. Perhaps you have found this to be exactly what I have criticized other exploration into this topic to be – superficial at best. It may be a fair cop – I didn’t think that I would be breaking new ground with this talk. However, wherever you fall on that binary, it does not at all invalidate the core foundation of this presentation. The more the world become smaller, the more its constituents are coming to practitioners in all kinds of shapes, sizes, colors, backgrounds and cultures. The three forms we have briefly discussed have given us manners in which to not only navigate this diverse and often unfamiliar territory, but to flourish as well. They have at the very least, shown us that it is possible and in the end, much more beneficial to incorporate rather than to discriminate; to collaborate rather than to separate.

Our work, our profession and ultimately, our world, will be better for it.