The Search for Unity in Diversity: Implications for Architectural Education

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"In the United States, we have the richest mix of ethnic groups, of racial groups, of global experience that the world has ever known and it is the richness of this mix that yields our incredible creativity and innovation. We have not even begun to experience the real potential of our fantastic human resource mix — our competitive edge in the global economy." - *John Naisbitt*

Increasingly researchers are recommending that we restructure our architectural educational process to enhance opportunities for women and minorities. These architectural educators see a direct connection between increased diversity and expanding the influence, potential and vision of the profession. As the workplace continues to change, many practitioners are also asking what will be the role of the architect and the profession in the future. Encouraging diversity may hold the key to finding solutions to these questions. This paper proposes that developing a vision of unity in diversity and seeing change as part of a sustained process can promote the desired diversity. We can consciously move from the traditionally unequal relationships that have limited diversity in the past to more equal relationships that encourage it. For this change to be successful we must face and understand the strong emotions that are released in this process and learn skills to make the transition. An addendum of useful steps in this process of increasing unity in diversity is included.

IN THE SCHOOLS

In reviewing how men and women are treated in architectural education, Sherry Ahrentzen and Kathryn Anthony argue that gendered educational practices maintain a "chilly" environment for women students and that as the numbers of women entering the work force continue to rise, it is important to make special efforts to open up to a diverse student body.' They believe that improving the educational environment for women may also improve the climate for all students – both men and women, racial minorities, international students and others. In turn, the "valuable perspectives that these students offer may cause us to redefine dramati-

cally the roles of sex, stars, and studios in architectural education."[2] They recommend a "multi-pronged attack" to address these issues, believing that a series of coordinated events can raise the collective consciousness of faculty, administrators and students.[3]

A lack of awareness about gender and racial bias in studio and jury reviews can limit the effectiveness of these important aspects of architectural education. Reporting on his study of gender and racial bias in design juries, Mark Paul Frederickson believes that the jury has a "potentially wonderful role" to play in our educational system and could become a way of adjusting our professional attitudes and improving our methods of communication.[4] Yet it is possible for even a few unreflecting jurors to alienate students, limiting the value of the jury. Frederickson asks, "Shall we promote and maintain conceit and exclusivity, or can we envision and develop an aggressively diverse, collaborative, and just professional body that is more reflective of the changing profile and needs of the society in which we live?"[5] Frederickson makes several recommendations on how to improve the jury process, most of which focus on improving the listening, leadership, and communication skills of the jurors and on the presentation skills of the students. The jury process and the studio can reflect the limits of how we think or be a force in the evolution of our profession.

IN THE PROFESSION

In the larger profession there is also an increasing concern about where architecture is headed and what is the role of the architect in society. Thomas Fisher, in a cover article for *Progressive Architecture,* asks, "Can this profession be saved?"[6] He wonders what transformations will be necessary in the future, citing several factors creating tremendous change and leading in several different directions simultaneously. Fisher emphasizes the necessity for a new vision with a quote from Colin Rowe, Dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Design, where a series of symposiums on this subject have been held: "The very idea of what constitutes architectural practice requires substantial expansion. . .

(and) the conceptual models and, indeed, the language or terminology by which we discuss these matters must also be revised."[7] In this search for new ideas we need to expand our options and resources.

The often quoted Chinese character for 'crisis,' composed of two parts representing 'danger' and 'opportunity', applies to our current situation. We can be passive recipients of forces larger then ourselves, or we can actively search for new paradigms to create our vision of the future. Linda Groat calls for a shift away from the dual models of architect-as-artist and architect-as-technician to a new paradigm of architect-as-cultivator, believing that this new culturalist perspective is the necessary antidote to many of the current limits in theoretical discussion of the profession and "are, at least in part, the source of architecture's resistance to cultural diversity."[8] She suggests that without "such a shift in perspective, architecture is not likely either to embrace the principles of diversity or to achieve a truly respected and valued role in our society."[9] Increasing diversity and a new role for our profession in society are tied together in a dynamic process. As diversity of perspective increases in our schools and profession we will find creative new ways to perceive and practice architecture. These changes will, in turn, facilitate the increased diversity of our profession as individuals who feel marginalized become part of the continuing transformations.

