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### The Right To The City: Rethinking Architecture's Social Significance

Lee Stickells

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## EDITORIAL

# THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: Rethinking Architecture's Social Significance

Practices that made brief appearances in the cities of the 1960s and 1970s are now resurfacing, after having fallen into a temporary obsolescence. Like an underground river, they continued to flow and re-emerged in new forms in unexpected places.<sup>1</sup>

Recent changes in *Architectural Theory Review's* editorial structure have been accompanied by a recasting of the journal's aims and scope.<sup>2</sup> The changes in editorial approach have accentuated the use of *review* as a verb, emphasizing the investigation of relationships between current critical issues, the legacy of past debates, and the continued reconfiguration of enduring concerns in architectural theory. Forthcoming issues will reinforce that emphasis through the effects of a formal strategy: each special issue of *ATR* will concentrate on *reviewing* the implications and legacies of a particular object – whether a text, a drawing, a building, or otherwise.

Work on this issue commenced before the new editorial stance was put in place; flowing out of an earlier exhibition and symposium – *The Right to the City* – held at the Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney in April 2011. Although the call

for papers for this issue preceded the introduction of *ATR's* new emphasis on performing review, it's pleasing to note that there are strong resonances between the exhibition, the symposium and this issue in the way that specific texts were catalysts for each – forming points of departure or contention; of revision, re-evaluation, and review. *The Right to the City* exhibition took David Harvey's widely influential 2008 essay of the same name as its provocation; in the accompanying book a number of contributions related to this essay but also returned to Henri Lefebvre and his initial conceptualisation of "the right to the city."<sup>3</sup> Consequently, a number of the essays included within this issue of *ATR* – which broadly considers an apparent resurgence in the exploration of the social in contemporary architectural culture – also take up the implications of Lefebvre's ideas.

In that way connections form between the *review* of the position of the social in architecture – the recent surge in practices that echo forms and concerns of the sixties (participation, "social architecture") – and a wider revision and recasting of social and political concerns of that period in the light of recent "global financial crisis." The quote from Mirko Zardini that opens

this editorial – taken from his introductory essay to the book *Actions: What You Can Do With the City* (2008) – points to those renewed connections. The book accompanied an exhibition at the Canadian Centre for Architecture and was co-published by SUN – a Dutch publisher specialising in architecture. It documented and analysed a host of experimental interactions with urban environments, seeking to reveal the potentials for people to positively shape their cities. That an *architectural* research centre and publisher would generate a project focused on such a variety of practices (from freegan-ing to illicit road repair) and such a variety of actors (mostly non-architects) reinforces the sense that renewed attention to participation in the production of urban space has consequences for understandings of what architecture is, what it does, and what it can be. The right to the city is a compelling concept for thinking about such phenomena, and one that has resurfaced in myriad discourses, from local urban intervention to global institutional policy; inviting further scrutiny of its architectural implications.

Coined by Lefebvre in the late sixties, “the right to the city” was originally an impassioned demand for a new and radical kind of urban politics; it is now in widespread usage, particularly in more reformist contexts.<sup>4</sup> In his 2008 essay “The Right to the City”, Harvey rearticulated Lefebvre’s central belief, arguing that “the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.”<sup>5</sup> In a very basic sense, architecture (and architects) are directly connected to the possibility for such change because buildings are key physical elements of the city and the material fabric of our everyday experiences (while urban plans and speculative architectural designs can equally change the way we think about how the city works, or should work). Architecture, we might

say, is fundamentally “in the world” and implicated in urban change. Yet Harvey gives limited attention to the role of design, or more particularly, architecture, in thinking about the potential for alternative, reconstructive visions. This special issue of *Architectural Theory Review* reflects on architecture’s capacity for transformative action; extending exploration of what the “right to the city” – and the freedom to make and remake cities for ourselves – might imply for architecture.

This consideration immediately raises issues of architecture’s agency – the social efficacy of architecture as built form, the position of the architect as designer/citizen, the power of its educational and professional structures. More specifically, within this issue, it prompts an engagement with the limitations, possibilities and genuine tensions raised in the complex contemporary intertwining of architecture, design activism and urban social movements.

### The Right to the City and Social Movements

Introducing the notion of the right to the city in 1968, Henri Lefebvre argued it “is like a cry and a demand”; and the intensity he conveyed was manifested in the May events of that year.<sup>6</sup> The creativity and experimentation in urban living that defined those upheavals offered a clear, forceful expression of Lefebvre’s contention that human beings have “[a] need for creative activity, for the *oeuvre* (not only of products and consumable material goods), of the need for information, symbolism, the imaginary and play”.<sup>7</sup> The *oeuvre* was a concept that recurred in Lefebvre’s work and stood for a more expansive understanding of the city, placing it as an unintentional and collective work of art, richly significant yet embedded in everyday life – beyond the realm of commodified space.<sup>8</sup>

Lefebvre's right to the city meant the enabling of *citadins* to participate in the use and production of urban space.<sup>9</sup> This enabling extended to all urban inhabitants, and conferred two central rights—the right to *participation* and to *appropriation*. Participation allows urban inhabitants to access and influence decisions that produce urban space. Appropriation includes the right to access, occupy and use space, and create new space that meets people's needs. In this way, the right to the city emphasized a right to the city as a whole, not simply the notion of rights within cities: "The *right to the city* cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*."<sup>10</sup> Critically, for Lefebvre, this "right to the city" manifests itself in creative terms: it is the right to participate in the perpetual creative transformation of the city, which thus becomes "the *ephemeral city*, the perpetual *oeuvre* of its inhabitants."<sup>11</sup>

