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Architecture, Anarchism, and Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

Architecture is a political act. However, in practice we steadfastly avoid that fact. There is a steep price to pay for that avoidance. If we are to evolve as a profession in the realm of today's environmental tipping points and socio-economic shifts, we must better understand our place in the development of policy and certainly begin to unpack some of the assumptions governing our decisions about the built environment. The nature of politics concerns the way we choose (or are told) to live together. This relates directly to our assumptions about the design of the built environment. Architecture, though, can and should be asking how we *could* live together. Robert Kennedy, when running for President in 1968, said: "Some people see things as they are and say, 'why?' I dream things that never were and say, 'why not?' "This tends more towards utopian thinking, and, I believe, it is a natural perspective for architecture. Such a question, though, requires us to discard many of the assumptions made when we start sketching the future and asking ourselves 'why not?'In this paper I want to address that question through the lens of a few notable outliers in the field of architecture and the environment: John F.C. Turne and Colin Ward. What would/could architecture be if we challenge our assumptions as we imagine our next steps, as we ask, 'why not?'

1. Introduction

This paper is, in part, an homage to the late John F.C. Turner. After he died in September of 2023, I participated in an online tribute to him[2]. One of the conclusions that came out of that tribute was this question: 'Is Turner still relevant to this and the next generation of architects?' Implicit in the question is that it was certainly relevant to those of us in that online tribute on 31OCT and 02NOV23. One could not help but notice, though, that the average age of the participants was probably 65+. In other words, we were architecture or planning students in the 60s – a period where students were vigorously

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[2] There were two dates over which '**Remembering John Turner: An Online Tribute Series'** were held – on 30OCT23 and 01NOV23. This was organized by Geoffrey Payne and Kirtee Shah on the INHAF YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/@INHAF). Episode 1 is here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVblBg-XvaY and Episode 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFEKlGdZHjc

challenging all the traditions our parents and society were pushing on us. As Brando, in The Wild One, answered the question, 'What are you rebelling against?' He said, 'Whatta you got?'

Times have changed. Are we now just old folks recalling our youth and channelling that through the life and work of Turner? Is he relevant anymore? Does this generation of architecture students even know the name? I would hope so, but I have some doubts. This paper will argue for the relevance of Turner's work in the education of architects. I must start down that road by examining his influence on my own explorations as an architect and pulling from that a broader argument about the need to present such alternative thinking in the curricula of architecture schools.

The argument begins with the understanding/premise that architecture is a political act. Many architects would prefer to ignore this simple fact in favour of not landing on one side or the other of the political spectrum. After all, our clients are often governments. Overt criticism of such paying clients may cost us jobs. In our work, we follow a client's program, not a political ideology. Paper projects, utopian thinking, is fine for personal speculation but no one is going to pay for that in the real world. If you teach, you can be allowed such fantasies and students, too, will engage in them. Academia has the time, and they are paid to think long into the future.

On the other hand, all architects are, by nature, at least somewhat utopian in their thinking. 'I can do this better.' We can look at an existing building or even a chair and say, 'I have a better idea'. While this is hardly the utopian thinking of Thomas More and his speculations about a more equitable world, there is a kernel there that lends itself towards making even a chair or a teapot or a stained-glass window a better design than what came before. What happens when we expand on a client's program and say, for example, 'the workplace should be better than it is.' What would be the basis for saying that? Unions would say that is a very political statement, and the formulation of that statement is one in which they would demand to be involved. Would the architect take the stance that the workers must be directly involved in the design of their workplace? Whatever the architect chooses, it is a political decision. It is about how people live and work together. And how we could live and work better together is a vision of a possible future. It can even be a goal. Architects certainly like to think of themselves, at their best, as visionaries. Frank Lloyd Wright had his vision in Broadacre City, Le Corbusier in his City of Tomorrow, Paulo Soleri with Arcosanti. The suburbs tended towards Wright's vision of a house on a lot (his were about an acre) while our construction of Corb's vision tended towards the high-rise towers. We've done them both. And yet, neither has worked out quite the way either of them envisioned how people could/would live together.

I believe Turner started his investigations by looking at what we have here now – not in the cities imagined by architects, developers, city planners but cities being built by the citizens themselves out of necessity, out of the need for a stake in the city and its opportunities. We may be able to imagine a better world, and many were envisioned since More wrote Utopia in 1516. Some of those imagined worlds were built and found wanting. What I read in Turner was his focus on our 'starting point'. What is the foundation upon which we can build a world that works?

2. John F.C. Turner

'It is my increasing impression, more a hope perhaps, that interest in nature- and community-based principles and practices is growing from a small but ancient base. In fact, I am sure that it is the only realistic hope for a real civilisation'[3]

I came to Turner through *Freedom to Build* (1972) not long after I entered architecture school in 1974. I'm not quite sure how that happened. It certainly wasn't on the syllabus of any of my classes. Sadly, I imagine that's still the case. Considering the profound and positive effect it had on my professional life, I feel fortunate to have found it amidst the stacks of more traditional writing on architecture.

