Re: the Recent Decision to Deny Assistant Professor Aleksandr Mergold Tenure at Cornell University

To J. Meejin Yoon, the Gale and Ira Drukier Dean of the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning,

To Professor Andrea Simitch, *Chair of Architecture* at the *College of Architecture, Art, and Planning*,

To the Faculty of the *College of Architecture*, *Art, and Planning*,

Dear Dean Yoon, Chair Simitch, and the Department of Architecture Faculty,

It has come to our attention with great dismay that Assistant Professor of Architecture Aleksandr Mergold, AIA has recently been denied tenure by Cornell University without option to appeal. We, the undersigned alumni of the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning alongside his extended network of colleagues and collaborators, believe he has earned tenure. We request that he be given the opportunity to appeal the University's decision, and that AAP Faculty and Administration advocate on his behalf.

Based on the depth of our collective experience as Professor Mergold's past and present students, colleagues and collaborators, we are in strong support of his tenure. His contributions to the school and to the development of its students are integral to Cornell Architecture's pedagogy and its standing in the field. We are deeply concerned by the impact of this decision on the future of the architecture program at Cornell University. Moreover, this decision has been made in an opaque manner despite significant support from the Department of Architecture, which undermines our trust in the University's tenure review process.

Over the past 12+ years as part of the AAP faculty, Professor Mergold has developed a scholarly body of research and design work that bridges the disciplines of architecture, art (history), landscape, archaeology, and anthropology, among others. As a practicing architect with endless curiosity for design and an unmatched ability to empower his collaborators, Professor Mergold has had a profound impact on countless Cornell Architecture students and faculty. His critical approach to sustainable design as seen in his winning international competition installation Sural Ark, playful but pointed exhibition designs like PS72 for Open House New York (organized by Droog and Diller Scofidio + Renfro), and curation of interdisciplinary events like "Spolia: Histories, Spaces, and Processes of Adaptive Reuse," have inspired a generation of Cornell Architecture students who have gone on to become passionate and proactive architects, academics, entrepreneurs, activists, community members, and changemaking citizens of the world.

The decision to deny Professor Mergold tenure—following his decade of commitment to the highest quality of interdisciplinary design practice, pedagogy, and scholarship around issues of sustainability as seen through the historical and theoretical lens of *spolia*—is a devastating loss for the department, college, and university. Professor Mergold has served a critical role within Cornell's Department of Architecture, demonstrating how the fundamentals of Cornell's architecture program prepares students to translate experimental, provocative, and progressive ideas into a variety of refined, built designs that can range in scale and span the disciplines of architecture, art, and landscape.

In recent years, the Department of Architecture has seen the retirement and passing of several faculty, while others have moved on to academic, administrative, and professional positions elsewhere. Alongside Professor Mergold, many

recent hires have brought with them technological prowess, funding relationships, and scientific research methods. The program has been strengthened by these additions to the department, resulting in a faculty cohort with diverse scholarly research and design interests who expose students to multiple ways of thinking, working, and creating. We support the program's embrace of interdisciplinary collaboration, research-based design, and expanding socially-motivated practice. Professor Mergold's work simultaneously builds on the humanistic approach of Cornell Architecture's institutional legacy, and represents the current aspirations of the program, positioning him uniquely to be a leader in both the university and the discipline of architecture. Without his voice, the unmatched design legacy of Cornell Architecture and the future of the program will both be diminished.

Professor Mergold is an outstanding instructor, mentor, thinker, and practitioner. He excels in teaching both fundamental and upper-level design studios, elective seminars, and is a celebrated and sought after thesis advisor. This is due in part to his emphasis on conceptual clarity, graphic rigor, and experimentation in the creative process, as well as his interests in the most urgent issues that the discipline of architecture is faced with. Professor Mergold has coordinated several cohorts of 50+ second-year students and faculty members in design studios focusing on issues of sustainable design. By working alongside Cornell University Sustainable Design (CUSD) and involving faculty and graduate students in the Department of Engineering, several prototypes for schools in Haiti and South Africa have been developed and proposed to local communities in these regions of the world. Professor Mergold continuously creates opportunities for his students to become active voices in academia and in practice. During the summer of 2014, he taught an 8-week design studio with B.Arch students in their second to fifth years. The unparalleled success of this experiment led to the designs of all

students involved being featured at the "BIO50: 24th Design Biennial in Ljubljana"—an international and multidisciplinary exhibition in Slovenia that has been leading discussions in design for over half a century.