Lefebvre's writing outlines a difficult, open concept; David Harvey has argued that the openness and expansiveness of his discussion "leave[s] the actual spaces of any alternative frustratingly undefined."<sup>12</sup> Certainly, Lefebvre's discussion of rights offers little in the way of a normative framework for evaluating contemporary policy-making experiments in cities. Most subsequent discussion in social theory has expanded Lefebvre's concept and interpreted the right to the city as a call "to radically rethink the social relations of capitalism, the spatial structure of the city and the assumptions of liberal democracy."<sup>13</sup> However, this has not stopped the concept being taken up as an ambiguous, unifying reformist slogan in attempts to formalise that right. Hence, "the right to the city" now links an incredibly diverse set of social movements across the world, struggling

for access to space and decisional power in cities. These initiatives span from the localised, grass-roots activism of Right to the City Alliances in the US and Europe, to the efforts of UNESCO, UN-HABITAT and international NGOs to locate the idea within a human rights framework. Some of these movements are centred on specific identities (such as ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality or homelessness), while others form around specific themes of action (such as affordable housing, access to public space, services and infrastructures, and environmental or social justice).

The right to the city has thus been absorbed as a catalyst to thought, policy and action at a range of scales; it has been codified in general programs, implemented in specific local urban policies, in world charters, global coalitions of cities and municipal statutes, and has generated numerous projects, manifestos, conferences and seminars.<sup>14</sup> As grass-roots, bottom-up claims on the city are translated at an institutional level, notions of active community appropriation and participation are gaining a certain momentum, visibility and strength. However, it is an ongoing subject of debate as to whether the institutionalisation of these claims fails to explicitly address the structural change implicit in Lefebvre's radically emancipatory conception – the challenge to existing power relations under the framework of capital-driven urbanization. For example, the *World Charter for the Right to the City* – drafted by international human rights groups at successive World Urban Forums – articulates the right as a legal instrument to reorient and strengthen existing urban processes, helping to fulfil "the social functions of the city and of property; distribution of urban income; and democratization of access to land and public services for all citizens, especially those with less economic resources and in situations of vulnerability."<sup>15</sup>

The advocacy of this new human right – moving towards its legal recognition, implementation, regulation and placement in practice – may be laudable in its own terms, but it sloughs off Lefebvre's more fugitive, yet powerful, implications. The "right to the city" for Lefebvre was not reducible to the right to better housing, lower rents and participatory budgeting in the framework of the capitalist city, but the right to a very different life in the context of a very different, just society.

### Giving it all away (Architecture, Urbanism and the Right to the City)

*who: you*

*what: change*

*where: the city*

*when: now*

*how: do it yourself!*<sup>6</sup>

One of the characteristics of urban activism in the wake of the 1960s social movements was a rejection of what the German psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich called "the inhospitality of our cities".<sup>17</sup> Protests in Western countries focused on the barren character of planned, zoned urban development, quality and cost of housing, public transport, childcare and other public services, and – importantly for this discussion – the limited opportunity to participate in their design. Demands for participatory politics thus had implications for architecture and planning – community activists and political radicals decried the authoritarian, over-determining and alienating qualities of urban planning and design.

By the early 1970s architects had begun to propose and experiment with participatory design, advocacy and self-help architecture – their strategies often aimed at transforming

professional structures and inverting traditional client-architect relationships.<sup>18</sup> One of the most well-known early manifestations is the 1969 proposal for the "Non-Plan" program, by Cedric Price, Reyner Banham, Peter Hall and Paul Barker; a proposal that called for the abolition of planning in order to allow a freedom in urban development that would emancipate urban inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> Ideas about user empowerment and participation began circulating even within mainstream journals of the profession such as *Architectural Design*.<sup>20</sup> Many of the values and strategies developed around that time recur within contemporary social movements, albeit framed by different technological, political and cultural environments.<sup>21</sup> For example, a key strand of recent urban political research has highlighted a shift in emphasis from "old" concerns over collective consumption and social reproduction to a "new" urban politics centred on issues of competitiveness and economic development.<sup>22</sup>

For architecture, urban planning and design, a particularly strong point of mobilization in this regard is the issue of participation and empowerment in processes of spatial production and design. In a discussion contextualising recent Right to the City movements and demands for inclusion – particularly their implications for architects, urban planners and designers – Margit Mayer has argued that contemporary "neoliberal" governance works through the hegemonic model of growth politics. Emerging to challenge the forms, goals and effects of corporate-led urban development, she identifies protests that "fight the commercialization of public space, the intensification of surveillance and policing of urban space, the entrepreneurial ways in which cities market themselves in global competition, and the concomitant neglect of neighbourhoods falling by the wayside."<sup>23</sup>

The agency of architecture becomes a relevant consideration because the notion of the right to the city is underpinned by an understanding that urban spaces are constantly produced on multiple registers by shifting social practices and dynamics of power and expertise. As Lefebvre famously put it: "(social) space is a (social) product."<sup>24</sup> These processes are particularly visible in spaces where urban development processes have slackened or intensified – where vacant, neglected spaces emerge, or where large-scale renewal impinges. A familiar scenario can be described; one where representations of possible urban futures are developed through the "expert" practices of built environment professionals, and government and developers mobilize these. These practices are crucial to the way in which problems are formulated and solutions provided – creating the visual and technical language that delimits public discussion, consultation and participation. Thus, a field of knowledge and discursive territory is restricted, becoming the prerogative of a limited set of organizations and individuals (architects, developers, planners, financiers, politicians). This imaginative monopoly circumscribes, and often resists, the attempts of active citizens to effectively engage and develop counter proposals; participation becomes merely an exercise in persuasion.