[3] Turner quoted in GOLDA-PONGRATZ, Kathrin (2021). Available online at https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/reputations/john-fc-turner-1927

I came to architecture not out of fine arts but out of a degree in English and Philosophy. As a result, I gravitated to the more theoretical end of the profession, but reading Le Corbusier's writings, 20th Century manifestos, or Venturi's post-modernist apologia, left me with little enthusiasm.

But Turner's writing certainly did. It may have been first an article I read in Architectural Design[4], or it could have been *Freedom to Build.* In any case, it was through his book that the value of architecture began to make some sense to me. 'Ornament is Crime', Less is More (or less is a bore) faded like jingoistic bumper stickers. Here was something that related much more directly to people, to a sense of justice and how architecture could be part of that struggle for autonomy, for freedom. Enabling architecture shaped from the bottom up in and by communities.

That book helped me connect architecture to political philosophy and to a fundamental question, 'who is architecture for?' In most jurisdictions, architecture is governed by legislation giving the profession a monopoly on a set of skills that can only be used by people duly registered as architects. Such legislation implies, if it does not state outright, that the profession has some obligations to society – obligations that should go beyond mere competence in the delivery of a set of services. We enter, here, the domain of ethics, an area in which the profession is not especially well-versed.

Turner's *Housing by People* reinforced an answer to that question – architecture is for/by people, by communities. That second book, led me, through its preface, to Colin Ward. Another door opened and it was a short walk to Kropotkin and mutual aid[5], Bakunin[6], Emma Goldman[7] Illich[8], Schumacher[9], Bookchin[10] and many others. As these ideas developed, I began to understand the political nature of architecture and, related to that, the inadequacies of professional ethics[11] and, similarly, the inadequacies of architectural education – issues on which I continue to work.

And, as luck would have it, at the end of my second year, UN-Habitat came to town in June of 1976 and, with it, the Habitat Forum – the first time the UN had the involvement of the informal/NGO sector. One of the many luminaries who spoke there was Turner.

As I have had occasion to say many times since, I learned more about the possibilities of an alternative architecture than I ever learned in school. This is what I was looking for. And here were thousands of others who shared a similar vision about what we could (and should) do with that set of skills we were learning.

That was nearly 50 years ago now. What was it I found in his work? There were two fundamental principles to which he led me:

- Ethics – there is a principle here about where the skills of architecture are best used. It seemed clear to me that, if architecture is to have substantial value to society, the first focus of these skills must be towards the most vulnerable of our citizenry. I saw this principle as well in Fathy's book, *Architecture for the Poor (*1973). In turn, this raised questions about the nature of the profession and the legislation governing it. The legislation creating a monopoly on the practices of architectural services and, sometimes even the use of the word, appeared to be devoid of any specific obligations to society beyond mere competence. There must be more to it than that. Both Turner and Fathy were addressing that question.

[4] Turner's article in AD's 'Architecture and Democracy' is available online here - http://www.communityplanning.net/JohnFCTurnerArchive/pdfs/ADAug1968SquatterSettlement.pdf

[5] See Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902), *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* (1899), and *Ethics: Origin and Development* (1922).

[6] Particularly *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State* (1871)

[7] See *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1910), particularly on feminism.

[8] Ivan Illich, see *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) and *Disabling Professions* (1977)

[9] *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (1973) and *Buddhist Economics* (1968)

[10] *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971), *The Limits of the City* (1974), *Urbanization without Cities: The Rise and Decline of Citizenship* (1992)

[11] See 'Chapter 1.3: Professional Conduct and Ethics' in the Canadian Handbook of Practice (CHOP) of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC). Available online at https://chop.raic.ca/chapter-1.3 Given that there are few, if any, courses of professional ethics in the architecture curriculum, this short addition to CHOP I wrote in 2021 is hardly adequate to address the issues involved.

- Introduction to anarchism – Turner found a discarded copy of the anarchist newspaper, Freedom[12], during his National Service which interrupted his studies at the AA[13]. From there his reading expanded to Kropotkin, Geddes, and many others. His reading list became my reading list.

I have been working/learning/teaching since then to advance what I learned from Turner and there were several other principles that arose out of that ongoing experience. One of the first of these was set out by Colin Ward in his preface to *Housing by People* as Turner's 'Three Laws of Housing' (Ward, 1976b: xxxii-xxxiii):

- Housing is a Verb – " . . . the important thing about housing *is* not what it is, but what it *does* in people's lives, in other words that dweller satisfaction is not necessarily related to the imposition of standards."
- Tolerance – " . . . deficiencies and imperfections in *your* housing are infinitely more tolerable if they are your responsibility than if they are *somebody else's*.
- Decision-making/participation – "When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contribution to the design, construction, or management of their housing, both the process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social well-being. When people have no control over, nor responsibility for key decisions in the housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfillment and a burden on the economy."[14]

This last 'law' was a source of some conflict between Turner's anarchist approach and that of a more Marxist approach. This hinged upon the role of government. Turner was adamant about who it is that controls the act (or 'verb') of housing. For him it was critical to address the fundamental questions: "*Whose participation* in *whose decisions* and *whose actions*? (Turner, 1976:145). This could not be the role of government. Nor could it be the role of experts like architects.

