Biennale Sessions

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Reporting from the Front is the celebrated theme of the 2016 Venice Biennale of Architecture curated by Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena of Elemental. Arevara states that there are several battles that need to be won and several frontiers that need to be expanded in order to improve the quality of the built environment and consequently people’s quality of life. The theme aims to focus on architecture which works within the constraints presented by a lack of resources, and those designs which subvert the status quo to produce architecture for the common good - no matter how small the success. Arevena’s curatorial statement concludes with ‘there is not only need but also room for action.’ The ISU.CoD.DoA Biennale Session will consist of a two-day student workshop entitled Making Room: Design/Carry/Build and a one-day colloquium will address the first of the themes – To Be Determined. Both address the Biennale themes - Reporting From the Front. The workshop, led by Shelby Doyle and Leslie Forehand will consider both the Giardini and the Arsenale exhibitions as sites for action, for making room. Fifty design, interior design, and architecture students, faculty and beyond will create a dynamic form that elevates our understanding of the performative actions of making room through architectural engagement, the most elemental production of architecture. In the end, this temporal installation will serve as an architectural intervention to a near-invisible condition of the plane before us, Making Room: Design/Carry/Build The focus on non-classified architecture leads into a discussion of the
architecture of groups underserved by the traditional profession: the other – be that the impoverished (or any otherness). Does the concept of architecture as craft beget a non-traditional practice? And how does the architect address poverty when he himself is not impoverished?

In The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World Elaine Scarry remarks on the de-objectifying effect of pain and its consequent destruction of language. On this lack of referential content Scarry says, “...it is not surprising that the language for pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak on behalf of those who are...”[1] However, how do those who speak gain their voice and their agency? For Scarry this happens through the act of imagining. Through imagination, the speaker can enter into the unsharable space between the certainty of pain and the doubt of its objectlessness.

“...Imagining may entail a revolution of the entire order of things, the eclipse of the given by a total reinvention of the world, an artifact (a relocated piece of coal, a sentence, a cup, a piece of lace) is a fragment of world alteration. Imagining a city, the human being “makes” a house; imagining a political utopia, he or she instead helps to build a country; imagining the elimination of suffering from the world, the person instead nurses a friend back to health.” [2]

Despite Scarry’s conviction that imagination alone produces agency, she does allow that the objects resulting from imagination have their own agency: “...through tools and acts of making, human beings become implicated in each other’s sentience.” Or as John Ruskin, declared in The Crown of Wild Olive: “what we think, or what we know, or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only consequence is what we do.”[3] It can therefore be reasoned that a consciousness of things cannot be independent of the things themselves. Through an engaged material consciousness, we become particularly interested in the things we can change.