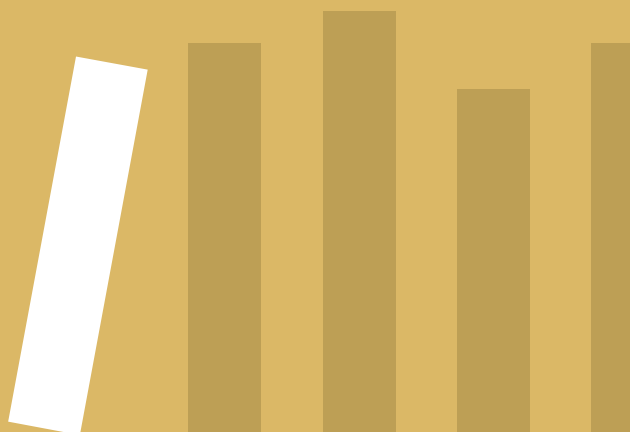


CHAIN REACTION

Do buildings damage your health?



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Compiled and edited by Alex Julyan

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FOREWORD

Alex Julyan

I started to think about architecture in the 1960s, when I was a child growing up in London. This burgeoning interest was due in large part to the influence of my father, a graphic designer and socialist, and a family friend who worked in the historic buildings division of the Greater London Council. I learned from them that buildings were architecture and that architecture could be contradictory. Whilst some kind of post-war architectural desecration was being wreaked upon the towns and cities of Britain, a brave new world of dynamic and forward-thinking design was emerging, somewhere in the middle of this landscape sat the preservationists who engaged in complex battles that are still being won and lost today. I learned that buildings could hold meanings and mean different things to different people at different times. That politics were involved, though I had no clear understanding of what one had to do with the other. As I grew up and came to live in different parts of London I acquired my own appreciation for its buildings, one that connected me to my childhood experiences of the parks, pavements and shops that had augmented my territory of home and school.

Most of us are not architects, planners or developers, yet simply by inhabiting buildings and streets we develop an expertise in and of our built environment. Our memories and emotions reside in the places we know - the structures and thoroughfares where our identity, behaviour, attitudes and relationships are forged. This is the map where our lives play out. As humans we intuit that the built environment profoundly affects the way we feel both physically and mentally, it may overwhelm us in its scale or uplift us in its beauty. Design can impact us in a

thousand discreet ways, supporting us in our aspirations and social networks, or pulling us towards decline and isolation. Understanding these impacts and articulating our feelings is a challenge, so we generally entrust this responsibility to a range of building professionals who design and advocate on our behalf.

In recent years I have been struck by the aspiration and commitment of many such professionals to deliver social good through their work, and conversely, how few individuals and communities feel they are the beneficiaries of these intentions. Lately, I have observed a movement or desire emerging from this schism, one that is politically engaged and striving to re-instate the individual, the family, the community and the environment as drivers for the delivery of progressive and effective design.

My recent conversations with architectural practitioners and members of the public have resulted in this book of essays and interviews. Four of the five authors have nominated a respected colleague to write an essay, creating a 'chain reaction' of thoughts and ideas. Together these authors call for more collective, imaginative and democratic approaches to complex local and national challenges. They lay bare the systems of policy, planning and development that are no longer fit for purpose. The testimonies of five individuals are recorded in the accompanying interviews. These are people who experience first-hand what it means to live with the consequences of good and bad decision-making. Their words are insightful, candid and at times shocking.

When architectural thought is deep, is connected and carried through with humility, it can nurture a lasting affection for the places in which we live and work. Good design can connect us to each other, offer choice and increase our life chances. As the complexities of our health needs seem to intensify daily and new global challenges unfold, it is clear that architecture must play a central role in sustaining our good health. Whether in housing, civic buildings or infrastructure projects, many architects and communities are proposing more creative and respectful approaches which transgress the norm and could transform our lives.

As you digest the ideas and reflections in the pages that follow I invite you to consider the implications of creating places that can support us all in meaningful and health-affirming ways. I hope you draw your own conclusions and imagine how you might influence the discourse, because you are after all, part of this conversation.