

lunch volume 3 : territory

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FROM ESTUDIO TEDDY CRUZ: OUTPOST ON THE POLITICAL EQUATOR

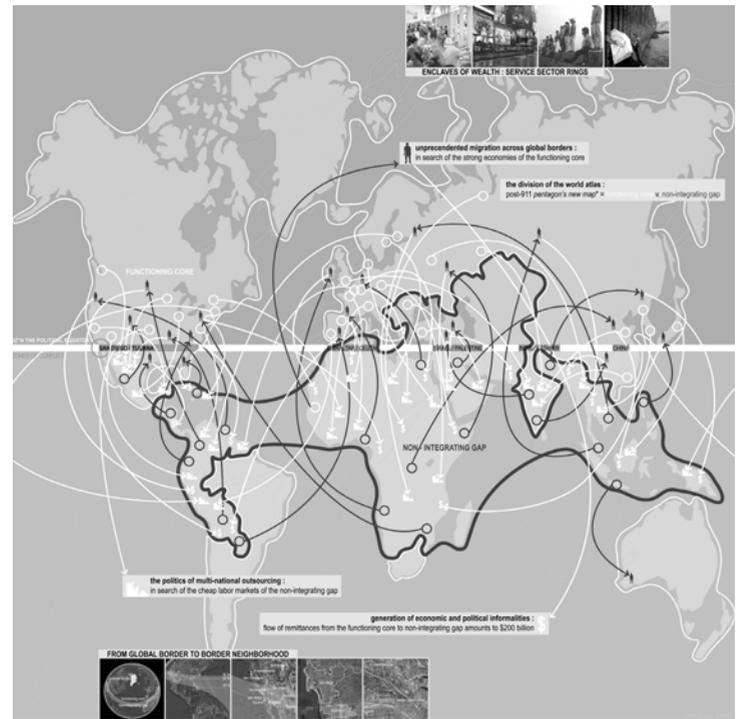
Andrea Dietz
estudio teddy cruz

THE POLITICAL EQUATOR AS CONCEPTUAL MATERIAL

The Political Equator¹, a Cartesian swath narrowing and thickening between the 25°N and 35°N parallels, denotes the materialization of an increasingly defined demarcation between the first and third worlds, a binary geographical settling of the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere into what Thomas P.M. Barnett terms the “functioning core” and the “non-integrating gap”.² The notional boundary between the haves and have-nots, now, is actualized, manifest, solidified, in a line of fortifications damming a string of conflicted, congested urbanities that hug the divide between realities. Both a belt delimiting continental polarization and a link connecting many of earth’s embattled regions, the Political Equator incorporates such contested territories as the Mexico/U.S. border, the Africa/Europe bridge spanning the Mediterranean, the centralizing emblem of Middle East strife at Palestine/Israel, and the swirling junction of Kashmir/India/Nepal/Tibet and developing/developed China. Each of these concentrated locales, stressed and transgressed from the south by floods of human immigrants in search of stable economies and from the north by international corporations attracted to exploitable labor, shoulders the repercussions of pervasive consumptive ideologies and logics.

FROM THE GLOBAL BORDER TO THE BORDER NEIGHBORHOOD

The metropolitan hotspots bisected by or clinging to the Political Equator necklace, all concussant densifications, belong to no other typology. They exist not simply as globalized hubs but as pooled microcosms replicating, intensifying, and congealing the field standards that play out across and between the two sides. Tijuana is not Mexico: San Diego is not the United States. Tijuana, the historical byproduct of U.S. Prohibition and playground of Dry Law escape, while the most Americanized city in Mexico, simultaneously is the exemplary referent for Latin stereotyping. At the same time Mexican visitors to and long-term residents of Tijuana perceive the place as an "other" within their country, U.S. anti-immigration advocates rely on Tijuana as broadcasting headquarters of the invader tendencies towards abuse and criminality. San Diego, on the other hand, models a different inversion, a folding-in, as if the first-world excesses, upon hitting their property extents, collapse in upon and multiply themselves. Even within the riches of the U.S., allusions to Southern California connote an extreme, a bubble of egocentric naivety. Tijuana and San Diego, together, share more than proximity; both, the unique phenomena of 32°N overlap, defy, through problematic exponentiation, national identification. The region exists as a single complex, a network of indistinguishable interdependencies meshing a 50-mile cross-section of equatorial fat.