It is from within that unpromising context that a recent urban politics of inhabitation has emerged. A huge range of social movements, undefined self-organising groups, and cultural and social activists populates an associated landscape of contemporary urban activism; tied together by Lefebvrian notions of appropriation and participation. The concept of the right to the city has real relevance for these heterogeneous urban circumstances, and for architects. As Margaret Crawford has described it:

The question of what strategies and tactics should be used in these struggles is both open and inclusive. Lefebvre's insistence on the centrality of thought, and the key role of urban imaginaries in understanding, challenging and transforming "the urban" opens the door to a multiplicity of representations and interventions. It also empowers artists, architects and other cultural activists to become key players in defining struggles and outcomes.<sup>25</sup>

Whether taking up Lefebvre's call consciously or not, a proliferation of practices has materialised, developing imaginative and practical counter-proposals to existing dynamics of spatial production – defining, fighting for, and claiming a right to the city. This self-organisation is present in an active and identifiable set of practices, and (re)emerging in contemporary theoretical discourses of political art, social theory and urban practice.<sup>26</sup>

The approaches are not unified and have been diversely labelled; "Tactical Urbanism", "DIY Urbanism", "Guerrilla Urbanism", "User-Generated Urbanism", and "Emancipatory Practices" are just some of the neologisms conjured. The activities captured range from asserting a right to bicycle in city streets (the Critical Mass movement), protesting housing affordability by staging a "sleep-in" on the streets of Taipei's most expensive district, to "guerrilla gardening", informal businesses operating from residential garages, and the creation of "outdoor living rooms" with temporary furniture. These, and other, diverse practices have been addressed in an array of publications focused on urban "informality", unintended uses of public space, and the exploration of alternative modes of spatial production.<sup>27</sup>

Particularly relevant to this discussion, such interventions have often adopted techniques,

processes and forms that draw from, and intertwine, architecture, art and activism. Indeed, they have frequently involved design professionals directly, in all manner of roles – generative, supportive and collaborative. A range of exhibitions, public projects, books and websites has similarly explored the potential of projects expanding the capacities of architecture and design as disciplines.<sup>28</sup> The curatorial précis for one of these – the exhibition *Talking Cities* (2006) – is worth quoting in full, as it effectively sketches some recurrent strategies and aspirations in that diverse set of activity:

Talking Cities features innovative international design, architecture and spatial interventions in a trans-disciplinary exhibition and event platform. The participants stretch the boundaries of architecture and urban design and shift our perceptions of contemporary city spaces. It is a dense collage of statements and designs that exemplify the dialogue on reconfiguring and reactivating the marginal, residual and public spaces of our cities. Talking Cities investigates the fragmented conditions that make up our present day urban realities.<sup>29</sup>

Curator Hou Hanru's introduction to the *Trans(ient) City* public art project in Luxembourg (2007) – which involved architectural offices such as OMA, Périphériques and Atelier Bow Wow – reiterates that emphasis on urban interventions and revitalization. In arguing for public art as a transformative force that can regenerate urban (especially public) spaces, he suggests:

[P]ublic art today should systematically resort to collaborations with other disciplines, especially architecture and urban planning, while, on the other hand, merge [sic] itself with the day-to-day life of

urban populations. Inevitably, it becomes a process of envisioning new urban spaces and life while being totally open to the shared participation and of [sic] the people who inhabit these spaces.<sup>30</sup>

What emerges in such programs and events (and the projects produced or documented) is an emphasis on: the material organization of communicative situations, ephemeral or temporary constructions, and the modelling of alternative ways to communally inhabit the city. There is also a consistent focus on dialogical relationships – through design processes that privilege working with others – and projects characterised by small-scale forms of self-organisation (attempting to mobilise and connect inhabitants, activists and professionals). The work begun by the European Platform for Alternative Practice and Research on the City (PEPRAV) is a notable attempt to understand and develop these alternative activisms; it aims at “a collective critical enquiry into contemporary alternatives to practice and research on the city.”<sup>31</sup> The architect and artist editors of two PEPRAV publications – *Urban/Act: A Handbook for Alternative Practice*, and *Trans-Local-Act: Cultural Practices Within and Across* – explore activities that reinvent the uses and practices of traditional professional structures, ranging from “radical opposition and criticism” to “propositional acting”.<sup>32</sup> Rochus Urban Hinkel (a contributor to this issue of *ATR*) also evokes some of these slippery, trans-disciplinary modes of working in his introduction to the book *Urban Interior: Informal explorations, interventions and occupations*: “projects that range from socially engaged practices to phenomenological investigations, from ephemeral phenomena to installation based insertions, from performance based investigations to observation based enquiries, to relational participations and social appropriations.”<sup>33</sup>

