EXPANDING ARCHITECTURE DESIGN AS ACTIVISM

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METROPOLIS BOOKS

By expanding the population we serve and the services we offer, designers can play a significant role in addressing the most critical issues we face in the world today.

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FOREWORD

Architecture and all the design professions are undergoing a major transformation that is both pro-active and reactive: proactive as a search for roles with greater relevance, and reactive as a response to the humanitarian and environmental crises facing the world.

Public-Interest Architecture: A Needed and Inevitable Change

THOMAS FISHER

This book provides an exceptional overview of the diverse and growing practice of community design and public-interest architecture. Some architects may consider these activities to be marginal within the field, but this form of practice promises to open up whole new areas of service for design professionals; and, given demographic and environmental trends, it may eventually become a primary career track for many people. That may sound odd to those who currently work in this area, given the occasional sense of embattlement and the number of obstacles that many of the authors in this volume have encountered. But the gap continues to grow between what millions of people need and what the current system of housing and building provides. For that reason, change is inevitable.

Consider the metaphor that Sergio Palleroni uses to describe the situation most North American architects find themselves in: "I often compare the situation of living in the United States to being in the eye of the storm. When you are standing in the eye of the storm, everything seems calm. But as you step away…you realize that this storm you're at the center of is changing the rest of the world dramatically."[1] Millions of American citizens, as well as billions of people around the world, battle the storms of inadequate services, unaffordable housing, and unsafe neighborhoods on a daily basis. It is only a matter of time before the winds of unrest and a rain of violence descend upon everyone, including those who may think their money and power can keep them permanently safe in the storm's eye.

The architectural profession reflects this dichotomy. Most architectural practice is similar to the practices of physicians and lawyers, in that professionals work mainly with clients—wealthy individuals, corporations, institutions, and governments—who can afford to pay professional fees and who receive, in exchange, highly customized responses to their specific needs. In architecture, this form of practice has led to the design and construction of many visually powerful and functionally successful buildings, but it also greatly limits the number and types of people served by the profession. As several writers in this book tell us, architects directly affect only about 2 to 5 percent of all that gets built, which hardly makes a dent in the requirement that we, as licensed professionals, attend to the public's health, safety, and welfare.

As Palleroni observes, things may seem calm now to many American clients and their architects, but the storm clouds are on the horizon—and they are rapidly approaching. If you want proof, look at the housing situation in the United States. One-fourth of all American households—some 30 million families—lack adequate housing or the funds to secure such housing, as Kathleen Dorgan and Deane Evans note in their essay, and subprime mortgage lenders have created a financial tsunami of foreclosures around the country, which have increased 90 percent since mid-2006.[2] Tighter regulation of the mortgage industry may help reduce the size of future foreclosure tidal waves, but the failure of creative financing to get more people into their own homes highlights the growing hopelessness among a substantial number of Americans, whose inflation-adjusted incomes have remained essentially flat for decades even as the cost of housing has risen faster than inflation in most areas of the country.[3] The United States is becoming divided, like many developing countries, into a small number of the super-rich and the majority, whose relatively stagnant incomes place the American dream permanently beyond their reach.[4]

1 Sergio Palleroni, "Building Sustainable Communities and Building Citizens," in this volume, 275.

2 Kathleen Dorgan and Deane Evans, "Mainstreaming Good Design in Affordable Housing," in this volume, 149; John Schoen, "Mortgage Foreclosures Rise to Record; Delinquencies Jump among Riskiest Loans; California, Nevada Hit Hard," MSNBC, June 14, 2007, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19225568/.

3 "Median Income and Housing Cost Index vs. United States," Swivel, www.swivel.com/graphs/show/1170178.

