
WORKING CITIES:
DENSITY, RISK, SPONTANEITY
Moderator: Anthony W. Schuman,
New Jersey Institute of Technology

Protagonist:
J. MAX BOND, JR.
Davis Brody Bond LLP

Panelists:
PHOEBE CRISMAN
University of Virginia

TERRY HEINLEIN
Wentworth Institute of Technology

MICHAEL PYATOK
University of Washington

ROY STRICKLAND
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Session Summary

ANTHONY W. SCHUMAN

New Jersey Institute of Technology

Max Bond's essay criticizes trends in contemporary urbanism — the “risk-free bourgeois vision” — that do not extend the benefits of urban reinvestment to the whole population — “to working people in need of working cities.” The four respondents, three blind refereed papers and one invited speaker, approached this call at different scales and strategies, with differing views about architecture's role in redressing this trend.

Terry Heinlein's work with students in East Cambridge, MA, was skeptical about the power of an alternative architectural vision to derail the gentrifying forces of private development. Only tight zoning restrictions can maintain the physical character of the present “messy” urban neighborhood. Even measures like tax incentives for low-income homeowners will not stop the upward spiral of real estate values. The student work focused on small social service buildings (day care, senior center) dispersed in the neighborhood to provide anchors for the remaining residents in the face of larger scale redevelopment.

Michael Pyatok, nationally-known for his practice in affordable housing, argues that “democratic” urbanism can be promoted by an architecture that recognizes residents' need for economic development. His work in Oakland, CA provides concrete examples of how residential design can anticipate and accommodate people's desire to transform part of their home into a store or office, through the relationship of the dwelling to the street and through the interior design of the units. His work adds depth to the notion of “everyday urbanism” and carries an implicit critique of prescrip-

tive design codes that prefer esthetic order to messy vitality. Pyatok's work epitomizes the model of architect as community activist.

Invited speaker Roy Strickland discussed the innovative work of his New American School Design project at MIT, an interdisciplinary workshop for architecture and planning students. By linking physical renovation to curricular reform he is able to utilize school reform as a community development tool. In Paterson, NJ, for example, his “city as school” concept involves renovating spaces in a number of downtown buildings for use as dispersed classroom clusters around the city. His work emphasizes the architect working in partnership with public agencies, here the board of education.

While the first three panelists focused on infill projects in existing neighborhoods, Phoebe Crisman addressed the question of how to create a heterogeneous, “spontaneous” urbanism within “an overarching vision or framework strong enough to produce or stimulate particular physical conditions.” She advocated a hybrid approach consisting of physically distinct but interrelated urban “projects.” Using Amsterdam's Eastern Docklands development as an example, she demonstrated how large scale development could be tempered at the urban scale by introducing different building types and functions and at the building scale by flexible unit design based on a row-house/loft building hybrid. Her example emphasized the high level of public oversight and high degree of collaboration among design, planning and engineering consultants in the process.