This, of course, raises the question of the role of architecture in the development of housing. In studying and, later, practicing architecture, it seemed clear that there must be a role for architects in the meeting that basic need (Bristol, 1992). Typically, architects are not housing advocates as such. They will wait until there is a source of funding from government authorities. This funding is often funnelled through non-profit organizations who act as intermediaries in organizing the financial, professional, land and other resources to get a project completed. The actual prospective residents are kept at some distance in this process. The common rationale is that it slows the process down considerably thus adding to the costs of completion. Architects then design to a program set by governments or by housing agencies or they are designing for the 'market'. In any case, Turner's 'rules for housing' are certainly not applicable in this process. As one of the agencies puts it on their website:

> "Specializing in social purpose real estate, Terra helps harness the value of real estate assets for the benefit of communities, residents, members and homeowners."

One of the assumptions here is that this is about 'real estate'. It is about 'assets'. Well, yes, of course it is. The world we live in must assume concepts of capital, of property, of a strict regulatory environment. However, behind Turner's rules there are different assumptions. His assumptions are based on what he saw in working in the slums of Peru after he graduated from the AA. Land tenure is far more ambiguous, funding is scant, if there is any at all, and people are building outside the regulatory environment. Because they are building on land from which the possibility of eviction is a

[12] *Freedom* was founded in the UK in 1886 – see https://freedomnews.org.uk/freedom-press-history/ Turner's first contribution to Freedom was an article in Vol9:1, 10JAN1948, 'The Work of Patrick Geddes' after he returned to his studies at the AA. The editor of Freedom at that time was Colin Ward who would later write the preface to Turner's *Housing by People: Towards Autonomy in Building Environments* (1976)

[13] Architectural Association founded in 1847, https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/

[14] Ward takes this from *Freedom to Build,* 'The Meaning of Autonomy", p241.

looming threat, they cannot invest their scant financial resources in the thought of permanence. It is, though, a foothold in the city and access to its resources.

We see this now in developed urban environments with the growth of 'tent cities' in the parks, undeveloped properties, and sidewalks[15]. The response of the State is to exert control with the use of law enforcement (police, fire) which creates jail as the default housing 'solution'. The problem, from the perspective of the State, is establishing control and stopping people from using the streets and parks as land for housing.

While Canada has recently recognized housing as a right[16], the response on the ground in cities throughout the country is found wanting. Housing is a 'real estate asset'. It is viewed through the lens of economics rather than rights. With Turner's demand for dweller control, the lens clearly shifts from economics towards rights. This was reinforced in the Vancouver Declaration of the first Habitat conference in 1976. The Declaration stated:

> 13. All persons have the right and the duty to participate, individually and collectively in the elaboration and implementation of policies and programmes of their human settlements. (UN-Habitat, 1976:5)

3. A Political Act

> *"Technology can be used to subjugate the people or it can be used to liberate them . . . And whoever says that a technician of whatever sort, be he an architect, doctor, engineer, scientist, etc., needs solely to work with his instruments in his chosen specialty, while his countrymen are starving or wearing themselves out in the struggle, has de facto gone over to the other side. He is not apolitical' he has taken a political decision, but one opposed to the movements for liberation . . ."*[17]

In *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger makes the argument for understanding representational art through a political lens. Tafuri's *Architecture and Utopia* makes a similar argument about the nature of modern architecture and capitalism. In his book, *Wasteland*, Stephen Kurtz puts forward a reductive but telling analogy:

> For buildings create and perpetuate environments for social interaction. In this, they are more like bodies of law than to paintings. And although one might scruple to condemn a still life on moral grounds, such legal acts as the fugitive slave law are readily censured. Why not, then, the plantation architecture that was as integral a part of slavery as the laws supporting it? (Kurtz, 1973:5)

Buildings come out of a context. Certainly, part of that context is cultural, but another related part is political. As architects, we often prefer to ignore the political. Governments change and their policies with it. Since government funding is often related, directly, or indirectly, to a successfully completed project, we don't want to cut off future possibilities by siding with the policies of one government or another. The survival of any firm depends on getting the work.

It was, though, *Freedom to Build* which first questioned my assumptions about housing, its relationship to architecture, to land, to the role of the private and public sectors in its provision, to money, to the laws and regulations governing its production[18]. From there it was a straightforward set of steps to recognize the role of politics in housing and the dependence of the architectural profession on policy and its assumptions (also our assumptions) about what housing is and how to get it.