One vehicle for this transformation is identified by Margaret Crawford in an new approach to feminist criticism of the profession inspired by the poet, bell hooks.[10] Groups that have been traditionally marginalized in the profession can "redefine the edge condition as 'a space of radical openness.'"[11] Instead of a resignation to marginality, this position can be seen as a source of creativity or a "cutting edge," which chosen freely and maintaining a critical relationship to the dominant center, can open up new patterns of practice in the profession. Looking at the problems facing our profession she observes, "The pursuit of new groups of clients and new modes of practice suggests the possibility of radically different architectural identities. Thus, those on the fringes of architecture might also begin to imagine its transformation."[12] Women and minorities, who have often been marginalized because they did not match the dominant role models of the profession, can bring a new critique and perspective to the field.

The writings of Professor Sharon Sutton are an example of diversity bringing new energy and perspective to the profession as she argues for creating a broad knowledge base for architecture, believing that knowledge is power.[13] In a profession she claims is currently virtually powerless in the face of the political and economic forces molding the built environment, she is "tireless in trying to capture the imagination of a new generation of architects who are diverse not only in race and gender, but in class, ability, and world view."[14] Her "hopes as an African-American woman for a more equitable society are – like it or not – tied to hopes for a more diverse and empowered architectural profession."[15]

She sees that the solutions and motivation for addressing many of the issues facing our profession may come from encouraging a more diverse current and future membership in our profession.[16]

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

If we chose to actively promote diversity in our profession, we are forced to ask ourselves if we will achieve a dynamic new synergism or a new form of Balkanism, where each group retreats to its own comer and bitterly defends its turf. We face these alternative possibilities at every level of our society – in the cities, in the profession, and in our schools. Two factors contribute to the negative splintering of conflicting interests: a lack of shared vision among all participants and one or more groups resisting the development of other groups. Conversely, partnerships working to fulfill a dream and supporting each individual to achieve their potential create an exciting process where the whole becomes much more then the sum of the parts. To realize the positive results of diversity we need the goal of unity in diversity, where each individual is free to develop fully yet feels connected and invested in the process of the larger organization.

An appropriate metaphor for visualizing unity in diversity is the example of the human body and how the incredible complexity is carefully balanced.[17] Each cell in our body shares common DNA and receives oxygen from the blood yet each is unique and has a specific role to play in complex organism of the body. The liver, the lungs or the arms are all important for the full functioning of the body. In the organic growth from simple zygote to complex adult, it is vital for the total functioning of the body that each cell reach its full potential and contribute its part to the whole. When cells in one area fail to thrive or grow in an uncontrolled way, we have either a disability or cancer. In our interconnected body, when one part suffers, it is vital to the whole organism to appreciate, protect and heal each unique part. As a dynamic model of positive growth in our profession, which will encourage and promote all members, unity in diversity is a powerful vision.

CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

If we choose to work towards this vision of unity in diversity, what challenges will we face? Once we have articulated a shared vision, we must find a way to assist each individual to reach their full potential. This requires removing bamers to their growth and supplying necessary skills and resources. The most successful transformation is usually made with a strong commitment and an understanding that real change is made step by step over time.[18] Although we may experience a sudden leap of understanding or awareness, the ability to sustain dramatic change takes time and setbacks are common. It is important to have patience with the process and maintain the firm commitment of all involved. Real transformation is an on-going process, in which there is always something more to learn and the results grow organically

from the process, instead of being rigidly predetermined at the beginning.

The process of change brings many strong and conflicting emotions to the surface. It is important to address and channel these feelings or the commitment to the process will vanish. We do not often explicitly address emotions in our profession or in our society but without learning skills for recognizing and dealing with our emotions it is virtually impossible to make dramatic changes in individuals or organizations. This is one of the reasons that it is difficult to force others to make significant changes if they do not share a commitment to a common vision. It is possible to legislate rules and try to enforce compliance, but real transformation can only come when each individual makes a personal commitment. This is why the role of education is so vital, whether in encouraging recycling, regular dental check-ups, or actively supporting diversity in architecture. Significant change is not easy but it can be critical to our future.

