



PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN
SUMMER FELLOWSHIP 2016

THE ALBERT AND TINA

**SMALL
CENTER**

FOR COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

05	DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT
06	ABOUT THE FELLOWS
08	RENTERS' RIGHTS CAMPAIGN
12	BEHAVIORAL HEALTH + PUBLIC SCHOOLS
16	NEW ORLEANS LEAD WATER STUDY
18	HOUSING NOLA INITIATIVE
20	THE PUBLIC INTEREST IN DESIGN JAVIER GONZALEZ
22	REDESIGNING A DESIGN EDUCATION CHESLEY MCCARTY
24	PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN AND EDUCATION JOHN LUDLAM
26	HSIEH YING-CHUN: DESIGN FOR PEOPLE SHIRLEY CHEN
28	WE CANNOT DISASSOCIATE POWER + PRIVILEGE KATI DVORAK
30	HUMANITARIANISM + WHITE MANIFESTATION WITH "HELPING THE OTHERS" CASSIDY ROSEN

PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN:

DESIGN DECISIONS
THAT ARE BEYOND
PURE AESTHETIC
VALUE, AND INSTEAD
ADDRESS ECONOMIC,
ENVIRONMENTAL, AND
SOCIAL FACTORS.
THE DESIGN AIMS TO
IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF
LIFE FOR THE END USER.

- AS DEFINED BY THE SUMMER 2016 PID FELLOWS



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Each year, we are fortunate to be able to hire young designers from the Tulane School of Architecture to work in our office for an 8-week intensive fellowship. This is an opportunity for the Fellows to hone the technical skills they learn in school while helping to advance real projects alongside leaders from organizations addressing the needs of New Orleans citizens. With a dedicated workforce, this fellowship is an opportunity for us to experiment with new modes of working and to engage the Fellows as thought partners on questions and challenges we see in the field.

As designers, we learn to analyze the built environment through representation: maps, diagrams, sketches, pictograms, annotated photographs. We are taught to begin design for a site by understanding the broader social, cultural, and physical context we work in; we know that those systems are physically manifest in the built environment of our city and it is our responsibility to know how our proposal is impacted by and hopefully improves the systems it engages. This process of understanding is often done through maps and diagrams that we make as explanations to ourselves. These artifacts are rarely displayed as an architect's 'work.' Small Center staff are excited to see other designers (Center for Urban Pedagogy, Hester Street, Teddy Cruz, Scape, to name a few) using representation and architectural analysis as tools of education and activism to challenge the often invisible structures that shape our lives.

This summer, our Fellows took on the challenge of testing and framing our approach to design projects as advocacy and education. Together with Small Center staff and partners, the Fellows worked with organizations and individuals who are helping to shape a healthier city through needed improvements to the systems of healthcare, education, housing, and water. They have been patient, thoughtful, and inventive as we developed a set of projects much different than those they work on in school.

We are proud to present to you the Summer 2016 Public Interest Design Fellows. The following booklet was developed by the Fellows as a reflection of their experiences. We are particularly proud that they proposed to each write a critical reflection on Public Interest Design as a capstone to their summer. It gives a window into the thoughtful work and critical thinking that characterized this group. We look forward to seeing them continue to grow as leaders in the field.

GREATER NEW ORLEANS FAIR
HOUSING ACTION CENTER

HOUSING NOLA INITIATIVE



KATARINA DVORAK

ITHACA, NY
M. ARCH, 5TH YEAR

In Spring 2016, Katarina participated in a design/build studio with Small Center that worked to remodel the interior space of the Community Book Center on Bayou Road. Katarina is excited to work as a Fellow this summer and through this work she hopes to gain more experience using design as a tool for social justice and the creation of equitable solutions.

CASSIDY ROSEN

BOULDER, CO
M. ARCH I, 2ND YEAR

Cassidy attended the University of Colorado at Boulder for her undergraduate degree in Environmental Design, with a concentration in Architecture and minor in Ethnic Studies. What drew her to Tulane for graduate school is the work of Small Center. She is interested in the intersection of social justice and advocacy and its relationship to creating equitable spaces.

EVAN WAGNER

WALL, NJ
M. ARCH, 5TH YEAR
2017 SIEZELER FELLOW

Evan has appreciated the compelling history and unique culture of this city throughout his time here, and he is interested in learning how to contribute to a more equitable future for New Orleans. Working at Small Center provides him the opportunity to grow as a socially conscious citizen while participating in impactful community-focused projects.

CHESLEY MCCARTY

HUNTSVILLE, AL
M. ARCH, 5TH YEAR

Chesley's time with the Undergraduate Admissions Office and Undergraduate Student Government have shaped her passion for collaboration across disciplines in the creation of effective design solutions. She is excited to spend her summer developing her public interest design skills and exploring new ways to combine her interests to create meaningful design work.

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH +
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**NEW ORLEANS LEAD
WATER STUDY**



JAVIER GONZALEZ

GUATEMALA
M. ARCH, 2ND YEAR

Javier completed a Bachelor of Science in Architecture at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He is interested in the built environment for the manifestation of social, cultural, economic, physical, and political forces and values in its design. He hopes to use his education and experience in order to embed socially conscious and responsible practices into his work.

SHIRLEY CHEN

FUZHOU, CHINA
M. ARCH, 3RD YEAR

Her experience in different urban environments sparks an interest in understanding the relationship between place and identity. She is excited to learn more about Public Interest Design and the architect's role in community engagement as a summer fellow at Small Center. Her other interests include cooking, traveling and graphic design.

PAVLO IOSIPIV

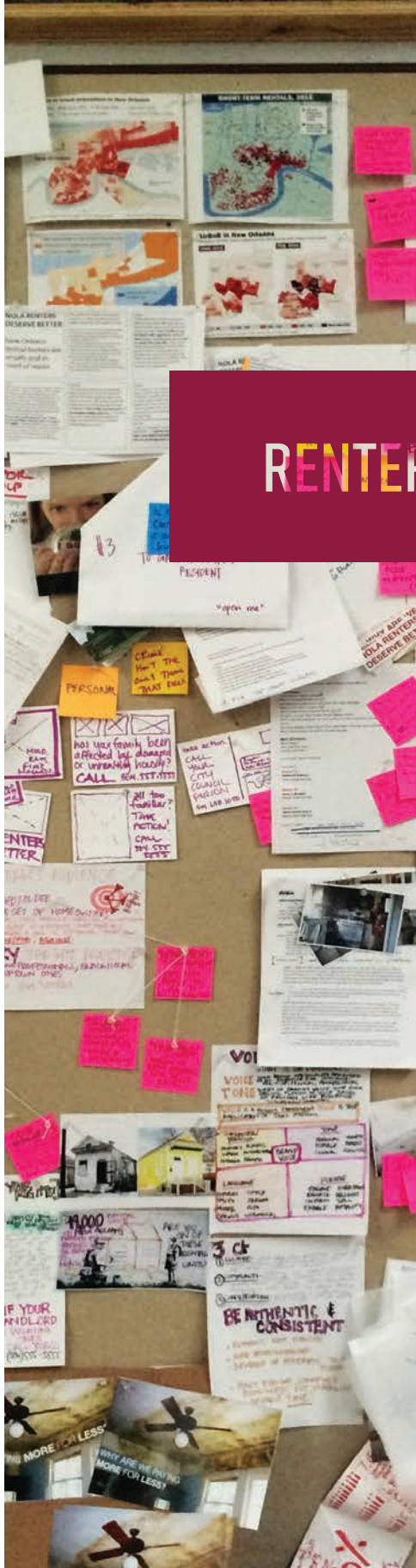
NEW ORLEANS, LA
M. ARCH, 4TH YEAR

A native of New Orleans, Pavlo is a rising 4th year in the 5-year M. Arch program at the Tulane School of Architecture. During his time at Tulane, he has developed a greater interest in visual communication, as well as thoughtful and socially-conscious design.

