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Threshold Sites of Encounter: Dialogic (Place) Making to Enable Cross-Cultural Community Development—Lessons from Tuti Island, Khartoum, Sudan

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ABSTRACT

This text explores a possibility for extending our thinking on enacting dialogical placemaking and its potential to contribute to cross-cultural exchange through co-joining making and place as threshold sites of encounter. Advancing our knowledge and practice of dialogical placemaking and cross-cultural interaction is significant owing to the increasing presence of cultural differences, and with it economic, environmental, and social disparities, in an ever-increasingly globalized world. To advance this intention, this text will, through qualitative research, critically reflect upon the experience of a postgraduate Design Studio project based around the regeneration of an urban community situated in Khartoum, Sudan. Preliminary conclusions drawn from this critical reflection will then be further tested and refined through a critical textual analysis. While posing some considerations about pedagogy and processes of cross-cultural interaction that inform placemaking, its primary intention is to consider a possibility arising from the work in the Design Studio project and critical reflection based on an analysis of it. Emergent is a conceptualization of places of collaborative making and the collaborative making of places mutually informing each other as figurative and literal threshold sites of encounter across cultural difference. Through such action, a dialogic space is generated in which further dialogue is enabled.

Keywords: Bakhtin; Community Development; Cross-Cultural; Making; Participatory Design; Sudan

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1. Introduction

What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies?

Henri Lefebvre ^[1]

One joy of teaching architecture is identifying fertile ground for work; literal sites resplendent with challenges and opportunities to prompt and frame physical and programmatic interventions. Less tangible, but more significant, is witnessing what can arise through purposeful provocation and empathetic guidance, inviting students to step beyond known horizons of knowledge, skills, and how they schematize the world; emergent from such faith is their capacity to make leaps of creativity and criticality, opening new dialogues of inquiry. Such intentions evoke Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's call that 'if you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and assign them tasks, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea' ^[2].

This was our recent experience working with Master of Architecture Design Studio students in the context of Khartoum, Sudan, an act enabled and enhanced by collaboration over 8 months with partners in Sudan, Europe, and the UK. From this research-informed, design-led inquiry, students generated proposals for the regeneration of Tuti Island, situated at Khartoum's center, yielding strong results within academic parameters. Equally emergent was an expansion of thinking, evidenced not only in students' own horizons but also in thinking on intercultural interaction as enabled through a dialogical co-joining of place and making.

This paper focuses on the expansion of thinking, emergent from our critical reflection upon the project. This is not, however, just an examination of pedagogy but focuses more on the project's revealing of an innovative approach of value to community development and cross-cultural exchange. This is significant as we live in an ever-globalizing world increasingly defined by difference across cultural, economic, environmental, and/or social representations ^[3-7]. As architectural critic Michael Sorkin argued, 'the accommodation of difference is the key project of democracy' ^[8], and indeed humanity. It is a challenge

exacerbated by intensifying cultural, economic, environmental, social, and political shifts.

Our text discusses three primary reflections. First, the materials (including our project context) and methods underpinning our work. Second, the students' work, in a descriptive sense, and through preliminary conclusions drawn from our own initial analysis. Third, a discussion of the implications and possibilities of these conclusions through a textual analysis to test and expand, reinforce, and refine our original conclusions. Together, these reflections frame our primary research question: what does a critical re-examination through a dialogic lens of a research-informed, design-led inquiry project praxis and its outcomes – the former itself grounded in dialogism – reveal about a dialogical approach to cross-cultural exchange and community-based development?

2. Materials and Methods

Our discussion of materials and methods builds on four elements: *a priori* experience; dialogic space; context; and research methodology.

2.1. *A Priori* Experience

Our critical examination here begins with ourselves. Such reflexivity acts as a *currere* to understand the experience and meaning of one's own practice ^[9]. A *currere* situates one's work within a broader discourse while illuminating the thought processes behind one's assumptions ^[10]. Such reflexivity reflects Kant's *Test of Criticism*, underscoring the 'responsibility to define the origins and constraints of the thinking that one employs' ^[11]. Moreover, beginning with where we are prefigures a key orientation within this text.

Who we are—as educators, practitioners, and researchers – is greatly informed by being somewhere else. That is, American and Romanian expats, respectively transplanted in the UK, with multiple detours through those roles in Africa, Asia, and Europe. Formative in each situation has been working across social and cultural boundaries, and through this, recognizing ourselves as the "other" in those contexts. Such recognition has cultivated a shared concern for the other.

We recognize *the other* we seek to encounter and

learn with as equal partners in moral and aesthetic discourse^[12] also encapsulates a host of intersecting *a priori* conditions of systemic oppression, predicated on centuries of prejudice against difference - racial, religious, cultural, economic, gendered, etc. - well captured for example in the critical works of Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Franz Fanon, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak. This history of the other-wrought in the Western philosophical tradition of understanding the other through, and as extensions of, the self^[13] —has been written in encounters of ‘appropriation, acquisition, and violence’^[14]. We acknowledge that such othering extends to our own academic, disciplinary, and professional cultures^[15–21]. Although beyond this text’s scope to trace and address the evolution of othering discourse, we begin in opposition to its core misconception: that *the other* sits in and is defined through undesirable opposition to everything we perceive ourselves to be. This position is driven by our ethics and conscious efforts—as educators, practitioners, and architects - to nudge thought and practice within our field to recognize the centrality of other-self encounter and its powerful potential. Other disciplines—such as psychology, for instance—have already made strides in this direction^[14].

This concern is well articulated by Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism^[22]. Through a dialogical approach, we embrace the understanding and values of the other, even across difference, in dialogue with our own understanding and values. Yet rather than forcing synthesis, this dialogue creates shared ground within which *a priori* thinking can be tested, reaffirmed, enhanced, and/or new insights generated. This thinking is summarized by the proposition that:

I can see things you cannot, and you can see things that I cannot ...If we wish to overcome this lack we try to see what is there together^[23].

Revealed through this encounter is that each can afford something to the other. Such thinking also reflects philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’ situating the other spatially, i.e., the other not as a static condition but as represented in an act of movement going forth from a world familiar to us and encountering *terra incognita*^[24].

