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EDWARDS' SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF ARCHITECTURE

It is our Task-our essential, central, crucial task – to transform ourselves from mere social creatures into community creatures. It is the only way that human evolution will be able to proceed.

-M.ScottPeck : The Different Drum : Community Making and Peace

Social architecture means responsible architecture. It seeks to enforce every link to reality, and pave a paradigm shift towards -more ethics, instead of pursuing only an aesthetic research. It is an Architecture intended for use by the mass of people as social beings in contrast to a reaction against architecture concerned with form and style supposedly for the dominant members of society.

Social Architecture seeks to shift its focus from the shape to the functionality, from the object itself to the users- the people. More ethics means: attention to the sustainability of the building, to the functionality, to the durability.

The Wikipedia definition of "Social architecture" is the conscious design of an environment that encourages a desired range of social behaviors leading towards some goal or set of goals.

Social Architecture is a movement, a way of being, building, growing together. We do it as much for the love of the finished construction as well as the process and the information we get out of it. And the most important thing is to connect people who care and make this world a better connected place.

Interconnectedness

"We are all implicated in each others' fates in significant ways and bear tremendous responsibility for that." —Russell Banks

The venerable peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh emphatically propounds that "We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness". The Earth does not belong to us rather we belong to the earth.

How do we perceive ourselves?

Our existence?

These fundamental questions are beautifully addressed in Martin Buber's book "Ich und Du" (I and Thou) in two ways:

The foremost is the attitude of the "I" towards an "It", towards an object that is separate in itself, which we either use or experience.

Secondly, in the attitude of the "I" towards "Thou", in a relationship in which the other is not separated by discrete bounds.

We are bound together by some level of awareness of our interconnectedness with all living beings on this fragile, wondrous planet.

the word "Social Architecture" has been in use for a long time. Cesar Harada started doing experiments in 2008 at the Royal College of Art, Design Interactions Department in London, UK, he called "Social Geometry", strongly inspired from his work as assistant of the architect Herman Hertzog, himself very influenced by the work of Gordon Pask. Later the experiments were called "Architecture of play". In 2012, Cesar Harada formally named the experiment series "Social Architecture" experimenting at the Ecole Supérieure d'Architecture in Paris France, and at the TED Fellow retreat in Whistler, Canada.

Response-ability

We accept responsibility that it is the cumulative effect of our anthropocentric, disconnected human choices that have brought us all to this precarious time in the history of our planet.

Even though the relative comfort of our lives insulates us from the day-after-day realities of the grinding poverty of millions of our brothers and sisters, and the often silent holocaust of our world, we feel the increasing weight and despair that comes from knowing (and caring about) the truth but not yet recognizing the ways we can "response-ably" act on that truth. It is our deep, insistent yearning to close that gap which urges us to undertake the most meaningful journey of our lives — the journey toward a right livelihood that champions those things we most care about.

The journey of a crusader is a difficult one, necessitating deep reflection on the ways in which we live our daily lives. It means making choices and changes— changes in how we invest our time, how we interact with others, how we meet our basic human needs, how we perceive ourselves in relation to the whole — until more and more of our lives become a demonstration of the world we wish to create.

Great cultures take great strides naturally.

The social architecture's primary work is to map the social system in place by listening carefully and assembling the most empowering new solutions drawn from the culture itself, finally seeing that they are powerfully anchoring and connecting the whole group.

Ancient wisdom suggests in building a strong culture with empowered teams and individuals. They will automatically take care of the details. It is not necessary to disassemble a system to reassemble an appropriate response. The new responses become the new traditions.

Whereas, traditional engineers and architects to date have principally focused on functional specifications for buildings and a sense of place, the social architect is a culture-crafter creating a world that "works" for everyone and crafting dimensions beyond it.

Social Architecture are ways to learn about :

- how networks grow depending on the people (culture, social structures, age, sex, ability, style), the materials (plastic, bamboo, mud, etc), the environmental constraints, the set of instructions, the questions and their agendas and to find out which network configurations (social relationships & built environment) are the most comfortable ,productive, stimulating or otherwise.
- Explore & invent new construction techniques/technologies, new relationships and perhaps new theory.
- Build a new type of space virtual or physical which reflect the principles and respond to a crisis situation (poverty, earthquake, tsunami, flood, fire, forced migration).

Social Architecture need not be expensive. What is required is mindful adaptation. To help understand the crafts of culture it is helpful to be reminded of some of the tools that construct culture. Cultural designs can now be consciously furthered by focusing on ideals and not issues.

Even though we have a long way to go in making the necessary dramatic move — from "egocentric" to "eco-centric" buildings, many people around the world have been inspired to build with varying combinations of earth and fibers such as straw bales, cob, adobe, earth bags, bamboo, thatch, and other regionally available, renewable materials. The needs of humanity compels us to discover, with great humility, the most appropriate ways to enter and honor unique cultures and traditions while working with communities in a participatory manner to put our most effective tools to work for their benefit.

Truly sustainable construction supports human dignity, while minimizing negative impacts on the natural environment.

One approach is based on vernacular tradition, on an appropriate use of materials, creative networking, and the other a conscious human-centered process to create comfortable, decent

homes for those most in need—a flexible approach to design, adaptable to available materials and skills and that fit within cultural and social mores. Appropriate construction techniques can result in buildings that mitigate environmental damage and, through proper siting and design, save energy by utilizing renewable resources such as sun and wind. Ideally such dwellings would form the cores of sustainable communities where food, water, and waste treatment as well as economic and cultural opportunities are all collected, grown, or created locally. In places without decent housing,

natural building techniques can be a key component in achieving cheap, comfortable, and easy to build shelter.

Such a toolkit can create a sufficient diversity to produce a meaningful renaissance in planetary affairs. We can build a utopia of rich cultural alternatives. Through the application of social architecture principles and tools, we can evolve as a civilization toward a continuously designed dynamic idealism, a positive and thriving social ecology and a new expanded concept of living.