JOHN LUDLAM

RED HOOK, NY
M. ARCH, 5TH YEAR

John came to the School of Architecture excited to learn from its focus on community engagement and socially conscious design. During his time at Tulane, he has developed an interest in making, as well as urban design, which he studied during a semester abroad.



KATARINA DVORAK
CASSIDY ROSEN

ALBERTA WRIGHT
EMILIE TAYLOR WELTY

RENTERS' RIGHTS CAMPAIGN

Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC), is a nonprofit civil rights organization established in 1995 to eradicate housing discrimination. Partnering with GNOFHAC, the project team worked to create three deliverables that would help raise awareness for the lack of adequate renters' rights in New Orleans. These deliverables included the creation of a mailer which would be sent out to all New Orleans Council Districts, a brochure which could be distributed to neighborhoods, and focus groups critiquing the first two.

It was important to take into consideration the very different audiences who could be receiving the mailers and brochures, so establishing the correct tone and feel was the first priority. The focus groups were essential in getting the critical feedback needed from target audiences.

MAILER

The purpose of the mailer was to get the attention of renters and homeowners in New Orleans, with the intention of getting constituents to call their specific City Council member. The main challenge with the mailer was paring down the information to the most essential, as well as trying to evoke a response from those who would be receiving the piece in the mail. The mailer went through many rounds of feedback, from the first focus group to getting opinions from citizens on the street.



FOCUS GROUP

The team held two focus groups; the first being very early in the design process, and the second after the team had refined the information and tone a little bit more. First came the generation and selection of effective slogans for the campaign. Then the group identified images that were particularly striking. The final focus group gathered feedback concerning the final direction for the mailer as well as preliminary feedback regarding the brochure. At each stage, this input played a decisive role in the direction of the design.



BROCHURE

The brochure builds on the tone established in the mailer; however, as it hoped to induce a lasting awareness and support for the issue, the brochure had to be framed in a different manner. As a graphic design challenge, as well as an informational challenge, the input from the focus group was essential in creating the most effective document through multiple lenses. Various rounds of feedback led to both the graphic style as well as the hierarchy of information.

“

LEARNING TO CREATE AND FACILITATE A FOCUS GROUP WAS AN ENTIRELY NEW EXPERIENCE, ONE THAT TRULY DEMONSTRATED THE VALUE OF GATHERING STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK.

– KATARINA DVORAK

GREATER NEW ORLEANS FAIR HOUSING ACTION CENTER

Renters in New Orleans deserve safe, healthy homes.
LEARN MORE AND HELP OUT

5,300 units experienced **WATER LEAKAGE** from the outside of the structure.

NEW ORLEANS IS A CITY OF RENTERS.
Thousands of renters are living in units with unsafe and unhealthy physical conditions.

HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?
Approximately 49,000 private rentals needed major repairs in the last 12 months.

RENTAL HOMES
47% 50%

Renters are entitled to **decent, safe and healthy homes!**

FOR RENT
\$700/month
incl. Mold, Rats, Water Damage

Landlords should have provide safe and operating:
PLUMBING HEATING ELECTRICITY REPAIRS

THERE IS CURRENTLY NO FUNCTIONAL CITY SYSTEM FOR THE INSPECTION AND ENFORCEMENT OF SAFE RENTAL PROPERTIES

WHAT IS THE ISSUE?
Thousands of New Orleans renters are living in units with unsafe and unhealthy physical conditions.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?
The quality of a home has tangible impacts on educational outcomes, health outcomes, and quality of life.

- hospital visits
- poor school performance
- missed days at work

LOW-QUALITY HOUSING CAN IMPACT THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD

Units with safety and health violations often see high turnover rates as renters leave when they realize landlords and code enforcement won't help. The result is that neighborhoods with substandard rental units tend to have more transient residents. Research shows that crime is often lower in neighborhoods where neighbors say they trust each other and have shared expectations for appropriate behavior.

WHO ARE WE?
The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) is a nonprofit civil rights organization established in 1965 to advocate housing discrimination.

CONTACT US
9am-5pm Mon-Fri
404 S. Jefferson Davis Pkwy
New Orleans, LA 70119
504-596-2100

www.gnofairhousing.org

learn more and find out what you can do . . . ➔

"I was lucky to not have children living in this situation and to be able to come up with another security deposit and move as quickly as I did. I think most people don't have that privilege."
- George

Renters in New Orleans deserve safe, healthy homes.



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- hospital visits
- poor school performance
- missed days at work

"In addition to the physical toll it took on our family, living in the apartment also affected us emotionally. We were often aggravated and at odds with each other and our son was embarrassed and hardly stayed home."
-Lackey

LOW-QUALITY HOUSING CAN IMPACT THE WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD

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WHAT PROTECTION LOOKS LIKE IN...

	Inspections	Rental Registry	Data Collection
DALLAS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FORT WORTH	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
NASHVILLE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

“When I lived in Nashville, before anybody moved into a new apartment there was a mandatory inspection by the City to make sure the home was up to code.”
-Aimee

WHAT COULD PROTECTION LOOK LIKE HERE?
Protection looks like a self-sustaining program that would ensure all rental homes meet basic health and safety standards. It would include a system for receiving complaints and require regular inspections of rental homes.

WHAT CAN I DO?
Share this with your...
FRIENDS
FAMILY
NEIGHBORS
CHURCHES
SCHOOLS

Call and ask for your City Councilmember at:
(504) 658-1000

“Rent is higher than it's ever been before. No one should have to live in a home that makes them sick. The city should make sure all apartments meet basic health and safety standards.”

DID YOU KNOW ... ?

5,250 homes do not have a working **SMOKE DETECTOR**

1,900 homes lack complete **KITCHEN FACILITIES**.

7,150 homes had signs of **RODENTS** in the last 12 months.

2,350 homes had **NO WORKING BATHROOM** during the last 3 months.

CONSTRUCT YOUR OWN HOME

“The people next door got bedbugs and they got sick, her babies’ backs were eaten up. He rented it to the next people without saying a word.”
-Brays

“We had rodents and roaches too. Living in that apartment, I started to develop respiratory problems. I coughed constantly, I had nosebleeds, and I would go through half a box of tissues a night.”
-Ms. Duncan

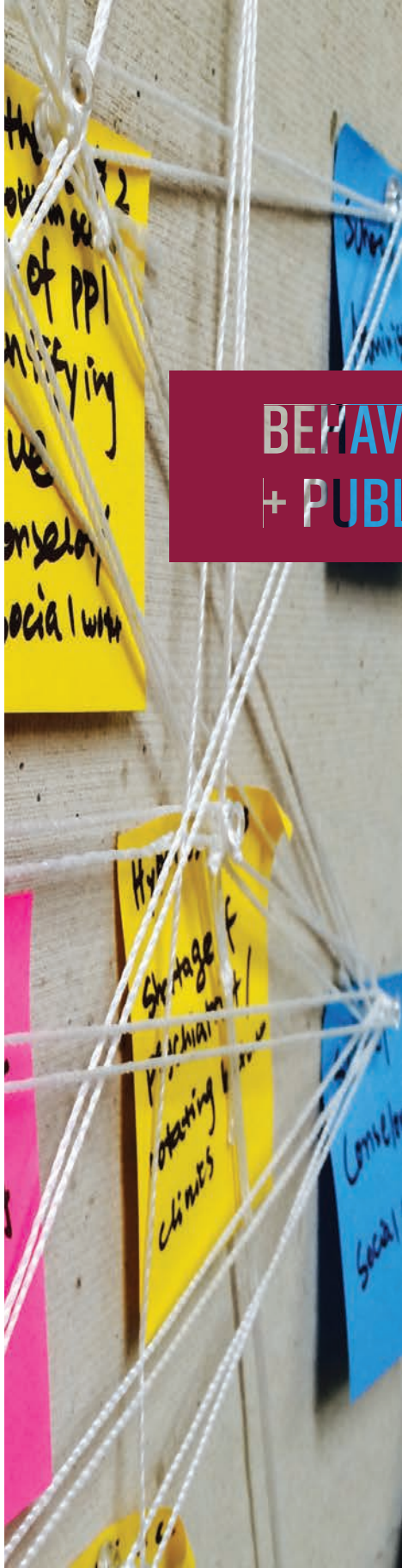
“There were feces coming out [of the] ceiling... I immediately thought it was a water leakage, but found out later through a plumber that it was feces and urine coming from the upstairs plumbing which never got fixed.”
-Mr. Carroll

For more information visit www.gnofairhousing.org

6,850 units experience **WATER LEAKAGE** from the inside of the structure.