This dialogical orientation is present in our community-based teaching, practice, and research. Each is initiated

by *beginning with where they* (the students, community, and/or research participants) *are at*^[25,26]. Initial group-heuristic-making-participatory exercises explore and reveal underlying schema (e.g., aims, beliefs, experiences, ideas, and values). These foster a shared ground enabling further discussions. This ground is generated experientially and physically by enabling the students, community, and research participants to appropriate the space as theirs. This belonging affords confidence to raise, question, explore, test, and evaluate emergent schema, operating within a place more as a collaborative workshop than as a formal teaching or hierarchical consultation. Such ground serves as a forum for experimentation to extend collective horizons, while establishing a working relationship. This practice has been concurrently explored through qualitative research, whether as action research, case studies, and/or more conceptually oriented textual analysis^[27–37].

2.2. Dialogic Space

Equally significant is the revealing of dialogical space explored through our teaching and qualitative research^[38,39]. Dialogic space is grounded in the human need to gather—biologically^[40], socially^[41–43], and culturally^[44,45]. This thinking is reflected in urban discourse, which articulates gathering as essential to urban life^[46–52], and as evidenced by contact theory research^[40,53–58].

Dialogic space transcends inherited Western conceptions of space, emphasising ‘monological coherence and closure’^[59], instead reconceptualizing space as a ‘multi-valent project’^[60,61]. Dialogic space is not deterministic, nor a universal which accommodates everything (and hence nothing). Rather, it suggests and implies, opening to possibilities people bring to it and/or generate within it. Through this place, people and their performances become interrelated^[31]. Within this dialogic space, difference – whether cultural, economic, environmental, political, and/or social—can not only be accommodated but also embraced. This co-presence of difference affords opportunity for encounters with others, and with this, both activation and mutual illumination. Moving away from singular representations, anticipated is a more ‘messy model...one that cojoins incommensurate terms, more in keeping with the often contradictory, and strange adjacencies’ that are intrinsic to everyday life’^[61].

This conception of dialogic space draws upon Bakhtin's spatial discourse. He posits that 'aesthetic self-activity always operates on the boundaries...where it comes to an end (in space, time, and meaning) and another life begins, that is, where it comes up against a sphere of self-activity beyond its reach – the sphere of another's activity' ^[22]. We understand aesthetics here in a Bakhtinian sense as 'how parts are shaped into wholes' ^[23]. Key to note is that these individual parts are each represented by their own aesthetics, which may give rise to friction—but also mutual embrace—when situated in relation to each other.

Central to dialogic space is the construct of threshold. For Bakhtin, the emphasis is not on 'that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the threshold' ^[62]. Bakhtin drew upon Fyodor Dostoevsky's novels, in which the action occurs at thresholds – e.g., doorways, foyers, stairways, stair landings, or public squares. Such spaces are more than a line one crosses over from one space to another. Rather, 'the threshold... takes (s) on the meaning of a "point" where crisis, radical change, an unexpected turn of fate takes place, where decisions are made, where the forbidden line is overstepped, where one is renewed or perishes' ^[63]. These are places—threshold sites of encounter—where events occur, notably encounters with others, and give rise to decisions that determine our lives ^[64].

At the urban scale, such thresholds are not only porous but also act to bind territories. This threshold belongs to each territory simultaneously; yet its ambiguity affords it its own spatiality. Vital here is an allowance for simultaneous inhabitation by multiple participants. Critical is that thresholds stimulate us into action—to move, to pause, to stop—concurrently, they stimulate creative response. In contrast to received, formal, fixed models of public space, thresholds are open to interpretation.

Threshold sites of encounter – a name inspired by art critic Robert Stam's reference to threshold encounters between different disciplinary knowledge ^[65]—are defined by two key qualities. First is ambiguity, with thresholds neither one thing nor another, but rather multivalent (in form and use). Second is playfulness, being open to (re) interpretation and re(appropriation) ^[31]. We distinguish threshold sites of encounter from liminal spaces, the latter

more typically used to denote residual spaces or spaces left behind. Yet like liminal spaces, dialogical space and threshold sites of encounter are essential. Figuratively, they are where, as philosopher Homi Bhabba suggests, one culture (or any one individual or community) encounters another, and is challenged and reinvents itself ^[66]. Such encounters pose a potential for disorder ^[52]. Yet these encounters also prompt questioning of underlying restrictive order (as structure, policy, or practice) ^[67] and so stimulate creative change ^[68] and new forms of agency ^[50]. Equally questioned here are the typologies—and inequalities—of knowledge encountering each other at thresholds; some, recognized and disciplinarian and occupying the center, others, indigenous, oppressed, and marginalized to the periphery. Such knowledge segregation presents barriers to exchange and legitimacy ^[16].

A final consideration concerns the surfaces present within dialogic spaces, which may act as threshold sites of encounter. Key is their own haptic nature and their relationship with other surfaces (e.g., juxtaposition, sequence), and the enhanced meaning afforded through these relationships ^[69]. Such thinking is evocative of, though not driven by, object-oriented ontology and its valuing of material objects and their agency in the world ^[70].

2.3. Context

2.3.1. Tuti Island and Sudan

Our Design Studio work was situated on Tuti Island, Khartoum, Sudan. Tuti Island (8 square kilometers) lies at the convergence of the Blue and White Nile (the Upper Nile) into the Lower Nile and beyond to the Mediterranean. It also lies centered between three cities (the capital Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman). Its inhabitation dates from the 15th Century, marking it as one of the earliest, possibly first, inhabited areas of Khartoum. It sits as a "green eye" of rurality amidst the conurbation of Sudan's capital region ^[71].

Concurrent with our project's commencement, there was sporadic fighting between rival factions of the Sudanese post-2021 Coup military government. The current Civil War did not start, however, until April 2023 ^[72–74]. Despite these hostilities, normal life was continuing in Khartoum, reflected in regular architecture and planning

classes at the University of Khartoum and ongoing work by the Sudanese Urban Development Think Tank (two of our project collaborators). Together, they identified the following primary issues facing Sudan:

1. The alternating presence of drought and flooding.
2. Economic decline and inflation.
3. Conflict-induced displacement.

