

What *AND* How: The limits of technological instrumentalism

*Phoebe Crisman*

Many recent projects and publications focus on the production benefits of digital technology, parametric design and rapid prototyping to the exclusion of socio-economic considerations. Even architectural practices designing humanitarian aid projects for the global South incorporate building materials and advanced technologies that far exceed the acquisition, construction and maintenance capacity of the location. *Atopia Research* is a critical practice that operates quite differently in rural sub-Saharan Africa. Their smart and sustainable work advocates for 'localized, decentralized and non-linear approaches to infrastructure design combined with direct community engagement in the management of resources and resource distribution'. Recalling *Arquitectura Nova's* politicised work that proposed a 'poetics of economy' and an 'aesthetics of poverty,' their powerful projects exemplify why the architectural discipline must think critically about who is being sheltered, why and with 'what', in addition to the 'how' of technological innovation and gratuitous form.

Biography:

Phoebe Crisman is Associate Professor of Architecture and Director of the Global Environments + Sustainability program at the University of Virginia. Her teaching and research focus on the design of sustainable relationships between specific cultures and built environments. Educated at the Harvard GSD and Carnegie Mellon, she practices with Crisman+Petrus Architects.