“I reported to my landlord that I had mold. My landlord said someone over to paint over the mold.”
-Della

1,770 homes had **MOLD** in the previous year.



SHIRLEY CHEN
JAVIER GONZALEZ

JODY TOWERS
NICK JENSICH

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH + PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Working with the Recovery School District, the team compiled an investigation that presents the relationship between behavioral health facilities and schools in New Orleans. The investigation took the form of using geographic information systems (GIS), as well as qualitative data in the form of interviews to develop an understanding of the panorama relating to these services for school aged children.

Our initial assumption was that behavioral health needs were not being met to their full extent in New Orleans schools, and that it could be useful to investigate the spatial relationships between schools and behavioral health resources, given the landscape of the all charter school system in New Orleans. This distance between where kids live and where they go to school creates a problem when attempting to compile resources that can service both areas.

MAPS

The maps capture spatial and structural relationships between schools and behavioral health resources in New Orleans. Variables included student population, age groups, types of services provided by clinics, neighborhood median income, and languages spoken. The geographical patterns suggest that the supply of behavioral health resources exists but may be underutilized. We realized, however, that the maps could also cause confusion if read without context. That is to say, there is no indication of capacity, quality, types of services, qualified professionals, nor mobility by simply looking at the locations of clinics.

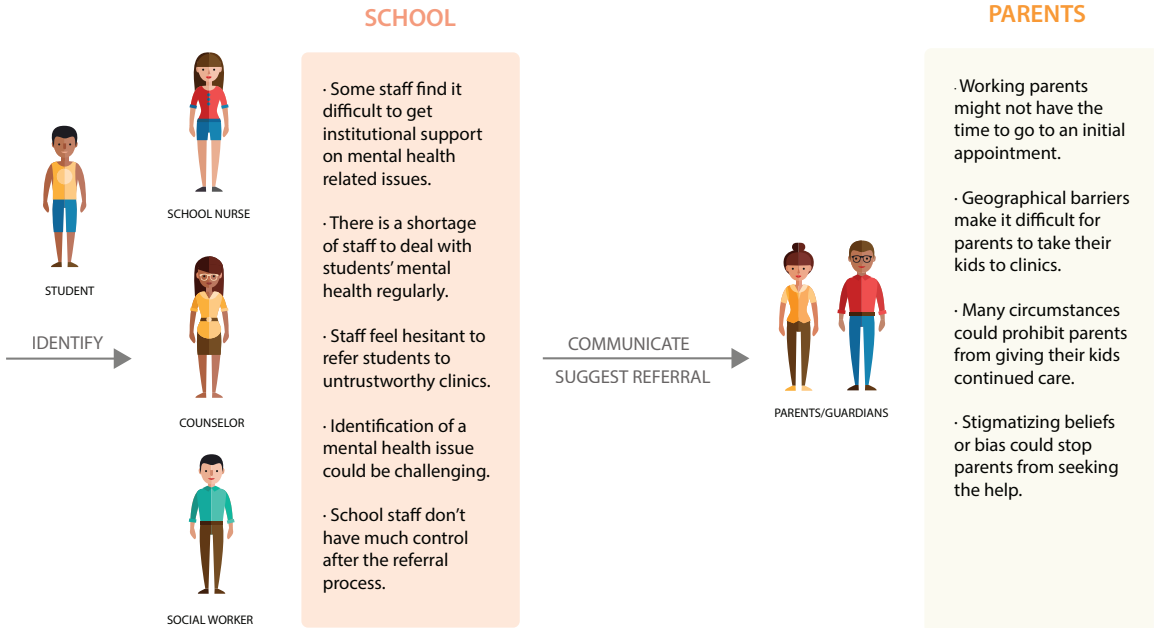
REPORT

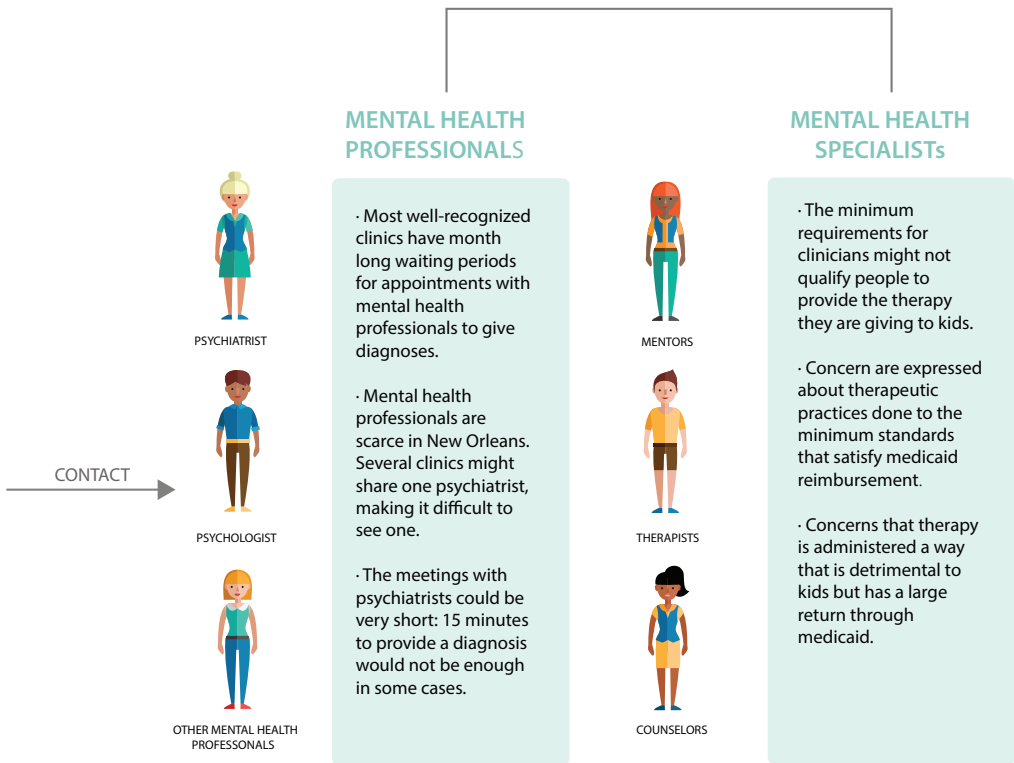
The final report contains not only the maps and interviews, but also related national and regional data, analysis on what the maps do and do not show and case studies. As the project was broadened from the initial scope which prioritized geographical factors, to a greater overview of the problems within the system, the report aims to show the magnitude of factors, including geography, in this complicated issue. The report and maps would serve as a communication tool for Recovery School District and other organizations or individuals involved, and hopefully contributes to the process of providing better mental health support to children and youth in New Orleans.

FOCUS GROUPS

Speaking with a variety of people including school administrators, counselors, parents, and youth group leaders, it was apparent that the quality of mental health services was many interviewees' primary concern. Some people also brought up that it is difficult to distribute and navigate through information within decentralized school and health systems. Infographics tried to capture the comments and feedbacks regarding the mental health referral process from the individuals we interviewed.