These conditions in turn impacted water and food security, health, human rights, energy provision, the physical fabric of buildings, and wider ecosystems^[75,76]. Along with other urban settlements, Tuti Island was suffering from intensive cycles of floods, drought, and riverbank erosion^[77]. Flooding and intensive rainfall also posed implications for traditional building methods and materials^[77]. Existing

traditional earthen structures on Tuti Island were especially vulnerable, given their proximity to the Nile. These buildings, mostly two-to-three stories, are concentrated towards the island's center, while the periphery is used predominantly for agriculture.

Another critical factor is that Tuti Island is marked by its shifting ground. Mappings reveal a constantly shifting shoreline (**Figure 1**), subject to the seasonal flows of the Blue and White Nile. Thus, the island's identity is not defined by any sense of stability, but rather by continual shifts and re-territorialization. In contrast, the population of Tuti Island has remained relatively stable over many years, even after the construction of the first-ever bridge in 2009 linking the island to the mainland of Khartoum.

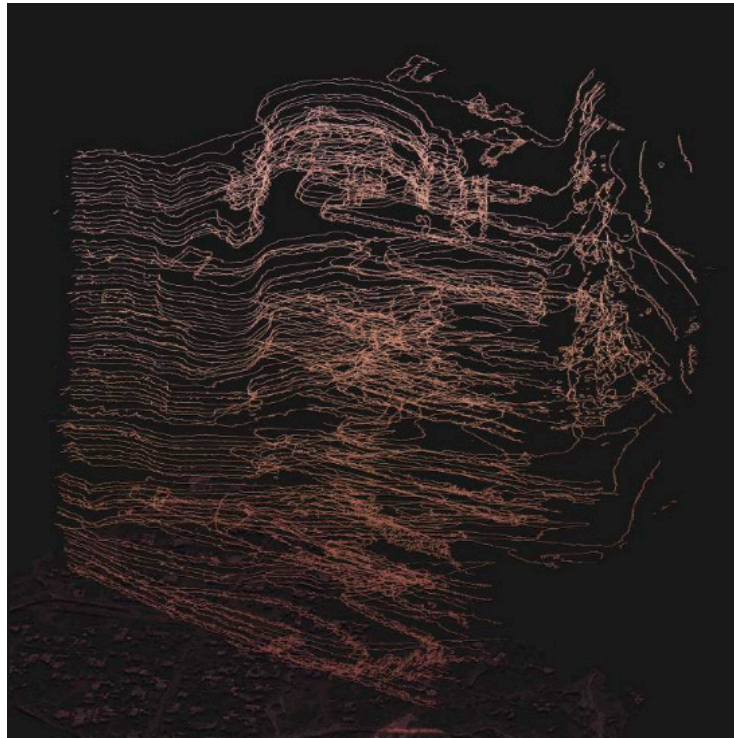


Figure 1. Mapping of Tuti Island's shifting shoreline.

Source: Image courtesy of J. Shaw and K. Stone.

The urban structure of Tuti Island does not reflect conventional Western models. While a colonial legacy of public spaces exists in mainland Khartoum, Tuti Island's structure is reflective of an informal settlement. This is characterized by ad-hoc, dense development, with a single main road and the riverbank as key delineating features. Owing to a lack of government provision^[78], present within Tuti Island's built fabric are informal public spaces

provided by the informal sector, reflecting prevailing models in the Global South^[79]. These informal spaces emerge through a range of activities—i.e., socio-cultural, ecological, and/or economic—contributing directly to community livelihoods.

Such informal models of public space—whether internalized or externalized—are valued for their expanded program linking with the wider community and other

programs of activity in other spaces more than spatially. Lacking traditional resources, these spaces arise tactically rather than strategically^[80] via joined-up thinking, enabling synergies between seemingly disparate programs^[81]. Delivered not from a top-down, overarching level and assembling an overall, singular structure, they emerge from bottom-up tactics at an inter-relational level, which may include juxtaposing diverse elements^[3]. Tactics combine fluidity of adaptation within/against overarching structures, with longer-standing ‘doings and knowings’ that traverse social networks and so bond people with places. Such community-based, dialogue-driven tactical approaches, and the experience of informal models from the Global South, hold significant lessons for professionals and educators in not only the Global South but the Global North as well^[82].

One example of an existing tactical response is an early-warning flood response system enacted by the Tuti Islanders. Monitoring points (*tayas*) are dispersed around the island, voluntarily staffed by islanders. They provide immediate warning of a sudden change in the Nile’s water level. This system reflects the Sudanese tradition of *nafir*, a form of mutual exchange. *Nafir* is enacted through community members working together to help a neighbor with work; their neighbor, in turn, provides them with food and drink and sometimes music^[83,84]. *Nafir* exists as a performative celebration of creative agency. It is equally present as a spatial representation, whether through a physical artefact and/or actions situated and emplaced mnemonically in place. *Nafir* is not limited in its reach, as encounters are enacted across cultural, economic, and social differences.

2.3.2. Design Studio Project Brief

Central to the Design Studio work was a three-phase process. A first analytical phase identified existing cultural, economic, environmental, and social assets (i.e., facilities and/or the landscape) and agencies (i.e., programs of activity). Overlaying these disparate mappings revealed convergences (i.e., overlaps) and divergences (i.e., gaps) between the asset and agencies. This composite mapping was used to determine each student’s (or group of students’) field of operation. Within workshops, students interrogated their proposed field of operation’s viability by introducing relevant precedents to test their field’s parameters.

The second urban strategy phase invited students, working within their field of operation, to generate a co-joined strategy linking assets and agencies into a coherent, mutually supportive proposition. Central here was to foster new or reinforce existing sustainable livelihoods.

Third was a building proposition for a small-scale building utilizing their urban strategy as a platform. This proposition was similarly intended to enable new or strengthen existing livelihoods. Across each of the phases, a primary intention was enabling co-joined agendas; this recognizes that two or more different elements might work together, including through the sharing of resources, one asset or agency literally or figuratively builds off another / others, and/or complement each other where their agendas are disparate^[85].

Central to our approach was beginning with where they (i.e., the island’s stakeholders) were at in terms of their existing or desired livelihoods. Students explored co-joining existing assets and agencies to mutually reinforce each other, whether in their urban strategy and/or building proposition. These building programs ranged from live (i.e., as housing or health), work (economic production), or play (celebrating culture). Students also worked with the island’s found qualities, considering climate, the river’s presence, scale, and topography. The key was how these factors intertwined with cultural, economic, environmental, and social agendas.