Furthermore, Professor Mergold's design studios and seminars consistently deal with larger historical and political questions. Specifically, his knowledge of non-Western architectural traditions—namely Russian and Eastern European architecture—makes him completely singular among the school's faculty. For example, students in his *Design Plan* option studio series worked with stakeholders across the globe to investigate and precisely define problems that can be solved with the input of designers and architects. The second installment of its kind, Design Plan 2.0, imagined afterlives for a mid-19th century farming estate known as *Bzionkow* in Poland. Aside from exposing the class participants to Polish architects and local stakeholders, the student projects were featured prominently in "Reversing Oblivion," a documentary film about the Upper Silesian estate, that was premiered across Germany throughout 2016 and 2017.

Professor Mergold is one of the few faculty members who truly embraces an interdisciplinary approach, forming relationships with different departments and colleges across Cornell, and within the Ithaca community at large. Take for example his *Chain Works District Masterplan* done in collaboration with the landscape architects of D.I.R.T. Studio; an adaptive reuse proposal for the former Morse Chain Factory postindustrial site that overlooks Ithaca. As the College pursues a more socially-driven design approach, we believe Professor Mergold is uniquely positioned to lead the school in this direction, both locally and globally. At present, he is among the strongest voices in the school for integrating social, environmental, material, and intellectual practices of architecture, and for collaborating with other disciplines.

This is the foundation of his great popularity among students who see in his work a deeply relevant (and urgently needed) practical methodology.

A prime example of Professor Mergold's ability to communicate and collaborate with constituencies from multiple disciplines was the exhibition and symposium at Cornell's Johnson Museum of Art, titled *Unpacking the Nano: The Price of the World's Most Affordable Car*. As the Project Leader, Professor Mergold communicated, coordinated, and collaborated with a team of 15+ people which included former AAP Dean Kent Kleinman, students and faculty across the colleges of AAP, Engineering, and Asian Studies, as well as local fabricators and NANO factory managers in India. The exhibition and symposium were major successes, in great part due to Professor Mergold's determination to realize visionary and (literally) out-of-the-box ideas.

Professor Mergold has boundless enthusiasm for design. He is an active architectural practitioner with an extensive portfolio of built work and research, having won international design competitions, exhibition design commissions, and several research grants. He has also edited books like his forthcoming title, Towards an American Spolia: A Loose Inventory of Antecedents and Possibilities, which will undoubtedly lead to further interdisciplinary collaborations with notable figures and courses that take a critical position on the architect's role in the age of the Anthropocene. Importantly, Professor Mergold constantly creates opportunities for students and practitioners of other disciplines. He is not only the model of what a well-rounded architect can be—someone involved deeply in practice, research, and teaching, working between all with seamless continuity but also a design leader, one who foments, creates and facilitates critical conversations and connections with a range of audiences and fields. It is rare to find someone so committed

to teaching, building, and thinking critically about architecture as a service discipline.

The fact that so many of Professor Mergold's past and present students, colleagues and collaborators feel so strongly about his irreplaceable value to Cornell is a testament to his strengths as a professor and practitioner, and the meaningful relationships he has formed with us over the years. We believe that denying Professor Mergold tenure is a mistake and request that he, at minimum, be granted the opportunity to appeal this decision.