NEW ORLEANS LEAD WATER STUDY

JOHN LUDLAM
PAVLO IOSIPIV

EMILIE TAYLOR WELTY
MAGGIE HANSEN

Lead Exposure Assessment for Drinking Water Study (LEAD Study) is a research project quantifying the levels of lead in New Orleans' water. We partnered with Dr. Adrienne Katner, the LEAD Study principal investigator, to create materials that improved accuracy, reach, and scope within the New Orleans study area. Focusing on older, low-income neighborhoods of the city, LEAD Study tests residents' water for free, with the goal of highlighting at-risk areas in the city. More importantly, Dr. Katner's work helps residents understand lead exposure health effects and how to protect themselves and their families. The team developed five tools for the study: easy-to-understand instructions to accompany the study test kits; a door hanger for outreach initiatives; a brochure showing how to take action against lead; a poster examining common lead sources; and bus ads to raise both the profile of the study and the issue itself.

is **LEAD**
in your
water?

Many New Orleans homes have lead pipes, which can leech your children and family.

Ask your doctor about blood testing.
Buy an NSF-certified faucet filter to stay safe.

Call 800-239-7379 for free water testing.

Children
 Pregnant Women
 Adults

Lead in water can harm children's brains and behavior.
 Pregnant women and young children are most at risk.
 Lead in water can also harm adults, especially those with high blood pressure, kidney disease, and pregnant women.

About 10% of homes in New Orleans have lead pipes.
 Lead pipes are most likely to be found in homes built before 1980.

The LEAD Study is a research project to test the water in homes in New Orleans for lead. The study is free and confidential.

For more information, visit www.leadstudy.org or call 800-239-7379.

DOOR HANGER

Door hangers were designed to be distributed to homes across the city, focusing on older, low-income neighborhoods of the city that are at higher risk of lead exposure. Clear graphics and messaging inform residents of some health effects and steps to take to reduce risk of exposure.

OUTREACH

Events were held in conjunction with the LEAD study group to distribute materials and familiarize residents with the test kits and effects of lead exposure. Clear instructions for how to perform the lead water test were designed and distributed by the Fellows, as well.



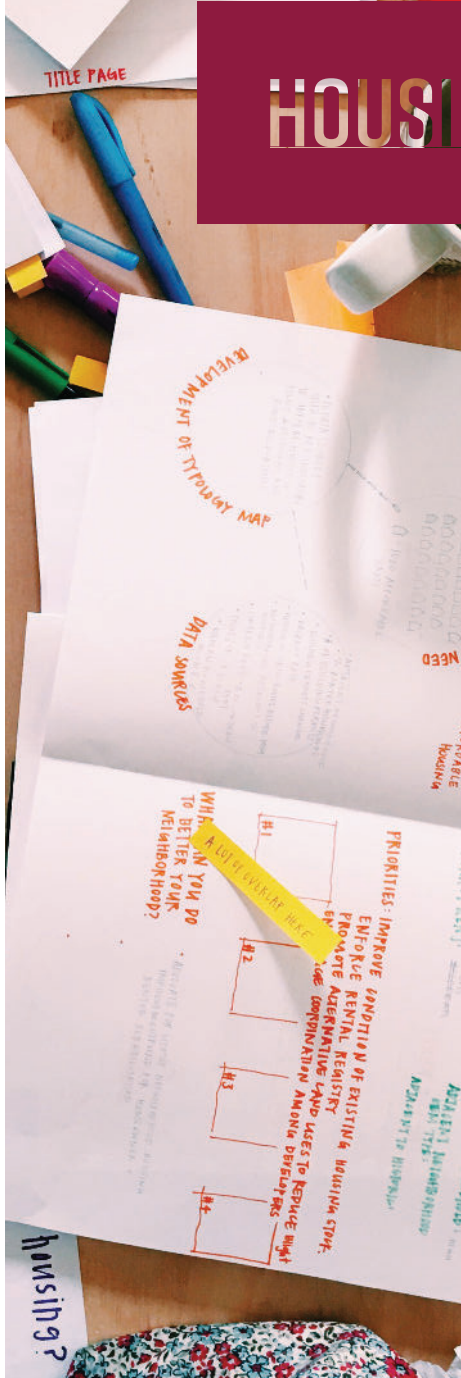


EVAN WAGNER
CHESLEY MCCARTY

DWIGHT NORTON
NICK JENISCH

HOUSING NOLA INITIATIVE

Our work with the Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance and the HousingNOLA initiative, which is an affordable housing plan for New Orleans, unfolded into three deliverables over the course of 8 weeks. First, we created 15 different brochures each aimed at a different key stakeholder in the quest for affordable housing, including state legislators, renters, specific neighborhoods, home buyer educators. Second, we created a “New Orleans Housing Density” interactive slide show that could be used to educate and illustrate density in our city; this presentation includes twenty slides with different examples of density and also an exercise illustrating how housing density is affected by zoning regulations. Lastly, we worked with HousingNOLA to create a report card that can be used to track their yearly progress, as they work to achieve a more equitable New Orleans through housing.



TRIFOLD

During the first half of the summer, the team worked to develop three series of informational brochures for multiple user groups, including one for each neighborhood gem type, legislators, and community members such as landlords, owners, and renters. The brochures include HousingNOLA's mission, the current housing crisis in New Orleans, and the action each user group can take to address the crisis. Each series takes on a different tone depending on the ultimate user; for example, the brochures issued to each "gem type" used diagrams and pictures to graphically represent the data, whereas the brochures issued to the legislators used bar graphs and include more text on specific policies. Between the fourteen documents produced, the series covers a wide range of information and provides recommendations and solutions for the future of housing in New Orleans.



REPORT CARD

The HousingNOLA team worked with Small Center to develop a report card to monitor their progress in improving the housing crisis in New Orleans. HousingNOLA needed a document that was easy to use to track in house progress, but also helpful for people in New Orleans to understand strides that had been made and also areas for improvement in the coming years. The report card breaks down into major short-term goals and long-term goals.



DENSITY STUDY

For the density study, Fellows worked with HousingNOLA to develop a user friendly presentation on housing density in New Orleans. This served as an educational tool in meetings to explain the types of historic density found in New Orleans, and also illustrated current proposals for density. The study and presentation aimed to dispel misconceptions about density and to advocate for a density number that echoed the city's historic urban fabric.





JAVIER GONZALEZ

THE PUBLIC

INTEREST IN DESIGN

20

When writing about a polemical subject in the current discourse of Architecture, I find no more appropriate way to begin a discussion than through a Facebook status – the de facto platform of choice by many to discuss and confront world affairs. I am specifically referring to Patrik Schumacher's retort in response to the announcement of Alejandro Aravena's 2016 Pritzker Prize. Allowed to speak for itself:

"The PC takeover of architecture is complete: Pritzker Prize mutates into a prize for humanitarian work. The role of the architect is now 'to serve greater social and humanitarian needs' and the new Laureate is hailed for 'tackling the global housing crisis' and for his concern for the underprivileged. Architecture loses its specific societal task and responsibility, architectural innovation is replaced by the demonstration of noble intentions and the discipline's criteria of success and excellence dissolve in the vague do-good-feel-good pursuit of 'social justice.'" (1)

When he speaks about the politically correct takeover of architecture, Patrik refers to work following a trend in society to challenge systemic issues that perpetuate injustices. Today, new forms of communications have already created a networked culture. Social media, cellphones with video recording capabilities, and free information sharing platforms have made it increasingly difficult to conceal socially unjust or inequitable societal processes (2). As many endemic problems rise to the front of all the screens that pervasively fight for our attention every day, projects that challenge the status quo of prioritizing profit-making and venerating the free market, as well as neoliberal ideologies, garner deserved attention by those interested enough to look for them. The fact that there is institutional support by the Pritzker Prize

Committee to architectural projects of this nature should symbolize a commitment by the profession to look at its role within this greater conversation.