From this reading, the serendipity of having the Habitat Forum at my doorstep in the summer of 1976 only added to the argument that architecture, and indeed, development is a realisation of the

[15] See, for example, the National Right to Housing Network and their recommendations on 'Encampments in Canada' - https://housingrights.ca/encampments-in-canada/
[16] See the National Housing Strategy Act (S.C. 2019, c. 29, s. 313) - https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/n-11.2/FullText.html
[17] Che Guevara speaking at the 1963 UIA Congress in Havana in Comerio & Protzen (1982)
[18] See also Hardoy & Satterthwaite, *Squatter Citizen Life in the Urban Third World (*1989).

political will of the State. Limiting that State power and vision are the rights of citizens and the duty of the State to protect those rights.

A set of simple sketches clarified that connection between architecture and politics, or more specifically political theory. They came from the Berkeley Tribe, a weekly underground newspaper published in Berkeley, California (see Fig. 1 below).

The before/after sketches clearly indicated to me that when one posits an alternative political structure, the relationship to land and the relationship to each other can change. In this example, the change is gradual. These are renovations to existing suburban city blocks, to streets and access, and to existing apartments. A street is removed and reclaimed for food production. We see that happening in cities now with community gardens in vacant lots. Like the 'Lifehouse' (centre right in the site plan), co-op housing and cohousing have community spaces for meetings, for group dinners and so on[19]. In other words, what may look like a radical change in the way of life has already been implemented in many respects in our approach to housing.

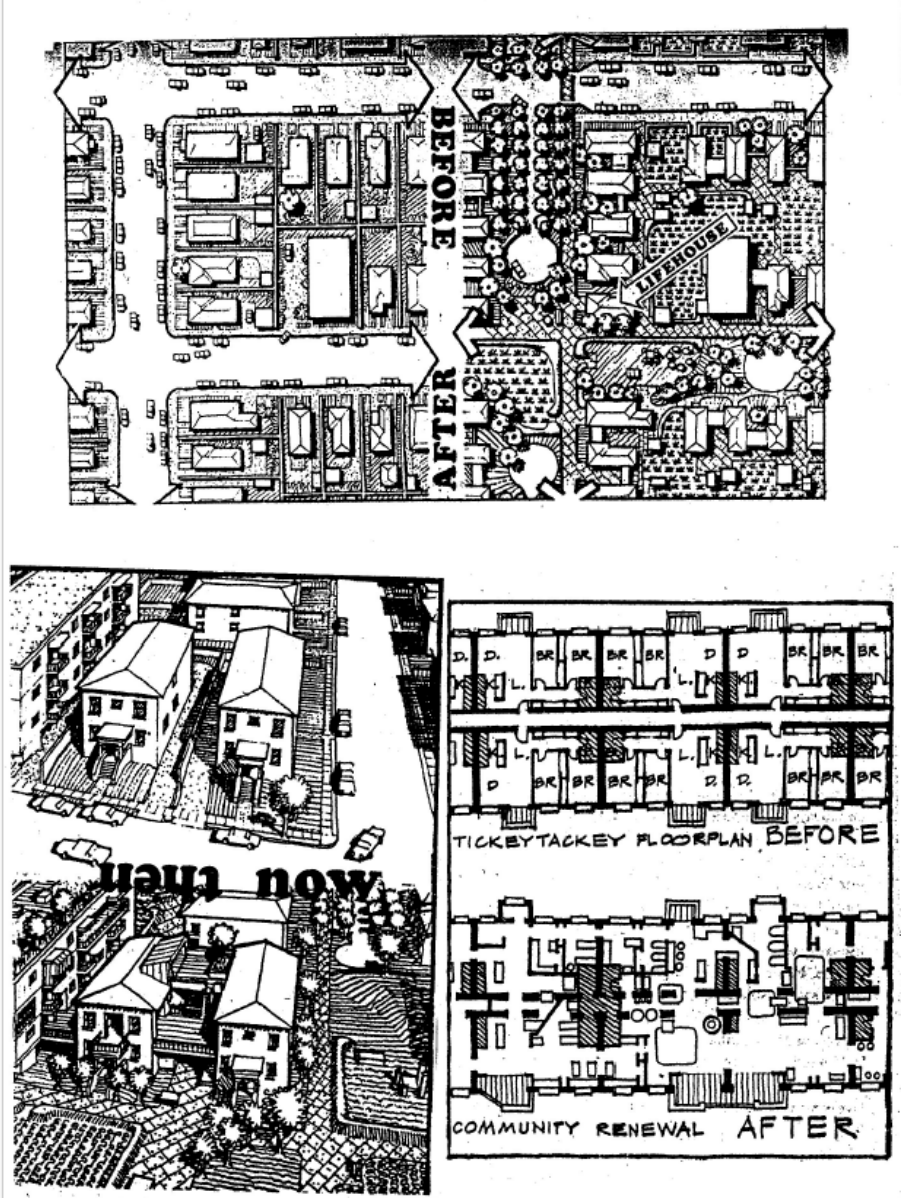

Figure 1-from the Berkeley Tribe 13-MAR70[20]