TRADITIONALLY UNEQUAL RELATIONSHIPS: BARRIER TO DIVERSITY

If we are serious about developing greater diversity in our architectural education and the profession then we must look at what patterns have been prevalent in the past in our society and reflect if these may still be effecting our interactions today. One of the patterns that hinders our personal interactions is the residue of traditionally unequal power relationships. For example, over centuries men have had more power then women and whites have usually held more power then people of color. Another way to describe these patterns is that they are 'win-lose' or based on the concept of a limited "pie." These patterns have been challenged repeatedly and have changed considerably, but subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, residual effects still remain.

To take full advantage of our potential diversity we need to be honestly aware of these patterns of the past and question our role in perpetuating them. Because they are traditional, we are raised from early childhood with these beliefs and behaviors, and they are often unconscious. If we do not make an active effort to change then we usually maintain the old patterns.[19] As with making the effort to recycle, the initial awareness and efforts to change may feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable but the results are worthwhile. We do not have to feel responsible for the whole problem or provide the complete solution, but change will not happen unless many of us each do a small part.[20] Awareness of the dynamics of traditionally unequal relationships can help us overcome their effects.

Traditionally unequal relationships are destructive to everyone—both those on the top and the bottom. Imagine the old British household with the master of the house upstairs while the servants occupied the downstairs. Those upstairs believed they must control those below and spent much time and energy trying to do this. Although the master believed he knew what happened in the house, he actually could never know the reality of life downstairs, while the servants knew all the most intimate details about his life. Those downstairs actually lived a dual life, with a 'downstairs' culture and separate behaviors and expectations when they were 'upstairs'. They usually had a more accurate view of activities in the household but could never really trust those upstairs or safely reveal their true opinions or feelings. If, in an effort to get ahead, they began to adopt behaviors and attitudes of the 'upstairs' then they were considered to be putting on 'airs' and were often not accepted by either group. This polarization in unequal relationships encourages stereotypical thinking on both sides and reinforces the beliefs that there is only a limited amount available for all. If one side has more then everyone believes the other side has less, creating an intense competition.

This pattern of traditionally unequal power relationships constrains the development of individuals, who are circumscribed by their roles; it limits relationships, friendships, and partnerships; and it strangles the flow of information and accurate perception. For architects in practice it limits the creativity and solutions of the design team because it reduces the ability of the team to communicate accurately. Some members will not feel it is safe to express their ideas or concerns. 'Win-lose' attitudes also make it more difficult to interact with clients, users, contractors, and consultants, effecting the profitability of the firm. These same patterns can discourage students from entering or continuing in the field, depriving us all of unique solutions to the problems facing the profession.

EMOTIONS RELATED TO UNEQUAL RELATIONSHIPS

The natural reaction to being traditionally on the 'lose' end of relationships is anger. Anger is like steam and is a natural reaction to injustice. If suppressed it just builds up and can erupt at the first weak spot. It can be released in non-destructive ways, and if channeled can create great energy for change. Those who have usually been in the 'win' end of unequal relationships often don't understand this anger and may try to condemn the feelings as irrational and restrict the expression of the anger. While the destructive expression of anger is not useful, the reality of the anger will not go away simply by claiming it is 'inappropriate.' Constructive and positive ways to channel the energy need to be discussed and developed. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. helped many people channel their anger at injustice into positive action for change in the civil rights movement of the sixties. In contrast, the riots following the Rodney King verdict demonstrated the power of anger without a positive channel for change.