Patrik Schumacher, points to a deep problem of architecture as a profession by saying that what Elemental does is not a part of our expertise, which is the rejection of the responsibility and agency that designers have towards the built environment. Narrowing the problem of architectural design to its formal and technical experimentation is a willful rejection of the social, communal, and economic platform that creates the conditions for design to emerge. There are inherent value systems embedded in every technical enterprise. Proposing architectural interventions without examining their social dimension is simply a regurgitation of the modernist fascination with the scientific mentality as a universal solution (3).

Criticism of this mentality has taken a multiplicity of forms in the architectural discourse. I won't go into a history lesson of architectural styles and practice, but it will suffice to say that there are at least two schools of thought that are attempting to tackle the problem today. The first addresses it through insulating architecture into a self-referential cultural product done for its own sake outside of the relationships and parameters that define it (4). The second, and the one which concerns this essay, works through the recognition of the instrumentality of design thinking in addressing structural and societal problems along other professions. The latter is where public interest design comes in.

This is not an argument that takes a stance that technical experimentation should be dismissed by the profession.

Technological advancements within the construction industry need to occur in order to reduce the extremely problematic statistic that accounts buildings as producers of 39% of the Greenhouse gas emissions in the US (5). Neither is this an argument for the superiority of architecture in solving deep rooted structural issues. The recognition of the limits of architecture is an integral part of the push for socially conscious design within and through interdisciplinary practice. This is an argument to acknowledge the role that the built environment can have in producing conditions conducive to equity (6).

Accepting this is the first step in taking responsibility. As such, it also involves an examination of what the limits are for design to tackle these issues. As designers, collaborating with other disciplines should be a large portion of our expertise. Even beyond simply taking a interdisciplinary approach, we can foster justice through elevating the communities which are affected by our work as critical stakeholders in the process of design. Communities know and understand their needs and experiences better than anyone. This creates an expertise, which can and should be embedded in our built environment (7). This process of negotiation and community input is constant. Stepping away from the elitist mentality that has historically accompanied the profession is a necessary first step.

Designing without fully understanding the issues that communities care and know about has real consequences that have played out in our built environment. The problem of gentrification and public housing are just one of the latest manifestations of deliberate spatial manipulations that were engineered to disenfranchise entire communities (8). The reason that the profession is perceived to be losing relevance is its resignation to issues of that nature as “outside our expertise”. It is time that professionals of the built environment take on the responsibility to advocate for the users of that environment. If we want to tackle the problems that we as a society are clearly in need of solving, new ways of thinking and uncomfortable conversations need to happen first.

Public interest design is an attempt to widen the scope of the profession to include this responsibility (9). It is born out of a critical stance of the practice and theory of architecture to look inward for answers about its relevance. It does not allow itself to disengage with the issues that give rise to the conditions that produce it and does this by giving a voice to the people it engages with. It celebrates the notion of local knowledge and creates a platform for discussion and control of the built environment by the public. It is a call for the design profession to truly question what its role is, and to come forward – not as an instrument of power and oppression for the ruling few, but as a platform for the disenfranchised many to foster agency over their environment.

NOTES

- (1) Patrick Schumacher
- (2) Examples include Anonymous, the Arab Spring, Wikileaks, the Occupy Movement, Black Lives Matter, the Snowden Revelations, etc.
- (3) Cedric Johnson. “The Urban Precariat: Neoliberalization and the Soft Power of Humanitarian Design”
- (4) Gage, Mark Foster. “Killing Simplicity: Object Oriented Design in Architecture.” Foster writes about the incorporation of object oriented ontology in architecture and the need to define architecture primarily by what makes it architectural. Avant-garde architecture programs such as Southern California Institute of Architecture or Pratt University tend towards this.
- (5) UN Environmental Programme Buildings and Climate Change Report
- (6) See “Rebel Cities” by David Harvey, “Writings on Cities” by Henri Lefebvre, or “An Architecture of Change” by José L.S. Gámez and Susan Rogers for the case of architecture and the built environment to possess emancipatory qualities and potentials.
- (7) The so-called father of Neoliberalism, Friedrich Hayek, wrote an essay on “The Use of Knowledge in Society” which advocates the notion that people are experts in their own interests. Here, that same notion is used without taking the free market as the best solution to create the fairest possible society. Giving primacy to economic transactions in a supposed equal playing field ignores the structural inequities discussed here and provides a stage for people with access to capital to have disproportionate voices and naturally advocate for self-serving interests.
- (8) See the history of redlining maps in the United States, the background of which also set the stage in which the Black Lives Matter protests are taking place.
- (9) It addresses the lack of concern for equity brought up by the Whitney Young Speech given to the AIA in 1968.



CHESLEY MCCARTY REDESIGNING A DESIGN EDUCATION

22

Public interest design: described as the “next frontier” of both sustainability and architecture; an inclusive design approach that requires front-end participation and contribution to the design from the user, often the local community at large, and considers the social and economic implications of how a design might affect the surrounding area.

Not that this should come as any surprise at all, but I’m having one of those moments where I am trying to figure out what exactly what I want to do with my life, and I blame much of that feeling on the “Design Futures” conference I attended at the end of May. The five day conference studied how the built environment has shaped racial, gender, and class dynamics and explored how design can help to break through the walls that we built in order to make our communities and other communities better places to live, work, and play. Attendees included a range of educational backgrounds, including illustration, economics, urban planning, engineering, architecture, and communication design, all from different parts of the country and world with various upbringings and histories. We spent the day in lectures and workshops and the early evenings in small group discussions, where we dove deeply into questions about privilege and discrimination, but the conversations continued well into the night and challenged us to adopt a mindset that infiltrated every aspect of our work. All of these discussions broadly covered different facets of public interest design, a noun that in the past ten years has entered common architectural lingo in school and the professional world, and in some places more than others. Public interest design demands a more socially and ethically responsible architecture; it’s the next wave of sustainability, using a wide-angle lens to see why environmental problems, public policy, and social constructs have shaped the way we occupy space.

At the root of many of our discussions during the conference was this manifest:

“As an architect, you are responsible for the built environment. The built environment has shaped communities, our vision of a community, and a community’s vision of themselves. As designers we are responsible for the inequity of spaces, for racial and class tensions that permeate neighborhood boundaries. What are you going to do about it? How are you going to use design to change what our predecessors have created?”

There seem to be two approaches to this question:

The first is the design approach, and requires that instead of making assumptions about what is right and best, you rigorously engage the community to reach a collective consensus on the ultimate design. This often manifests itself as participatory design meetings with users from the surrounding or affected area, to see what they want in the design and how the design can benefit them. Allow me to point out that this approach requires a serious questioning and understanding of the “community;” many designers use this phrase very nonchalantly, failing to recognize that their perception of the community is often incorrect and exclusive of a large group of people who will ultimately be affected by the design.

The second approach comes only after recognizing that as an architect, you have some power, but not nearly as much power as the developer or policy maker, which is the guy behind the desk making a decision about the zoning that keeps certain types of homes in one areas and certain types in the next area. These people are the ones really calling the

shots in the built environment, because they decide what gets built where and who can live there, and then they send off their building request to the architect, who in a moment of desperation looking for a design job, is most likely not going to question the ethical sense in building a neighborhood next to a nuclear power plant or at the bottom of a hill. This gap between the decision makers and the designers calls attention to the many problems in the built environment, including displacement, the affordable housing crisis, lack of access to healthcare facilities – the list can go on and on here. In order to really see through some of these radical changes that are necessary for the built environment to become a healthier and more inclusive place, we cannot only engage the community, after recognizing who the community really includes; we have to engage the developers, the patrons, the policy makers, the business owners, or better yet, we have to become them.

