

I'D BETTER PLANT THAT TREE TODAY

AN IDEALISM THAT BEARS THE FRUIT OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

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Community change requires three things: A *vision* of justice, an *ability* to take action, and a *commitment* to sustain your efforts, despite persistent injustice. Civil rights activist and musician Si Kahn (1995) wrote a poem during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement called "I Have Seen Freedom" that addresses the parameters of community change. Part of that poem is especially apropos to this spring season and goes like this:

*There are no easy answers
No promises, no guarantees
Sometimes not even a good long shot
But because the road is hard and long
And because as blues singer Robert Johnson said
There are "stones in our pathway"
We have no choice
Except to get started right now.
And this reminds me of a story
From my own Jewish tradition:
A very old man is sitting with a friend
In front of his house.
And he tells the friend:
"Tomorrow I'm going to plant a fig tree."
His friend looks at him and says,
"You're crazy.
A fig tree doesn't bear fruit for generations.
You'll die years before that ever happens.
Maybe your grandchildren will eat the fruit—
but not you."
The old man turns, looks at his friend and says:
"In that case,
I'd better plant the tree today."
And I remind myself, I tell myself
In another saying from Jewish tradition:
"It is not your responsibility
To finish the job;
But you are also not free
From the obligation to begin
And to do your part."
Because freedom is a "habit of resistance"
An acquired taste for saying "no" to injustice
A conditioned reflex*

*For helping others
Stand up and speak out.
Freedom is not
The safe harbor
At the end of the journey.
Freedom is the journey itself
Every day of our lives
Every step of the way (p. 120).*

Community change is about accepting the obligation to do your part to achieve a vision of justice. It is about speaking out, standing alone, taking on unpopular causes. It is about helping others by the example of your personal and professional life. I am pleased to participate in a conference held in a city that is so illustrative of the terrors and delights of human being — a conference in which architecture educators have come from around the world to speak out on the political dimensions of our work. This morning, I will do my part by sharing some thoughts on the idealism that is necessary to sustain a struggle for justice throughout one's life.

I will begin by reminding you of the social and environmental problems that refuse to go away and talk about the possible responses to these problems. I will describe an emerging worldview that requires us to think differently about communities and the professional roles our students will assume in those communities. I will show some slides of the university-based community-change projects that are underway in the United States and discuss the pedagogy that is appropriate to a more inclusive and just society. Finally, I will do my part by playing some inspirational music because throughout time and across cultures, music — and all the arts — have been a key to the sense of inner strength that the struggle for justice requires.

More than likely, those of you who are from the United States can agree on the litany of our social and environmental problems, and I suspect that those who are from other countries can agree on a similar list. Indeed, most of us wake up daily to the bad news of violence, hatred, greed, and a pervasive sense of disaffection. In the United States, we know that nearly

one quarter of all children are born into poverty, that one in five teenagers carries a weapon, that there are more persons incarcerated in the United States than in any other country, that over one million Americans are homeless. We know that barely half the population takes the trouble to vote as democratic participation and the sense that individuals can make a difference dwindles (Lappé and DuBois, 1994). As architects, we know that breath-taking natural landscapes are bulldozed every day; that they are replaced with poorly designed, energy-consuming subdivisions in which the concept of neighboring is nonexistent; that fear of the unknown and outright paranoia have resulted in the abandonment of civic life; that life now occurs in segregated, privatized realms where all sorts of goods and services are increasingly accessed via television or personal computers. The list continues — we can all recite it — but what should be the response to such dilemmas?

The pessimists among you might say that the crisis in our global society is not violence, environmental degradation, or homelessness. The pessimists might say that the crisis is really powerlessness, fear, and an absorption in individual self-interests that prevent people from coming together to articulate a common good. The idealists among you might point, instead, to an unmistakable awakening in our sense of integrity — to a quickening in democracy not as a safe harbor but rather as an active way of life. The idealists would insist that a growing number of individuals and groups *are* coming together to solve problems in their schools, workplaces, and neighborhood associations. The idealists are increasingly recognizing that the antidote to powerlessness requires not only participative decision making (Lappé and DuBois, 1994; Seabrook, 1993) but also a new way of seeing the world in a more inclusive manner (Reason, 1994).