The realigned understandings of architectural practice that these explorations suggest are even more clearly demonstrated by projects for the fourth International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR) in 2009: "Open City: Designing Coexistence". The Biennale, directed by Dutch architect and urbanist Kees Christiaanse, asked "how can architects and urban designers make an active and specific contribution to the promotion of social, cultural and mutually beneficial coexistence?"<sup>34</sup> The selected designers (including artists, writers, curators, geographers, planners, cinematographers and economists) were called on to explore ways that "spatial design practices" could be applied to create the conditions of an "Open City." "Situations" were explored, not related to particular programs or sites but to "socio-spatial processes."<sup>35</sup>

Very broadly, if the practices discussed so far might be placed towards one end of a spectrum, where the deployment of architectural, spatial or design intelligence occurs within fluid activist urbanisms, at the other end are more recognizably "architectural" practices that operate with socially responsible commitment. Recent books such as *Design Like You Give A Damn: Architectural Responses To Humanitarian Crises* (2006) and *Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism* (2008) describe and advocate ways in which architecture firms, community design centres, design/build programs, and service-based organisations procure, design and construct buildings for underserved and disadvantaged groups.<sup>36</sup> They connect with an established history and set of practices (from Walter Segal's self-build housing of the 1950s through to the Rural Studio program in the 1990s) and point to a resurgent interest in the deployment of architectural expertise as social service.<sup>37</sup> Probably the most high profile marker of this recent social turn was the *Small*

*Scale Big Change Exhibition*, mounted at The Museum of Modern Art in New York (3 October 2010 – 3 January 2011). Curated by Andres Lepik, the exhibition and accompanying book were focused on projects that demonstrated "a renewed belief in the social responsibility of architecture."<sup>38</sup>

Lepik characterized this belief and commitment as focused on collaboration with clients and users to create community resources. In this way, his curatorial stance stressed less tangible aspects of the chosen projects, sidestepping the aesthetic, formal unity that might have been expected (particularly at a MoMA show). Subsequently, reviews critical of the exhibition suggested it lacked cohesion, pointing to the variety of building types, scales and contexts included, as well as ambiguities in the curatorial conception of what "change" implied.<sup>39</sup> However, the most important correlations between projects appeared to lie in the processes of dialogue and community engagement each experimented with, rather than formal or typological similarities. Indeed, Lepik had argued that the featured projects "mark an important departure from the modernist ideal of the architect as mastermind who designs everything from teapots to entire metropolises."<sup>40</sup> Rather than model design solutions addressed at a unified social entity the projects were described as highly specific, offering localised, collaborative resolution.

Given this focus, a more pointed criticism was that the exhibition over-emphasised the buildings (through extensive drawings, sketchbooks and models) while offering insufficient information about the complex interplay between architects and other agents and the way that structures of participation and collaboration were formed, or the development of tactics for advocacy and engagement.<sup>41</sup> Particularly as



the latter aspects were often critical, innovative components of the exhibited projects, their articulation as mere context to the built structures tended to reinforce the conventional boundaries of architectural practice: bluntly, that social architecture is *building* for the poor.

The constellation of practices, publications, exhibitions and events discussed so far reconfirm the ceaseless fluctuation of architecture's boundaries: currents of critical research have developed participatory and collective approaches; a growing intersection with the fields of performance and contemporary art practices has generated strands of creative urban intervention; and engagement with socio-spatial disciplines such as urban studies and cultural geography has produced new tactics of visualisation and mapping; in parallel, the socially transformative potential of built projects has continued to be explored and developed. The significance for this issue's concerns is the manner in which all this activity contributes to positing architectural practice in an expanded field – reimagining and testing the potential for architects to effectively engage with processes of spatial production. Further, that potential is being identified in approaches that confront architecture with its entanglement in political, social, economic and cultural process, rather than evermore forcefully inscribing limits and boundaries to its conception and production.

This means acknowledging spatial production as a shared enterprise, which finally returns us to Lefebvre, whose “right to the city” is the right for everyone to participate in the perpetual creative transformation of the city. Thus architecture's role might be reimagined as the empowerment of its collective construction, and a forceful articulation of this perspec-

tive can be seen in the *Spatial Agency* project, directed by Jeremy Till, Tatjana Schneider and Nishat Awan.<sup>42</sup> The book, subtitled “other ways of doing architecture”, and the accompanying online database, set out an alternative approach to conceiving of architectural practice, focused on its collaborative, contingent properties. The authors hold Lefebvre's ideas as key, particularly his positioning of spatial production in a broader social context – countering its assumed position as the domain of specialist professions such as architecture.<sup>43</sup> They especially seek to reframe conventional understandings of the architect as expert author, the foregrounding of the building as the ultimate goal of architectural processes, and the limited treatment of architecture's social efficacy. Repositioning the possibilities of architectural practice as “spatial agency”, the book and website offer a large collection of examples of this expanded field: “from activism to pedagogy, publications to networking, making stuff to making policy – all done in the name of empowering others.”<sup>44</sup>

This push to rethink and deepen architecture's capacity for transformative action raises a number of issues about architecture's agency, the position of the architect as both designer and citizen, the power of educational and professional structures and the social efficacy of architecture as built form. It especially prompts an engagement with the limitations, possibilities and genuine tensions raised in the complex intertwining of architecture, activism and social movements: what are the dangers of alternative practice?