[19] Communal dining also featured in More's *Utopia.*
[20] Original is available online - https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll8/id/58868

The radical implication, though, of these sketches is the shift in assumptions about how it is that a community lives together. The 'After' does not assume property lines and fences. What do these sketches say about the concept of property? One of the fundamentals in our design thinking about housing (certainly in the West) is the nuclear family. What do these sketches say about the nuclear family? One can recall Hilary Clinton's book, *It Takes a Village*. Her point is that there is a community around that nuclear family and that community also takes on a responsibility for nurturing the next generation. One can see this reflected as well in Chris
Alexander's Pattern Language, particularly in patterns 80-86 covering "the workgroups, including all kinds of workshops and offices and even children's learning groups" (Alexander, 1977:397-430). When we design, we are always making assumptions about all these ways of living. If we are to move forward, we must question many, if not all, of our assumptions. Utopian thinking helps in that exercise. Another lesson from Turner, as Colin Ward pointed out:

> "John F. C. Turner is something much rarer than a housing expert: he is a philosopher of housing, seeking answers to questions which are so fundamental that they seldom get asked." (Ward, 1976: xxxi)

4. Utopia/Dystopia

> "*Hard times are coming, when we'll be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now, can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies to other ways of being, and even imagine real grounds for hope. We'll need writers who can remember freedom – poets, visionaries – realists of a larger reality*."[21]

I started architecture school not long after the 1973 Oil Embargo ended in the spring of 1974. Watching those lineups at gas stations all around the US showed, with great clarity, our dependence on petroleum. It didn't take much to extrapolate a dire future from these images on the television. What would the world be like without this access to cheap energy? It is relatively easy to transport to any location on the planet and it can be stored for use at any time. On the other hand, it is a form of self-destruction.

But what will happen when that source of energy is no longer available to us? The oil embargo started to show the rapid fraying of the social fabric when the tap was cut off. It was cut off for political reasons rather than a straightforward lack of supply or environmental reasons. Still, it is not hard to extrapolate beyond lineups at gas stations to energy use in the construction and maintenance of buildings. Where I live (Vancouver, Canada) about 87% of our generation of electricity comes from hydroelectric power. We are blessed with mountains and rivers. Japan, on the other hand, generates electricity mainly from fossil fuels (72%). The effect of the oil embargo was certainly worse for Japan[22] and other countries with a greater dependence on oil.

That access to cheap energy and readily available energy certainly influences what we build, where and for whom we build it. These are all political questions. And these questions are not just about access to energy but access to all resources – food, clean air, water. Our access or lack of it is a function of rights as well.

We ask, then, what is wrong with our present condition. What do we want as a society? How can we get there from where we are now?

Robert Kennedy, when he was running for president of the United States in 1968 borrowed from Shaw[23] when he stated: "Some people see things as they are and say, 'why?'. I dream things that never

[21] Ursula Le Guin's acceptance speech at the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, 19NOV14. Available at https://www.ursulakleguin.com/nbf-medal

[22] MIHUT, Marius Ioan and DANIEL, Decean Liviu (2012). "First oil shock impact on the Japanese economy", Procedia Economics and Finance 3, pp1042-1048. Available online at https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212567112002717. A further note is that Japan faced another trade embargo (including oil) in July of 1941. Along with civilian access to energy, it is clearly a national security issue.

[23] From *Back to Methuselah,* act I

were and say, 'why not?' A statement to indicate a visionary leading the flock to the promised land, the utopia of peace and plenty.

Of course, there is more to it than that. Turner's work in the slums of Peru was first trying to address the question of 'why?'. A persistent question and if we can't define the problem, it will be hard to move forward. There will be obstacles in the way of 'Why not?'

From Plato's Republic to Soleri's Arcosanti we have had a plethora of utopian visions. Most have only been imagined but some have been realized[24]. One such commune founded in 1971, Christiania in Copenhagen, has become a tourist destination[25]. Realized 'utopias', of course, are not utopias. They exist in a place, and they involve imperfect humans. On the other hand, to imagine it is one thing, to build it quite another. Those who acted on the vision did more than ask 'why not?' They said, let's start here. Let's start now.

But, to go back to origins, it is an enlightening exercise to reread More's *Utopia* (1516) inspired, in part, by the voyages of Columbus and Vespucci to the New World in the late 1400s. We are more familiar with Book 2 with its description of the island nation and how people lived together in this imagined world of peace. Book 1, though, begins with the 'why' questions and, in large part, this is an argument against the enclosure movement in which the commons was, in essence, privatized. The enclosure movement led to penury for the peasantry and, for many, starvation since their source of food was from the commons[26].

