The Urban Precariat, Neoliberalization, and the Soft Power of Humanitarian Design

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the humanitarian design movement's efforts to address the crushing need, social precarity, and ecological frailty that define global megacities. The aims and character of the humanitarian design movement have been shaped by both the ethical demands of antiglobalization struggles and the rise of nongovernmental organizations as a principal means of social service–delivery in the Global South. The emergent humanitarian design movement offers a compelling critique of the failure of mainstream architectural and industrial design practices to address profound human suffering. Champions of humanitarian design, however, offer a technological fix (e.g., life straws, paper log houses, and hippo rollers) for problems rooted in imperial histories and neoliberal restructuring. In failing to address the dynamics of structural underdevelopment, do-good design performs the grassroots ideological work of neoliberalism by promoting market values and autoregulation. Within the humanitarian–corporate complexes, the global poor are construed as objects of elite benevolence and non-profit largesse, rather than as historical subjects possessing their own unique worldviews, interests, and notions of progress. This essay concludes by briefly sketching an alternative approach to self-determination for the poor where technological development is grounded in egalitarian cultures of anticapitalist social movements.

Keywords: neoliberalism, governmentality, poverty, precarity, humanitarian design, technology, development

> We are dealing with an urgent problem of our epoch, nay more, with the problem of our epoch. The balance of society comes down to a question of building. We conclude with these justifiable alternatives: Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided.
>
> (Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture*, 1923, 1995)

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> Rather than viewing design as a material, we should see design as a form of capital that empowers.
>
> (Emily Pilloton, "Design Can Change the World," 2009)

Introduction

On January 12, 2010, a massive 7.0 magnitude earthquake rocked the Haitian city of Léogâne and the nearby capital, Port-au-Prince, leaving an estimated 230,000 people dead, according to Haitian government reports, and upwards of one million homeless. In the week that followed, 52 aftershocks – some measuring between 4.3 and 5.9 on the Richter scale – rattled residents and frustrated relief efforts. The physical destruction was extensive and the human toll was unfathomable. The crumpled dome of the National Palace provided a visible symbol of infrastructural collapse and the diminished capacity of an already weak governing regime. More disturbing, however, was the sight of mass graves. As local morgues were overwhelmed by the escalating numbers of dead and fears over public health and contagion spread through the streets, health care workers, residents, and volunteers rushed to create landfills for human remains. With dump trucks and earthmovers in motion, hundreds of distended, broken, and debris-covered bodies were buried without systematic identification, ceremony, or basic dignity. The Haitian earthquake disaster provided a violent reminder of persistent, deep global inequalities of wealth and power. A month later, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake shook the Chilean coastal city of Concepción leaving hundreds more dead. Corporate media pundits and reporters quickly compared the Chilean disaster with Haiti's, noting how the destructive power of the Chilean quake was tempered by better building practices and superior infrastructure. Such opportunistic comparisons betrayed deeper similarities. By and large, the Chilean victims, like their Haitian counterparts, were society's most impoverished, at-risk and marginalized – an urban precariat formed out of the processes of neoliberal restructuring. These events underscore the implicitly social essence of urban disaster too often belied by the continued use of the anachronism, "natural disaster." Whenever seismic, epidemiological, and meteorological forces interact with complex human societies and their attending class structures, political institutions, and unique cultural norms and practices, the outcome is never natural. Who survives and recovers in the face of pandemics, earthquakes, violent weather, and the like

is intimately mitigated by the social. By 2050, it is predicted that 10 billion of the earth's inhabitants will reside in cities. Given this explosive growth of megacities, the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile; mudslides in Niterói, Brazil; the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami; and the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster – all portend a future of urban disaster on an unprecedented scale.

These disasters also illuminate the influence and scope of global humanitarian–corporate complexes – those networks of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); transnational corporations; philanthropical foundations and private donors; and international governing bodies – who coordinate, finance, and execute economic development, aid, and post-disaster relief and reconstruction projects worldwide (Hardt & Negri, 2004; Klein, 2007; Ong, 2006). As neoliberal restructuring has hollowed out the welfare safety-net in one nation after another, these complexes have evolved as the preeminent means for addressing human need and emergency. The work of disaster relief, clean-up, and reconstruction is largely undertaken by NGOs and not-for-profit firms. A brief prepared by the United States Institute of Peace following the 2010 earthquake disaster refers to Haiti as a "republic of NGOs" (Kristoff & Panarelli, 2010). Prior to the earthquake, the estimated number of NGOs operating within the country ranged from 3,000 to as many as 10,000. Over 1,000 NGOs took up the work of rebuilding Sri Lanka after the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami with many others operating throughout the flood-damaged coastal regions of Indian Ocean rim. Each of these disasters has also created opportunities for multinational firms to secure contracts related to debris removal, security, infrastructure rebuilding, and other needed services. Naomi Klein (2007) refers to this phenomenon as "disaster capitalism" and argues that neoliberals have seized upon moments of disaster, social trauma, and political instability as fast tracks for advancing market reforms. Disaster profiteering may be the most visible and insidious aspect of the work undertaken by humanitarian–corporate complexes, but the softer forms of do-good capitalism are more pervasive and pose a serious challenge to the modes of critique and action common to the post-Seattle left.

