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## Places

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## Architectures of Globalization

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*Architectures of Globalization: Places/Practices/Pedagogies*, a three-day conference, was sponsored by the University of California, Berkeley, Department of Architecture in November, 2000. It brought together an interdisciplinary group of critics and theorists to examine the ways in which architecture and the built environment shape, and are shaped by, globalization. Assistant professor Greig Crysler organized the conference in conjunction with a seminar he taught at the College of Environmental Design.

Globalization is a disputed term, packed with a rich and intricate array of interpretive possibilities that, once released, raise important questions about architecture, its institutions and its outcomes. Conventionally, the word “globalization” has been associated with flows of capital, labor, products and ideas that have crossed, challenged and blurred established national boundaries. It often evokes images of a shrinking world, in which accelerating flows of information and travel technology compress time and space in the relationships between world cultures, political economies and the built environment.

Today the idea of the global city, once characterized by nodes of high-rise towers associated with nexuses of capital flows vying for command and control of the world economy, is being reconsidered. With advances in electronic media and telecommunications, people can live simultaneously in both bounded urban public environments as well as highly constructed personal virtual environments. Such virtual connections permit national formations to be maintained across international boundaries, as individuals construct virtual neighborhoods that sustain a life of what theorist Benedict Anderson refers to as “long-distance nationalism.”

“Architectures of Globalization,” a three-day conference held last fall at the University of California, Berkeley, assembled an interdisciplinary group of critics and theorists to examine the ways in which architecture and the built environment are shaped by, and shape, globalization. The conference shifted the traditional discourse on globalization and architecture from a focus on the architectual object, preferring instead to

consider the broad social, economic and political processes that are involved in forming our built environment.

The conference, organized by Greig Crysler, used the themes of places, practices and pedagogies to move the discussion of the “architectures of globalization” from the spaces of flows to points of negotiation and resistance. The discussion drew on a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, as well as various analytical approaches that have emerged in response to new configurations of power, knowledge and space that globalization has brought on.

### Places

A key issue within the debate on globalization is the topic of place. Much discussion about this subject has involved the consideration of architecture as an agent of the so-called “McDonaldization” phenomenon, in which global flows of trade, capital and ideas are construed as a force that threatens the local. Within this context, place becomes something that is on the verge of being lost to an outside force beyond the control of the people within particular locations.

In his opening comments on place, Crysler suggested that by moving the discussion beyond the simple binaries that oppose the local to the global, and the fixed to the fluid, the idea of place can be recast, becoming not so much a static repository of authentic and rooted culture as a site of contest and contradiction.

Theorist Michel Laguerre effectively argued that the movement of people as “embodied culture,” through processes such as forced economic migration and global tourism, makes the association of place with a single, unchanging culture difficult to sustain. Instead, Laguerre used the idea of “poles” to describe the communities in which people are bound together, often within highly accelerated frames of space and time that are alien to their conventional environments. He discussed

how migration not only extends the meaning of place outward, but also disrupts our conventional assumptions about place.

For example, Laguerre said, an individual has the ability to transcend his “ethnople,” a community that comprises people with the same ethnic background and has characteristics relating to an ethnic homeland, and to merge with another pole, such as the “global technople,” a community whose economy is based on high-tech industries and involves designers, programmers and manufacturers around the world. In recognizing the very tenuous and permeable boundaries of these diasporic poles, Laguerre introduced the notion of “spatial scales” to describe how migration between these poles is more than just a system of political and economic flows or an interface between the local and the global: poles are places of continuous change, where social struggle and negotiation take place.

One of the dilemmas architects face today is how, in the context of communities that are increasingly characterized by a mix of races, genders and cultures, architecture can represent the cultural values of a multinational community within a global city. Jim Collins, in his paper, “Between the World Bazaar and the Family Attic: Domestic ‘Place’ and Globalized Neighborhoods,” addressed this question by calling for further examination of how the media, the Internet and consumer catalogues help construct and disseminate images with global currency.

The discussion of his paper highlighted the issue that we, as architects of our own communities, must recognize that images are contested and must continuously question how they are used to shape our built environment. As an example, he described ebiza.com, an Internet site that enables people to purchase objects from around the world, to highlight how modern technology has created a virtual bazaar of global images that can be accessed within the domestic setting, rather

than through foreign travel. These objects, acquired via the Internet, now represent fashionable taste, an international decor that bears little relevance to geographical borders or wordly experience. In order to constitute what a sense of place might be within such a global culture, we must be conscious of the extent to which our thinking has been colored by the diverse forms of global imageability.

### Practices

The second panel, on architectural practices, explored globalization within the context of knowledge and power within professional structures. Chrysler framed the discussion by noting that architectural theory has traditionally focused on architectural objects, and that architecture critics have left largely unexamined the global chain of productive relations that is embedded within the structures and materials of our buildings.