"The Political Equator": graphic: Teddy Cruz, Andrea Dietz, and Esther Mildenerger of *envision+*.
May 2007: Rotterdam Biennale.

+25

+25 MILES : BREAD BASKET

Laced within and extending from the San Diego city limits lie some of the world's most fertile and productive agricultural terrains. It is a land mired in paradox, both the object of patriotic pride and the beacon (at the mercy) of foreign opportunists. These and like farms, driven by the sustenance demands of the world and fueled by the efforts of migrant laborers, annually hire 1.6 million persons, "1.2 million [of which probably are] not authorized to work in the US."³ In contrast, "under the H2-A [immigration] program, farmers can bring in temporary workers [only] after demonstrating that American workers are not interested in the jobs and after going through a lengthy application process. [This primary legal avenue] bring[s] in about 50,000 such workers a year."⁴ The outcomes of these tenuous conditions include both a constant supply of fresh flowers, fruits, grains, and vegetables as well as canyons and parking lots occupied by tent communities and job-seeking loiterers.

+20

+20 MILES : DEVELOPER DIGESTION

In addition to (or in concert with the financial imbalance inherent to) the operational dilemma of US agriculture, despite ever growing raw food needs, property dedicated to cultivation shrinks in area. Census reports indicate that nationally in 1997, there were 954,752,502 acres of land in farms, but that, by 2002, there remained only 938,279,056 acres, revealing an approximate daily deduction of 10,000 acres.⁵ The undermining violence of this erasure compounds more conventional decries of sprawl as environmental depredator. Contemporary populating tendencies to treat ground not simply as source, but as consumable, to not simply restructure topography, but to shape alien ecology, lend hyper-meaning to notions of the cleared site. At the same time development techniques literally eat both the already plowed and untouched natural of the local, "building construction and [maintenance] account for half of US energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions," draining also the resources of the global.⁶ The San Diego region grows by an average of 14,300 new housing units per year.⁷

+15

+15 MILES : BEIGE BAN(D)

The occupants of previously dominated scrape spaces likewise are (con)formed to replica McMansions, insulated in series of gated communes, and shielded in transition by gas-guzzling hummers. These societal filters of sameness, coupled with comprehensive camera surveillance, assure, through the villainizing of difference, the exclusion even of the ideal of heterotopia. A read of the lay betrays a definition of arrival or comfort increasingly hijacked by the money logics of the mass generic and the fear-induced mentality of media hysteria. Ironically, precisely the risks assumed to achieve this deceptive safety augment the expectational enslavement, as those who buy into actually are bought by the advertised lifestyle image. "San Diego's high housing prices [with a median half-million dollar sale value, along] with its relatively low wages, make it the sixth least affordable area in the country... [And,] a 665 percent jump in home mortgage foreclosures between 2005 and 2006 [establish Southern California as an epicenter of the subprime crisis]."⁸ Herein, land use, interestingly, is the revelator of the desirability of ease, subsidized by debt fueled existence, pushed too far.



"+25 miles". photographer : Andrea Dietz . April 2007 .



"+20 miles". photographer : Teddy Cruz . June 2005 .

"+15 miles". photographer : Andrea Dietz . April 2007 .



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+10 MILES : FORT DOWNTOWN

The personal bunkers of the civilian suburbs mirror the military complex that is San Diego's urban center. About a quarter of the area's land is owned by the federal government and dedicated as marine and naval bases. The people affiliated with or working in these restricted access zones account for over 15 percent of the region's population.⁹ The air of paranoia and secrecy emanating from these focal enclaves establishes the guarded as the norm. Supplementary to the censoring and control methodologies of the national, similar troop binding tactical maneuvers lock the local in, arguably, one of the country's most arbitrarily stringent environment determining systems. Having relinquished downtown construction responsibility to the Centre City Development Corporation, an independent organization charged with a singular objective, the bankrupt City of San Diego steered the physical making of place into a profit redeeming endeavor. CCDC and like pocket neighborhood commissions, all carrying the force of law, combined with overly-complex and unwieldy building regulations, and weighted by a prohibitively expensive and lengthy permitting process, reduce the measure of quality design to assimilation with pre-determined formulae. Architects and planners serve a mere auxiliary role in this process, staying afloat by positioning themselves as mass-production cloners; or forced underground as clever manipulators of the rules.