### Lines in the Sand

Awan, Schneider and Till offer spatial agency as a “more expansive field of opportunities in

which architects and non-architects can operate". In doing so they raise one of the significant issues for alternative practices – the demarcation of architecture's specific disciplinary knowledge and domain. In a recent essay on spatial agency, Schneider and Till argue that to challenge the norms of professional structures and behaviour is not to dismiss the importance of professional knowledge, but that such knowledge should be "set within other ways of acting".<sup>45</sup> They admit that the methodological fluidity of spatial agency (including many of the practices described above) introduces ambiguity. However, they argue for a disposition where "the lack of a predetermined future is seen as an opportunity and not a threat."<sup>46</sup>

Debate about architecture's disciplinary autonomy has a long history, but like the socio-economic turbulence of the late 1960s and 1970s (which Tahl Kaminer has argued precipitated a shift to autonomous "paper" practices), the financial crises experienced globally since the late 2000s have reignited such examination.<sup>47</sup> Concurrent with the porous sensibility of spatial agency is an anxiety about potential dissolution.<sup>48</sup> While Urban Think Tank (featured in *Small Scale Big Change*) has argued that the emphasis of architectural education and practice must shift from "form-oriented to process-driven", Pier Vittorio Aureli has reaffirmed the making of form as the "real and effective necessary program of architecture".<sup>49</sup>

Another enduring field of tension exists around the notion of participation; for any practice that calls for more involvement by people in the making of their environment, it is a central concern. Architecture's engagement with participation has a history dominated by questions of power, control and the legitimacy of architecture. One critical issue is authenticity, an issue clearly elucidated by Sherry Arnstein's

1969 essay "Ladder of Participation" (which criticised placation and tokenism in consultative decision making)<sup>50</sup> and Johann Albrecht's 1988 essay "Towards a Theory of Participation in Architecture" which argued a need to develop more effective methods in architecture.<sup>51</sup> For Arnstein, Albrecht, and many others, "real" participation was a must. The issue has been subjected to concerted scrutiny again recently in the edited volume *Architecture and Participation* (2005), which looked at the politics, histories and practices of participation.<sup>52</sup> Within that volume, Teresa Hoskyns, with reference to Lefebvre's "centre of decision making", reaffirmed a role for architecture in affording a truly participatory democracy – in reconnecting people to the *polis* both physically and politically. In doing so, she made a critical differentiation between the terms *user* and *citizen* and cautioned against impoverished participatory processes:

If architects and planners are thinking about real participation, they should be thinking both spatially and politically about developing the role of people as citizens, instead of as users, and about increasing, not decreasing, the public realm.<sup>53</sup>

However, equally problematic is the essentialising of participatory processes. Now ubiquitous in planning processes, consultation models founded on romantic notions of inclusion, negotiation and democratic decision-making can also mask ineffectiveness and mere political legitimisation. Markus Miessen is one provocative critic of such instrumentalised practices, who instead calls for a format of conflictual participation—where the spatial practitioner acts as an enabler, a facilitator of interaction who stimulates alternative debates and speculations.<sup>54</sup>

A final area of contention to note here (without in any way exhausting the possible

subjects of discussion) is the ambivalent status of many anti-disciplinary spatial practices and tactical urbanisms. Often operating in canny, improvised ways, in order to invert the supposed power dynamics of particular urban environments ("tactically" as Michel de Certeau described in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*), they are exposed to recuperation and accusations of broader ineffectiveness. These criticisms follow a number of lines. One is a suggestion that they lack any efficacy; for instance, debating the concept of "everyday urbanism" with Margaret Crawford, Michael Speaks described its effects as "too much bottom, not enough up."<sup>55</sup> Other tensions lie in the evaluation of impact; Mimi Zeiger has charted the difficulties in evaluating the political purchase of a range of urban interventions involving architects (noting, for instance, the indeterminate relationship between political "authenticity" and genuine effect).<sup>56</sup> Martha Rosler makes the point even more critically in a related discussion of recent "social practice" in art; she decries the lack of sustained commitment in many such practices and the way they often render invisible the longer term work of existing local communities (as well as aiding the transformation of urban space into highly valuable real estate).<sup>57</sup>

The essays in this issue address a number of these issues, and they do this in relation to a range of the practices touched on above, such as citizen-led urbanisms, critical spatial practices and social architecture. Paul Jones and Kenton Card subject the latter to close examination in "Constructing 'Social Architecture': The Politics of Representing Practice." They adopt Actor-Network Theory and conversation analysis in order to discern some implications of the designation "social architecture", and to argue against the use of the category "as a kind of a 'black box' into which disparate types of

practice are placed never to be interrogated further."<sup>58</sup> Their aim is to deconstruct ambiguous, often romanticised, representations of these practices. At the same time they scrutinise theories of "alternative" architecture and critiques of dominant architectural modes, arguing that they need to be understood relationally – especially requiring engagement with the ways in which these resistances and unconventional propositions bear traces of the established models of architectural production they seek to reject.

Continuing this line of scrutiny, Lara Schrijver offers a rethinking of the Situationists' legacy, noting that many current activist urban practices make reference to Situationist thought.<sup>59</sup> Schrijver argues that, while the Situationists did emphasise praxis, a gap between totalizing theory (focused on the logic of capitalism) and individualist praxis was, and continues to be, problematic in the evaluation of Situationist-inspired urban activism. Her essay "Utopia and/or Spectacle? Rethinking Urban Interventions Through the Legacy of Modernism and the Situationist City," suggests that alternate forms of activism, though founded on situationist practices, also rethink this legacy of resistance and negation in favour of exploring alternatives, even if that means running the risk of becoming part of the system.