During the 1980s, Kenneth Frampton, in his writings on critical regionalism, voiced concern over the relentless and universal transformation of the built environment that has resulted from the use of optimized technology in the manufacturing of building elements. This technology results directly from issues of time-space compression: as people, information and goods become more mobile, they are subjected to fiercer economic and social competition, which often results in a more poorly produced product.

Dana Cuff, in her discussion “Scales of Practice: Architecture in the Global Economy,” specifically addressed contradictions found in the discussion of architectural regionalism and architectural localism, being particularly skeptical about Frampton’s ideas on critical regionalism in a time when architectural practice is becoming increasingly global. According to Frampton, the fundamental strategy of critical regionalism is to attain, as economically as possible, a balance

between elements that are universal and those derived from a particular place, in order to give the architecture a unique and independent identity.

Cuff argued that, in retrospect, Frampton underestimated the powerful effect that the global economy would have on local economies, and local architecture. She cited Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao as a case in point, comparing Gehry's signature style to a fashion designer's label on a handbag. Architectural branding, she suggested, has become embedded within both the design and materials of our built environment. Indeed, Gehry and the Guggenheim have proven that "archi-tourism" can create a tourist destination out of an industrial wasteland.

Like Cuff, Ellen Dunham-Jones viewed the restructuring of practice in an ambivalent and contradictory light. For Dunham-Jones, while networking rationalizes architectural production in a way that may contribute to modular landscapes of sprawl, it also opens new possibilities for participatory design that connect communities through "tele-democracy."

Kris Olds analyzed practice at the scale of global mega-projects, or the transformation of entire quadrants, even cities, through massive building projects that sometimes involve the movement of thousands of people. These projects call into question the ethics of architectural practice at such a scale, when architects' efforts contribute to such large-scale displacement of people, culture and local economies.

### **Pedagogies**

The third session examined philosophies of teaching architecture in a global context. Typically, questions about pedagogy and globalization have focused on the European teaching approaches around which American architectural academies are organized. Currently, this hegemony is being challenged by the rapidly changing

demography of higher education, opening debates about what might be referred to as a "world space" within the more progressive quarters of academia.

There has been a call for a new and critical pedagogy that engages architectural education with this new global context. The term "critical pedagogy" is associated with a specific approach to teaching advocated in the 1970s by Paulo Freire, who argued that giving a voice to oppressed, marginalized groups could help construct a new vision of the future. The challenge today is incorporating self-reflective analyses of globalization within the context of conventional and formal approaches to architectural studio education, which are based on Modernist (male, caucasian and ethnocentric) canonical paradigms derived from European architectural practices.

Lesley Lokko, who practices an approach similar to critical pedagogy at Kingston University, discussed the ways in which national cultures appear and disappear according to time and place. Lokko's course, aimed specifically at post-professional architecture students, explores, through a series of design problems, issues of race, gender and cultural identity, which she regards as central to the process of architectural design investigation. The goal of the course is to recognize whose identities find lasting architectural expression.

Grant Kester, in a parallel debate on the sensual inherent within the political, critiqued what he called a "pre-social domain of personal autonomy and self-expression." His paper implicitly addressed the role of theory in architectural education, revealing the problems of retreating into the "space of the body" as a privileged site of aesthetic experience.

Within architectural studio programs, Kester explained, sensual experiences find their realization organized around abstractions of the phenomenal body. Based on the abstraction and spatial rigidity of the plan, a rational concept

evolved from the Renaissance and the fundamentally poetic process of form-making, Kester argues, the resistance of architectural practice is measured by the designer's capacity to disturb or disrupt the rationality of building. This can occur through the use of amorphous rather than linear forms, in the employment of more organic, texturally complex materials, and in challenging the relationship between the inside and outside of a building.

Even in studios that focus on specificity over abstraction, the tendency is to universalize the body that moves through unique spaces. The body, unmarked by differences in race, gender or class, becomes a prototype of sameness in one's experience of light, space, air and form. Kester argued that the process of design requires a greater understanding of the relationship between somatic experience and theoretical reflection on how we understand and situate ourselves within a variety of socially, economically and politically constructed images.

Crylser further commented that globalization offers an array of embodied aesthetic experiences that occur within, rather than in opposition to, the expanding space of a capitalist world system. It is a system whose multiple scales and complexities are sometimes impossible to see or feel in any concrete manner, but which nevertheless exert enormous influence in determining the limits and possibilities of our lives. Grant argued that this form of understanding should find its place in architectural education, for if theory were permitted to reflect more on specific affiliations between architecture and power on a global scale, it would further allow practices to be more receptive to change.