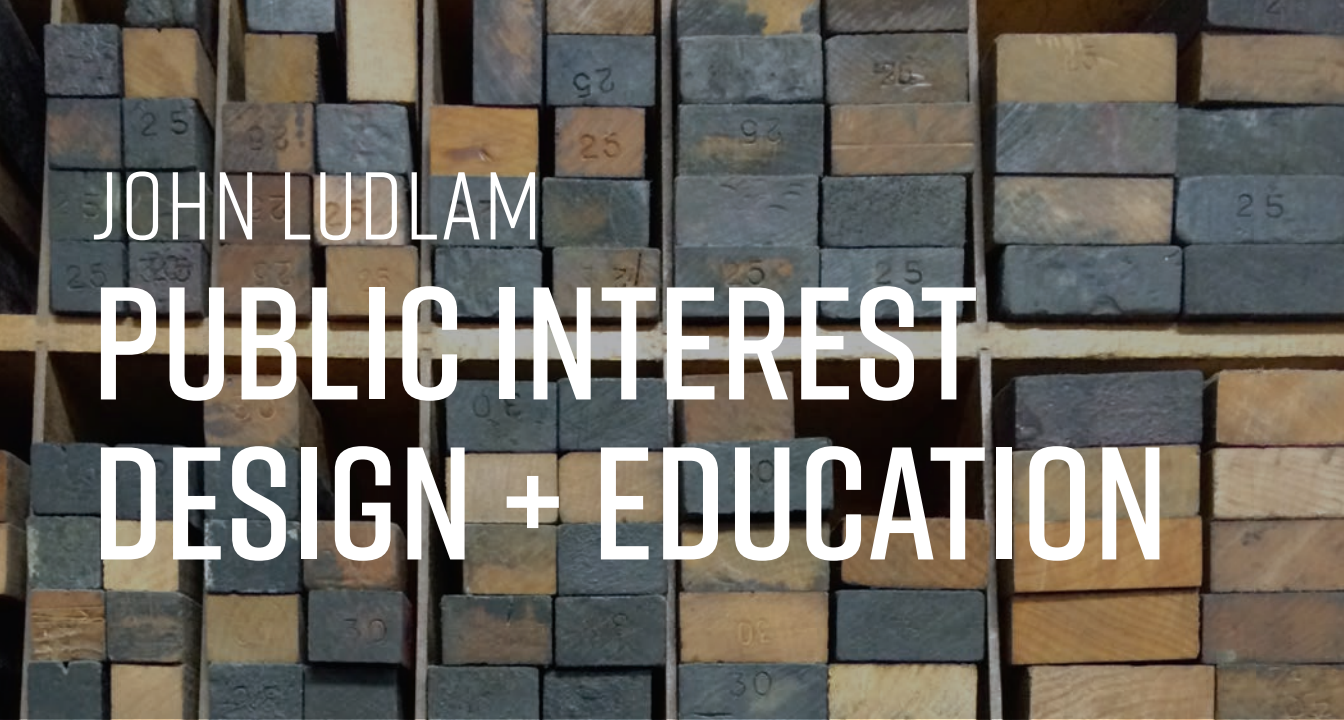
So why blame the conference for my lost sense of place? I use blame very lightly here, because I'm actually very grateful for the way those five days have shaped my understanding of architecture and my future as a designer. The conference showed me that I can use a design degree to become a consultant, a politician, a sociologist, a developer; in fact, becoming a public interest designer demands that my architecture hat be one of multiple hats that I own, and that I wear all of these hats at one time. Truth be told, my architecture education has only prepared me for one version of what the architecture world looks like, yet because of the unique opportunities I have sought out, I have seen that there is more than meets the eye. I wish I had known and accepted at a younger point in my architecture curriculum that I could use my degree to become an urban planner and economics guru that fights for more equitable spaces in residential and commercial spaces.

When I was a sophomore, I took a professional concerns class that nearly scared me out of the major entirely; we spent hours talking about the road to licensure, a 5-7 year (on average) process expected of many architecture graduates as they enter the professional world, and requires a handful of tests and hours spent at a desk working on construction documents. It made me think that was the only thing I could do with my degree, and that scared me. Since then, I have come to believe that an architecture major is absolutely one of the best educational decisions one can make, but it certainly comes with an array of challenges that demand a student not only to have endurance, but also to self-reflect, self-educate, and self-motivate, especially in terms of determining a career path.

Sustainable design is now a given; you wouldn't design an interior gathering space with no shade, all glass, south facing, and not thinking about the effect it will have on your energy bills. Public interest design is the next frontier, as we use design to address big problems and small problems whose

energy can be felt most strongly in the development of the built environment. In order to prepare designers for this next frontier, the analysis of both an ethical and carbon footprint, it is time that we seek a change in our education. No matter your chosen discipline, your worth, skills, and interests cannot be measured by your transcript and your resume, and your path after graduation is not determined by the degree that you hold. Trans-disciplinary collaboration – the intimate collaboration between different practices areas to create the most appropriate solution – should not just start in the professional world for those lucky enough to find its benefit in professional practice. Instead, this collaboration should start in the classroom by encouraging design students to understand financial implications of material decisions and business students to see effective, profit-earning developments that bring people together. The practice of public interest design is not limited to a small sector of the design world, but it is a mindset that can and should be adopted by designers, engineers, businesses, illustrators, and developers. The built environment is at the forefront of many issues we grapple with day to day – issues of shelter and affordable housing, sexual orientation, maintenance of tradition and heritage, education, healthcare – and we have the power to change it only if we accept that our role as architects is larger than what an architecture education has taught us, and that in every businessman and psychologist there is also a little bit of architect. Until we advocate for changes in our education, the changes our world demands for survival and growth will be slow to come.

I am so grateful to have had an experience that opened up my understanding on the design world, and this is only the beginning of the journey. People ask me what I will do after graduation - will I go into historic preservation, or will I design buildings? My question is, why does our conversation limit a designer's capability to such a narrow execution of our skill set, and what can the future of design really look like?



JOHN LUDLAM PUBLIC INTEREST DESIGN + EDUCATION

24

Design, as it is taught in architecture school, can be an isolated process, often framed in the context of designing for a single person or group, without regard to the wider impacts of the final result. This blatantly ignores how a project will affect the larger community, especially for those who are not in a position to hire their own designers. Because the only people who have power over design are those included in the process, creating a more equitable profession requires an education to emphasize practices that favor an equitable world.

The theme of the precious few ruling the many is inescapable in contemporary society. Protests and campaigns have been founded on distrust of the elite, who have been empowered by staggering wealth inequality and public policies that unfairly favor them, such as funding schools through property taxes (1) and corporate tax loopholes (2). Candidates and artists have spent their time and publicity on exposing the issue itself. Films and music tell stories of abundant downtrodden. In this cultural context, how can we be content with a practice that imposes the desires of the few onto the needs of the many?

Modernist logic, ubiquitous in architecture schools (3), teaches one to see a design project as a problem that, with sufficient study, can be solved (4). Students dissect a site's physical characteristics, such as surrounding building fabric, green space, and views. Less emphasized in these site visits, however, is interaction with the myriad of social and cultural characteristics. Furthermore, the research that is done on these subjects is often completed in a school library or studio, devoid of any face-to-face interaction with the community.

If design truly intends to better the circumstances of those that

are affected by it, designers must learn to receive feedback from those very groups. Students, however, are educated in an environment in which the primary feedback they hear is from professors and peers, which leads to an emphasis on formal characteristics, rather than function and larger impact (5). Rarely is there a framework in place for receiving input from those outside of the design field. This can breed an insular environment often content with discussing only the aesthetics of a structure. While beauty is desirable, it is tarnished if it chooses blindness over virtue.