> "They stop the course of agriculture, destroying houses and towns, reserving only the churches, and enclose grounds that they may lodge their sheep in them. As if forests and parks had swallowed up too little of the land, those worthy countrymen turn the best inhabited places into solitudes; . . ."

There was a time, then, when land as property did not dominate our understanding. In *Utopia*, More could see the hazards of the enclosure movement and derided it. Like Fig. 1 above, when we question the concept of land as property, our thinking about design will change with it. In my youth I was confused at first by Proudhon, the French anarchist, and his book title 'Property is Theft'. My understanding of land as property was entrenched. Fig. 1 helped to uproot that failed understanding.[27]

In addition to our entrenched thinking about land, money, resources, there is a valuable but ill-defined understanding of a community.

5. Anarchism

> *You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.*[28]

Anarchism is not the same as chaos. It is not about violence and mayhem. It is about finding effective ways for people to come closer to freedom and the solidarity of community. Here, I think what Turner experienced in the slums of Peru reinforced his foundational reading of anarchist literature prior to his move to Peru. For most slum-dwellers, the only presence of government they experience is the force of law against them. Eviction is a constant threat. Under such circumstances, cooperation and solidarity within the community is the only means by which a foothold in the city can be realized.

Referring to More's criticism of the enclosure movement, more than a century later, as conditions worsened after the start of the revolution beginning in 1642 and leading up to the execution of Charles

[24] See, for example, Dolores Hayden's *Seven American Utopias. The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790 – 1975,* Berneri's *Journey Through Utopia*.

[25] See, for example, 'History of the Christiania area' - https://www.sbst.dk/byggeri/christiania/history-of-the-christiania-area

[26] Eula Biss in her New Yorker article, "The Theft of the Commons", provides a valuable description of the move from access to the commons to enclosure and the privatization of the commons. There are still places in the world – Papua New Guinea is one of them – where the commons, or 'customary land' as it is called in PNG, persists over nearly 90% of its land area.

[27] As did 3 years of working for the PNG government as an architect. In turn, that experience gave me a better grasp on the land claims of First Nations here in Canada. See also Bristol (2010). There is a fundamental conflict here between ways of living on the planet. Sir Thomas More, in *Utopia*, saw that in the early 1500s.

[28] Ursula Le Guin, The Dispossessed (1974:242). She echoes here the spirit of Gil-Scott Heron's 1971 song, 'The Revolution will not be Televised'

I in 1649, a resistance movement known as The Diggers formed to take back the commons. As their manifesto[29] stated:

> "The Work we are going about is this, To dig up Georges-Hill [in Surrey] and the waste Ground thereabouts, and to Sow Corn, and to eat our bread together by the sweat of our brows."

They occupied St. George's Hill in April of 1649 and were summarily evicted the following year[30]. However, the stand they made echoed as a form of direct action held by most anarchists. In 1966, in San Francisco, another group of anarchists took up the name and started distributing free food throughout the San Francisco area[31].

These various forms of direct action have been repeated over centuries now. And, as David Graeber points out, this is more about action than theory and it is action that has been taking place as long as our species has been here:

> "The nineteenth-century "founding figures" did not think of themselves as having invented anything particularly new. The basic principles of anarchism—self-organization, voluntary association, mutual aid—referred to forms of human behavior they assumed to have been around about as long as humanity." (Graeber, 2004:3)

There are a few basic principles that arise out of a reading of the history of anarchist thought. Some of them are:

- Direct democracy – the more direct the better. This has implications about the viable size of a community supporting this principle – the larger the community the less direct its democracy. Co-op housing always struggles with this unlike strata councils which are hard-pressed for volunteers.
- Mutual Aid – The Russian anarchist, Kropotkin wrote about this pointing out that it is cooperation rather than competition that best insures the survival of species.
- Turner's 'Three Laws of Housing' (see above) should be included in these principles.
- Networks not Hierarchies – networks are far more responsive and dynamic. This would include the hierarchy of expertise[32]. This relates to the professional's understanding of their place in any decision-making process. The removal of hierarchies also means the removal of patriarchies.
- Bottom-up not top-down – society's attention is best drawn to those who are most vulnerable.
- Self-organization – Graeber's point above.
- Voluntary association – See also the UDHR Art. 20

There are others but this short list is, I think, sufficient to help recognize that there must be radical changes in the way we approach architecture if we posit an anarchist future. I would be very interested to see how such a future could develop.

6. Human Rights

> *In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech, and expression—everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of*

[29] See "The True Levellers Standard Advanced: Or, The State of Community Opened, and Presented to the Sons of Men." Available online https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/winstanley/1649/levellers-standard.htm
[30] Some of this history is recounted in Simon (2019)
[31] See https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/diggers-san-francisco for some of that history.
[32] See Illich on Disabling Professions. https://www.panarchy.org/illich/professions.html

> *armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world. That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation*.[33]

I see the relationship between anarchism and human rights in the recognition of the limits of the State. The modern legal environment of rights continues to expand from aftermath of the Second World War. The Nuremburg trials set some limits on the power of the State and the responsibilities of the individual to question that power. It would no longer be a valid excuse for atrocities to say, as Eichmann did, that they were only following the orders of superiors[34]. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)[35], adopted in December 1948, set further limits on the State with the drafting of a set of aspirational principles outlining the responsibilities of the State to its citizens.