4 Roger Lowenstein, "The Inequality Conundrum," *New York Times Magazine*, June 10, 2007, 11–12, 14.

However socially and politically divisive that gap may be in the United States, it doesn't come close to the extremes of wealth and impoverishment or the depths of desperation experienced by billions of people elsewhere in the world. With the global population anticipated to increase to about 9 billion by 2050, the United Nations expects the number of people living in slums to reach 2 billion by the same date.[5] The conditions in what Mike Davis has called "a planet of slums" may seem far-off and abstract to most Americans, but such concentrations of human misery will eventually affect us all.[6] It is almost certain, for example, that a devastating disease will originate in one of these slums because of terrible sanitation, and that unsuspecting people on airplanes will spread the disease to the entire human population, rich and poor alike. We have already seen how the sense of hopelessness and anger that young people feel in such situations can lead them to embrace various kinds of extremism, providing fuel to terrorist activities that disrupt economies and undermine democracies. Add to this the prediction that as many as 200 million environmental refugees will be on the move over the next several decades because of global climate change, and we have all the makings of a human hurricane from which no one will be entirely safe.[7]

As such calamities come to our shores, there will be urgent calls to correct their causes, which will place community design and public-interest architecture at the very center of public concern. This will, in turn, transform the profession, for we may soon find that we have too many architects skilled at designing museums and mansions and too few able to work with indigent people and communities in need of basic housing, sanitation, and security. Licensure may push this change as well. Right now, we assume that architects' responsibility for public health, safety, and welfare remains largely confined to those who commission and use our buildings. But with the human storm gathering force around the world, architects may well see the definition of "architecture" expand to include the health, safety, and welfare of all people, wherever they live and whatever their ability to pay.

Changes in education and practice will follow these changes in demand and expectations. Currently, architectural education mostly prepares students to meet the building needs of relatively wealthy individuals and organizations, even though most of the growth in population and most of the need for architectural services exists among billions of impoverished people across the planet. In some ways, architectural education occupies a place similar to the one it occupied in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when schools still taught the design of classical monuments even as newly industrialized cities grew up around them. The schools changed their curriculums in response to that transformation, and a similar change will occur again in the coming decades.

The same sense of overdue change exists in the delivery of housing and other essential services. As several of the essays in this book attest, practitioners of public-interest architecture and their nonprofit clients must continually struggle against the resistance of conservative lenders, unwilling to invest in anything different from what they have funded before, and cautious regulators, reluctant to approve anything they have not seen before. This approach may make sense to those who think they can stay in the eye of the storm forever, but once the tempest arrives, we will look back at this resistance in disbelief, as we now do at those who, charged with protecting us, acted as if we were immune to international terrorism.

What might a whole new profession of public-interest architecture look like? Precedents exist in medicine and law. Although the traditional practice of architecture parallels those of medicine and law, architects do not have the benefit of an insurance system that protects patients from paying the high fees of doctors, or the contingency-

5 "World Population Will Increase by 2.5 Billion by 2050," United Nations Population Division, www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/pop952.doc.htm; "UN-HABITAT Report on Global Slums," InfoChange News and Features, Oct. 2003, www.infochangeindia.org/bookandreportsst48.jsp.

6 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006).

7 Norman Myers, "Environmental Refugees: An Emergent Security Issue," lecture, Thirteenth Economic Forum of the Organization for Security and Co-Operation, Prague, Czech Republic, May 23–27, 2005, www.osce.org/documents/eea/2005/05/14488_en.pdf.

Right
In Piyadigama, Sri Lanka, a boy takes a shower at his grandmother's home, which was destroyed by the 2004 Asian Tsunami.

based fee agreements of lawyers who get paid only if they win the case. Nor do most architects have the ongoing relationships and repeat business that many doctors have with their patients or lawyers with their clients.

In the area of public service, medicine and law have created an infrastructure within the profession that allows its practitioners to provide services to the needy, but architecture has no such infrastructure. Of course, doctors and lawyers (and architects) do pro bono work in legal aid clinics or as part of organizations like Doctors Without Borders. But medicine has spun off the field of public health, and law has created a public-defense system. These are vocations in their own right, focused on serving the needs of large numbers of people who are unable to pay market-rate fees but who are in great need of professional expertise. Architects have an important nonprofit effort, Public Architecture, doing heroic work in getting more architectural firms to donate 1 percent of their billable time to pro bono work.[8]

8 John Peterson, "Mobilizing Mainstream Professionals to Work for the Public Good," in this volume, 94–103.

But we need a career path, and possibly even a profession, of public-interest architecture, parallel to public health and public defense, that has its own educational requirements, practice models, financial support, and client base.