Sincerely, Concerned Members of the AAP Community

Spencer Lapp, AIA '09 B.Arch, Associate COOKFOX Architects + Shuping Liu, AIA '14 B.Arch, Senior Associate / SHoP Architects + Aaron Goldstein '15 B.Arch, Designer David Jaehning Architect/Cornell Teaching Associate '15-16 + Jonathan Negron '14 B.Arch Senior Design Professional + Stephanie Gitto '14 B.Arch Architect, Lab at Rockwell Group + Jackie Krasnokutskaya, AIA '14 B.Arch Project Architect, Weiss/Manfredi + Andres Romero Pompa '17 B.Arch Junior Designer, BIG + Cristina Medina-Gonzalez '17 B.Arch Designer + Maur Dessauvage '16 B.Arch PhD candidate, Columbia University + Mandy Chen '15 B.Arch Project Manager / Rockhill Management + James Slade '15 B.Arch Alumni + Lucia Marquez '17 B.Arch Designer at KPF + Gabriel Salvatierra '15 B.Arch Product Designer / Studio MAI + Ryan Carrington '15 B.Arch Project Designer, Studio Shamshiri + Arnold San '17 B.Arch Architectural Designer + Ibrahim Desooky '18 B.Arch Architectural Designer + Maggie Zou '17 M.Arch Architectural Designer, Perkins Eastman + James Hoffman '15 B.Arch + Courtney Song '10 B.Arch Experience Design Manager at Sonder + Sophie Nichols '16 M.Arch Associate/SO-IL + Sasson Rafailov '18 B.Arch MDes HPDM, Harvard Graduate School of Design + Irina Chernyakova '10 B.Arch PhD student, Columbia University + Olesya Vodenicharska '10 B.Arch Lead Architect, Studio GANG + Elena Toumayan '15 B.Arch Senior Design Professional / SOM + Todd Drucker '17 B.Arch Architect + Vincent Ahn '16 B.Arch + Thena Tak '09 B.Arch Lecturer/UBC SALA + Ben Kessler '16 B.Arch Masters Candidate, Harvard University + Suzanne Lettieri '12 M.Arch Assistant Professor + Daniel Marino '12 B.Arch Design Director - LAB at Rockwell Group + Wachira Leangtanom '17 M.Arch I Architectural Designer + Luke Erickson '15 M.Arch Registered Architect / Morris Adjmi Architects + Joshua Carrelo-Méndez '15 B. Arch Associate Designer + Lucas Greco '15 M.Arch Registered Architect / BRIBURN + Apexa Patel '15 M.Arch Ennead Architects + Siobhan Lee '15 M.Arch Domio + Hong Yeol In '15 M.Arch Norsman Architects + Niko Seong Hur '15 M.Arch HGA Architects & Engineers + Joe Nelson '14 BS Env. Eng. Cornell University Sustainable Design project director + Nick DeMaio '15 M.Arch Registered Architect / Phillip Cerrone Architect + Katie MacDonald '13 B.Arch Cofounder, After Architecture; Tennessee Architecture Fellow + Kyle Schumann '13 B.Arch