+5 MILES : INFORMAL FIRST

Silently lurking in the shadows of the skyline of cranes, a population of 10,000 homeless¹⁰ creates a sub-texture within the totalizing frame of the core. Dependent primarily on the under-funded generosity of private non-profits, the crowds of the unseen thicken on the urban fringes, forming a spontaneous service sector on the shifting joint of a semi-active tectonic fault line. This no-man's land, in concert with the diving and towering concrete incision of Interstate 5, establish a double barrier between two versions of newness, a clear boundary separating US San Diego from Mexican San Diego. The post World War II ring of residential growth, which extends southward to the international border, along with an east and northward scattering of island communities, wears the re-adaptations of the recently immigrated. Mutated by both formal and functional, ignored and under-the-radar contraventions in code and zoning, the ubiquitous becomes singular, taking on new life as the row-house mercado, the dim-sum strip mall, or the artist factory. Only in these government neglected territories does the visible fabric reveal a comfort in the display of identity and ownership.



"+10 miles". photographer : Teddy Cruz . May 2007

"+5 miles". photographer : Andrea Dietz . April 2007



FIELD: GREEN ARTIFICE

Unified as an oasis in the desert, San Diego acquires only 10-20 percent of its water supply locally, with 80-90 percent imported through a 242 mile-long aqueduct from the Colorado River and a 444 mile-long aqueduct from northern California.¹¹ The residents who depend on this construct inhabit an elaborate farce of plenty decorated in a blanket of non-native plant species.

GROUND ZERO : THE WALL

That from which the built fabric of San Diego runs and to which the built fabric of Tijuana flocks is a 14-mile, sheet-metal barricade, thickened into no-man's bands where the wall, in places, is doubled and tripled. A primarily symbolic gesture of deterrence, terminating in the true obstacles, the turbulence of the Pacific Ocean on the west and the forbidding sands of the Sonoran Desert on the east, the narrow strip shelters only the covert activities of the Border Patrol. The central puncture, the world's busiest port of entry, ushers through an average of 93,000 vehicles and 20,000 pedestrians each day.¹² The control measures frequently are skirted by elaborate smuggling schemes and bypassed altogether in upwards of 30 known underground tunnels varying in length and sophistication. Though, the only unrestricted flow, that of the Tijuana River, which crosses from Mexico in the United States at its mouth, carries the byproducts of an inadequate sewer and waste system into the northern neighbor's waters.

FIELD : BROWN NATURE

The precarious actualities of the regional ecology are exposed in one simple geographic displacement; the earth literally betrays the international demarcation in an abrupt transition to dusty, windswept lots and dirt roads littered with potholes. Already, up to 65 percent of Tijuana's water is a provision of the United States, traveling from a Colorado River aqueduct. Combined with the remainder, originating in underground aquifers, the drinking supply services only 85 percent of the city's population, a daily dearth of more than 114 gallons per person.¹³

"You seem to see the last futile effervescence of the burst of the American adventure. Here our people, so long told to go 'West' to escape from ill health and poverty, maladjustment and industrial oppression, are discovering that, having come West, their problems and diseases remain and that the ocean bars further flight. Among the sand-colored hotels and power plants, the naval outfitters and waterside cafés, the old spread-roofed California houses...they come to the end of their resources in the empty California sun...."

Edmund Wilson, as quoted in *Under the Perfect Sun : The San Diego Tourists Never See*, by Mike Davis, Kelly Mayhew, and Jim Miller. (New York: New Press, 2003)

"In no place have I felt, as in Tijuana, the force that a territory imposes on its inhabitants. The city has a vocation of belonging to all and in it one can breathe a strange pride, maybe the pride of being a gigantic hotel without doors. Not being imagined as a real city, but as part of a strategy, not as end but as means, ruined that aura of 'being for always' that the majority of cities have. There is this sense that at any moment everyone will go and will move to the middle of the desert or to another border."

Guillermo Fadanelli, as quoted in *Here is Tijuana!*, by Fiamma Montezemolo, Rene Peralta, and Heriberto Yopez. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006)



"Green Artifice". Photographer: Andrea Dietz. February 2008.