This career path could come into existence in a couple of different ways. A profession of public-interest architecture might emerge in partnership with public health. The latter arose out of medicine in the nineteenth century. Coincidentally, designer Frederick Law Olmsted was a major figure in the public-health movement's early history, through his leadership during the Civil War of the Sanitary Commission, which eventually became the American Red Cross. Today the lifestyle diseases arising from the sedentary habits of people in North America and the epidemic and pandemic diseases stemming from the sanitation problems of global slums have caused the public-health community to become newly interested in working with design professionals. That interest has, in turn, provided an opportunity for designers to connect with the funding sources and governmental and nonprofit organizations that have traditionally supported public health.

Because of that connection, the practice of public-interest architecture might end up having a much stronger body of research behind it, as well as a more diverse set of disciplines working with it. While the traditional design and engineering fields will continue to be a part of public-interest practice, professionals who do not normally work with architects—such as public-health physicians, social workers, sociologists, and anthropologists—might begin doing so. Public-interest architects might also have closer ties with the academy—not just with architecture programs but also with scientists and social scientists who can help study the impact of our efforts and bring their knowledge to bear on public-policy decisions that have a design component.

The recent transformation in the governmental perception of homelessness is a case in point. Once research showed that it is far more expensive for people to remain on the streets than to be housed, because of the number of police interventions and emergency room visits that the unhoused generate, local and state governments began providing the supportive housing needed to get people off the streets. A public-health model for design practice would be good not only for the many people served by it but also for the architectural profession itself, which has long suffered from a dearth of data to demonstrate the value of what we do.

Public-interest architecture might also emerge as a distinct field in the way that public defense has within law. While most public defenders have a traditional legal education, their practice differs substantially from that of private or other governmental lawyers. Public defenders are typically paid by the judicial branch of federal and state governments, either as full-time judicial employees or as members of private firms who work as assigned counsel or under contract with the public sector. This system arose from the public commitment to give every person a fair trial regardless of his or her ability to pay. Architects need to make the case—with the research to back it up—for a parallel public commitment to ensure that every person has affordable housing and access to essential services.

Those are the very goals that public housing strives to meet, although as we now know, such housing has served as a blunt instrument for handling a highly diverse set of needs. This is part of the reason that we have so many distressed public housing projects. Community design, like the public-defender system in law, has evolved a much more sophisticated set of methods to identify the needs—or more important, as Amanda Hendler-Voss and Seth Hendler-Voss argue, the assets—of people and communities, and consequently to develop a range of options for people to consider.[9] We need, in other words, a viable public process for securing housing and creating community, rather than a one-size-fits-all product like public housing.

9 Amanda Hendler-Voss and Seth Hendler-Voss, "Designing with an Asset-Based Approach," in this volume, 124–31.

While most law schools do not have a specific public-defender track, they do offer the essential civil and criminal courses needed by people going into this specialty. The same curricular components could easily be developed in architecture programs. In addition to the housing studios and the programming and environment-behavior courses that many schools offer, a track in public-interest architecture might guide students to specific courses elsewhere in the university related to working with diverse communities and dealing with issues of environmental health and safety. As with public defense, internship opportunities for students of public-interest architecture need to be established to facilitate their transition into this line of work.

The first signs of ideas like this already exist. The SEED (Social, Economic, and Environmental Design) Network has brought together individuals and organizations committed to public-interest architecture. I predict that, after a few more global storms come ashore, as they did with 9/11 and Katrina, SEED will become as central to social-justice efforts as the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program has become for environmental issues.[10]

10 Barbara B. Wilson, "The Architectural Bat-Signal," in this volume, 28–33.

Meanwhile, we have much to learn to get ready for the winds heading our way, and this volume is full of examples of what many in the profession will someday be doing as the public looks to us, along with other professional fields, to help handle the flood of misery welling up from within our own borders and converging upon us from other parts of the world. No one looks forward to such a time, but the longer we fool ourselves into thinking we will always be in the eye of the storm, the more unprepared we will be when the typhoon hits land. See this book, then, both as a storm warning and as a guide for our future preparedness.

PREFACE

By expanding the population we serve and the services we offer, designers can play a significant role in addressing the most critical issues we face in the world today.

Expanding Design Toward Greater Relevance

BRYAN BELL

Good design has the potential to benefit many more people than it currently does. Design can play a direct role in addressing critical social issues that we face. The process of creating the built environment can allow communities and individuals to improve and celebrate their lives. It can help solve their struggles by reshaping their existence.

