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Dana Cuff, *Architectures of Spatial Justice*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass./London, 2023.

Architecture today is in crisis. What is architecture for? Who is it for? Who gets to participate in design, and who gets to enjoy well-designed spaces? Rarely do architects really examine their role in the society in which their profession operates, and even more rarely do they question how their industry has an impact on that world and the effects of their work within a broader socio-economical context. During the last few decades of neoliberal capitalism, the construction industry at large has been responsible for over 40% of carbon emissions, and ever-larger populations have been facing houselessness, displacement, and lack of basic infrastructure. Meanwhile, architecture has become an introverted "discipline" of formal speculations and not the place where the future is envisioned, debated and worked on. The idea that architecture and good design can contribute to a better society—and that this is the expected responsibility of anyone in the larger field of the built environment—has been mostly ignored.

Once in a while, thankfully, a book comes along that breaks through established barriers of thinking and proposes new possibilities for theory and work. Dana Cuff's *Architectures of Spatial Justice* is one of such books and comes at the right time. Architecture, as a form of a struggle for spatial justice, has been functioning in many different ways and in different locations. *Architectures of Spatial Justice* examines what architects can do to create a better society by leveraging their design, organization, collaboration, and research skills. It shows how architecture can be done differently—outside of capitalist expectations though still within the current system—and how it can produce beneficial spaces

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that provide some form of spatial justice. Through personal stories and case studies, Cuff presents a plethora of projects or examples of socially responsible architecture.

Through the lens of the 21st century, and in the tradition of Edward Soja, David Harvey and Henry Lefebvre, as well as bell hooks and Cornell West, the book maps out a trajectory of architectural work based on spatial justice and provides guidelines for practicing it. Cuff examines architecture as a product of work that has a responsibility to provide not just shelter but also quality, equity, and dignity for the most marginalized and excluded populations within society. The search for spatial justice and the definitions of it span decades of scholarship in urban planning, architecture, geography, and the social sciences. While belonging to that tradition of scholars, Cuff provides a fresh take of what spatial justice is through examples from work done by the cityLab research laboratory at UCLA, as well as works of other architects and activists from around the world.

This book is organized and framed around several concepts that outline how architectural projects push the boundaries of work that is beneficial for groups of people usually marginalized by mainstream architectural practices within a capitalist system. These concepts are *leveraging design, radically public architecture, partnerships of difference, generative demonstrations, legible policy* and *critical junctures*, each of which is elaborated in separate chapters with projects serving as case studies that illuminate these ideas. Leveraging design refers to architects using their design expertise to provide quality architecture to spaces and projects typically overlooked by the industry, in combination with the skills of other parties involved in the search for strengthening the commons and outside of the typical capitalist relations of a client–servant. This leveraging of design toward serving the commons inevitably becomes a search for ways of building "radically public architecture" in the sense that these spaces provide access to good design to populations rarely taken into consideration in many architectural projects. This way of working requires the creation of partnerships of difference between architects and the public, where an agonistic approach is not only accepted but sought after by designers and the broader public. A lot of these projects are not typical "finished" projects in the sense that an architect delivers a set of drawings, and their job is done. Rather, these projects, as proposed by Cuff, should be taken as design initiatives, projects that can keep going and that keep reevaluating their scope and deliverables. Such projects sometimes result in, and derive from, generative demonstrations, which can be applied

at different scales, locations, and contexts. This type of working is then expected to provide a legible policy that is inclusive of its agonisms and differential requirements, as well as possibilities for further proliferation of similar proposals that sometimes become critical junctures in design and architectural thinking, acting as catalysts for further development.

> Design is the lever that architects will use to create a more just built environment. The buildings most effective at advancing social goals will be designed to be radically public in that they are fresh, adaptable and equitable. To suit this greater public, the design process and outcome will depend on partnerships of difference, within which debate and contestation are upheld. In turn, those partnerships will aim to create generative demonstrations that are intended to proliferate.[1]

The book gives us a pathway to thinking about architecture and practicing architecture as a working process—a labor process that is involved in society's evolution, and reestablishes the much-needed analysis of labor in architectural discourse. Architecture is the result of a societal process in which labor plays a key role and results from multiple kinds of labor forces coming together. As such, architecture needs to recognize its broad implications and repercussions and work towards expanding its capacities of incorporating multiple agencies and populations into the process, as opposed to excluding them and relying on the architect as the "master-builder" who always knows best. The book re-centers the work of building professionals as work that depends on, and is for, the society at large, rather than a select elite, and so it needs to show its potential for providing a better society through its built work.

Architectures of Spatial Justice comes in a long line of exploration of architecture as work for the public good and, as such, it furthers ideas and concepts mentioned by Marx and Engels, Bernard Rudofsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Henri Lefebvre, and many others that explained how the environment that we create is the result of the relationships that we create. This book is quite needed at this moment because it shows how architecture can and does operate beyond the stale debates of formalism and autonomy. It also shows how architecture can function through the cracks of the oppressive capitalist system, and recenters the core of architecture where it should be: serving the commons.

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[1] D. Cuff, *Architectures of Spatial Justice*, p. 202.