To fully understand how and why this inclusive worldview is coming into being at this particular time, let us reflect momentarily on the evolution of the human psyche and how people's understanding of their relationship with the world around them has changed. Initially, hunter-gatherer societies were embedded in a local ecology, at one with an enchanted world of plants and animals. There was no separation between self and other. However, as societies became more complex and differentiated, humans began to strive for control over a hostile and unpredictable environment. A hierarchical order developed in which more powerful persons established primacy and mastery over less powerful persons and nature (Martin, 1992). The professions, including architecture and education, were born into this hierarchical social order and mirrored its values by establishing control over specific areas of knowledge and expertise. The professionalization of what had been everyday activities increased people's reliance on specialists while decreasing their own sense of personal efficacy (Illich, 1977). For example, in education, a few persons decided how learning would occur — who would go to which schools, what knowledge would be imparted and in what order, how success would be evaluated. Frequently, the behavior of teachers was as circumscribed as students by higher-ranking

administrators.

In the United States, the rise of the professions coincided with the appearance of the middle class, who carved out elite occupational niches that were closed to women, persons of color, the poor, and also to those who were merely rich. Higher education emerged as the protector of professional knowledge and middle-class privilege (Ehrenreich, 1990). A distinctive aspect of this period was the division of life into the various achievement tracks that were laid out in schools, corporations, the government, and the professions (Bellah et. al, 1985). These achievement tracks were reinforced by hierarchies of physical space that regulated the environmental experiences of individuals and groups according to their social status (Bledstein (1994). The communal spaces of secretaries in comparison to the private offices of executives or the redlining of African American neighborhoods in comparison to the heavy mortgaging of white neighborhoods provide two examples of the many links between access to social position and access to the physical environment.

Thus, the culture of professionalism grew out of a worldview of differentiation. It was shaped by the interests of well-educated Caucasian males who used a process of credentialing to socially and spatially keep "the other" out, while intimidating the public into acquiescing to their authority. Rituals evolved around such symbols of authority as membership in professional associations, display of honors and awards, and the use of jargon and technical devices — all intended to heighten social and economic status (Bledstein, 1978).¹

Over the years such control over people's lives has often resulted in a habit of resistance — both violent and nonviolent — that achieved many victories for specific individuals and groups. However, this resistance did not fundamentally change the social and economic order (Kahn, 1995).

Today, the profound costs of a hierarchically ordered, highly differentiated society are becoming increasingly apparent as the population expands and the wealth of some persons continues to increase while natural systems are lost and violence escalates within and between nations (Crowfoot, 1994). Oddly enough, the enormity of these interdependent costs is having the beneficial effect of encouraging people to realize that they distinct, but not separate, from other people and nature — that they are imbedded in a local environment, while also being part of a global context (Reason, 1994). In the coming years, the professions will increasingly reflect this ecological worldview by focusing on enabling and facilitating instead of unilateral control over knowledge and expertise. New collaborative professional roles will emerge so we can begin waking up to the good news of communities that are healthier, safer, more conserving, and more spiritually satisfying. Community change in this emerging era will require the ability to work in a participative manner — to share our control over knowledge, while inspiring a grassroots constituency to fundamentally change the social and economic order.

To prepare students for such roles, we educators must adopt new, more empowering pedagogical techniques. In a chapter of a recent book called *The Sex*

of *Architecture* (Weisman, 1996), Professor Leslie Kanes Weisman defines a feminist pedagogy that reflects a more inclusive worldview. According to Weisman, this new pedagogy would value and reward interdependent team problem-solving in lieu of competitive, individualistic creativity. It would require faculty to share their authority with students as well as with persons outside the university; it would connect academic knowledge with applied practice; it would involve students with persons who are different from themselves; and it would emphasize ethical values and inter-connectedness.

These ideas are not limited to feminists but are also embraced by many progressive teachers who are seeking to articulate a postmodern educational paradigm — one that is more broadly democratic, more socially just, more ecological, and more integrative across disciplines and across the varied dimensions of human existence, intellectual, social, physical, and spiritual (Huckle and Sterling, 1996). These ideas emphasize that power-sharing is not a choice but will necessarily result from the global information systems that are already limiting faculty's capacity to dictate what and how students learn. To ensure that this increasing technology is grounded in worthy personal and community values, it seems critical to emphasize the spiritual dimensions of learning. Certainly Daniel Libeskind underscored the difference spirituality can make in one's work during his keynote speech for this conference.

In the late 1940s, an economist named Leopold Kohr was the solitary advocate for the concept of human scale in communities — an idea that was popularized 25 years later by another economist Fritz Schumacher in a book called *Small Is Beautiful* (1973). Such communities would empower their residents because they would command a sense of belonging and facilitate local problem-solving. The economies of these small communities would also be local so as to plug the leaks of wealth that lead to patterns of decline. Energy efficiency would be a primary means to impede the outflow of wealth since up to 20 percent of a family's income is spent on energy, 80 percent of which leaves the locality where it is spent. Energy would be saved not only in the design of buildings but also by buying locally, marketing local products, and using local skills, thus reducing transportation and all its related costs (Seabrook, 1993).