But currently the opportunity to create a built environment is reserved only for the very few, the elite, the highest income bracket served to excess by market forces. Designers have let these market forces alone determine whom we serve, what issues we address, and the shape of all our design professions: architecture, landscape architecture, graphic design, industrial design, planning, and interior design.

How can we expand the practice of design to provide for the rest, the great number currently underserved, and to play an active role in responding to the social challenges we face in the world?

To make design more relevant is to reconsider what "design" issues are. Rejecting the limits we have defined for ourselves, we should instead assume that design can play a positive role in seeking answers to many different kinds of challenges. We have limited our potential by seeing most major human concerns as unrelated to our work.

Designers can also easily increase the number of clients that we serve. Right now there is a large contingent of potential clients that we are not reaching, and there is no competition for their projects. These clients have needs that represent the most exciting design challenges in existence. Yet the great majority of this public does not know what design is, or why they might want it, or how it could help them. It is our job to explain this, to define and communicate the value of architecture. If we do, we will all have enough work for many lifetimes.

We can use our training and talent to make much broader contributions to the world, but it will require that many of us change the way we practice architecture. In the first book I edited, *Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service through Architecture*, Roberta M. Feldman defined *activist practice* as the act of architects leaving the office, engaging a community, and seeking a need for design in that community, rather than passively waiting for clients to come to them. In another essay from that collection, Jason Pearson defined *operative practice* as any intentional, creative action—formal, programmatic, fiscal, functional, physical, social, political, or aesthetic—that achieves lasting positive change. These two notions are examples of ways we can redefine practice so as to free ourselves from our traditional, limited role and to empower ourselves to make the contributions that we believe designers can and should make.

Over the last seven years I have been trying to find designers engaged in this type of proactive practice. Through my work on *Good Deeds, Good Design*, a series of conferences called "Structures for Inclusion," and the present book, I have had the opportunity to see the work of many who are bringing design of very high quality to bear on critical social, economic, and environmental issues. Some people have called this

kind of work a movement, and I think there is enough of a critical mass to justify that claim. Ultimately, however, I prefer simply to think of it as the practice of architecture, just broader than before. Most of us doing this work do not need to decide whether we are in a movement or not. The crucial thing to remember is that these serious issues are not going away. I have been working with migrants to develop housing solutions for fifteen years now, and it is clear that there will be a need for this work for the rest of my life. That is all I need to know.

Though I may seem critical of the profession, I am actually extremely optimistic about the future of design. As society evolves let us strive for the improvement of the lives of all, not just the privileged few. Designers can play key roles as we give new forms to the diverse needs of this future.

Right
2007 Design Corps Summer Studio
Raised House for Patty Broussard, Biloxi, Mississippi. 2007–8. Rendering by James Sweeney for Design Corps

INTRO-DUCTION

Architecture is political. Architecture is powerful. The time is right for an ideological architecture that does good by being good.

An Architecture of Change

JOSÉ L. S. GÁMEZ AND SUSAN ROGERS

Hope coincides with an increasingly critical perception of the concrete conditions of reality. Society reveals itself as something unfinished, not as something inexorably given; it becomes a challenge rather than a hopeless limitation.

PAULO FREIRE, *Education for Critical Consciousness*

Powerful voices are emerging to call for an architecture of change, an architecture that matters to everyone, and these voices are being nurtured and sustained by the activist practices of designers and citizens working close to the ground. As the voices grow louder, the message is becoming increasingly clear: architecture can both do good by societal standards and be good by professional standards, and design does not have to be compromised in the process of serving the needs of others. These voices have the potential to become an immense wall of sound and a primary force shaping the discourses that define the roles of the architectural academy and the profession of architecture. The voices of change collectively call for the activation of a politicized and spatialized project that will work to counteract the forces that typically control production of and access to space. They claim that the political work of architecture is not limited to the work of building. They assert that the political can be beautiful and that architecture can be socially engaged in ways that sidestep the conflicts of ethics versus aesthetics and finance versus virtue.