The parameters of this project work are better understood within the overall ethos of the Design Studio, defined as *real people, real places, real projects*. This ethos is in recognition of (not necessarily in opposition to) a historic paradigm within UK architectural education valuing the avant-garde at the expense of social commitment or realism^[86,87]. This ethos is enacted through aligning with live urban regeneration programs in the UK and overseas (Africa, Asia, and Europe). Formative is a collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including community-based groups, local government, the private sector, professional organizations, and partnering schools of architecture.

Historically, students and staff have visited the UK and overseas sites of our projects. Meetings, lectures, and workshops with local stakeholders are key in these visits. Such encounters are instrumental in expanding students’ understanding, offering opportunities for exchange of

ideas, and testing working practices. Unfortunately, the growing unrest in Sudan made a visit untenable. Yet we were keen to continue our historic dialogic interaction with stakeholders, and so embrace what was available—i.e., interacting online. Our COVID epidemic had prepared us for this. This enabled us to deliver—with relevant modifications—a praxis supporting our students and our collaborating partners (see illustration of methods in **Supplementary File S2**). This included:

- Initial online meeting with our Sudanese partners (expat Sudanese academic/architect, University of Khartoum School of Architecture, Sudan Urban Development Think Tank) to share information on previous academic/professional practice and research, and discuss the project itself, including contextual issues and the site's specific parameters.
- 6 weeks into the academic year, we organized an online symposium with our Sudanese partners, invited European and UK academic contributors, the Sudanese expat community, and our own and Sudanese students. A set of talks (recorded and supplemented by the digital documentation) allowed discussing the challenges and opportunities facing Tuti Island, Khartoum, and Sudan more generally.
- A generous supply of books and pamphlets about Sudan from the Sudanese expat community.
- A virtual site visit by Sudanese architecture students and staff, filming and photographing as they walked through Tuti Island; supplemented by aerial and street views courtesy of Google Earth, Google Maps, and archival information courtesy of the students' research and supportive expat Sudanese.
- Guest lecture by Sudanese expat academic/architect on archival reading of Sudanese and Khartoum history.
- Drawing on previous experience of using ritual to encounter another culture^[88], Sudanese refugees running a local catering company were invited (and paid) to prepare Sudanese food for the Design Studio. Such ritualistic engagement enables insight into another culture's aesthetic sensibilities (**Figure 2**).
- Two online workshops joined Sudanese architecture students and our Design Studio students to co-investigate Sudanese culture and Tuti Island, mapping and

testing key parameters.

- Lecture and discussion with Sudanese architecture students by one of the authors.
- Further examinations of Sudanese culture, particularly traditional and contemporary music, and traditional earthen crafts and construction. The latter included students fabricating traditional pottery and bricks.
- Unfortunately, continuation of dialogue with in-country Sudanese partners was compromised by increasing hostilities and the outbreak of civil war in 2023. Fortunately, dialogue with key expat Sudanese partners continued, providing overall guidance (1 visit) and tutorial input (3 times) to students.
- The project's impact continued through the exhibition of student work by our expat Sudanese partners. Locally, during the annual *Refugee Week* organized by the University's Law School (2024), and the *Sudanese: Past, Present and Future Exhibition* (Plymouth, 2024). Two students' work was also exhibited at the London headquarters of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

The tangible impact of our praxis was in the meaning the work had for our partners. One of them commented, *'I enjoyed the process of engaging with you...learning from the way you operate in structuring the project to really provide the students with all the necessary tools and relevant conversations.'* Our praxis was equally impactful on the students, with one group noting:

During a workshop activity with the Sudanese architecture students we started to explore (music). Music became a key way of connecting with the site and understanding [a] culture... we can only experience from the outside. As music is so important to their culture and community it became a way that we could understand existing conditions, allowing music to underpin the narrative of the building proposal... A connection was also found between vernacular architecture and music in the form of narratives describing an assemblage of building elements... This directly influenced our methodologies going forward, as we began to view singular building components and methods as notes which, when used in collaboration, can become even more resilient.



Figure 2. Engaging with Sudanese culture in multiple ways.

Source: Image courtesy of I. Popovici.

2.4. Research Methodology

The research underpinning this text was inspired by the successful outcomes of the Design Studio project. Our Sudanese partners and Design Studio students valued our collaborative activities, one of the former stating, ‘the projects continue to be a source of inspiration.’ The students’ project work was also valued by external voices—external examiners and most notably the RIBA, who awarded two of our students one of only three commendations in their annual worldwide (Student) Silver Medals. RIBA President Muiywa Oki noted their work’s *strong focus on how architecture can address the needs of people and their communities (and) speak to what it means to be human on a planet in crisis. In this challenging context, [they] have dared to dream by...tackling the climate emergency head-on. There is a future where*

everyone, individually and collectively, plays a part in shaping better spaces for all ^[89].

This recognition, and our expat Sudanese partners’ continuing feedback, prompted us to critically reflect on this project—a marked attainment of our design studio pedagogic practice extending back 15 years. While the work of preceding years was also of merit (e.g., multiple prizes in the international Creative Conscience Awards), rather than pursuing more extensive study, we thought this project’s crystallization of intention, outcomes, and lessons for broader discourse warranted singular attention. Critical in this interrogation was an intention to identify the salient issues and lessons emergent from the project. Of special interest was the agency of dialogism.

Methodology

Our research methodology is based on qualitative re-

search through grounded theory emergent from the Design Studio project as a specific case study (**Table 1**). Relevant insights arising were then interrogated through textual analysis of leading discourse on issues central to our praxis and the project. To expand, this analysis was advanced through a multi-stage process including:

Table 1. Mapping of research methods.

