



On Practice

2013

We have worked for the last 5 years on projects in the Philippines—an archipelago located 5,000 miles away from our studio in Brooklyn. On a map, the Philippines floats, more like a constellation than a country, just above the equator, between China to the north, Vietnam and Indonesia to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east.

The history of the Philippines has been marked by this floating geography. Chinese traders, Hindu merchants, Muslim chieftains, European missionaries all crossed its waters. The country is a collection of things that have never truly been unified: islands, tribes, dialects, ethnicities. The Filipino sensibility has evolved to work with this idea of a loose amalgam. Hybrid identities are a norm in this place. People and spaces in the Philippines feel as if they are constantly drifting apart.

To design in the Philippines requires a different idea of order. We have come to think of scatter and spread as its own kind of organization. Our plane of projection is an archipelago with fifty seven dialects and an urban population of over sixty five million people. We have replaced the usual concepts of solidity and legibility in architecture with branching, drifts and other technologies of itineracy. Our drawings seek out connections, mining the points of instability in a culture with so much room between identities.

The story of the Filipino has become our research agenda. We have studied its history, economy and explosive diaspora. Diagrams of migration, mixed breeds and successive political revolutions fill our Brooklyn studio. Our methodologies have become married to the local knowledge we have found. We think of geometry as a means to build loose structures of association between the social phenomena we observe. Our ambition is to create an architecture that transforms the physics of everyday life in this distant archipelago into unexpected cultural expressions.

As outsiders to the Philippines, we embrace foreignness as a boon. New York is a city that has built itself on the back of exiles. Being without a place has informed our idea of what cities can be. We are all slightly unmoored. Our prescription for the future of the profession is to practice in a hyperlocal style through our shared reality of exile.