In New Orleans, the redevelopment of the St. Thomas Public Housing Development put the wants of the privileged over the desperate needs of the many (6). In this case, as in many others, the process played out alongside stark racial divisions. By the 1990s, St. Thomas was over 95% African American residents living in dire poverty, surrounded by wealthy white neighborhoods. At that time, 739 affordable units were occupied; the new development only planned to contain 276 affordable units, a 62% reduction in subsidized housing stock. Taking the place of the previously affordable units were market-rate ones, useless in assisting those in harsh financial straits.

The floor was taken out from under these people. Only 64% of those displaced received any government assistance in moving to new affordable housing. This means that over a third of the families that were removed from their houses were left with nowhere to go as wealthier residents moved into their neighborhood. The city can now point to St. Thomas and say it is no longer a sinkhole of poverty, yet that belies the fact that it evicted 2,785 residents, nearly all African-American, and only provided partial assistance in finding them

new places to live.

Public Interest Design's (PID) essential difference from standard architectural practice is the group of people it places an emphasis on (7). In conventional practice, a client comes to a firm seeking a design that fits their desires. While the firm does get feedback from their client, those are generally closed-door discussions. The building the clients and the firm are designing has the opportunity to live outside of public view until it is constructed. Considering it will live nowhere else once it is completed, a restrictive process only serves to alienate the building from its permanent surroundings.

An equitable world is not possible if only the wealthy and powerful have a seat at the table. Exclusive, elitist processes cannot produce equitable outcomes, only inclusive ones can. The people impacted by the construction of a building must be consulted, and their voices given a venue to be heard and to influence the future of their surroundings. Working in this way prevents the top down approach that ignores larger needs in favor of the production of formally pleasing, yet contextually clueless, projects. Designers working in tandem with those who will be impacted will have the ability to create a product that is complete in its analysis, sensitive in its implementation, and precise in its solutions.

Students must be taught this way of working is unquestionably more valuable to the world than its restrictive counterpart. This change in education will result in a field populated by those who are focused outward, looking for opportunities to apply their skills in the service of many. Architects are the builders of the world around us, and that world starts during their education. It must push them to create places that work for all.

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SHIRLEY CHEN

HSIEH YING-CHUN: DESIGN FOR PEOPLE

26

During the Fellowship, there were a lot of meaningful conversations around whether or not public interest designers should commit to stay in a certain area or migrate from place to place, or whether we should only work in regions that we are familiar with. Sometimes I found myself drifting away from the debate, wondering who “we” are in these conversations. There seemed to be an underlying assumption in which Western designers working with non-Western communities was the common narrative. Growing up in a different country, I believed that this was not the only narrative for public interest design in a global context, and learning about the practices of those designers who are from different cultural, racial, ethical and national background would be helpful to create an alternative voice. Started by asking the question “Is public interest design a truly Western-dominated field or just a Western-dominated dialogue?” I was overwhelmed by the magnitude of this subject. I then shifted my focus to writing about one representative PID practitioner from a non-Western background, Taiwanese architect Hsieh Ying-Chun, and his works, hoping this could bring some dynamism into the conversation.

Hsieh Ying-Chun was considered a social design pioneer in Asia, with a focus on rural areas that had been decimated by natural disasters. His firm was known as Atelier-3 or Design For People (DFP). Prior to his involvements in public interest design, Hsieh ran a conventional architecture practice in Xinzhu, Taiwan where he used to design for semiconductor factories. Hsieh believed that a humanitarian design approach is one where professionals create an open system to work with locals and return the power to people.

In his TED talk, “Returning the Power to People,” Hsieh Ying-Chun shared the reason that he focused his works in rural area: people often talk about how fast cities grow in China. What they don’t know is that there is four times as much construction in rural areas in comparison with cities. However, there is little participation of professionals such as architects or structural engineers in such projects, and some people spend their life savings on houses that are poorly built, not eco-friendly and extremely vulnerable to natural disasters.

According to Hsieh’s observations, during earthquakes, many newly constructed structures were more vulnerable than the older, traditional dwellings due to low quality materials and unqualified building methods. Those fragile new-built homes became deadly in natural disasters like the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake, which killed nearly 70,000 people with the majority of buildings destroyed in the region.

Hsieh addresses this issue by proposing a simplified, low-cost single-family housing prototype, which could be adapted to specific circumstances, traditions, skills, and availability of materials while cutting the cost from 25% up to 50%. He used reinforced cold-rolled steel as the structural skeleton with a lightweight steel floor and roof in almost all of his projects. The lightweight material enabled the structure to resist earthquakes up to a magnitude of 8 on the Richter scale while also creating a system that allowed more flexibility and adaptability. Indigenous and sustainable materials, such as stone, bamboo and clay, were introduced according to the geographical nature of the sites as non-structural elements, which made the structures more affordable and resilient. The building materials and methods also allowed unskilled labor to work on the projects, which increased their efficiency.

When it comes to community engagement, Hsieh believed that rather than “empowering” the people, architects and designers should return the power to them and help facilitate self-reliant reconstruction. Many survivors didn’t like to be addressed as victims and were fully capable of rebuilding when provided with the correct tools. Atelier-3 developed a model for ‘collaborative construction’, a cooperative structure for building adapted to specific contexts; for example construction only happened in periods where farming pressures were at their lowest and surplus labor was available. When villagers were trained to build locally appropriate dwellings, they became the builders of their own houses, knowing they will live in buildings with greater safety, structural integrity, and sustainability.

Hsieh also addressed the psychological effect of the participatory model. “We wanted to encourage local people to join the reconstruction...the best therapy is activity. House building takes a lot of energy as well as a lot of cooperation. Being involved in such an activity helps to eliminate the suffering caused by the disaster.” People regained a sense of stability and rebuilt their community bonds through the building process.

Hsieh recognizes the potential to help develop solutions for broader social issues through participatory design. One of the fascinating effects of his projects in Sichuan is that many young migrant construction workers returned to their hometowns to join the rebuilding team. Migrant workers are the most important work force in the current urbanization process in China. They encounter socio-geographical issues, job insecurity, identity crises, and discriminations in the cities when their left-behind children and elderly people in the rural areas experience lack of care. Considering the shortage of skilled workers in the rural areas, Public Interest Design could become a tool to encourage young migrant workers to return to their hometown by hiring them to work on projects. They are equipped with proper experiences in construction in comparison with volunteers and unskilled labor; additionally, they have more knowledge of and deeper ties to the area.

In the long term, the participatory process enabled the residents to learn through reconstruction and the architect would not stay in the communities once the primary structures were finished. In Hsieh’s own words, “No architect is capable of creating the perfect home for its inhabitants. All we can do is provide a framework and let those living in that space fill it with whatever they wish to fill it with.” The best outcome for a public interest design project should be that people in the community would keep striving without the help of designers and architects in the future and that every individual of the community could customize their home and “fill it with whatever they wish”.

Global public interest design shouldn’t be talked about without context; the social and cultural identities of those involved are dynamic, and could not be represented by a single narrative. Who “we” are impacts every design choices “we” make. There are many practitioners and organizations like Hsieh that have not received much recognition in the Western world. Learning about their work and bringing their expertise to the table would help us to see public interest design as a global phenomenon and understand it with a more comprehensive lens. Public interest design is neither a Western-dominated field or a Western-dominated dialogue, but a global movement.



KATARINA DVORAK WE CANNOT DISASSOCIATE POWER + PRIVILEGE

28

Understanding and addressing our privilege is a necessary reflection, but it is not without its inherent challenges. While we are taught to treat others with respect and empathy, it seems that often it is meant to only apply to a specific few. We tend to reserve judgment, bias and scorn for those whose situations we know little about; for those whose experiences in life we may never even begin to grasp. This seems to be a natural tendency – it's easier to assume someone is worse off due to their own flaws, rather than due to inherent power structures that you yourself are benefiting from. While it would be nice if all our successes were based on personal willpower and achievement, that reality does not and cannot exist. There are too many systems in place that support and defend inequities.