Process	Outcomes
Re-examination through a dialogic lens of: 1) Lectures and workshops; 2) Students' work, including their reflective journals; 3) Our tutorial notes.	Key emergent themes: -Belonging -Community -Dialogism -Making -Place -Social conflict -Thresholds
Reflection upon key themes in prior teaching, practice, and research.	-Reaffirmation of the above as themes running through previous work into this project
Interdisciplinary qualitative thematic analysis (i.e., Bakhtinian Cross-Disciplinary Drift ^[65]) drawing upon our existing knowledge (including pursuing key sources identified in references cited in our work), and insights provided by our project partners.	-Community development / urban planning/urbanism -Dialogical aesthetics -Environmental psychology -Making, including case studies from art/craft, health -Philosophy -Sociology/conflict resolution -Spatial theory
Expanded themes framed further searches for the latest advances in discourse, using generative AI (Google AI, Microsoft Co-Pilot, and ChatGPT)(See the Note below)	-Reaffirmation of previous sources' value -Identification of new sources

Note: We utilized these search engines, owing to previous use, their processing capacity, cost-effectiveness, and Microsoft Co-Pilot's availability through our university. We critically filtered suggested material for value against our existing points of reference (of known value), and through additional cross-referencing for validity and salience to our topic. Potential bias was tested through inclusivity during prompting, expanding the field beyond just conventional Western academic references.

3. Results

3.1. Student Work

Presented here is a brief descriptive synopsis of the Design Studio project work. Identified are key intentions defining the projects, reinforced by images of the students' work. Central to all the projects is that they are small-scale, urban acupuncture-like interventions (two to three story buildings of 2000–3000 m²); as urban acupuncture, they add both their own agenda and stimulate activity around them. Each project has a central function based around economic or cultural production, co-joined with other cultural, economic, environmental, and social agendas. Each acts as a site of exchange for the sharing of making practices between ethnic/cultural groups and with tourists, centered around internal and/or external public

gathering spaces. Further commonality is in the use of traditional earthen walls—enhanced with reinforcing cement additives—whose thickness keeps the interiors environmentally comfortable. Formally, each project embraces vernacular forms, while responding to current needs.

3.1.1. Project 1: Multi-Material Production Facility

Within this facility, traditional earthenware domestic artefacts are made from continually replenished sediment deposited by the Nile on the island's shores. More experimental work is also produced, including *palmcrete* (concrete using palm leaf additives) for construction use, and various products utilizing plastic recycled from the Nile and wider city. Tourists' access is enhanced by the project's location at the water's edge at the island's south

end, adjacent to the only bridge onto the island. Environmentally, the proposal's multiple structures are positioned to stabilize the ground here, a location subject to frequent shifts of the shoreline. The key dialogic thresholds are the internal, communal making spaces, the spaces themselves made of the same materials people are making within the space (**Figure 3**). Also key is an external folding yard, in which various acts of making and different groups interact.

3.1.2. Project 2: Brick-making and Prototyping Facility

Project 2 proposes a production facility based on brick making, including more experimental types. Located at the island's eastern shore, its primary users are residents of both Tuti Island and the adjacent mainland. Critical is the project's socio-cultural and economic agenda of

supporting arriving economically displaced immigrants from rural areas. The primary threshold in the project is an internal public space focused on the facility's primary kiln; this internal public space opens onto the external public space, which in turn acts as the entry to the project site (**Figure 4**).

3.1.3. Project 3: Cultural Production

Project 3 focuses on music as cultural production, providing recording and teaching spaces coupled with performance spaces. Situated within the island's urban fabric, it acts as a catalyst for further cultural activity. Distinct building elements within the proposal act as thresholds through evoking vernacular forms, recalling memories, and inviting inhabitation (**Figure 5**).



Figure 3. Project 1. Proposal and materials testing.

Source: Image: J. Shaw and K. Stone.

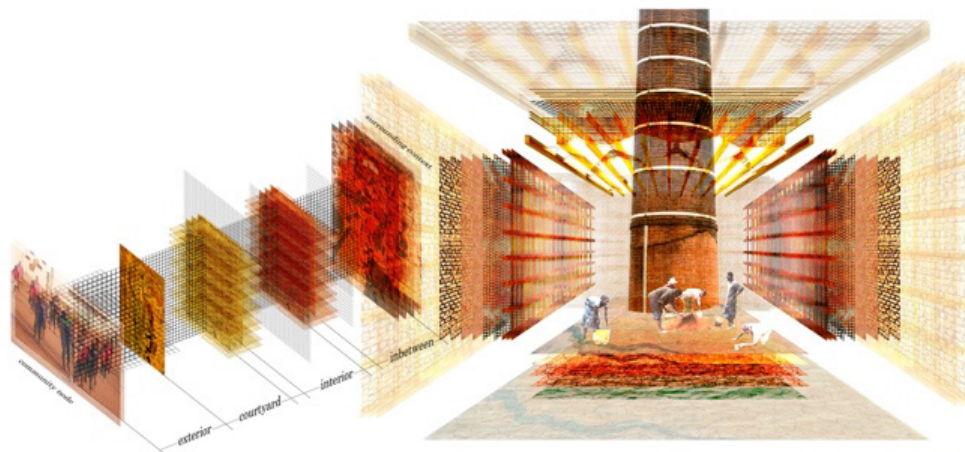


Figure 4. Project 2. The kiln and porous courtyard wall.

Source: Image: A. Shakeel.

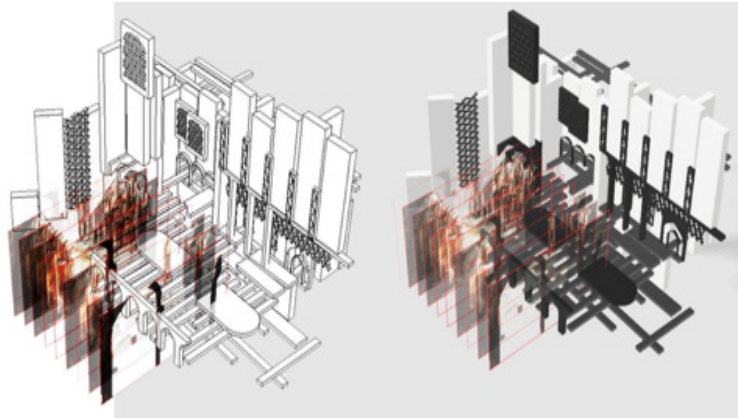


Figure 5. Project 3. Spatial proposition—main performance courtyard.

Source: Image: B. O'Brien, C. Foster, T. Szmidtke.