The emergence of new voices from the margins calling for and acting on an architecture of change, the continued presence of established voices, and the myriad voices in between illustrate the fluidity that characterizes contemporary architectural and intellectual landscapes. The forces that influence the ideas, knowledge bases, and practices of our discipline are in constant flux. If our political engagement is to move beyond "tiny empowerments" and toward systemic change, we must find a way to move out of the cacophony of a million voices and toward the harmony of a choir that obtains its power from collectivity.[1] What is needed is an architecture of change—an architecture that moves the field beyond the design of buildings and toward the design of new processes of engagement with the political forces that shape theories, practices, academies, policies, and communities.

1 Leonie Sandercock, "Insurgent Practices: 'A Thousand Tiny Empowerments,'" in Sandercock, *Towards Cosmopolis: Planning for Multicultural Cities* (Chichester and New York: John Wiley, 1998), 129–60.

Modernism: A Promise Unfulfilled

The call for an architecture of change is not new, but it has fallen out of favor. The early modern movement possessed a clear sense of political engagement, and it envisioned broad societal change as a crucial and fundamental part of its architectural practices. What Jürgen Habermas has termed the *project of modernity* emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, a transitional period of social unrest, armed revolutions, and rapid industrialization and urbanization, all occurring as logical outcomes of Enlightenment ideals.[2] The modern movement conceived of progress and technological advancement as tools to be employed in the service of social equality. Modernist architects strove to create "universal" spaces—rational, orderly, and accessible—that would give opportunity and freedom to everyone. While the utopian ideals represented by proposals such as Charles Fourier's *Le Nouveau Monde* were not to be realized, such projects are worth recalling, even as we question the universal truths and grand narratives they espoused.

2 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), 3–15.

By the early 1900s many of the modernists' goals had been realized, aided in part by the professionalization of architecture and urban planning. In constructed form the flaws of a modernist architectural palette that is separated from utopian social ideals came clearly into view. Mainstream modernism as represented by the International Style was regarded as increasingly disconnected from the everyday social world. Modernist architecture reemerged powerfully during the 1960s as urban-renewal programs and public-housing projects remade landscapes in distinctly modernist idioms throughout the world; but by the end of the decade, the demise of the modern project was well within sight. Forces for social and political change were taking aim at modernism's evident limitations. Grand narratives were challenged by localized and unheard voices, universal truths were challenged in light of contextualized differences, and international formal styles were challenged by indigenous cultural expressions. Modernism as a movement was discarded not because of the ideals on which it was based but because of the conflicting principles by which it was realized—namely, the contradiction between the goal of social change and those of market capitalism and institutionalized power.[3] While most would agree that modernism's end has provided new opportunities, the loss of an ideological agenda has had a significant impact on the power of the profession to influence the production of space and the public realm at large.

The end of the modern movement also brought with it the end of the political project in architecture. As postmodernism stepped in with a series of variants to replace the modern paradigm, the political continued to disappear from mainstream architectural practice. This occurred despite the fact that many prominent critics of the modern project helped open discursive venues for previously unheard voices. Cultural theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard called attention to the totalization inherent in universal narratives, the falsity of external truth, and the impossibility of achieving the goals of overarching emancipatory projects. These theorists and many others pointed out the naiveté of the modern project's utopian musings, emphasizing that enlightened reasoning does not protect us from the whims of totalitarianism.

The fruits of modernity seemed to have rotted on the vine. Postmodernity opened up a space within which to question established thought, and that very questioning seemed to provide yet another new promise of emancipatory progress. A new utopianism began to emerge that questioned the construction and representation of the self and the other. Freed at last from the hegemony of modernity, society would rise up to show its intrinsic diversity. An implicit expectation of this *third space* was that it would not support universal frameworks.[4]

However, without the ability to address broad societal goals, architecture was left to focus inward. In this way the postmodern movement liberated critical thought from the confines of rationalism while continuing the liberation of architecture from politics. Postmodernism gave rise to severe contradictions between the emancipation of ideas that envisioned pluralistic power and the imprisonment of architecture within institutionalized power.

We are again in a period of rapid transition. Political, social, and economic changes have transformed the manner in which space is produced and accessed. Space has become the final frontier of capitalist expansion, and the political continues to be eviscerated from the architectural. Both modernity and postmodernity have failed to deliver on their respective emancipatory promises. Each in its own way promised to free the individual from repressive regimes, to improve our social standards, and equitably to distribute access to our social and physical landscapes.

