Forwards: In Conversation with the Editors

Nicholas Frayne and Jerry Chow

Jerry Chow (JC):
This issue of *Scroope* began with a word, *disenclosure* — one that we kept returning to as a title and theme. What about disenclosure did you find compelling and apt for our ambitions as editors?

Nicholas Frayne (NF):
Looking back over the last issues of *Scroope*, what we see is a shift towards the socio-political dimensions of architecture, with themes like 'Crisis', 'Power', and 'Duplicity' grounding some of our recent previous issues. While in the first decade of the publication there was a conscious choice to let the journal be guided solely by the pieces volunteered by contributors, rather than by editors' agendas, approaching architectural praxis without a clear ethical direction today is, for me, problematic. The fact is that there are serious issues we face today that implicate all of us: new injustices, ongoing colonial complicity and persistence, genocide,[1] climate emergency, and pervasive exploitation under neoliberal capitalism; the list goes on. These issues are not abstract metaphors, to reference Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's well-known article on decolonisation,[2] but produce concrete lived realities. And the production, imagination, and interrogation of the built environment is an integral part of these realities, as each article in this issue of *Scroope* has demonstrated. Our work as editors needs to engage these wider conditions that architecture sits within, bringing me to your question on *disenclosure*.

But perhaps we should begin with *enclosure*. Following recent decolonial work, enclosure is a spatio-ontological condition that characterises these violent realities and helps us understand the processes by which they are sustained. Opposing this, *dis*enclosure compels us to focus on moments of absolute

1 Forensic Architecture, *A Spatial Analysis of the Israeli Military's Conduct in Gaza since October 2023* (Forensic Architecture, October 15, 2024).

2 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1.1 (2012), pp. 1–40.

impasse, or enclosure, through an architectural lens, situating our discipline as a potential force towards shifting those moments. Disenclosure has real, serious urgency in the face of ongoing injustice, and I think this has made it a strong thematic framework for this issue. It is the groundedness of the term in tandem with its rich theoretical foundations — Nancy, Mbembe, Fanon, Memmi — that gives the concept strength as an architectural idea. Disenclosure, as a framework, seems to keep the door open on itself, remaining pertinent to our ambitions as editors to foreground the challenges that we all share, albeit in radically divergent and not always compatible ways.

When we were crafting the call for this issue, we worked to include space for questioning what the limits and thresholds of *disenclosure* might be. Did you find the submissions we received matched this effort to not only extend but critique the theme? And what might the nature of our submissions say about the place of this kind of questioning in architectural theory and criticism today?

JC:

Each of the submissions offers a slightly different reading of the theme, and I would also suggest, enacts its own kind of disenclosure. Some of them call us to action, or extend lines of enquiry into stories that have been overlooked, or even reconsider the boundaries, forms, and substance of architecture and academic work. Our intention in making space for critique in the issue was to not take the idea of disenclosure for granted, or as a metaphor, to return to Tuck and Yang. We wanted to seriously grapple with what decolonisation actually means and might look like in architecture, as well as the academic communities we are a part of. The contributions to this issue give us a glimpse of what disenclosure — as a kind of messy, difficult opening — could be, both in terms of their content and as acts of disenclosure in and of themselves. I am still returning to and rereading them, and continue to discover new things that both reaffirm and

challenge my own convictions about the discipline and its disenclosure.

I expect some of our readers will feel that the work in the issue went too far, and others that it didn't go far enough. Learning how to navigate that discomfort has been a difficult part of editing an issue like this for me. But I also believe that each piece we have included asks important and necessary questions of the discipline and invites us further into thoughtful conversation and practice. The nature of our submissions suggests that this kind of questioning in architectural theory and criticism is needed, but ought also to be constantly questioned. We can both ask questions and ask questions about those questions. As you said, disenclosure seems to keep the door open on itself. I would like to think that continuing to ask critical yet generous questions of ourselves, others, and the work that we do makes for a discipline that is more kind, humble, honest, rigorous, and open. So I hope that these submissions represent not the limit of questioning in architectural theory and criticism, but small disenclosures that open us to more questions that expand how we think about and make architecture with more curiosity and care.

Something that we've also talked about over the last few months of editing, though, is what's missing — all the voices, perspectives, and approaches that we missed, or didn't have the capacity or time to bring into the conversation. How do you reckon with these absences?