The often-ephemeral condition of such practices, focused on generating a more engaged and active relationship between people, and between people and public spaces is the subject of a lively conversation between Rochus Urban Hinkel and Mick Douglas. In their contribution "Atmospheres and Occasions of Informal Urban Practice" they reflect on their professional and academic experiences in exploring what they term "social atmospherizing." Their dialogue explores the

potential role of the creative public practitioner; and unravels both their conflicting and shared desires for how informal creative practices might operate, while also teasing out how creative criticality might be more publicly valued and lived by urban citizens.

Lee Pugalís and Bob Giddings' essay, "A Renewed Right to Urban Life: A Twenty-First Century Engagement with Lefebvre's Initial 'Cry'", attends to that subject of citizens' spatial tactics. They argue that Lefebvre's right to the city has definite contemporary relevance, extending to spatial practitioners such as architects. They explore "the neoliberal imperative to conquer space, grappling with the issue of social justice as a means to decipher *who* (re)produces the city and in what particular ways."<sup>60</sup> They argue that some specific counter-practices, framed as "little victories", offer insights into alternative methods of production, and pose some unsettling questions for architects.

The final essay in this issue provides a cautionary counterpoint, raising questions about the Euro-centric traditions that often guide not only official processes of spatial production but also their counter-practices. Janet McGaw, Anoma Pieris and Emily Potter's "Indigenous Place-making in the City: Dispossession, Occupations and Strategies" considers some key issues that have arisen in the design and development process for a Victorian Indigenous Cultural Knowledge and Education Centre. Tracking these, they argue that contemporary architecture continues to be shaped by the dominant place-making culture of the Australian settler-colonial. Subsequently, the cultures of place-making directing the policy, architecture, planning, and inhabitation of contemporary Australian cities are problematically grounded in Euro-centric traditions.

Sometimes, despite intention, these reinscribe a hierarchy of spatial occupations and political purchase. How, they ask in this context, can a fundamentally "other" Indigenous place conception claim a centre?

This issue also features a number of book reviews that, taken collectively, emphasise the contemporary potency of the issues discussed above, as well as reinforcing that they are not without precedent. The books range from Jessica Ellen Sewell's exploration of the lives of women in turn-of-the-century San Francisco, and how women's increasing use of the city played a critical role in the campaign for women's suffrage (*Women and the Everyday City*); to Łukasz Stanek's excavation of Henri Lefebvre's contributions to French architecture culture in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly his identification of architecture's potential for research about society's possible futures beyond Fordism (*Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*). If we are currently faced with pressing claims to rethink what urbanism entails, then what the reviewers consistently recognise in these books is a timely call to consider the historical contexts for such agitation and revision.

To conclude, all the discussion within this issue consistently declares architecture's position as an exercise of power, not simply forced from outside but present in its own disciplinary and professional structures and procedures. The significance of architecture, then, lies not in its autonomy but actually in its social dependence, in its thoroughly implicated status. A challenge for architectural theory becomes the development of models for appraising the ways that architecture contributes to structuring the power dynamics of social space. This implies architecture's dependency as a positive

expansion of its possibilities, rather than a weakness.<sup>61</sup> It is a powerful inversion; as Bruce Robbins has suggested:

Nothing could be less autonomous than architecture: could we, I wonder, read this as a kind of boast, a claim to social significance registered not by our degree of proud separation, as all the clichés have it, but on the contrary, by our

degree of social dependence, dependence on the social forces that for better or worse are setting the limits and the agendas? If so, we would have to reinterpret the politics of the charge that architects and other professionals have typically wanted, above all, to hold themselves apart from laymen.<sup>62</sup>

LEE STICKELLS

### Notes

1. Mirko Zardini, "A New Urban Takeover" in Giovanna Borasi and Mirko Zardini (eds), *Actions: What You Can Do With the City*, Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture (co-published by SUN), 2008, 15.
2. See *Architectural Theory Review* 16, no.2 (2011) for a full explanation of the new editorial vision. Volume 17 of ATR will see the introduction of a new Editorial Advisory Board alongside the recently appointed editors and reconfigured Editorial Committee.
3. See, for example, Margaret Crawford, "Rethinking 'Rights', Rethinking 'Cities': a response to David Harvey's 'The Right to the City'", in Zanny Begg and Lee Stickells (eds), *The Right to the City*, Sydney: Tin Sheds Gallery, 2011, 33–36.
4. Henri Lefebvre, "Right to the City" in Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (eds), *Writings on Cities*, New York: Blackwell, 1996, 63–181.
5. Harvey, "The Right to the City", 23.
6. Lefebvre, "Right to the City", 158.
7. Lefebvre, "Right to the City", 147.
8. Henri Lefebvre, "The Specificity of the City" in Kofman and Lebas (eds), *Writings on Cities*, 101.
9. Instead of *citizens*, Lefebvre refers to those who have a right to the city as *citadins* – a term that combines the notion of citizen with that of denizen/ inhabitant (and the right to the city empowers urban *inhabitants*). Its enfranchising qualities differ from the more abstract "citizenship", associated primarily with membership in a national political community. Lefebvre argues that the right to the city "should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (*citadin*) and user of multiple services." See discussion of this in Mark Purcell, "Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant", *GeoJournal*, 58 (2002), 102.
10. Lefebvre, "Right to the City", 158.
11. Lefebvre, "Right to the City", 172.
12. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000, 183.
13. Mark Purcell, *Recapturing Democracy: Neoliberalization and the Struggle for Alternative Urban Futures*, London: Routledge, 2008, 92.
14. Two examples of the many programs and institutions that reflect, either explicitly or implicitly, the paradigms of the "Right to the City" are: The Right To The City Alliance, in the U.S. and Europe (an advocacy group representing a widespread network of local community organizations); UN-HABITAT and UNESCO, who work closely in promoting the "Right to the City" at the international level, particularly through supporting inclusive forms of urban governance.
15. Preamble to *World Charter on the Right to the City*, Elaborated at the Social