Above
Women carry buckets of clean water back to Cité Soleil, a slum in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

3 Andy Merrifield, "David Harvey: The Geopolitics of Urbanization," in Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 133–56.

4 Discussions of "third spaces" can be found in the work of Edward Soja, Homi Bhabha, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, and bell hooks, to name a few. We are using this term loosely here to refer to the possibility of a new form of spatiality that both breaks with modernity and promises to escape the confines of postmodern critique.

5 George Baird, "'Criticality' and Its Discontents," *Harvard Design Magazine*, fall 2004/winter 2005, 16–21.

The Postpolitical Turn

The postpolitical turn, which has been emerging for some time, has surveyed the current architectural and intellectual landscape and has pronounced that we have entered a *postcritical* age.[5] The implication is that architecture's recent infatuation with critical theory has now run its course, leaving us with a pragmatist's agenda for the foreseeable future. This is a pragmatism of expedience, not the pragmatism of the philosophers, which was founded upon a critical stance toward the autonomy of theory. Philosophical pragmatism reminds us that theory is not an end in itself, and it seeks to test ideas and measure their ultimate impacts for a collective social good. This uniquely American contribution to philosophical investigation has held promise, but a postcritical orientation cuts off the one good leg of a pragmatic stance: without a critical engagement with the world around us, we are left with just another way of doing things, and little or no formal, ethical, or intellectual guidance to help us choose a path.

The postcritical is not pragmatic; it is symptomatic. It is symptomatic of a profession that has benefited from an economy that limps ever forward. It is symptomatic of an academy that has been seduced by fashionable theoretical projects, only to reproduce them in bastardized form. Not only have American architectural efforts in the last fifty years been largely aesthetic exercises, but they also have flirted only briefly with the political—and then only in symbolic form. If modernism's political project failed to journey across the Atlantic as a part of the Museum of Modern Art's famed exhibition in which Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson first exposed the North American project to European modernism, then critical theory and its potential for radical reforms have now been sent back overseas to their Continental homeland as the summer of '68 continues to fade in our collective memory.

Political blindness is not new to architecture, nor is it rare in society. To stake a political claim is to run the risk of clashing with a divergent set of cultural values and alienating potential clients, prospects that few find enjoyable. Discussions concerning the political and issues such as equitable representation in real and imagined spaces are potentially painful and are therefore frequently avoided. The political thus remains an invisible and often unspoken subtext to otherwise well-grounded discourses and practices. The

disciplinary vacuum within which architectural ideologies are often investigated further fosters a social and political blindness that a postcritical stance can only reinforce. If we adopt a position that ignores the advancements that postmodern thought and critical theory provided us—a utopian goal of equity, fruitful diversity, and a critically engaged process of cultural production—we may find ourselves indulging in a naiveté similar to that of early modernism, which promised societal change almost solely through architectural practices and failed to recognize that space and its production are controlled by the dictates of capitalism and politics.

It is important to reclaim the critical utopianism of the postmodern project and critical theory. Critical social and cultural theories can form the backbone of a revived political agenda. They can challenge both the unevenness of social landscapes and the forces that produce such landscapes by looking at the way things are in terms of the way they could or should be.[6]

We must find a way to be both unified and diverse. This is not a renewed call for all of us to just get along; this is a call that requires a fundamental rethinking of the political in a changing society. To question the political in this era is to challenge societal conditions in an age of multicultural values, identity politics, and liberal agendas largely in retreat in a post-9/11 world. Contemporary American liberalism is dominated by a notion of multiculturalism that is essentially apolitical. For this reason mainstream multiculturalism is an ideology that downplays the potential clashes within a radical cultural pluralism in favor of established models of cultural integration. Mainstream liberalism and multiculturalism seek to eliminate discussions of uneven political, social, and economic empowerment in favor of a reformulated cultural melting pot, in which everyone has ostensibly had an equal opportunity. Mainstream liberalism and multiculturalism are fundamentally antipluralist ideologies in three primary ways: they advocate an adherence to a set of core values; they reject political consciousness; and they overlook questions of political and social parity, asking us instead to turn our backs on the question of power.[7]

6 Steve Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn: Paradigm Shifts in Theory, Culture and Science* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997).

7 Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield, "Multiculturalism's Unfinished Business," in Gordon and Newfield, eds., *Mapping Multiculturalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 76–115.