NF:

The biggest challenge that we faced with this theme was its inherent call to openness, to flexibility, to experimentation, and to platforming the gaps in our knowledges — a task that will necessarily always remain in progress. The absences produced by the act of assembling this publication are, perhaps, just as important as the contributions; the contours of architectural knowledge are defined as much by what is included as what is not. Reading this issue of *Scroope* — or indeed any architectural

publication — through the absences offers a method for seeing the limits of our own capacities to disenclose through editorial work. Were these gaps intentional, or simply a matter of circumstance? I wish, for example, that we could have had more voices from institutions in the Global South, but we struggled to get the word out to Southern universities. At the same time, we had to choose from many excellent abstracts, working with a double-blind peer review process. These circumstances and choices we made (or could not make) ultimately produced a curated view of our core theme. Attending to what is missing I think tempers any claims to total understanding, and highlights the partiality and provisionality of disenclosure at this time and place, with these people and ideas, through this particular form.

As the issue progressed, we kept finding new authors that we wish we could have included, and ways of engaging that would have added depth and nuance to the issue. I think here about Ozayr Saloojee's suggestion to us that the authors be provided with a forum to have a reflexive conversation about their collaboration. Often, contributors to journal issues work in isolation from each other; the editors have the bird's-eye view of the whole community, but authors only know at the end who their work is in conversation with. While we set in motion Ozayr's idea, we ultimately did not have the resources for it — we are, after all, pursuing this work in addition to other commitments we hold. This is a key point: the small editorial group that produces *Scroope* has its own gaps. Only those who have the time, space, resources, interest, and support are able to take on editorial work, effectively closing the door to many of our peers who have caring responsibilities, or for whom anything 'extra' is simply impossible in a very demanding academic environment. I think if we were to be fully committed to our theme, perhaps the process of editing *Scroope* itself would have been a good place to start.

Something that came up in several pieces was the role of architectural institutions in *disenclosure*. This journal is edited

by postgraduate students of architecture at Cambridge; it is produced in relation to the University, which — as pointed out by many contributors — is far from a neutral space for knowledge-production. What does it mean to you to be working on this specific theme with and from within the University of Cambridge; how do you think through our positionality at this particular time and place?

JC:

As editors, it's been an immense privilege to work with such an esteemed group of contributors, and despite working with and from within the institution, we've enjoyed a great amount of freedom to assemble the threads of conversations that run through this issue. Being Cambridge students has allowed us to move through and make connections across the academic world in an uncommon way — we have been afforded opportunities and visibility that many other students around the world do not enjoy. But our place at an institution like this has perhaps also given us a sense of responsibility about the work we do. Early on in our conversations about editing the issue, we both expressed an interest in writing that might expand what academic writing in architecture looks like, building on the ongoing work in the department to critically engage with ideas of decolonisation in the discipline, such as in student groups like UNFOLD.[3] I think we both saw the idea of disenclosure not just as a passing research interest, but a kind of obligation, in recognition of when and where we were writing and editing. Jean-Luc Nancy writes that 'space is not conquered without space conquering its conquerors as well.'[4] And although institutions like Cambridge have been complicit, even culpable, in enclosure, this suggests that disenclosure is not necessarily just an external force, but one that comes from within too, wherein enclosure begins to undo itself.

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3 See: https://www.decolonise.space/

4 Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Dis-Enclosure', in *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 159.

This is not to say that colonialism will simply resolve itself, but to draw our attention to ways disenclosure is already happening, both beyond and within the University. This has been part of the work we have started doing in attending to the gaps as editors — to not only seek out the 'new' or stories that have been untold, but to also recognise the stories that have been under-told, the cracks that are already opening.

In your question you've couched positionality in specifically temporal and spatial terms, which reminds me of the ephemerality of our tenure as editors of this journal. As we near the end of our time here I, like you, have also been thinking about the ways we might have enacted a greater disenclosure in our work. At the same time, I don't want to lessen the significance of the contributions we have been able to include in this issue. As editors working within our own constraints, we need to make peace with an incompleteness of disenclosure. Perhaps we do this by learning to find contentment with what has been achieved in this particular time and place while remaining hopeful that the disenclosure we have been a part of will continue to open, will continue to be a way by which architecture moves forwards.