

## Schooling and Education in the GFRY studio

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In thinking about how I might communicate my time with the GFRY studio I am reminded of Cornel West's differentiation between schooling and education. Schooling is how we acquire skills and knowledge. Education is what stirs the soul. At its core the GFRY studio is a pedagogical exercise. An attempt, I believe, at giving students an opportunity to think through the very foundations of democracy and design for the purpose of arousing in them some bit of soul stirring or, as West has put it, an education in these subjects.

Institutions of learning are pressurized situations in which students are forced to confront not only themselves but their habitual modes of thinking. They are asked to consider new possibilities and to imagine alternatives to what they already know or feel is true. There were certainly days in the studio when one could feel this pressure mounting around the group, leaving those in the position of educator to alleviate the rising tension and anxiety. In the end all of us were schooled by each other, by the situation, and for that we are all the better. GFRY is all the better.

Questions abound in our process of learning. How can we make public space more accessible to a variety of publics? How can we make design principles more democratic? How might we create situations of inclusion for the excluded? A city is not populated by architects and designers alone. It needs people, the widest possible variety of people, to lead a diverse array of lives. Let us not forget that buildings are made for habitation and public space is for the masses. Taken as holistic truths these statements and the questions that accompany them motivated students to proceed towards newly imagined solutions. Sometimes real. Sometimes speculative. Collaborative. Socially engaged. Pedagogical and performative. The projects that emerged from the students have a breadth and range as diverse as any city.

Approaches to inquiry and process were less varied. From where I sit, as consulting editor and advisor, there are two main approaches to the content of the course. One being a pragmatic attempt at reversing top down approaches to design and urban planning and the other being a grassroots approach to access. While I don't believe it is entirely useful to divide these two approaches across disciplinary lines, I do, for the sake of crafting a sense of the studio, want to acknowledge that generally those interested in pursuing careers as design professionals had an inherent belief in the privilege of design, while those committed to futures in what we might call community art or civic engagement were more interested empowering neighborhoods and individuals.

Between these two approaches is the GFRY studio as a classroom. A space for all involved to experiment, grapple with, elaborate upon, abandon, or explore each other's work as well as their own individual terrain. To my mind, this is the value of the GFRY as both a space for schooling and an educational opportunity. The subject matter of the course, what brevity has had me reduce to *design* and *democracy*, is inherently difficult. Difficult to enact, difficult to produce and difficult to reach a collective understanding about. Let alone attempt to merge into

a synthesis that might fundamentally alter how we produce cities and construct public space (among other possibilities). These are stakes of the GFRY studio. Each of the projects in this volume, each of the students involved, with the help of various collaborators and educators, is working to make a difference in how human beings, how *ordinary* citizens exist in the world. The weight of such an undertaking is not lost on those involved. Again one can feel the pressure rising.

I am fond of Cornel West's remarks about schooling and education because it opens up new possibilities for how we educate each other and ourselves. We might rethink outdated design models, lead after school programs, make a documentary, design new solar technologies, theorize about what we're doing and why we're doing it, or we could offer a year long seminar and invite students to join professionals, consultants, artists and designers to do all of these things, all the while educating each other in the process. This, for me, is the GFRY studio.