

## **Novel Methodologies and Processes: Theories for an Expanded Practice**

### **Towards an Expanded Practice**

**Jesse Reiser and Julian Harake**

The 11-year gestation of the Taipei Music Center, a new cultural district on the outskirts of Taipei, suggests an expanded mode of architectural practice whereby architectural form impacts and negotiates a broader political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural landscape. Though these spheres typically reside outside architecture's disciplinary borders—intersecting only at certain critical moments—the Music Center's formal development demonstrates a design approach which profoundly integrates these aspects through design practice. This contrasts with projects claiming to foreground these spheres by recourse to naïve functionalism, minimalism, et cetera, ironically consonant with ruling tastes. In these instances, political, social, and cultural potentials implicated in the immediacy of the design artifact are left unexamined and undeveloped. Contemporary discussions around expanded modes of architectural practice tend to perversely reject architecture's underlying material and formal basis, seeing it in opposition to other pertinent issues. Catalyzing these developments is a redefinition of the term context, which takes into account a fuller spectrum of conditions beyond the physical extents of a site or building envelope. Consequently, traditional architectural demands are increasingly diminished against the social and political backdrop which presumably engenders them, as aesthetic-formal criteria have come to include the communities, cultures, and socio-political conditions through which architecture operates.

Several predominant working methods exemplify this overall approach. The first is a technocratic methodology, based on statistical analysis and attempts to quantify qualitative aspects of site and program, including social, economic, environmental, political, cultural, and racial dimensions. Through quantification, these specific, nonlinear, and informal characteristics are abstracted such that they can be purportedly integrated through design in a measurable, justifiable, and communicable way. Not far from the scientific method, it is a process of defining variables and generalizing the so-called problems of design, often resulting in generic architectural solutions. The second approach defaults to regional styles, such that new architectural interventions might immediately be absorbed into their urban settings and justified on the basis of precedent. A third approach hybridizes these technocratic, functional, and regionalist approaches, into what Kenneth Frampton phrased critical regionalism. A fourth approach, characteristic of contemporary spatial practices, is to outright reject any concept of form making, instead staging happenings, protests, and interventions typically immaterial in nature. These methods are rooted in the belief that quantitative, sociological, and historical analysis of given site conditions is enough to initiate positive change, as design should foremost be rooted in unearthing, representing, redirecting, or amplifying features native to a given context. Absent from these methodologies is the introduction of an independent architectural context, increasingly viewed with skepticism given its inherently foreign nature.

As the Taipei Music Center demonstrates, the introduction of strong, independently generated architectural form, when negotiated with the nonlinear demands and conditions native to a site, is capable of catalyzing positive impacts in ways otherwise impossible. As the practice of farming requires the strong, active presence and foreign influence of a farmer to cultivate a site—negotiating food

culture, foreign species of plants, technology, and personal tastes with the potentials and ingredients of a given site—the alien nature of the Taipei Music Center’s architecture, similarly negotiated against political developments, the music industry, and everchanging cultural tastes, allows it to resonate within and beyond its immediate, immeasurable, and informal surrounds.