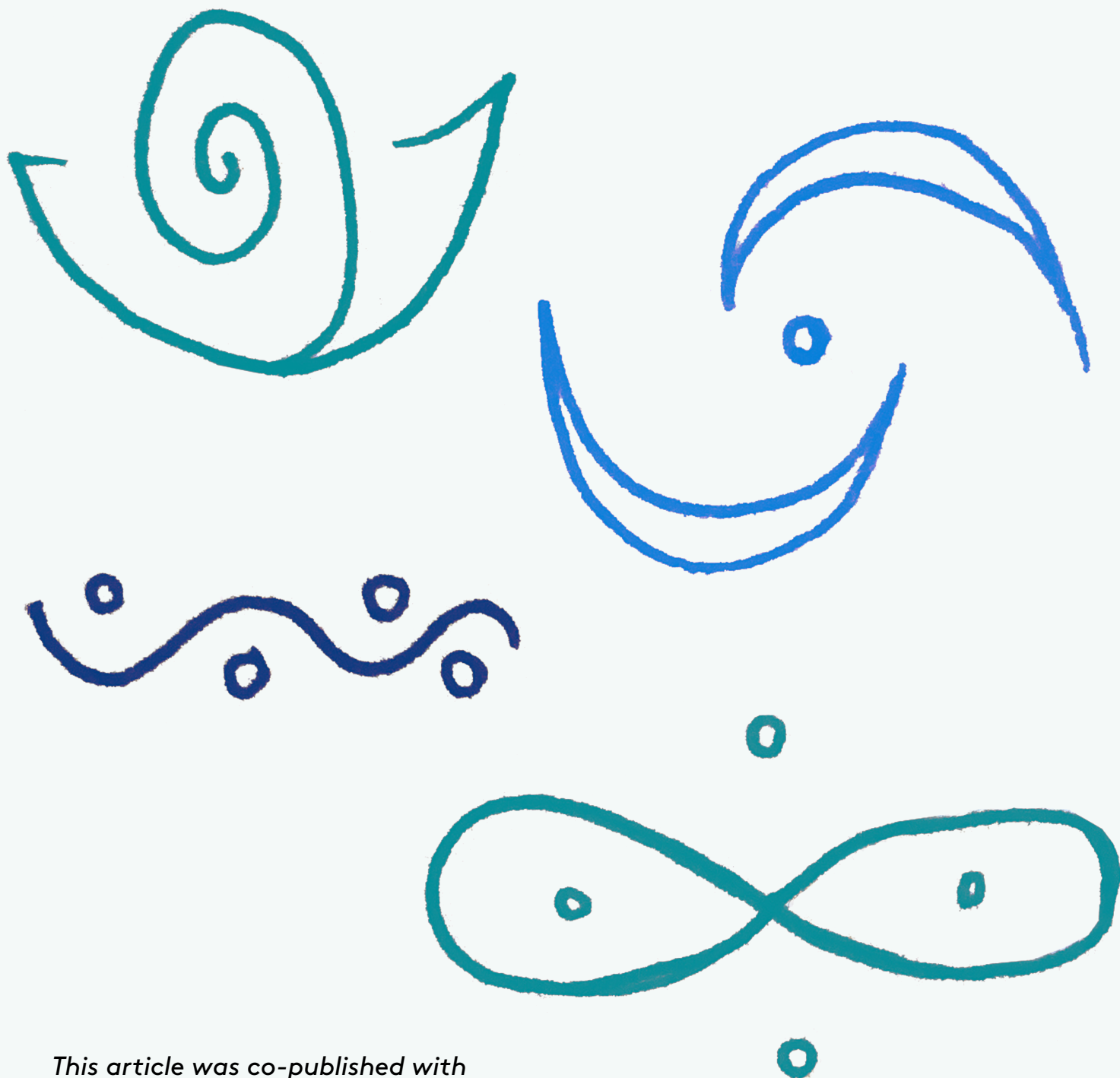


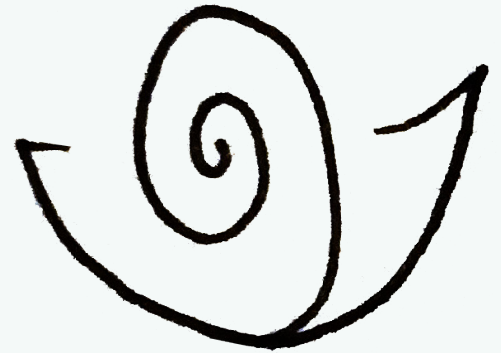
10 Codes from the [UN]Commons : : *A How-To Guide To Worldbuilding*