Cofounder, After Architecture; Tennessee Architecture Fellow + Catherine Breen '20 M.Arch + Renee Rust '17 B.Arch Architectural designer + Josué Pérez Campos '20 B.Arch + José Ibarra '16 B.Arch '19-'20 Urban Edge Fellow, UWM + Pamela Chueh '17 B.Arch Design Strategist at Gensler + Josué Pérez Campos '20 B.Arch + Kristina Alford '13 B.Arch Digital Design Lead at Zendesk + Brandon Choy '19 B. Arch Former Student + Adrianne Ngam '13 BA Senior Product Designer + Madeleine Eggers '19 B.Arch + Brooke Hyesoo Rho '14 B.Arch Job Captain / Gensler + Ethan Davis '17 M.Arch Associate - Mithun + Andrew Fu '15 B.Arch Associate / SO-IL + Donald Silberman '13 B.Arch Senior Associate at RAMSA + Jacob Cohen '16 M.Arch Architectural Designer, Kohn Pedersen Fox + Jose Tijerina '13 B. Arch Architect / Rockwell Group + Brian J. Hong '19 M.Arch Cornell + Mohammed Mansoor '19 M.S AAD Designer at RAMSA + Lauren Lochry '16 M.Arch Designer, Ridge House Studio + Christopher Morse '16 M.Arch Cornell + Natalie Kwee '13 B.Arch + Leroy Patterson '16 M.Arch Junior Designer, Herzog & De Meuron + Dawn Kang '12 M.Arch Architect, David Baker Architects San Francisco + Alice Huang '14 B.S. DEA Management Analyst + Daniel Correa '19 B.S. DEA Graduate + Erin Soygenis '17 B. 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DEA Associate / Ten × Ten Landscape & Urbanism + Freddo Daneshvaran '21 M.Arch grad student + Mia Ovcina '10 B.Arch + Andrew Gorzkowski, AIA '13 B.Arch Architect, Pickard Chilton + Emily Chang '15 B.Arch Architect / Studio Bondy Architecture + Sonny Meng Qi Xu '13 B.Arch Senior Designer/ Stoss Landscape Urbanism + Jing Wang '20 B.Arch Student + Christopher Battaglia '17 M.Arch Assistant Professor/ Design Innovation Fellow + Angel Almanzar '21 M.Arch Student / Cornell University + Eleanor Krause '19 M.Arch + Tanisha Sheth '19 MSAAD + Elie Boutros '18 B.Arch Architectural Designer + Junsik Oh '20 B.Arch Student + Daniel Villegas Cruz '18 B.Arch Architectural designer + Riana Tan '21 M.Arch Former student + Jeremy Bilotti '18 B.Arch Graduate Fellow, Dual Degree MS Candidate, Architecture and Computer Science, MIT + Qianqian Ye '15 Master of Landscape Architecture Fellow at Processing Foundation / Artist + Travis Nissen '18 M.Arch I Design Staff + Jenny Kwon '13 B.Arch Former student + Isidoro Michan-Guindi '15 B.Arch Principal - Isidoro Michan-Guindi + Emma Boudreau '19 M.Arch + Andrea Onorato '13 B.Arch Film Set Designer + Jahoon Kwon '21 M.Arch + Richard Nelson-Chow '15 B.Arch Architect, Herzog & de Meuron + Mary Bray Erickson '14 B.Arch Job Captain / William Duff Architects + Giffen Clark Ott '13 B.Arch Architecture and Design Consultant + Karim Daw '15 B.Arch + Sean Kim '15 B.Arch + Ariane Phipps-Morgan '10 B.Arch Designer + Darius Woo '11 B.Arch Director / Kasawoo + Constanza Cortes '12 B.Arch Strategy Consultant, World Economic Forum + Kaichun Wang '17 M.Arch I Designer + CoCo Tin '19 B.Arch Architectural Designer / Research + Ihwa Choi '20 B.Arch Former Student + Cheryl Xu '18 M.Arch Intern Architect, Robert A.M. Stern Architects + Daniel Preston '17 B.Arch Graphic