Individuals from the traditionally powerful side of 'win-lose' relationships are often unaware of the patterns and their roles in them. Like the family members upstairs in the British household, they have usually just accepted the way things seem to be, never realizing that if they had been born

downstairs then life would be much different. Usually no one in their group ever encourages them to consider these issues and if they see anger or resentment from those downstairs, they do not understand what is happening. If they begin to be aware of how the unequal relationships restrict who they interact with and how they are treated, then they begin to experience a mix of conflicting feelings. They may feel guilt, fear of reprisals, sadness at the history of inequality, anger at an unjust system, and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that the problem is too large for them to address.[21] At this point it is very common to try to forget all about the issue or to blame the 'lose' group, who are reminders of the painful feelings. The mixed feelings and reactions among the whites of South Africa, as pressure against apartheid grew internationally, illustrate some of this complexity. Many whites in South Africa feared that they would all be murdered in their beds and they became even more resistant to changing the system. Some felt guilty about the past and moved to other countries to leave the situation behind. Others worked for positive change, sometimes taking great personal risks.

EQUAL RELATIONSHIPS:
A REQUIREMENT FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY

The historic pattern over the last century is to move from rigid hierarchy with clear 'win-lose' relationships towards more equity and participation by all people in 'win-win' relationships. The labor movement, women's liberation and civil rights all demonstrate this trend. Changes in the workplace, as many layers of management are replaced by teams of professionals with minimal management levels, and increasing equality and sharing in family life, as more women work full-time outside the home, also reflect this trend. Even our legal system, based on a 'win-lose' model, is increasingly turning to mediation and other types of negotiation as the cost and results of litigation become more destructive. This movement towards more equality is not easy or smooth, but instead can be painful and messy. There are always some who resent the changes, but most people would agree that it is not possible, or desirable, to return to the past.[22]

In equal or 'win-win' relationships, both groups are on level ground, so no one tries to maintain position by controlling the other and no energy is wasted trying to resist being controlled. Individuals are able to express themselves more freely and trust is possible between the two groups. Both sides gain a more accurate view of reality because of the open exchange of information, insights and ideas. With improved communication and trust it is possible to find more creative solutions to joint problems. Each group realizes their interconnectedness and that what benefits or harms either side effects everyone in the same way. The emphasis is on cooperation instead of competition. It is important to remember that true 'win-win' relationships are not possible unless both sides are committed to this process. If one side

is trying to operate under the traditional 'win-lose' attitudes, then it is almost impossible to find a 'win-win' solution together.

We can apply these ideas in our educational programs if we began to look openly at how we may be maintaining 'win-lose' attitudes among our faculty, in our studios, on our jury reviews, and in our projects. If we can begin to see the cost to ourselves and our programs for both the 'winners' and the 'losers,' then we increase the change of finding the motivation to change to 'win-win.' Focusing on creating a united vision of our goals will increase the positive benefits of efforts to increase diversity in our schools. Without this 'unity in diversity,' we risk fragmentation, power struggles, and defensiveness.

CONCLUSION

Researchers are recommending that increased diversity in our profession may lead to solutions for many of the problems facing the profession and the educational system. This paper explores how to create a vision of unity in diversity and examines a theory of traditional patterns of behavior that discourage women and minorities from taking an active part in the profession. The strong emotions created by these traditional patterns are reviewed and a process for creating new patterns of interaction that can enhance the diversity of the profession is shared.

ADDENDUM:
Some Steps To Encourage Unity in Diversity

There are many seminars, workshops and different approaches to encourage 'win-win' relationships. In my search for ways to move from traditionally unequal to equal relationships, and develop unity in diversity, I have found the following steps useful.[23] Over several years when I met weekly with a multi-racial group of friends as we researched ways to eliminate racism, these steps became a great source of strength and hope for us, and so I share them here. The transformation is the most powerful if both sides are committed to change and the steps are self-motivated. If these steps are used to criticize or blame the others then they will be counter-productive. These actions are simple yet challenging: several are most useful for individuals who come from the traditionally more powerful groups in society while others apply to individuals from the traditionally less powerful groups. It is useful to read and consider each one because most people are in both categories. For example, a white woman is traditionally in a 'win' position as a white but has probably experienced the anger of being in the 'lose' position as a woman.

Steps for members of the traditionally more powerful group (men, whites, etc.):

1) ***Believe I can make a difference!***
   The problem is large and will not be solved quickly or easily. It will not be solved by the "other" group alone.