3.2. Student Work: Analysis

The Design Studio project intended to explore the potential of dialogic space and the role threshold sites of encounter might play in enabling cross-cultural exchange. Another key agenda was to explore possibilities for co-joining programmatic agendas—whether cultural, economic, environmental, and/or social— together with the landscape of Tuti Island. These agendas were reflected in our initial analysis of the students' work (see **Supplementary File S1**—a table of embedded dialogic elements), including:

- Projects are situated in relation to the interface of the land / Nile and the existing urban fabric.
- Internal/external spatial relationships have spatial and functional ambiguity allowing for reinterpretation and re-appropriation of space by users.
- The form of the building fabric (i.e., surfaces) allows for re-appropriation and manipulation by users.
- The projects respond to found cultural, economic, environmental, and social conditions. The students' work embraced these conditions, including working with the Nile's flooding as an integral part of their work.
- The students' embrace of the concept of *nafir*.

Another key interpretation is how the projects conceptualize and offer co-joined agendas (**Supplementary File S3**), including through:

- Linking of economic production, cultural representation, and environmental strategies at a building and

landscape scale.

- Integration of socio-cultural exchange into proposals.
- Responding to found cultural, economic, environmental, and social conditions.

The most significant trajectory arising out of the project work, however, is the co-joining of two acts: the provision of places of making and making place. The first is reflected in the projects' primary role as places of shared making. Central to this shared making is cross-cultural engagement with others towards a common goal, whether in working alongside each other or collaboratively. In this shared working, there is potential for people to be known not through their origin story (e.g., connected with kin and from some other place) but through that collaboration.

The second act within this co-joining is a shared making of place. This making occurs in a figurative sense as a program of activity, and in a literal sense as a tangible, physical representation. The former recognizes that activities are spatialized, and through that spatialization, the space becomes synonymous with its program of activity. The latter emerges as a physical making of place, including places built from the building elements that the community (and even tourists) are themselves making. In doing so, participants transcend received boundaries and the singular claims of ownership that might otherwise inhibit interaction. Equally, these acts connect people to place, here through working with the very ground of the island and sediment from the Nile, i.e., how can you be *another* when your hands are working with the very ground

in which you are present?

This co-joined trajectory of places of making and making places is evidenced not only in the students' work but equally in a critical awareness of their own work (**Supplementary File S4**). As expressed by one student:

The building proposition is a production/community workshop aimed to facilitate the integration of rural economic migrants into an urbanized context (Tuti Island). These individuals face economic, environmental, and social challenges in a new context, which start to become resolved through the act of making between the existing and new migrants. The coming together of the new community will be facilitated through the co-creation of mud bricks, a shared activity and product familiar to individuals from all of Sudan.

Equally relevant were the words of three students acting as a group who noted:

Going back to Go Forward' meant a dedication to ensuring existing cultural initiatives were not lost behind other information sources not directly linked to the context. Highlighting that solutions are already present in the existing conditions, it is our challenge to reveal these hidden aspects and give them a platform to grow naturally...we can encourage others to explore their ideas, and celebrate their skills and knowledge, to build confidence through a cultural connection – allowing Tuti Island to become the composer for future resilience.

Through these co-joined acts of making and making place, an encounter is enabled across cultures. The sites of these co-joined making and making place are materialized as threshold sites of encounter, in which dialogue can emerge and grow (**Supplementary File S5**).

4. Discussion

Our discussion focuses on four issues. We begin with a summary review of this text's research methodology. This is followed by subjecting our preliminary conclusions to a textual analysis, represented in table formats. We then articulate a position on the overall significance of the emergent findings and consider potential future research directions.

4.1. Systematic Review of Research Methodology

This review draws upon criteria identified in Haradan Kumar Mohajan's insightful paper on 'Qualitative Research Methodology in Social Sciences and Related Subjects'^[90]. Key observations include:

- Flexible to follow ideas emergent through critical reflection of initial project work.
- Sensitive to contextual factors – i.e., situation in project context (Sudan), student experience (working in another culture).
- Relevant to a single case study.
- Allows for considering symbolic dimensions and social meaning.
- Allows for the creation of new ideas.
- Lays groundwork for further qualitative (and possibly quantitative) research.
- Original design studio inquiry not initiated as a specific research inquiry with a distinct research methodology.
- Not statistically representative (1 primary case study, and discursive [i.e., non-systematic] review of relevant discourse), so comes with a warning about uncritically applying more broadly.
- Analysis dependent upon *a priori* practices and pedagogic experience of researchers, who are present in the research.

4.2. Textual Analysis

4.2.1. Criteria

Driving this analysis was a continuing use of dialogism as a frame of reference. Examined through this lens were the following:

- Urbanism/Urban Development.
- Existing Approaches: Dialogic Planning.
- Emergent Approaches: Making.

4.2.2. Urbanism/Urban Development

A series of issues emerged in urban planning/urban development (**Table 2**).

The above raises the question of how we can ever live together^[94]?

Table 2. Critical consideration of urbanism issues.

Issue	Commentary
Urban discourse	Moved past singular representations of the city ^[46]
	Urban as a site of multiplicity ^[1,7,49,91–93]
Caveats	Wariness of multiplicity idealized through the rose-colored lens of multiculturalism, ignoring ‘the stubborn reality of difference and opacity of others’ ^[94]
	Don’t overlook complexities and contradictions intrinsic to city life ^[95]
	More than minor inconsistencies or inconvenient juxtapositions of differences.
	City as ‘site of antinomian discourses and contradictory and conflicting practices’ ^[95]
Prevailing responses to urban differences/ conflict	Can encounter aggression and antagonism ^[96]
	Contemporary critique highlights urban debates’ focus on homogenizing difference or absolute difference defined by autonomous group identities ^[97]
	Former ignores the richness the city offers through intrinsic variety ^[96]
	Latter recedes into dialectics of segregated dualities of: Global/local, empowered/disenfranchised, modern/traditional, corporate/immigrant, transitory/embedded ^[98]

4.2.3. Critique: Existing Approaches

collaborative planning attesting to its possibilities and evidencing positive outcomes. Yet significant questions have been raised (**Table 3**).
There is a considerable discourse on dialogue-based

Table 3. Dialogic planning in contested settings.