"The Wall". photographer: Andrea Dietz. April 2007.

"Brown Nature", photographer: Andrea Dietz. April 2007.



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zero

+5 KILOMETERS : COUNTER-TOURISM

Avenida Revolución, the emblematic engine of Tijuana's center city, confines both the imaginations and movements of the "daring" visitors. It is home of the caesar salad and donkeys painted like zebras, where wrestling mask dealing magnates are interrupted by panhandlers who thrill those marveling in disbelief at their whereabouts. Meanwhile, the seasoned blend into the fray: the ailing and elderly stocking up on prescriptions at the drug warehouses; fugitives from US law enforcement choking down Cuban cigars while leaning in shaded thresholds; teens stumbling to the next alcohol-serving, neon-blinking, base-thumping club; and midshipmen, in search of company and relief, strolling through the blaring and dinge of the red-light district. Or, so they say.

+10 KILOMETERS : MINI-MIRRORING

Far past the boundaries of the stereotypical, the footprint of Tijuana quintupled in size during the past decade. Attempts to meet a 60,000 unit housing shortage play out as a mimicking in miniature of US development practices.¹⁴ Stylistic photo-copies, the Mexican tract homes, shoulder the dreams and ideologies (but with a quarter the square footage of) their first-world counterparts. Use distinguishes them, however; for, in time, formal permutations express familial evolutions, micro-economic ventures, and theatrical staging. Absent the societal expectations dictating artifact treatment, the ranch burgers squelch their homogenizing origins.

+15 KILOMETERS : MAQUILADORAS

Over-shadowing the quilt of residential patches, 562 foreign-owned assembly plants, NAFTA's subjects, employ more than 100,000 Tijuana residents. Warehouse factories spanning asphalt sheets operate comfortably within the nation's minimal environmental, employment, and health regulations. Their finished exports, automobiles, electronics, furniture, mechanical systems, and toys, world-wide, bear the "Hecho en México" label. Otherwise, the predominant work in Tijuana is in San Diego; one out of ten locals round-commute daily across the border to earn a living.¹⁵



"+5 kilometers". photographer : Andrea Dietz . April 2007 .



"+10 kilometers". photographer : Teddy Cruz . June 2005.



"+15 kilometers". photographer : Gregorio Ortiz . May 2007.

+20 KILOMETERS : FAVELA SUSTAINABILITY

Redefining the recycling movement, the shelters of the desperate impoverished, some sitting in the factory run-off, assembled from manufacturing scraps, some scattered around and in landfills, agglomerated with the (13,500 plus¹⁶) tons of waste gifted daily from Southern California, all hovel in the underserved outskirts and on the fragile slopes of slide prone ravines. A makeshift infrastructure of electric webs tapped into existing power lines, pallet rack bridges, plastic bag fringed channels, and tire retaining walls unite the communities in parasitic dependency. But, within the apparent hopelessness of slum arrangements, inhabitants operate on a premise of empowerment through temporality, building silently and slowly out of anticipation of squatter rights application, the legal provision for property ownership after five years of camping. The lean-to shack dreams of box legitimization.

+25 KILOMETERS : LAWLESS WILDS

Then it all just ends, opening in expanse to unknown worlds of both defeat and promise. The geography, on the one hand, echoes bandit history. A newly contested field separating Sinaloa and Tijuana drug cartel lordships destabilized by the August 2006 US arrest of kingpin Francisco Arellano-Felix sends reverberations of violence into the urban core. In January 2007, with the local police suspected of corruption, the Mexican government ordered Tijuana under military rule. Tensions continue to escalate between complex bads and goods through regular kidnappings and increasingly visible shoot-outs, including a most recent neighborhood street battle in January 2008.¹⁷ But in parting the screen of the extreme, the Baja plains simultaneously shelter a different version of rebellion. Mexico supports the greatest number of worldwide US ex-patriots, gringos seeking cheaper living, greater freedom, and warmer climes. And, despite the technical illegality of foreign property ownership, coastal resort building booms, multiplying insular copies of first-world villages, reflect both a government and a ground dramatically responding to an influx of relocators. Heralding the Americanization charge, the New Urbanist and sustainability teams render unrecognizable, through immensely scaled Loreto Bay and like projects, larger and larger chunks of a land not home. Meanwhile, the everyday occupants, primarily the marginalized families of US migrant farm workers, in an otherwise barren peninsula and of way stations like Salsipuedes (Leaveifyoucan), go about waking, fishing, selling, and sleeping.