But what is the connection between architecture and the UDHR as well as other similar documents such as UNDRIP[36]?

Some years ago, I was teaching architecture in Bangkok. Every year I would do a studio focused on vulnerable communities. This was motivated by Turner, his example, and his writing. It was also motivated by the application of some of those anarchist principles. A third area of motivation was the Istanbul Declaration and the UIA student competition in advance of the Beijing Congress in 1999. The basic brief of this competition was to implement the Habitat Agenda in your city. This, of course, had to involve vulnerable communities. I also saw this as a way to challenge the students' more traditional understanding of their role as professionals.

In 2001 we were working with the Pom Mahakan community on the edge of Rattanakosin Island in Bangkok. They had been facing the threat of eviction at that point for nearly a decade and yet they continued to resist[37]. As the city pushed for a more immediate eviction in early 2002, the students, having gone through a lengthy process with the community in developing a design programme, prepared a bilingual feasibility study (English/Thai) for the community to use as part of their argument to stay. They took this study to the city planning department and were rejected by the experts ('we're the planners, you're not'). With the help of some Thai and international professors, we made a submission to the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand (NHRCT). In a 3-hour meeting with the Commissioner, the representatives of the planning department, the Governor's office, the National Housing Authority, one of my students was given about 5 minutes at the end of a short presentation by one of the four community leaders there. She presented a summary of the study and the proposal the community had for how their design could meet the requirements of the city for a park and still allow them to stay. At the end of the meeting the Commissioner told the experts to cease and desist until he had the opportunity to review this alternative plan and come to some decision about their right to housing and their right to culture (Bristol, 2009).

That experience led to a closer examination of the intersection between architecture and human rights. The argument made before NHRCT was not just about law. Architecture also formed a persuasive part of the community's successful argument. Architecture was not just a design – a tool for the design and construction of buildings – it was part of an argument for the protection and promotion of rights – in this case housing rights (UDHR, Art. 25) and cultural rights (UDHR, Art. 27).

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[33] Eleanor Roosevelt, FDR's widow, and the chair of the drafting committee for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, included these 'four freedoms' in the Preamble.

[34] See "Principles of International Law Recognized in the Charter of the Nüremberg Tribunal and in the Judgment of the Tribunal, 1950" available online at https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/nuremberg-principles-1950?activeTab=undefined. A similarly faulty defense was rejected at the court-martial of Lt. Calley in the aftermath of the My Lai massacre (https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/william-calley-jr-and-the-my-lai-massacre/)

[35] Available online here: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights

[36] The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf adopted by the UN September 2007. The RAIC adopted it at their annual conference in 2021. See https://www.constructioncanada.net/raic-adopts-un-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples/

[37] This story is told in more detail in Bristol, 'Strategies for Survival'.

Are there other connections? I have been exploring that since that meeting in the National Human Rights Commission. So far, this is where I see the connections[38]:

- The right to participate – as mentioned above, this was identified as a right in the Vancouver Declaration in 1976. That right relates to an important observation by Arnstein (1968) that participation can be and is subverted into, as she describes it, 'manipulation' and 'therapy'. This right also relates to direct democracy.
- Cultural rights – UNESCO[39] and ICOMOS[40] work to protect world heritage sites and architects are certainly involved in that work. The cultural rights that concern me here are about the protection of vernacular culture. As with the Pom Mahakan community, they recognized the culture they had and wanted to preserve it. It was, though, invisible to the authorities. They had quite a different (a much narrower) understanding of what constituted culture.
- Rights of Access – architects will understand this right more readily since, in many jurisdictions, it is part of the building code to provide access for the disabled. That is certainly a fundamental part of the rights of access[41]. However, there is more to it. We must also consider access to the services of the city[42].
- Housing Rights (UDHR, Art. 25) – Canada has recognized the right to housing in the National Housing Strategy Act (2019)[43]. This is still a big step away from a policy response protecting that right. There is still a huge gap between recognizing the right and implementing policy that protects it. We see the evidence of that gap on our city streets every day.
- Environmental Rights – The right to a clean environment was recognized by the UN in 2022[44]. Humans have a right to a clean environment but there is considerable movement now to recognize the rights of the environment itself[45] – rivers, forests, oceans. It is an insurmountable prospect to recognize our right to clean air and water if we don't recognize the rights of that air and water themselves to be clean.
- Workers' rights – in much of the Western world, construction workers are protected by legislation and oversight. For much of the world, though, such protections rarely exist. This applies not only to the workers themselves but to their families often living on site. Human Rights Watch has done some excellent work in reporting on the abuse of rights on major construction sites (the Olympics, World Cup, etc.). Architects and engineers, as prime consultants on such sites have the opportunity and the obligation to protect the rights of workers and, in most instances, their families as well.