Issue	Commentary
Viability	‘Assumed...that rational discourse among stakeholders is both appropriate and achievable’ ^[99] , including the assumption that stakeholders are on relatively equal footing, which is rarely the case.
	Even when a consensus is reached, whether the outcome is truly transformative ^[99]
	Internationally renowned social facilitator Adam Kahane argues: conventional approaches – i.e., a rational solution with a linear implementation strategy and organized within a clear organizational hierarchy – don’t work, and that dialogue on its own is not enough: <i>When the parties involved in a dispute have been at odds for generations, or come from disparate cultural traditions, or where there is a history of marginalization, something more than the usual toolkit of negotiation and mediation is needed, some ‘method’ which complements but also transcends the highly rational processes typical of the communicative action model</i> ^[99] .
Proposal(s) – break the rules and be creative.	In contested settings, we often can’t change others, but what we can do is change what we are doing ^[100]
	Introduce variety into the process ^[101]
	Avoid traditional categories of negotiation ^[102]
	More creative approaches, even radical reinterpretations of the received rules ^[100,102]
Proposal(s) – act first	Divergence opens an expanded field of more innovative practices ^[103]
	Noted planner John Forester: We don’t have to learn first to then act, as in prevailing collaborative planning practice – we can act first as a means of opening dialogue ^[104]
Proposal(s) – carnivalesque	Bakhtinian discourse on carnival and carnivalesque actions of adopting other guises and through this, challenging rules (and even the self) ^[105]
Proposal(s) – mappings	
	Mappings to draw out (figuratively and literally) nuanced information, especially about places that participants might not otherwise relate through traditional dialogue.
	Mappings are understood not as mere representations of given conditions but as a method to construct a deeper understanding and meaning.
	Can form unthreatening ways of beginning a project ^[103]
Proposal(s) – games	Provide an overall picture and convey a mental map of how stakeholders understand the environment.
	Games allowing participants to try ideas for themselves, and through comparison with others, begin a dialogue ^[29,106]

Table 3. Cont.

Issue	Commentary
Proposal(s) – mappings and games	Energy of the participants is directed at the map or game itself, and not towards potential or historic adversaries ^[107]
Proposal(s) – narratives	Narratives are recognized as having common currency, as we live, dream, remember, and communicate through stories, conveying information and expressing sentiments ^[108,109]
	Narratives through film, theatre, and the written and spoken word enact and evoke—rather than merely record—embodied, materialized, and spatialized memories, and are formative in helping people make sense of their lives ^[109]
	Creative play is at the forefront of this practice, enabling the telling of narratives reflecting memories of place and imagined futures.
	Overarching narratives connect across generational, socio-cultural, and economic boundaries, coming not from pure imagination but our memories, i.e., our cultural life script ^[110]
	Narratives about the past are useful in navigating long-standing, cross-cultural disputes. Enabled is revealing of relations between seemingly disparate tales and means to navigate towards dialogic narratives. Co-authoring of imagined futures has the potential to redistribute agency for implementing change ^[111]

4.2.4. Emergent Approach: Shared Making

Emerging from our critical self-reflection was the realization of the potential of making as a means of en-

acting encounter and dialogue across difference. To test this thinking, we turned to an examination of discourses on making and its potential to prompt dialogue (Table 4).

Table 4. Process mapping of a shared making approach.

Issue	Commentary
General	Participation deepened through enabling creativity, and creativity is contagious ^[102]
	‘The capacity to make, do, or become something fresh and valuable with respect to others as well as ourselves’ ^[112]
	Multiple case studies identify shared making experiences prompt broader/deeper levels of participation ^[113]
Enabled through shared making	Learning ^[114] through the building of skills ^[115] and fostering of creativity ^[113] .
	Creativity and, in turn, making meaning ^[116] .
	Personal and social well-being, including strengthening personal and communal identity ^[114,116]
	Intercultural and intergenerational community engagement and relationships ^[117] , including through the sharing of knowledge ^[115]
Value of the place of shared making	The place itself plays a critical role – not merely as a backdrop, but as a constituent component of the making which occurs.
	Place – rendered physically and/or socially – propels collaborative learning ^[113] and nurtures problem solving ^[113]
	Forester: place intrinsic to dialogical discourses, serving as a common denominator ^[104]
	Need to think more collectively about place ^[107]
	Forester: In directly acknowledging the role of place, we ceremonialise it, presencing place in dialogical processes ^[104]
	Place as a point of reference and as a unifying force ^[104]

Table 4. Cont.

Issue	Commentary
Linking place and identity	In referencing place, intrinsically speaking about identity, interests, values ^[104,107]
	Crucial, activating, and meaningful relationships are forged between people and place, with place as subject, we relate to dialogically ^[106] so place and people mutually identify each other
	Place provides a framework for beliefs, identity, knowledge, and livelihoods that concurrently inform how we respond to, experience, and understand place ^[118]
	Strong connection to place can enable and strengthen people's willingness, confidence, sense of agency, and sense of resilience in responding to change ^[118]
	Connectivity can prompt a sense of responsibility and care for place and provide linkages of meaning across time ^[118]
Place-identity as social construction	Place is in a continual process of becoming ^[119]
	Place as an assemblage continually re-encountered, reinvented, and made anew ^[120–122]
	As a creative, dialogical process ^[106] , place is embodied in us, framing the inhabitation of place
	We in turn frame place through inhabitation—appropriating and (re)making it—and through meaning we emplace upon it ^[69,123]
	<i>Critical circularity</i> of place structuring inhabitation while our actions and emplaced meaning redefine place ^[124]
Changing place, changing ourselves	Dialogue with place evokes memories of the past, reappropriates the present, and 'plays, experiments and toys with ideas for the future' ^[125] .
	Theologian Martin Buber's identification of the genuine person enacting change by beginning with himself/herself and the possibility of a place whose transformation helps towards the transformation of the world. The essential thing is to begin' ^[126] not with the world but with the place itself
Dialogical aesthetics	<i>Unless people are given the space to create...that is being free to invent, experiment, risk, break rules and so forth, then there is little change that they will be able to do what Edward de Bono understands as 'breaking out of the established patterns in order to look at things in a different way'</i> ^[127]
	Changing place, we change people – how they look at things, understand things, and how they engage with others. Through the act of making materially, to the making of a place where encounters may occur, emergent is a complex dialogue between participants, materiality, and place that defines these encounters ^[128] .
	Tangential connection to dialogical aesthetics.
	Through a dialogic process of discourse and exchange ^[121] , an aesthetic—the making of a whole—is enabled.
	Dialogical aesthetics shares the potential to generate something multivalent, generative, and transformative ^[122]
Place of making / making of place as a place of bridging difference	Dialogic aesthetics has a general orientation towards art.
	Despite distinction, much is to be gained through recourse to dialogical aesthetics as a form of practice.
	In the act of making place (and in places of making), the potential of creative thinking is not only towards making things, but relationships with others.
	Possibility of "new common space in which 'they' can be accommodated and become part of a newly reconstituted 'we'" ^[129]
	Attributes of the place of bridging difference:
	Neutral: 'Secure, safe preserve, outside territorial claims...of the protagonist groups'
	Shared: 'Arena for proactive and deliberate exchanges across the divide...it offers, at once, recognition and inclusion of difference'
	Cosmopolitan: 'Multiple cultural identities are on display. Diversity is celebrated and interrogated within...From such cross-pollination, springs new hybridities...we are creatures of both being and becoming. We cannot be tied down to one simple designation or affiliation' ^[130]
	Through undertaking joint projects, disparate people can develop a partnership ^[104]
	Beginning with making and taking small but concrete steps, gradually other issues can come into focus ^[102]
	Concrete reality of face-to-face encounter with others through shared making exposes our own ethics for (re) consideration ^[121]