We have yet to achieve Kohr's vision of a smaller, more participative, more self-reliant world, but the tree has been planted. As a worldview of inclusivity quickens, architects are rising to the challenge of engaging communities in a sustained conversation about how they want to live, work, play, and take care of children and the elderly. They are rising to the challenge of helping individuals set aside shortsighted self-interests and plant the trees of a sustainable future. Indeed, thousands of practical projects are being done in universities throughout the United States that exemplify an inclusive approach to community change. For example, some faculty and students are holding community design charrettes that bring local leaders together to address a local problem. They offer their expertise within a very short time frame with the intention of mobilizing the persons who can facilitate change over an extended period of time. Other

faculty and students are focusing their attention in primary and secondary schools, working with classroom teachers to bring greater excitement to learning, while also giving young people the capacity to shape their own surroundings. Still others are partnering with community-based organizations, documenting existing conditions, identifying stakeholders, then using the visualization process to generate informed debate among those stakeholders. Some partnerships result in proposals; others result in immediate interventions, including structures or landscapes that students actually install.

University-based community-change projects are sometimes characterized as community-service learning because they provide a service to the community while offering students a structured learning experience (Sutton, 1996). Such projects begin to define a new paradigm of education. They are collaborations among faculty, students, and disadvantaged persons; they provide institutional expertise to groups outside the institution; they offer students a broadened awareness of social and environmental problems; they help faculty share their authority as members of a studio team. And these experiences are often interdisciplinary, since the social and environmental challenges of our times cannot be addressed within the exclusionary boundaries of narrowly conceived disciplines (Sutton, 1993a; Sutton, 1993b).

Educators who are involved in this type of teaching propose that participative community-based processes help students acquire socially responsible leadership skills. I agree and believe that such experiences are mandatory if architecture education is to prepare students for professional roles in a more inclusive, multicultural society. Support for this position came from Lee Mitgang, who is co-author with the late Ernest L. Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation report, *Building Community* (1996). In an article in a recent *Architectural Record* (May, 1997), Mitgang writes:

The most essential challenge [to renewing architecture schools] is to change the content and culture of studios to prepare graduates to practice competently as well as to lead the profession to a broader definition of its ideals. Here, there's reason for optimism. A growing list of schools and individual faculty have lately done inspiring work in connecting studios to community concerns, and in producing meaningful research from those experiences. . . . At the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark, Professor Leslie Kanes Weisman's "service-learning studios" offer as clear an example as any of how community-oriented design studios can transform the outlook of both future architects and clients (p. 128).

To conclude, I will show a few slides that give an overview of the three types of community-change projects I mentioned earlier, namely design charrettes, K-12 design education activities, and partnerships between universities and community-based organizations. I will accompany the slides with a piece of music that summarizes my message about the idealistic commitment to justice that fundamental community change requires. I selected this

particular song by Tracy Chapman because, in addition to lyrics that express a sense hope, it uses a wonderfully simple technique of emphasizing the fourth, weak beat of a bar to create a syncopated rhythm. The song exemplifies community leadership as an unwavering capacity to inspire hope — to plant a tree — so that even weakest

members of our global society can enjoy healthier, safer, more conserving, and more spiritually satisfying communities. It confirms that the struggle for socially-just community change must occur every day of our lives, every step of the way. Tracy's song is called "Dreaming On a World."

1 Blank

1a Blank

(•)

2 Sky

(••••)

(••••)

(••••)

(••••)

3 Sky and Trees

(••••)

(••••)

(••••)

(••••)

4 Trees

(••••)

(••••)

(••••)

(••••)

___ Know I may be

5 Wishing on a Just World

(• • • •) (• • • •)
 Wishing on a World

5a Despite Social Injustice

(• • • •) (• • • •)
 ___ That may never Be , I'll keep on
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 Wishing
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 ___ No

6 I'll Keep on Wishing

(• • • •) (• • • •)
 Matter how Hopeless or

6a Despite Environmental Injustice

(• • • •) (• • • •)
 Foolish it may Seem, I'll keep on
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 Wishing
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 ___ Toss my

7. Toss Your Coins in the Fountain

(• • • •) (• • • •)
 Coins in the fountain ___ Look for

7a Place a Bet on a Design Charrete

(• • • •) (• • • •)
 Clovers in grassy lawns ___ Search for
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 Shooting stars in the ___ Cross my
 (• • • •)
 Fingers and dream, dream
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 On
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 ___ Know I may be