While I see an intersection between architecture and human rights, the profession has a mountain to climb to recognize our impact on these rights, much less to advocate for them. If we are to move forward to embrace these responsibilities, we have much work to do as individual professionals, as teachers of architecture, and as institutions.

7. Moving Forward

Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command

[38] See also Bristol, 'Architecture and Human Rights'
[39] See here - https://whc.unesco.org/
[40] See here - https://www.icomos.org/en
[41] See also Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) - https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd
[42] See also, the World Charter on the Right to the City - https://www.hic-net.org/world-charter-for-the-right-to-the-city/
[43] The Act is available online - https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/n-11.2/FullText.html
[44] See A/76/L.75 "The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment". Available online file:///C:/Users/glbri/Downloads/A_76_L.75-EN.pdf
[45] See, for example, "Rights of Nature: A Catalyst for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda on Water" Available online https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/rights-nature-catalyst-implementation-sustainable-development-agenda-water

Your old road is rapidly agin'
Please get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'[46]

There is a popular aphorism with many possible sources: 'A society grows great when old men plant trees under whose shade they know they'll never sit.' I find this relates well to Le Guin's statement that the revolution is in your spirit. It begins with an approach, a way to live a life, using the skills and knowledge you have picked up along the way. It is directed towards something. Socrates pointed out that the 'unexamined life is not worth living'[47]. That still holds true, but I want to say that there is an additional element – one must also act. In other words, you plant the tree. You do the work arising out of your self-examination. Turner led by example and his example has been recognized by many architects continuing this alternative to traditional practice. It has also been recognized and applauded by a wider community.

While the Pritzker Prize is regarded as one of the most prestigious honours for architects, there is a greater honour and that is the Right Livelihood Award. As their website states:

"Our Award aims to boost urgent and long-term social change. We do this by recognizing the actions of brave visionaries working for a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world for all."[48]

Of the 187 laureates, there are only two architects who have received this award. The inaugural laureate in 1980 was Hasan Fathy and the second in 1988 was John Turner. They both set a laudable example for the next generation of architects and their commitment to building a better world.

We are facing multiple challenges, indeed, crises in global housing, in climate catastrophe, in tipping points with resources. Our existing systems are largely responsible for creating these crises. We can't depend on them to overcome this state of affairs. We have no choice but to move forward with new visions and new strategies to get to a shared vision. All our assumptions must be questioned. In my experience, the political philosophy of anarchism is a great instigator in raising such questions about the failures of how we live together now and the possibilities of how we could find a better way. It is urgent that we find a better way. This old man is going to plant his tree and take the next step . . . and the next. As Martin Luther King said: "If you can't fly, run; if you can't run, walk; if you can't walk, crawl; but by all means keep moving."[49] The world won't get better unless we move towards it – arms linked in solidarity.

Of course, this raises many questions for further inquiry:

- How can solidarity be achieved in a fractured world? This is something with which I have had to wrestle while teaching architecture in Bangkok, particularly when we were working with migrant construction workers (see, for example, 'Report to Funders'). I have found some answers in the work of Sol Alinsky and John McKnight, both community organizers based out of Chicago. Achieving solidarity was also something with which Cesar Chavez had to wrestle in organizing migrant farm workers in California in the 1960s.
- What is the relationship between the processes of architecture and community solidarity? - This question relates to the development of a programme through the active participation of the community. How do we move beyond the tokenism typical of the modern public process of approving new developments in a city? (something covered briefly in Arnstein's 1969 paper)
- What is the relationship between the processes of architecture and advocacy for rights? – this raised the more general question about the role architecture can play in advocating for vulnerable communities (see also Paul Davidoff's Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning (1965)

[46] Bob Dylan, The Times They Are A-Changin' (1964)
[47] A variation from Plato's Apology 38
[48] Available online: https://rightlivelihood.org/what-we-do/the-right-livelihood-award/
[49] "Keep Moving from This Mountain," Address at Spelman College on 10 April 1960. Available online https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/keep-moving-mountain-address-spelman-college-10-april-1960

- What are the obligations of the profession in the use of design to rally communities towards solidarity and rights? There are individual 'citizen architects' (to use Sam Mockbee's term) but does the profession itself, through its institutions have a responsibility to advocate on behalf of communities who cannot afford the services of an advocate? Is there a place in the profession for what the legal profession calls a 'public defender'?
- What is the relationship between architecture and community organizing? Where does one end and the other begin? – I regularly came up against this question in working with students in slum communities and construction camps. One possible answer is in the composition of design teams to include community organizers, health care workers, educators and so on.
- How do these questions relate to the traditional curriculum in architecture schools?

The profession can and should be doing much more than it is.

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