Table 4. Cont.

Issue	Commentary
Social benefits	Contact theory: we benefit by being around others, which can advance engagement with the other ^[19,40,53–58]
	Social psychology: experiencing shared reality with others plays an important role in achieving social connection ^[131]
	A common goal can attract us to participate with others ^[131]
	Shared learning ^[100,102,104,107]
Considerations	Enablers (e.g., architects, architectural educators) may not be trained in reconciliation, so suggestions of directly embracing complexity and conflict ^[100] may be beyond the scope of what we are proposing
	People may have painful histories associated with others and/or place, so great care and sensitivity are called for ^[104,107]
	Need to be wary of a sense of dialogical determinism, recognizing that dialogical placemaking is not a panacea ^[121]
Potential	Does not depend on community-wide buy-in and can start with a cluster of individuals ^[110]
	Rather than <i>a priori</i> shared understanding, dialogue can be formed in specific moments ^[121]
	Such moments can yield new patterns of shared values and acts of reciprocity. Once word gets out that reciprocity works, people are more likely to continue collaboration, reinforcing the durability of that reciprocity ^[101]
	Such affirmations attest to the possibility of dialogues across different narratives of the city ^[98]

4.3. Practical Applications

The community at the heart of the project discussed here (Tuti Island) faces significant challenges to its cultural, economic, environmental, social, and political livelihoods. These challenges exacerbate and intensify each other. Any one shift reverberates across the others. For the students working in this context, the project mirrored this reverberation, including questions of complexity, ethics, scale, and unfamiliarity. Yet the co-joined approaches taken by the community in the face of its challenges (e., the *taya* flood warning system, the *nafir* cultural tradition of mutual support) give evidence of a capacity for transformative resilience; equally, the students' capacity to co-join new knowledge and skills together with their pre-existing schema and aptitude demonstrates their own capacity for transformative resilience. For both the community and the students, this resilience is grounded in a dialogue with the other, whether another community, culture, the environment, climate, or previously unknown knowledge and skills.

This willingness to engage in dialogue with the other, so enabling transformative resilience, is central to the lessons gained in this project and is transferable to other communities and contexts. Through dialogue, people facing such intertwined, seemingly wicked problems can crit-

ically re-examine their own existing thinking and practice. This holds for an engaged citizen or a reflective educator, practitioner, or student. Present is a decolonizing intentionality; not continuing to work with the same thinking and practices that have contributed to the challenges we now face, but rather—as reflected in our pedagogy and the students' work – to begin with where the other is at and build from there.

5. Conclusions

We posit that dialogical placemaking, grounded in a critical circularity of places of making and making place, offers a valuable model to enable cross-cultural exchange. However, this possibility to date has been mostly unexplored in the literature. This is highlighted by sociologist Rob Shields' critique, challenging that 'there has been relatively little application of Bakhtin's work to urban studies or architecture'^[59]. While Shields' critique was written in 1996, our analysis of discourse evidences that while some recent discourse in planning has pursued a dialogical orientation towards making and place, what is there is limited. Moreover, while dialogic aesthetics makes a valuable contribution through art and site installations, at a larger building/neighborhood / urban scale, a knowledge gap (and hence widespread practice) remains.

A parallel gap is evidenced by the lack of discussion on thresholds and their role in acts of encounter. Much of the discourse focuses on thresholds in a formal sense, and/or as transitional zones between inside and outside^[132,133]. What we propose is a conceptualization of a threshold as: a site of friction (between difference); as a boundary between difference rendered more porous; and a site of encounter and subsequent dialogue. This poses a shift in our inherited modalities of architectural conceptualization and design, opening to re-examination and re-articulation of inherited tendencies such as legitimization/de-legitimization and the ordered/disordered.

These gaps remain to be explored. Needed is a more systematic review of published research on dialogical placemaking in tandem with cross-cultural exchange and community development, to see what this might further reveal about the potential of co-joined places of making and making place. This would include the identification and examination of case studies of (best) practice. Equally needed is a review of potential linkages between practice and pedagogy of dialogical placemaking, especially as linked to enabling cross-cultural exchange and community development. The above two tangents will, in turn, contribute to a critical understanding of dialogic space and threshold sites of encounter. We are, however, encouraged by our investigations, which evidence that a dialogical discourse grounded in a critical circularity of places of making/making place has significant potential.

But rather than as any intention to ‘give rise to authority’ or ‘promote orthodoxy’, we take inspiration from philosopher Edward Said^[134], seeing this text as an extension of our continuing exploration; in parallel, we hope that our discussion of a dialogic co-joining of making and place can provoke a dialogue towards more critically aware and community-situated praxis, one which embraces the other even across difference.

Supplementary Materials

The supplementary materials can be downloaded at <https://ojs.bilpub.com/files/CCI-690-Supplementary-Materials.zip>. File S1: Embedded Dialogic Elements. File S2: Methods. File S3: Project 1. File S4: Project 2. File S5: Project 3.

Author Contributions

The conceptualization, delivery, and analysis of the postgraduate student project underpinning this text, the emergent text on this project and its wider lessons, were generated and advanced through dialogue between the co-authors. Both authors contributed equally to the research. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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