Designer / KieranTimberlake + Mariya Tsvetkova '15 B.Arch Investment Associate + Anna Kuchera '18 B.Arch Designer at Robert A.M. Stern Architects + Maria Stanciu '15 B.Arch Architectural Associate + Ben Widger '11 M.Arch Senior Associate, Kennedy & Violich Architecture + Alex Zink '17 B.Arch Architect + Carly Dean '14 B.Arch Architect / Herzog & de Meuron + Jiyoon Yoo '13 B.S. DEA Design strategist at wework + Michael Jefferson '12 M.Arch Fellow / University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee + Thanh Nguyen '18 B.Arch Studio Gang Architects + Mikhail Grinwald '13 B.Arch + Helena Rong '17 B.Arch MIT Research Associate + Laura Amaya '13 B.Arch Associate Director, FSG + Jessica Levine '13 M.Arch Architect / Handel Architects + Manjinder Ruby Kaur '18 B.Arch Designer + Julia Weiss '13 M.Arch Project Manager, Dimit Architects + Ngaire Stuart Gongora '16 B.Arch Architect + Maureen O'Brien '20 M.Arch Arch. 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DEA User Researcher + Jessica Gardenhire '14 B.Arch Designer Technical III / Solomon, Cordwell & Buenz (SCB) Architects + Kai Fukunaga '14 SHA (formerly B.Arch '14) Project Manager / Jacobs Doland Beer + Alejandro Finol '19 Bachelor of Architecture Alumni + Brandon Taylor '13 URS (formerly B.Arch '14) Assistant Program Officer / Local Initiatives Support Corporation + Andrew Herington '14 B.Arch Project Manager / Matiz Architecture & Design + David Huang '00 B. Arch Designer, Apple Inc + Freddo Daneshvaran '21 M.arch grad student + Sean Wen '14 B.Arch Architect / Parsons Corporation + Austin Couch '24 B.Arch Student + Sean Steed '20 B.Arch Graduate student at the Royal College of Art + Sarah Schwartz '14 B.Arch Lead Product Designer / Stash + Felema Yemaneberhan '14 B.Arch Design Professional / HOK + Ariel Seltzer '14 B.Arch + Alberto de Salvatierra '14 B. Arch Assistant Professor and Global Studios Program Coordinator / UNLV School of Architecture + Nicolas Savvides '14 B.Arch Assistant Project Architect, Construction Project Manager / NTA & Associates + Helen Tian Formerly B.Arch '14 + Son Dang '11 M.Arch 1 Director / Sproject + Mary Fessenden Director, Cornell Cinema + Christina Zau '19 B.Arch + Lusine Sahakyan '19 + Won Ryu '17 B.Arch Junior designer + Ian Erickson Junior Designer David Jaehning Architect / Incoming MArch I Harvard GSD + Genevieve Gary '22 M.Arch Student + San Yoon '22 M.Arch Cornell AAP + Karolina Piorko '21 Architecture + Cameron Neuhoff '16 B.Arch Designer/Carpenter - Studio Ferrari Architecture + Michael Raspuzzi '16 B.Arch Director / The Knowledge Society + Maiko Sein '23 B.Arch Student + Olivia Haynie '20 B.Arch + Dana Sobhy '23 B.Arch Student + Carolina Parekh '23 B.Arch Student + Daniel Halstead '23 B.Arch + Aileene Han '20 B.Arch Student + Johann Schweig '11 B.Arch Architect + Nadiya Farrington '23 B.Arch + Efrain Perez '99 B.Arch + Mariana Bittencourt '23 B.Arch + Max Vanatta '16 B.Arch Design Education Fellow + Andrew Boghossian '23 B.Arch Student + Megan Chang '22 + Lucy Yu '19 B.Arch Design Strategist Gensler + Dr. Elissa Sampson Urban Geographer