"+20 kilometers". photographer: Andrea Dietz. April 2007.

"+25 kilometers". photographer: Andrea Dietz. April 2007.



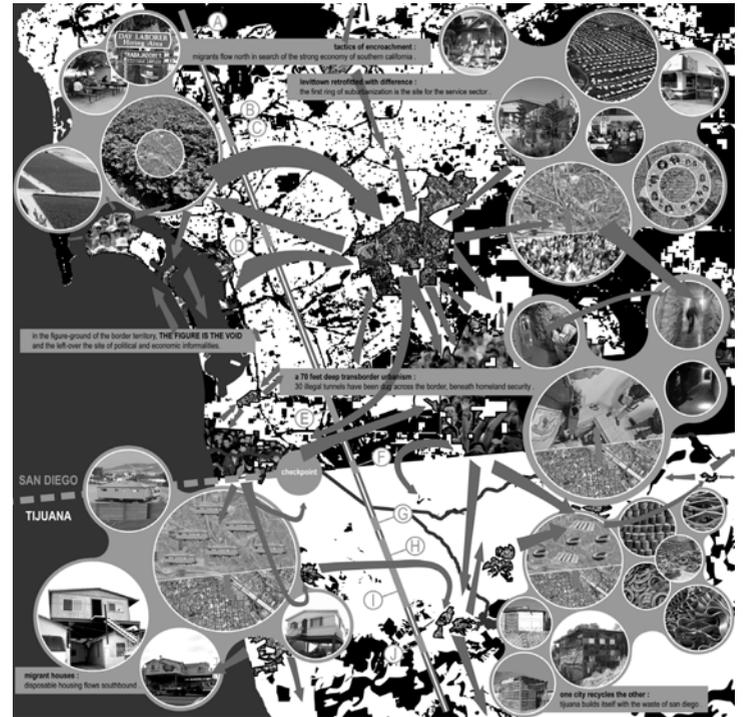
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+20

+25

FILLING VOIDS

As a re-unified Political Equator pearl, a 'figuralization' of the San Diego/Tijuana marriage reveals the opposing density logics, space expendable versus space indispensable, juxtaposed in one binary metropolis. Ironically, both inhabitation tactics construct ecological exploitations, the one environment pushed into un-nature and stressed to sustain a scattered populace actively insisting on the maintenance of their own personal utopias, the other raked for every last resource and drained by crowds compelled to cling to bare surfaces all too painfully proximate to the idealized alternative. Voids open in both schemes: in the north, as abundance normalizes space unconsidered, place ornamentally and programmatically empty both in actuality and conceptually and under-activated by a culture that values interiority and delimitation over community and expression—in the south, as gaps in infrastructure and provision necessary to feed an otherwise lively debate over the challenge to balance the expectation of surplus in an environment that barely promotes survival. These holes establish the platform for projective intervention, efforts in the social engineering of the gray lots and in the structuring of the life-support network of the appropriated.



"Filling Voids". graphic: Teddy Cruz and Andrea Dietz.
May 2007: Rotterdam Biennale.

"It is known that initially the situationists wanted at the very least to build cities, the environment suitable to the unlimited deployment of new passions. But of course this was not easy and so we found ourselves forced to do much more. And during the entire course of events various partial projects had to be abandoned and a good number of our excellent capacities were not employed, as is the case – but how much more absolutely and sadly – for hundreds and millions of our contemporaries."

-Guy Debord, as quoted in *The Situationist City*, by Simon Sadler. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999)

DESIGNING POLICY

Observations of, and even opportunity identification within, the context of the Political Equator, weighed with a domineering system of monetary prohibition, over- and under-regulation, and societal oblivion position designer solution tactics against mission next-to-impossible. Certainly, singular formal pieces, even those intended as strategic manipulations or as awareness magnifiers, ineffectually address the depths of border distress. Individual and grassroots campaigns facing an apathetic majority and power-wielding institutions struggling under their own unmanned bureaucracies put in question both the traditional bottom-up and top-down control mechanisms. Uniquely, the scale of architecture demanded of such a daunting scenario is that of the theoretical. In turn, the project of The Political Equator is an unachievable synthesis of comprehensive and detailed conjecturing on the maybes of cause-and-effect impacts, a complete vision intended to compromise and inspire, through criticism and debate, another reality.

