

# BERKELEY IN THE WORLD

This is a time of unprecedented globalization. While globalization is not new, the scale and intensity of global flows of capital, labor, innovation, and information is perhaps unmatched in the history of the world-system.

BY ANANYA ROY

Equally striking is the emergence of global social movements, global campaigns, and global alliances that seek to address issues of poverty and inequality. Indeed, the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been marked by the globalization of responsibility for the human condition – from human rights to environmental crisis to disease to extreme poverty. What is UC Berkeley’s role in this bold, millennial moment? This is precisely the question that led to the recent establishment of the Blum Center for Developing Economies on campus. How can UC Berkeley train the next generation of global citizens to tackle, in inspired but responsible ways, the world’s pressing problems? In doing so, how will they better understand their place in the world and thus remake the future of America?

But it is important to ask yet another question: what is the role of urbanists, urban planners, urban designers, architects, environmental planners, landscape architects at such a global

moment? I do not ask this question simply because urban planning is my professional calling card. I believe that this question has urgency for all those concerned with globalization, its promises, and its stark inequalities. After all, the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be not only a global century, but also an urban century. Cities are, and will be, a key space of economic development and of material and symbolic citizenship. The “right to the city” will be one of the most important human rights of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What role will urban professionals, scholars, and activists play in articulating this right to the city? How, in particular, will CED train the next generation of “insurgent” architects and planners?

Let me simply share one lesson that I draw from some of the classes, seminars, studios, and workshops that a few of us have been organizing and leading in CED: the act of planning and designing is fundamentally an ethical and political act. We can claim that we



are neutral technocrats or well-meaning artists, but neither guise fully captures the extent of our impact or paradoxically the impotence of our plans. We produce space. And we do so in a world that, despite what the gurus of globalization would have us believe, is **not** flat. The production of space thus implicates us in the structural logic of urbanization and urbanism; in the political fields of power and powerlessness; and in the unequal, and often unjust, landscapes of cities and regions. The ethical question is how we choose to participate in the production of space. Are we the consultant who plans the redevelopment of a slum and in doing so do we fiercely oppose evictions, or negotiate resettlement and compensation for slum-dwellers, or simply follow our client's script? Are we the planner who is commissioned to create a new city for a global elite and in doing so do we insist that the city has to be open and inclusive for all classes, or revel in the high-style architecture that we can

design, or reject the commission?

During this past semester, I have watched students in the Nano City Super Studio admirably struggle with these issues. How will they convince their client that a vibrant and just city is one whose value derives from more than simply valuable real estate and global connectivity? How will they make tangible and visible these alternative forms of value, those that are less commodified and lucrative than property capital? How will they plan for the villagers who live on the edges of the site, who are subsistence farmers and eager to sell their land and stop farming? Will they, as benevolent planners, preserve these villages as quaint relics of a lifestyle that the villagers themselves refuse or will they imagine a different future for the relationship between city and countryside? Most important, the students have known that the answers to these questions are not technocratic or aesthetic but rather ethical and political. While

they have been able to utilize their technocratic and aesthetic expertise, this expertise has been shaken and disrupted by the sheer social reality of the site, that encounter between the villager aspiring for a better life and the Berkeley student desperately desiring to do the right thing. The site haunts the studio and this is the way it must be – this always tense ethical and political relationship between expertise and social reality, university and community. We mediate this relationship as “double agents,” often complicit in the production of space but also hoping to subvert the cruel calculus of this production. <sup>FW</sup>

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