By Shreya Shankar



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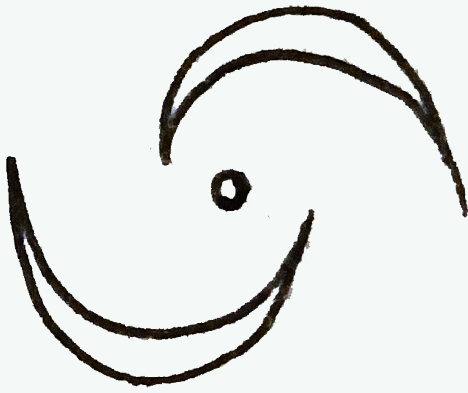
The [UN]Commoning Architectural Language symposium was a collective clearing of the eyes. It was activated by interdisciplinary pantheon of artists, architects, and educators Nyame Brown, Ife Salema Vanable, Bz Zhang, and Lonny Brooks, and facilitated by masters of ceremonies and CCA professors Uzoma Idah and Michael Washington. The panelists offered foundational teachings in world-building by sharing their own explorations bridging art and architecture towards healing and liberation. Through each participant's oeuvre, we were invited to re-member the wonder and possibility available in the work of built environment alchemy.



Nyame Brown's work forges new mythologies through a vibrant Afrosurrealist lens, offering visual narratives that honor and reclaim the Black body's relationship to space and story. Brown rooted us into a metaphysical world alive with possibility. [Code 1, 2, 3]

Here, Ife Vanable's Tall Tales of Harlem River Park Towers are right at home in interrogating the relationship between high-rises and race and class. Vanable shows us how Black perspectives hold bird's eye views of both violent systems and verdant possibilities that can only be seen from the sky. [Code 4, 6]

Lonny J Avi Brooks' accounts of Astro-Blackness take skyways interstellar. Brooks speaks into play and creativity, breaking down the metaphysics of Black creation from sound and vibration to griot-ship and game design. Brooks' stories of the ways Black communities dream and live into liberatory realities through creativity, set precedent for explorations in advanced worldbuilding and quantum timeline jumping. [Code 5, 9]



Bz Zhang opens us to the Both / And of built environment alchemy through research, architectural analysis, and ancestral excavation. Representing the many ways systems of harm, home, and healing coexist across the fabric of spacetime, Bz brings us into a layered present (as [Brandi Summers](#) puts it) that projects both past and possibility into architectural drawing. [Code 7, 8, 10]

Together, the panelists land us in the [UN]Commons ~ Where commoning is surrealized; where it evolves into worldbuilding.

I define worldbuilding as : : collective creative visualization contributing to a shared imaginary & way of being. Worldbuilding sparks collective creative action. The fulcrum of architectural language is imagination, and worldbuilding asks whose imagination and authorship we center. As a practice, worldbuilding is very much akin to the practice of commoning.

Commoning is defined as any action that activates a commons and strengthens alternatives to racial capitalism. In the land of architectural education, training in design and maintenance of a commons is surprisingly uncommon. The present moment calls on architects, educators, and built environment alchemists across worlds to root into what is [UN]Common, to form + find life-nourishing systems.

Throughout the symposium, each participant offered transmissions unlocking different dimensions of worldbuilding in practice. I've compiled these transmissions into 10 codes.



Here are 10 Codes from the [UN]Commons ::

1. Consider the connection between land, building, and body. Feel into the space, weight, it takes up. If the body was a place, where would it be? What would be built on it?
2. Create characters for the new worlds we're dreaming into. Get to know them. Work with them across different scenarios and storylines.
3. Make new mythologies. The old stories are food for new worlds.
4. Find your own surreal eyes. Wipe away the world's projections, and see in full color. Retrieve the magic embedded in all the places you thought you knew.
5. Enter the Pluriverse. Blow the door open for possibility; assume the impossible.
6. Investigate the roots. Interrogate the origin, and think critically about where each story begins.
7. The Both/And. What if all scenarios are not just possible, but present right now? Consider the many dimensions that co-exist within the present moment just beyond our perception, like colors outside the human visible spectrum, or ancestors that stand beside us.
8. Make magic in the basics. Architectural drawing conventions have more capacity for magic than architectural education might have us believe.
9. Let ancestral ways lead us. Learning from family and older generations can teach us what came before. And what came before can open our imagination to what comes next.
10. Architectural documents facilitate dialogues between timelines & dimensions. With each drawing, we dream into a future scenario ~ With each drawing, we get to renew our commitment to life-nourishing regenerative possibilities.



Tending to the imagination is critical work, especially in times of unprecedented possibility. Each of these codes can be a design prompt or a tool in our growing toolkits to surrealize commoning.

Architectural language and convention are ridden with racism, casteism, classism, settler colonialism, and ableism... Among other isms. The visual languages and cosmologies of the Afrosurreal, the ancestral, the [\[UN\]dercommons](#), give us glimpses into the possibilities available to us now. They give us syntax for systems that sustain us, and space to represent what we see.

In closing, I offer myself and each reader who made it this far a permission slip : : We are welcome to name, claim, and walk in our values. We are welcome to form + find new value systems that are in the right relationship with the earth. Our freedom dreams are welcome into reality. Let this be a green light to worldbuilders living in the new, now ~



Shreya Shankar's visual notes from the symposium

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