Great dedication, patience, vision, tact and personal initiative are needed to make real change but it is possible step by step.

2) *Let go of any sense of superiority.*

It is extremely difficult to avoid having a sense of superiority because it is often learned and reinforced since childhood. Because it is ingrained and often unconscious, it is difficult to see and let go of it. Indulging in guilt will not help the situation.

3) *Learn to recognize and stop the use of patronizing words and behavior.*

Find out what words and behavior are patronizing through books, videos, support groups, etc. Don't automatically expect members of other groups to be educators about the issues. Practice eliminating patronizing words and behavior.

4) *Demonstrate genuine friendship and sincere intentions.*

This will probably require you making the first step to reach out and leave your 'comfort zone' to try informal, spontaneous association. New actions may not feel 'natural' at first but will become comfortable with practice.

5) *Have patience and understanding if response is slow.*

You may not get an immediate response because of past patterns of misunderstanding so try not to be impatient at a lack of positive response. Don't be surprised to encounter anger but try to listen without getting defensive, knowing that the anger is not necessarily personal.

Steps for members of the traditionally less powerful group (women, people of color, etc.)

6) *Believe I can make a difference!*

The problem is large and will not be solved quickly, easily or by the 'other' group alone. Great dedication, patience, vision, tact and personal initiative are needed to make real change but it is possible, step by step.

7) *Respond warmly to efforts by the other group.*

A warm response encourages small steps to become larger steps.

8) *Be willing to let go of the past.*

It is very important to understand and learn from history but don't get caught in fear. Learn to let go of hurt and anger in order to move forward.

9) *Work on removing suspicion and cynicism about motives of the other group.*

There may appear to be many reasons for not trusting but be aware that suspicion can create self-fulfilling prophecies which will stop change.

NOTES

[1] Sherry Ahrentzen and Kathryn Anthony, "Sex, Stars, and Studio: A Look at Gendered Educational Practices in Architecture," *JAE* 47 (1) (September 1993): 26

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Mark Paul Frederickson, "Gender and Racial Bias in Design Juries", *JAE* 47 (1) (September 1993): 42-44

[5] Ibid.

[6] Thomas Fisher, "Can This Profession Be Saved?," *Progressive Architecture* (February 1994): 45-49

[7] Ibid., p. 84

[8] Linda Groat, "Architecture's Resistance to Diversity: A Matter of Theory as Much as Practice," *JAE* 47 (1) (September 1993): 9

[9] Ibid.

[10] Margaret Crawford, "In Favor of the Fringe," *Progressive Architecture* (March 1993): 116

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Sharon Sutton, "Architects and Power," *Progressive Architecture* (May 1992): 67

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] "What If the Answers Needed to Protect Our Environment Are in a Little Girl's Mind?" *AAUW Newsletter* (Feb. 1991): 1

[17] The garden is also a powerful metaphor for unity in diversity: "If you beheld a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, color and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but rather, monotonous and dull. . . . each flower, each tree, each fruit, beside being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all." 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Pans Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Baha in Paris in 1911,* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1969 11th ed.) p. 52

[18] Judith Katz, *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training,* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978) p. vii

[19] Ibid., p. 10 - 21

[20] Clyde Ford, *We Can All Get Along: 50 Steps You Can Take To Help End Racism,* (New York: Dell Trade Paperback, 1994) p. 2

[21] Katz, *White Awareness,* p. 12

[22] Thomas Kochman describes how African-American culture "has given me a powerful appreciation of qualities and concerns that my own white middle-class culture tends to downgrade: individual self-assertion and self-expression, spiritual well-being, spontaneity and emotional expressiveness, personal (as opposed to status) orientation, individual distinctiveness, forthrightness, camaraderie, and community. Black affirmation of these qualities in myself has strengthened them, increased my estimation of them, and enriched my life considerably in the process of doing so." Thomas Kochrnan, *Black and White: Styles in Conflict,* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981) p. 4 - 5

[23] Steps adapted by Barbara Ruys from: Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice,* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1939) p. 28 - 34