Still, instead of approaching situations with humility, it is often easier to try to ignore the power or privilege we bring to the table, as it absolves us of the responsibility to take an active role in the resistance of oppressive power structures. However, I have realized there is so much more to be gained by being honest about where I come from and the effect it has had on my actions, learning, and personhood than by trying to pretend my privilege does not exist.

Therefore, taking the active step of recognizing your inherent privilege and moving to ameliorate the ramifications of said privilege is a place to begin. Understanding the larger social dynamics at play becomes a necessary tool in extending our respect and empathy to fellow humans regardless of their situation.

Within the design community, this resonates in how often there is a lack of respect given to community voices, or clients

whose experiential knowledge is deemed to worth less than design knowledge.

It can be hard to accept that no amount of learning or training will award you superiority.

Equally problematic is that this need for superiority is learned, or rather, I do not believe in a human nature that requires superiority. It is the goal in a system that measures success by the metric of how much better off we are than others. We learn to judge ourselves against others, to measure our success in terms of what we accomplish in the specific realms of wealth and power.

I believe that in order to challenge the dominant system, we must change the metrics of success.

For me, Public Interest Design represents that challenge. In attempting to measure projects by the amount of community input and engagement, the typical architectural or design model is subverted. However, PID is not a definitive solution, and requires its own constant questioning.

First, there is the quagmire that is humanitarian design: designing for underserved communities or for those deemed "less fortunate." At a base level, there is an inherent issue with "I am helping you, therefore you must appreciate me." I think that in that first sentiment, "I am helping you" it is so easy to miss why even being able to help is a privilege not afforded to everyone. Even "help" is up for debate. Who decides if something is helpful?

Secondly, the expectation of appreciation is at once ingrained



CASSIDY ROSEN HUMANITARIANISM AND WHITE MANIFESTATION WITH “HELPING OTHERS”

30 New Orleans post-Katrina is often seen through the lens of needing “help,” with the white savior coming into an existing impoverished community to rescue it from its misery. I am not going to deny the fact that I am white, from Colorado, and wanted to come to New Orleans to be part of the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans post-Katrina through my architectural education. I was particularly drawn to Tulane because of its focus on service-based learning and humanitarian actions throughout the city. Tulane prides itself on its commitment to community service and has provided roughly 600,000 hours of service to New Orleans within the past three years. But let’s be real: Tulane is an ivory tower located in Uptown on high ground with roughly 71% of the total body being white and primarily from outside of Louisiana. Why is this significant? Because ultimately, the arrival of outsiders whether they are Tulane students or artists in the Bywater are shaping the dialogue surrounding issues of the power structure of race and what service is getting done and who is getting it done.

I am not dismissing the intention of humanitarian efforts or service learning, yet I am insinuating that we need to look through a more critical lens to understand the larger implementations of providing “help and aid.” Immediately following Katrina, there was a large influx of volunteers and nonprofit organizations fleeing to New Orleans. The ingress of outside help was primarily white volunteers, which in turn perpetuates racist stereotypes of those serving versus those being served. As I mentioned above, part of my initial interest in attending Tulane for my graduate studies in architecture, was to learn how I could use my design education to “rebuild” New Orleans. I wanted to be involved with Small Center and its focus on the new subset of architecture, public interest design. I came with the perceived notion that New Orleans needed to be fixed and that its residents needed rescuing.

There are intrinsic gallant intentions with wanting to participate in service learning and community engagement; I am not rejecting this apprehension. People want to engage in service learning because they have an inherent intellectual, emotional and psychological impetus for selecting to engage in service linked to learning. To better understand the breadth of service learning we must break it down into a continuum of charity, projects and social changes. It’s critical to understand the differences between these three degrees of service learning to better scrutinize our intentions within community engagement. Charity is a direct service where the control of the resources and decisions remains with the provider. This degree of service is typically confined by time and has limited allegations about the people and the impacts it creates. Service learning projects target defining a problem and through the implementation of a well-conceived plan determine an appropriate solution. An example of a project based service learning is rebuilding a house. Address a problem – lack of housing – thus resulting in a solution – build more houses. This often times dismisses the engagement of those being served within the process.

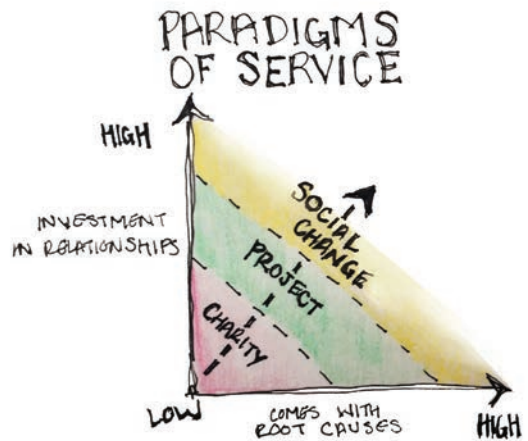
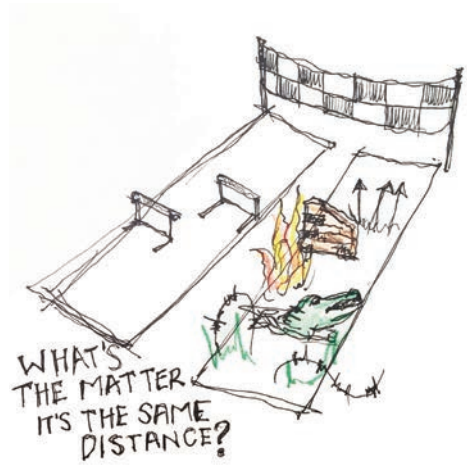
Social change and advocacy fall at the highest degree on the paradigm of service learning. Social change and advocacy is typically modeled as those with expertise protecting the rights of those who are weaker and less knowledgeable. Social change through service learning tries to focus on a process of building relationships among stakeholders (i.e. community members, organizations, etc.) while establishing a learning environment that addresses root causes of societal inequalities. From an architectural education perspective, we are taught the potential “power” architects and planners have upon shaping not only the built environment but also their ability to help eliminate societal inequalities such as

gentrification, housing discrimination, inability to access to public transportation, and the list goes on.

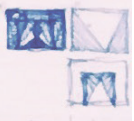
My involvement with Small Center has been one of the first times within my education where I felt like I am not just creating a design. Most of our summer work has focused on listening, researching and taking ourselves out of the equation, i.e., the model of social change/advocacy service learning.

The power dynamic between architect and community can oftentimes establish a framework where the architect dominates the community. It is important to note that community identity and development is not created by humanitarian design intentions but fashioned by the demographics of the community. The social construction of community, authenticity, and related urban representations is always a conflicted and contested process. When engaging in service learning through my participation in public interest design, I constantly need to step back and honestly think about how my actions reflect my intentions. Additionally, I need to truthfully address how the power dynamic of my race plays into the context of those being served in New Orleans. Is the fact that I am a white outsider attending Tulane engaging in public service projects perpetuating the deterrence of localized rebuilding efforts?

By consciously choosing to engage in service learning education, particularly within the context of New Orleans and Tulane, I am also consciously choosing to address and advocate for a problem I myself am contributing to. I must strive to breakdown the white colonialist implications of service, humanitarian efforts, and community engagement with its relationship to public interest design.



Timing schedule



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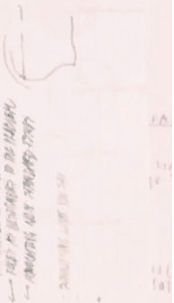
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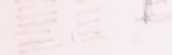


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So Workshop



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