8 Edward Soja and Barbara Hooper, "The Spaces that Difference Makes," in Michael Keith and Steve Pile, eds., *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1993), 183–205.

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Sunhouse built through a university-community partnership. See Steve Badanes, "Building Consensus in Design/Build Studios," in this volume, 248–55.

How to Expand Architecture

Architectural discourses and practices are now almost entirely apolitical due to the loss of a unifying agenda. For many this trend comes as no surprise, nor is it alarming; but for those who are seeking a new paradigm with the potential to create systemic change, the postcritical move in theory and practice is a phenomenon that must be countered. We need an architecture of change that will promote progressive and inclusive strategies in practice and education, strategies that have the potential to transform the production of space and to be more than a disparate set of points of action without an organized plan of attack. What is needed is an actively critical agenda that can inform the practices that lead to good design.

In order to rekindle architecture's political engagement, we must look at the forces that not only produce marginalization but also replicate it as an ongoing system of inequity.[8] Civil society is produced and reproduced through its civic, academic, and professional institutions. The academy plays a particularly important role as a filter for ideas and practices, and architectural education is no exception. Furthermore, education does not exist outside the practices and theories that form the background against which actions, ideas, and knowledge are produced. Therefore, in the task of transforming the architectural profession into a socially and politically relevant field, the academy must be considered a front-line combatant, strategizing the attack in collusion with the people on the ground who at this moment are leading the insurrection.

Experiments in architectural education have the potential to expand the field of engagement and to initiate students and faculty into the political aspects of architecture. If we begin with the foundation laid by the programs and projects featured in this book, we can create a framework for an architecture of change that returns the political to design, not selectively but completely. When we pull our collective head out of the sand, we can no longer deny the undeniable: space and its making are *political*. The return of the political to architecture does not involve designing a building but designing a process of political engagement—one by which architectural ideas, strategies, practices, and values are developed and disseminated in collaboration and contestation with greater society. This is a vision in which the only avenue through the architectural academy involves engagement with real issues affecting citizens and communities. Without such a requirement, the projects presented here will simply comprise one route available to activist students and faculty, and be vulnerable to the fluidity of currents and movements. In addition, other extant avenues will abide by and reinforce the status quo, reproducing elitism and continuing to formulate ideas and designs that serve no more than 2 percent of the population.

To support an architecture of change, a foundational theory that is based on action and provides a counterpoint to the current postcritical turn is necessary. We need a theory that is practicable and asks citizens to participate, architects to reinvent, academic administrators to rethink, and politicians to again become accountable. We need a theory that encourages designers to infiltrate city halls, statehouses, national offices, city streets, community meetings, and back rooms, as well as the offices of chancellors, developers, policy makers, and bank executives. Such a theory would examine the fragmentation in the current system of architectural education and practice—the rift where the political has been separated from the profession's aesthetic, cultural, and economic dimensions—and it would attempt to reconnect these domains. To achieve this goal such a theory would collapse the layers of politics, culture, and economics presently strewn about the landscape of architectural education in an attempt to build a unifying framework within which to capture the trajectories of change. In collapsing these layers it is imperative that we examine their impacts both independently and jointly on architectural curriculums

and pedagogy. This project therefore entails a complete reconstruction of the current system of education and practice.

Such a reconstruction would require three points of action. First, an understanding of the role of the market in realizing design should be integral to the education of an architect. We must know how to calculate and evaluate the effects of our proposals, both in terms of dollars and relative to their contributions to the spaces of our cities. Architecture should not be manifested at the expense of our communities. At the same time we also must question the tendency to blindly accept the market as a guiding principle. This uncritical acceptance is disempowering and undermines our capacity to conceive of alternatives or to define architecture differently. Instead of trying to move entirely outside of the influence of capitalism (a task nearly impossible in the twenty-first century), we need to challenge capitalism from within. We can refuse to play unquestioningly by market rules that insist on the profitability of design; we can investigate the market's spatial impact and look for ways to circumvent its negative influences. This can be accomplished through actively engaging citizens and communities in democratic design strategies and participatory architecture. Such practices refuse to conceive of architecture as a product that is designed and then turned over to the market for realization. Instead architecture should empower architects, designers, and, more important, citizens to build their own future. This requires that designers ground themselves in our diverse communities and be prepared to collaborate. The goal is to transform design from a reactive process to a proactive one, working through collaborative and dialectical relationships with citizens to imagine new possibilities, processes, and implementation strategies that challenge traditional methods and market norms.

