

The Right to the City (Architectural Theory Review)

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Call for Papers: The Right to the City

The Right to The City is an exhibition and publishing project exploring connections between architecture, art, philosophy and action; cosponsored by Tin Sheds Gallery at the University of Sydney and Architectural Theory Review. The Right to the City special issue will bring together papers that particularly consider architecture's potential for reimagining urban life (to be published as Volume 16, Number 3, November 2011).

The Right to the City takes as its starting point David Harvey's polemical article that asserted urban existence as a contested part of modern democracy: "The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights". Given widespread, acute anxiety regarding our environmental predicament, coupled with attention to the world's intensifying urbanisation, many artists, activists, planners and architects are seeking ways to "remake" the city in more socially connected and sustainable ways. These activities are often engaged with negotiating the increasing fragmentation and complexity of the contemporary city; developing critical spatial practices that engage in micro-political actions.

Architecture as a Social Catalyst

Recent decades have seen the emergence of a renewed sense of commitment by many architects to the idea of socially responsible architecture; what might be termed "engaged practice". This commitment is frequently directed toward small-scale approaches of direct engagement, where the focus is on collaboration with clients and users to create community resources. Although this emphasis on collaboration and participation is familiar from socially engaged movements of the past, the architects are often at pains to distance themselves from grand manifestos or utopian theories. Rather than model design solutions addressed at a unified social entity the projects (often temporary) are highly contingent and beholden to their specific contexts. A shift in attitude might be discerned, where a broad "utopian" agenda is set aside for provisional solutions in the here and now a commitment to a "radical pragmatism" attentive to the possibilities of addition, transformation and utilisation more than demolition, subtraction or replacement.

At the same time, this engaged turn in architecture frequently intersects

with a contemporary convergence of site-specific, installation, community and public art, and political activism. Such practices given terms such as "context-specific", "site-oriented", "site-responsive" or "socially-engaged" often have a discernable emphasis on "microtopic" urban interventions. Adopting do-it-yourself (and design-it-yourself) approaches, temporary constructions, and the material organization of communicative situations, they overlap with engaged architectural practices in their concern for modeling alternative ways of communally inhabiting the city. They also share an emphasis on dialogical relationships through design processes that privilege working with others: interactive activities, collective action and participatory practices. Contingent, interactive, place specific, models of possible universes; they strive to imagine and invent positive social relations and better ways of dwelling in the world.

With these tendencies and convergences in mind, we invite papers that explore architecture's contemporary role and potential for urban intervention - its capacity for transformative action. With reference to the above, we are particularly keen to receive submissions that reflect on:

- Architecture's agency in the city;
- Alternative or expanded models for architectural practice;
- Intersections of architecture, art and activism;
- The limits of participation and collaboration in engaged architectural practice.

Completed manuscripts should be submitted to Architectural Theory Review by the 3rd of May, 2011, via the journal's website:

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/13264826.asp>

Queries regarding the special issue or The Right to the City project should be directed to Lee Stickells: Lee.Stickells@sydney.edu.au

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Reference:

CFP: The Right to the City (Architectural Theory Review). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 30, 2010 (accessed Dec 20, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/32992>>.