- Forum of the Americas (Quito, Ecuador – July 2004) & the World Urban Forum (Barcelona, Spain – September 2004), <http://www.urbanreinventors.net/3/wsf.pdf> (accessed 4 February 2011).
16. Ruth Keffer, introductory text for *DIY Urbanism* exhibition at San Francisco Planning + Urban Research Association (SPUR), quoted in Mimi Zeiger, "The Interventionist's Toolkit, Part 1", *Places*, 2011, <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/the-interventionists-toolkit-part-1/24308/> (accessed 3 February 2011).
  17. Mitscherlich quoted in Margit Mayer, *Civic City Cahier 1: Social Movements in the (Post-)Neoliberal City*, London: Bedford Press, 2010, 19.
  18. A significant early collection of analyses and descriptions of architects as social change agents can be found in C. Richard Hatch (ed), *The Scope of Social Architecture*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984.
  19. Paul Barker, Reyner Banham, Peter Hall and Cedric Price, "Non-Plan: an experiment in freedom", *New Society* 13, no. 338, 20 March 1969, 435–443.
  20. See, for example *Architectural Design*, no. 3 (1976), which features articles from Henry Moss ("Professional Backlash") and John Turner ("Housing by People").
  21. Bryn Jones and Mike O'Donnell (eds), *Sixties Radicalism and Social Movement Activism: Retreat Or Resurgence?* New York: Anthem Press, 2010. The book's contributions assess resonances between the radical/libertarian emphasis on civil society "freedoms" in 1960s cultural radicalism and contemporary political global human rights movements. A general conclusion is that, in some senses, the sixties live on today in discursive and political themes.
  22. See, for example: Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007; Bob Jessop, "Globalization, Entrepreneurial Cities and the Social Economy", in P. Hamel, H. Lustiger-Thaler, and M. Mayer (eds), *Urban Movements in a Globalizing World*, New York: Routledge, 2000, 81–101.
  23. Mayer, *Civic City Cahier 1: Social Movements in the (Post-)Neoliberal City*, 26–27.
  24. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992, 26.
  25. Crawford, "Rethinking 'Rights', Rethinking 'Cities'", 36.
  26. One mapping can be found in Helge Mooshammer and Peter Mörtenböck, *Networked Cultures: Parallel Architectures and the Politics of Space*, Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2008. The book and DVD investigate urban network processes, spaces of geocultural crises, and forms of cultural participation and self-determination in Europe.
  27. See, for example: John Leighton Chase, Margaret Crawford and John Kaliski (eds), *Everyday Urbanism*, New York: The Monacelli Press, 2008 (expanded edition); Karen Franck and Quentin Stevens (eds), *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life*, London: Routledge, 2006; Loretta Lees (ed.), *The Emancipatory City? Paradoxes and Possibilities*, London: Sage Publications, 2004; Sophie Watson, *City Publics: The (Dis)enchantments of Urban Encounters*, London: Routledge, 2006; Jeffrey Hou (ed.), *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*, London: Routledge, 2010; Brett Bloom and Ava Bromberg (eds), *Belltown Paradise/ Making Their Own Plans*, Chicago: Whitewalls, Inc. 2004; Temporary Services, *Public Phenomena*, Chicago: Half Letter Press LLC, 2008
  28. In addition to the aforementioned exhibitions and their accompanying publications (*Actions: What You Can Do With the City, The Right to the City* and *DIY Urbanism*), also of note are: *Trans(ient) City*, a city-wide program of urban installations supported by the City of Luxembourg in 2007; *Unplanned: Research and Experiments at the Urban Scale*, an exhibition curated by Mitch McEwan at Superfront Gallery, California in 2010; *just space(s)*, an exhibition and program of events organised by Ava Bromberg and Nicholas Brown at LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) in 2007; *Designcity: Design for Urban Space and the Design City Discussion*, Berlin: Transform-Berlin e.V. (2006) (published on