Second, we must reconsider the power of utopian thinking as a way to form a unified front. Utopian thinking can help consolidate a movement behind a set of ideals, goals, and principles that redefine design as a mode of political and social action. This is not a nostalgic act but instead an attempt to redefine utopianism as a process and to view social and political organization as tools to help us articulate new emancipated spaces, not universal spaces. Modernist utopias failed in part because of their dependence on the state and capital for their realization. The system that utopian practices were intended to transform was in fact the same one required for their construction. As a result these spatial utopias were stripped of their broader social agendas when they became real spaces or architectural objects. We have to reconceive utopianism not so much as a practice but as a process, one that has the potential to transform both the production of space and the distribution of social and political power. This concept moves architecture beyond a solely physical practice and redefines academic and professional architecture as fields that envision alternative futures and have the means to help realize them.

Finally, as a liberated process, architecture should illustrate the value of alternative spatial practices with a plurality of aesthetic and spatial modes of civic expression that facilitate a diverse set of public realms. This requires both discourse and action. Discourse is called for to address the production of place as tied to specific positions within a social matrix of power, culture, identity, and politics. Such a discourse asks that architecture become a participatory practice, one that engages diversity of thought, action, and collectivity from both within and without. It suggests that projects in the academic studio and in practice should not be removed from the influences that shape their realization, but should instead be grounded in the processes and practices that mold our built environment and our forms of social and political organization. This is a call to act, to apply liberating spatial practices that work toward a realization of unity and diversity in our communities.

Ultimately, we have to recognize that acting in the world means taking responsibility for the consequences of those actions. By acting, we have chosen one route over an infinite number of others. The alternative is to not take any action and to accept conditions as they stand—and that is unacceptable.

Who Has Access to the Idea of Architecture?

Power is increasingly an asymmetrical component of the production of space. Developers, financial sectors, and public policy have served the purposes of powerful interests, and the architecture profession has followed behind blindly. In addition, the economic landscape has constrained the possibilities of design, particularly for those who have little access to the lending, banking, and investment industries. Prestige must be achieved through making design relevant to community practices and issues, instead of through costly work for the elite. The percentage of those able to afford architectural services must be increased, and that goal entails a growth in the number of those who have access to the *idea* of architecture.

If the relevance of architecture can be transformed through a critical engagement with the practices that shape the production of space, then the culture of architectural education (followed by practice) can also be transformed to create an economically and culturally diverse set of actors and audiences that perceive the profession as an active participant in the transformation of society. Along with the family doctor, dentist, local shopkeeper, and mail carrier, everyone would know a local architect, and they would know how she or he contributes to the greater good. Until then, the doors of the academy must be thrown open and its ivory towers infiltrated and transformed by the real issues facing our society. The academy has been far too limited in its ability to meet the needs of diverse students, citizens, and communities, and this condition will likely worsen as the resources available for higher education are reduced and the cost of a university education rises. We need a radical transformation in education if the academy is to become an accessible and effective agent of change.

Charles Moore is rumored to have said that there was nowhere in Los Angeles to have a revolution. The same is true of the contemporary university. We need a new school for a new school of thought, and this necessitates a liberated intellectual venue. The theory behind an architecture of change would free education by infiltrating and dismantling academies, informing policies, transforming architectural practices, and dispersing knowledge to and from communities and citizens: an architecture of the streets. This theory would suggest that architectural education will be elevated by being grounded in the needs and agendas of a diverse and engaged audience with the capacity to influence the production of space and build places to have a revolution—and in fact to build the revolution itself.

The foundation of architectural thought is constantly shifting. Theories are offered, accepted, disproved, and abandoned in rapid succession. Each movement reflects the political, economic, and cultural issues of the time, representing a different amalgamation of good deeds and good design, and profoundly influencing the practice and education of architecture. If we do not act now to begin a spatialized political effort and to implement an architecture of change, the polarization emerging around the globe will continue; the twenty-first century will be defined by a paradigm of access to space through division; and the tools for transforming space will become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the few.