8 Wish on World Far from Reality

(••••) (••••)
 Dreaming of a World

8a Children Can Make New Realities

(••••) (••••)
 ___Far from reali Ty, I'll keep on
 (••••) (••••)
 Dreaming
 (••••) (••••)
 ___No

9 Always Keep on Dreaming

(••••) (••••)
 Matter how unre Listic or

9a Children Are the Best Dreamers

(••••) (••••)
 Naive it may Seem, always keep on
 (••••) (••••)
 Dreaming
 (••••) (••••)
 ___Toss your

10 Toss Your Coins in the Fountain

(••••) (••••)
 Coins in the fountain ___Look for

10a Place a Bet on Design Education

(••••) (••••)
 Clovers in grassy lawns ___Search for
 (••••) (••••)
 Shooting stars in the ___Cross your
 (••••)
 Fingers and dream, dream
 (••••) (••••)
 On
 (••••) (••••)
 ___We must always keep

11 Think on World Far from Reality

(••••) (••••)
Thinking of a World

11a Students Can Think New Realities

(••••) (••••)
____As a place of Ties, always keep on
(••••) (••••)
Thinking
(••••) (••••)

____No

12 Always Keep on Dreaming

(••••) (••••)
Matter how Hopeless or

12a Students Can Help Others Dream

(••••) (••••)
Foolish it may Seem, always keep
(••••) (••••)
Thinking
(••••) (••••)

____Toss our

13 Toss Your Coins in the Fountain

(••••) (••••)
Coins in the fountain ____Look for

13a Place a Bet on Partnerships

(••••) (••••)
Clovers in grassy lawns ____Search for
(••••) (••••)
Shooting stars in the ____Cross our
(••••) (••••)
Fingers and dream On
(••••) (••••)
(••••) (••••)
____Know I may be

14 Blank

(• • • •) (• • • •)
 Wishing

14a Plant a Tree Today

(• • • •) (• • • •)
 _____ We must always
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 Dreaming of World with eq and J
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 Thinking there could World Without P and S
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 Wishing of a World without H and H
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 Dreaming of a World where people
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 Dreaming of a World
 (• • • •) (• • • •)
 _____ Dreaming of a World

15a Blank

(•)

To achieve a world of equality and justice, one that is without poverty and sickness, without hunger and homelessness, where all people live in peace, we middle-class professionals must relinquish our historical privilege to control other people's reality. As architects and educators, we must recognize that good design requires a breadth of view about how human artifacts "fit" within an immediate locality and region. In an era where faith in government is lagging and the sense of community is being consumed by greed and narrow self-interests, the making of the physical world poses an unsurpassed occasion to act on our democratic idealism. The design and construction of the physical environment we all share — no matter how privatized it may be — can not be the sole purview of professionals, but rather must be an occasion for gathering a local community together to discover its own potential. In ecologist David Orr's (1994) view:

The process of design and construction is an opportunity for a community to deliberate over the ideas and ideals it wishes to express and how these are rendered into architectural form. What do we want our buildings to say about us? What will they say about our ecological prospects? To what large issues and causes do they direct our attention? What problems do they resolve? What

kind of human relationships do they encourage? These are not technical details but first and foremost issues of common concern that should be decided by the entire . . . community. When they are addressed as such, the design of buildings fosters civic competence and extends the idea of citizenship (p. 114).

In an inclusive global society, the creation of physical artifacts must draw from expert as well as vernacular knowledge, from professional as well as self-help practices, and from broadly-based evaluation and assessment procedures (Schneekloth and Shibley, 1995). Expert knowledge and practices can not be interred in the jargon and technical formalities that are intended to raise the prestige (and salaries) of professionals. Rather the most complex concepts must be made accessible, even to young children, and vernacular knowledge — the knowledge that people have about a particular place — must be valued and incorporated into the ongoing processes of creating and maintaining the physical environment. Philosopher Michael Polanyi (1958) refers to *personal knowledge* to describe a much wider range of human perceptions, feelings, and intellectual powers than what is considered to be *objective knowledge*, which is the type of knowledge we impart in professional schools. To do our part as educators in an inclusive global society, we

must enable students to value the personal knowledge of their future clients and engage with them in the poetics of community change.

NOTES

- ¹ In architecture, these rituals include design studio charrettes and juries, the architectural licensing exam, the architect's license and seal, AIA and FAIA lapel pins, and various medals of honor, among other devices that indicate an individual's worthiness and position within the profession.

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