THE POLITICAL EQUATOR AS CONCEPTUAL MATERIAL

The Political Equator (www.politicequator.org) is, thus far, a biannual happening born of the idolization of the Situationist International agenda and practice. Not only sympathizing with predecessor disillusionment that "[t]he benign professionalism of architecture and design ha[s...] led to a sterilization of the world that threaten[s] to wipe out any sense of spontaneity or playfulness,"¹⁸ but that this antiseptic harbors and propagates a disturbing and totalizing cultural world order, the event organizational scenarios provoke a series of literal counter trajectories to the geographic Political Equator, the superstructure junction. Strategic crossings and gatherings of architects and artists working within or on either side of the divide interrupt, if negligibly, the dominant mechanistic flows and initiate a conversation between potential like-minded revolutionaries. Reflection through comparison and, in turn, re-evaluation of work scope offers a minimal hope to forcing figureheads already united in world-altering cause along intersecting pathways. Greater still is the possibility of encouraging, through dialogue, the unsuspecting participant to do and see what the current design administration cannot, to transcend the introspective superficiality of observation and speculation, even the perspective altering suggestive of the inconspicuous, and to lead comprehensive and projective change through social engagement.



"The Garage". photographer: Eloisa Haudenschild. November 2007.

FROM THE GLOBAL BORDER TO THE BORDER NEIGHBORHOOD

Combined with the energies of the Transitory Público conferences (www.publicotransitorio.com), *The Political Equator*² (16-17 November 2007), described herein as a purely logistical experience, congealed as a heterogeneous assembly on the Los Angeles Union Station platform. The mass, manipulated into a moving colloquium, traversed the border cross-section – by Amtrak through the omnipresent texture of southern California to the Haudenschild Garage (an alternative gallery space in the eight-car shelter of wealthy La Jolla art patrons), by University of California San Diego shuttle to lodging in the heart of downtown gentrifying redevelopments, by trolley to The Front at Casa Familiar in San Ysidro (the main-street face of a local non-profit organization active in both planning and service endeavors), by foot across the Homeland Security check-point into Mexico, by bus on tour of Baja's northern fringe and concluding at Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT). This hyper-introduction to the overlapping complex of the region's formalized dilemmas, narrated by a panel of influential voices, intentionally exhausted travelers in the frenetic over-abundance.

FILLING VOIDS BY DESIGNING POLICY

Of course, both obvious danger and potential evolution lie within an effort modeled after the stimulating, but ultimately failed, International Situationist discourse. History too easily repeats itself in the absence of learning from constructive criticism, through protectively autonomous independent and disciplinary pursuits, through the pedestaled placement of star monologues, and through the open-ended and undirected classification of problems. The Political Equator, having attracted substantial interest and founded a platform for debate, sits at a fork, between either, in keeping with precedent, documenting in time a nostalgic confluence of forces or, surpassing assumption, establishing a legitimized network out of networking. If there is an ideal outcome to The Political Equator, it is the establishment of an international cooperative, a world-wide studio, a boundary-less think-tank charged with and ordered through an executable and identifiable mission statement of collective reform. Inherent to the proliferation and success of such a union is a call for leadership, social responsibility shepherded through organization, skill, and vision.



"The Front". Photographer: Andrea Dietz. July, 2006.



"Moving Colloquium". Photographer: Kyong Park. November 2007.



"Taco Victor". Photographer: Kyong Park. November 2007.



"The Boredom Patrol". Photographer: Peter Hilligoss. November 2007.



"Bus Stop". Photographer: Peter Hilligoss. November 2007.



"The Line". Photographer: Peter Hilligoss. November 2007.

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- Andrea Dietz received a BS in Architecture from UVA in 2000 and an MArch from Rice University in 2005, having worked for Design Corps (a Raleigh, North Carolina based non-profit architecture organization) between. Since and currently, she teaches a theory and degree project studio at Woodbury University School of Architecture San Diego and collaborates with estudio teddy cruz, for which she is the project coordinator of The Political Equator.