Lecturer, Jewish Studies, Cornell University, College of Arts & Sciences + Leah Cohen '23 B. Arch student + Jessica Lee '22 M.Arch Student + Aishah Alhady '23 B.Arch Student + Lori Khatchadourian PhD Associate Professor, Cornell University + Valeri (Patti) Limansubroto '16 B.Arch Development Associate / Two Trees Management + Juliana Zalzman '23 B.Arch + Savannah Chasing Hawk '17 B.Arch + Melanie Turner '00 B.Arch Director of Residential Design, Pfau Long Architecture / Perkins and Will (SF) + Chloe Tsui '22 B.Arch Student + Remy Mermelstein '22 B.Arch Student/ESL Researcher + Nils Axen '16 B.Arch OMA Hong Kong + Mikki Heckman '18 B.Arch Architectural Designer, PGAL + Tiantian Wei '14 B.Arch Shui On Land Senior Business Strategy Manager + Allan Mezhibovsky '22 B.Arch + Andrew Sullivan '15 M.Arch Design Technology Manager + Youngjin Yi '13 M.Arch I Assistant Vice President, Design & Construction / GID Development Group + Elizabeth Saleh '14 M. Arch Architectural Associate, EH Architectur & Design + James Biber '76 B. Arch Founding Principal, Biber Architects + Turner Andrasz '23 B.Arch Student + Eunice Lee '23 B.Arch Student + David Allin '00 B.Arch Associate Principal / Diller Scofidio + Renfro + Mark Leskovec '16 M. Arch Architectural Designer, Weiss Manfredi + Philip Wilde '73 BS Biology Film Maker/Alumnus + Alex Stojković '16 B.Arch Lothrop Associates LLP Architects + Magdalena Zink '19 B.Arch + Adriana R. Pliego, AIA '08 B.Arch + Karen Shibuya '16 + Wendolin Gonzalez '21 B.Arch Cornell + Isabella Hübsch '19 B.Arch Designer / Henning Larsen + Alejandra Martinez '16 BFA in Arch + Leslie Mignin (now Mather) '11 M.Arch I Partner/Founder of Bristow Mather and Senior Designer/architect at Walgreens + Eric Schuldenfrei '99 B.Arch Head of the Department of Architecture at HKU + Walter Collins '23 B.Arch + Jimenez Lai + Alireza Shojakhani '19 M. Arch I OMA New York + Alison Nash, AIA LEED AP WELL AP CPHC '13 MArch. BFA, BA (1998). Associate, Sustainability Director / DiMella Shaffer + Javier Arbona '99 B.Arch Assistant Professor, American Studies / Design, University of California – Davis + Emony Robertson '17 Bachelor of Science Law School Student + Zachary Tyler Newton '11 M.Arch I Founder / Zachary Tyler Newton Photograph + Chrissy Fazio, AIA '11 M.Arch I Senior Architect / Ennead Architects + Adam Murfield '11 M.Arch I Lecturer / Northeastern University + Anton Dekom, AIA '11 B.Arch Architect / Neiman Taber Architects + Cristina Johnson (Marais) '12 M.Arch I Registered Architect at TMS Architects + Meri Pepanyan '19 Bachelor + Rebeca Balbin '20 B.Arch + Yilin Zhang '19 M.Arch Architectural designer + Erica Alonzo '16 B.Arch + Yimika Osunsanya '19 B.Arch Designer, Ennead Architects + Carlos Blanco '22 M.Arch I Grad Student + Seo Yun Bang '20 B.Arch + Ottavia Boletto '20 B.Arch + Meghan Mahoney '20 B.Arch Graduate + Kayzad Shroff '04 BArch and MArch Principal at SHROFFLEoN + Alex Torres '23 B.Arch + Tudor Halac '23 Architecture B'Arch + Ryland Dandreta '12 B.Arch Associate / Goldman Sachs + Alejandro Garcia '21 B.Arch Student + Erin Huang '22 Architecture Undergraduate student + Jacob Wong '22 B.Arch Student + Milo Bonacci B.Arch graphic designer + Nelson Crosby '12 B.Arch Architect + Weston Baker '11 Barch Founder of Weston Baker Creative Group, Brand Build and 15 Finches + Kyle Jenkins '11 M.Arch I + Mikail Maqsood '21 B.Arch + Frances Gregor '23 B.Arch + JQ Yang '23 B.Arch + jiacheng xu '18 M.Arch II + John Tsai '00 B. Arch + Andrea Gonzalez '15 M.Arch + Alexandre Mecattaf '19 Architecture M.Arch + Nicolas Martin '12 B.Arch Head of Retail Expansion / On Running + Austin Couch '24 B.Arch Student + Shania Bravo '23 Architecture Student + George Salinas '02 B. Arch + Olalekan Jeyifous '00 BArch Artist / Alumni + Marissa De Souter '16 B.Arch Technical Designer + Frances Gain '10 M Arch Associate Strategest + Hana Svatos-Raznjevic '15 Researcher at ICD, Uni Stuttgart + John Lai '16 B.Arch Freelancer + Alexandra Foster '17 B.Arch Project Designer - MTFA Architecture + Ani Ghazaryan + Samuel Castaneda '23 B.Arch + Je Hyeon Baek '21 B.Arch Undergrad + Sarah Schwartz '14 B. Arch Lead Product Designer + Aura Maria Jaramillo '13 B. Arch + Abram Collette '22 B. Arch + Chris Chown '17 M. Arch Architectural designer/Morris Adjmi Architects + Kyriaki Kasabalis '10 B.Arch Director Kasawoo + Allan Wexler, artist and architect + ...