- the occasion of Designmai 2006, Berlin); Rochus Urban Hinkel (ed.), *Urban Interior: Informal Explorations, interventions and occupations*, Baunach: Spurbuchverlag, 2011; Tim Rieniets, Jennifer Sigler and Kees Christiaanse (eds), *Open City: Designing Coexistence*, Amsterdam: SUN, 2009; Bartolomeo Pietromarchi (ed.), *The (un)common place: art, public space and urban aesthetics in Europe*, Barcelona: Fondazione Adriano Olivetti; Actar, 2005.
29. Francesca Ferguson & urban drift (eds), *Talking Cities: The Micropolitics of Urban Space*, Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006, 2.
  30. Hou Hanru, "Trans(ient) City: A Public Art Project for Luxembourg 2007" in *Trans(ient) City*, Barcelona: Books on the Move, 2008, 8.
  31. aaa-PEPRAV (eds), *Urban/Act: A handbook for alternative practice*, Paris: aaa-PEPRAV, 2007, 13. European Platform for Alternative Practice and Research on the City (PEPRAV) is a project partially funded by the CULTURE 2000 program of the European Union. It initially ran as a partnership between atelier d'architecture autogérée (aaa, Paris), the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, Recyclart (Brussels) and metroZones (Berlin), between September 2006 and September 2007. For more on PEPRAV's work see: [www.peprav.net](http://www.peprav.net)
  32. Doina Petrescu, Constantin Petcou and Nishat Awan (eds), *Trans-Local-Act: Cultural Practices Within and Across*, Paris: aaa-PEPRAV, 2010.
  33. Rochus Urban Hinkel (ed.), *Urban Interior: Informal Explorations, interventions and occupations*, 6.
  34. Rieniets, Sigler and Christiaanse (eds), *Open City: Designing Coexistence*, 12.
  35. Rieniets, Sigler and Christiaanse (eds), *Open City: Designing Coexistence*, 209.
  36. Kate Stohr and Cameron Sinclair (eds), *Design Like You Give A Damn: Architectural Responses To Humanitarian Crises*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2006; Bryan Bell and Katie Wakeford (eds), *Expanding Architecture: design as activism*, New York: Metropolis Books, 2008.
  37. See, for instance, the organisations Architecture for Humanity (established in 1999), Architects without Frontiers (also established in 1999) and Public Architecture (established in 2002, especially noted for an initiative to professionalize pro bono work).
  38. Andres Lepik, *Small scale, big change: new architectures of social engagement*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010, rear cover.
  39. Quilian Riano, "Relearning the Social: Architecture and Change", *Places Online* 2010, <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/relearning-the-social-architecture-and-change/19128/> (accessed 07 September 2011); Alexandra Lange, "Uncommon Ground" *Change Observer Online*, 2010, <http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/feature/uncommon-ground/18988/> (accessed 07 September 2011).
  40. Lepik, *Small Scale, Big Change*, 12.
  41. A point also made in the reviews by Alexandra Lange and Quilian Riano.
  42. Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, London: Routledge, 2011, and [www.spatialagency.net](http://www.spatialagency.net).
  43. Awan, Schneider, and Till, *Spatial Agency*, 29.
  44. Awan, Schneider, and Till, *Spatial Agency*, rear cover.
  45. Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, "Beyond Discourse: Notes on Spatial Agency", in *Footprint: Delft School of Design Journal*, 4 (Spring 2009): 98.
  46. Schneider and Till, "Beyond Discourse", 97.
  47. Tahl Kaminer, *Architecture, Crisis and Resuscitation: The reproduction of post-Fordism in late twentieth-century architecture*, London: Routledge, 2011 (reviewed in this issue).
  48. See, for example, the recent hand-wringing within Esther Choi and Marikka Trotter (eds), *Architecture at the Edge of Everything Else*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010. The introductory dialogue asks if architecture's theoretical, methodological and material borrowing (its "agnosticism") has taken the

- discipline to a point where it can no longer define itself.
49. Urban Think Tank, "Southern Exposures", *Archithese*, 3 (2010), 99.
  50. Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011.
  51. Sherry R. Arnstein, "Ladder of Citizen Participation", *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, no. 4 (1969), 216–224; Johann Albrecht, "Towards a Theory of Participation in Architecture: An Examination of Humanistic Planning Theories", *Journal of Architectural Education* 42, no. 1 (1988), 24–31.
  52. Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till (eds), *Architecture and Participation*, London: Routledge, 2005.
  53. Teresa Hoskyns, "City/Democracy: Retrieving Citizenship", in Jones, Petrescu and Till, *Architecture and Participation*, 123.
  54. See, for example: Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar, "Introduction: Did We Mean Participate, or Did We Mean Something Else?" in Markus Miessen and Shumon Basar (eds), *Did Someone Say Participate? An Atlas of Spatial Practice*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006; and Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation (Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality)*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010.
  55. Rahul Mehrotra (ed), *Everyday Urbanism: Margaret Crawford vs. Michael Speaks*, (Vol. I of the "Michigan Debates on Urbanism" series), Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, A. Alfred Taubman College of Architecture, 2005.
  56. She dubs these interventions "provisional, opportunistic, ubiquitous and odd tactics in guerrilla and DIY practise and urbanism". See: Mimi Zeiger, "The Interventionist's Tool Kit Part 3: Our Cities, Ourselves", *Places Online*, 2011, <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/the-interventionists-toolkit-part-3/29908/> (accessed 16 September 2011).
  57. Martha Rosler, "Culture Class: Art, Creativity", *Urbanism*, Part III, *e-flux journal*, 25 (May 2011), 15.
  58. Lee Pugalis and Bob Giddings, "A Renewed Right to Urban Life: A Twenty-First Century Engagement with Lefebvre's Initial 'Cry'", *Architectural Theory Review*, 15, no 3, 230.
  59. Doubly relevant here given that Lefebvre was close to the Situationists until an acrimonious split around 1962.
  60. Pugalis and Giddings, 278.
  61. A point that guides the whole of Jeremy Till's *Architecture Depends*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
  62. Bruce Robbins, "Pathetic Substitutes," *Assemblage* 23 (1994): 86–91.