This essay examines the technical and ideological dimensions of the humanitarian design movement which performs a crucial role as conduit between the professional design world, NGOs, and aid constituencies. (Architecture for Humanity, 2006; Bell & Wakeford, 2008; Bell, 2004; Berman, 2009; Heller & Vienne, 2003; Pilloton, 2009). Architecture

for Humanity, Project H, the Humanitarian International Design Organization, the International Design Clinic, and the Seattle-based media organization, Worldchanging, form principal nodes of this emergent movement comprised of architects, engineers, industrial designers, development professionals, grassroots activists, and the residents of underdeveloped communities and neighborhoods. Proponents of humanitarian design seek to craft technical solutions to pressing problems of water access, emergency shelter, affordable housing, education, health, domestic violence, crime, economic insecurity, and exposure to natural hazards and manmade hazards, such as landmines. Design professionals are intimately involved in how space is produced and how resources are distributed within the developing world.

The aims and character of the humanitarian design movement have been shaped by both the ethical demands of antiglobalization struggles and the expansion of the humanitarian–corporate complexes as the principal means of social service–delivery in the Global South. Humanitarian design has flourished within an international context where the policy emphasis of development professionals has tilted towards poverty-reduction measures and away from central focus on spurring national-level economic growth (Pender, 2001). The emergent humanitarian design movement offers a compelling critique of the failure of mainstream architectural and industrial design practices to address profound human suffering. This movement retains modernist faith in the capacity of science to improve the human condition while embracing a distinctively post–Cold War suspicion of progressive state activism and utopian left politics. Champions of humanitarian design proffer technological remedies for problems rooted in imperial histories and neoliberal restructuring. In neglecting the role of productive relations and state policy in producing inequality, do-good design often performs the grassroots ideological work of neoliberalism by promoting market values and autoregulation among poor constituencies. Within the humanitarian–corporate complexes, the global poor are construed as objects of elite benevolence and non-profit largesse, rather than as historical subjects possessing their own unique worldviews, interests, and passions. The soft power of humanitarian design has not supplanted other more brutish forms of social control and management. Throughout the Global South, slum dwellers are subjected to violence and strong-arm politics by police, military, militias, drug cartels, gangs, and factory bosses. Rather, the governmentality of humanitarian design is one compelling option increasingly pursued by

NGOs, philanthropists, and activists to address pressing material, health, and education needs.

The technologies developed and touted by humanitarian designers are non-neutral and yet ambiguous. Such technologies are an artifact of peculiar material and ideological interests, but they are also susceptible to subversion and adaptable to new egalitarian forms of production and social organization. This essay contemplates the emancipatory potential of humanitarian design practice and concludes by exploring an alternative approach to technological development that is grounded in cooperative modes of production and grassroots struggles for social justice.

Humanitarian–Corporate Complexes and Neoliberal Governmentality

Neoliberalism is essentially the ideological rejection of the planner state (both the Soviet state socialist model and the Keynesian welfare state alternative) and the activist promotion of a new order of market rule. David Harvey (2005) describes neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 4). Neoliberalism is a form of world-making predicated on the abatement of labor rights, social provision, public amenities, environmental regulation, and other artifacts of social democracy deemed impediments to capital accumulation. Although it is common within American Right-wing discourse to conflate the expansion of neoliberal market regimes with "smaller government," the state does not recede in importance under neoliberal advances. Rather, its role is recast as the market's hand-maiden. The state remains critical to creating and maintaining the institutional underlayment that supports the functioning of the free market system— the production and regulation of currency, domestic policing, the military, the courts system. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) note, neoliberalism "is not really a regime of unregulated capital but rather a form of state regulation that best facilitates the global movements and profit of capital." Under the process of neoliberalization, state expenditures are re-routed from social goods, such as child care subsidies, housing, education, health care, unemployment insurance, pensions, and the like toward security measures and the subsidization of private sector growth. As the redistributive functions of the state are diminished, social inequalities are increasingly

managed through more extensive policing and increasingly invasive forms of surveillance and social control (Wacquant, 2009; Wacquant, 2010).

Neoliberalism has its genesis in the Cold War. It was conceived in the lecture halls of the industrial North, but the Third World served as its laboratory. The post-war economic boom provided little traction for American economist Milton Friedman's parlor wars with Keynesian economics in the US. His doctrines and those of his Chicago School peers, like Friedrich von Hayek, gained notoriety among the ruling classes during the late 1960s when they attempted to restore their authority and prosperity against global democratic rebellions, falling rates of profit, and rising real wages (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007; Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). Neoliberal reforms were initiated first through the counter-revolutions of the developing world before making their way back to the advance industrial nations of the West. The socialist experiments undertaken throughout the formerly colonized world sought to lessen dependency on the West and meet citizen needs by bolstering national infrastructure, health care, education, and industry. Throughout the Third World, structural adjustment measures of the International Monetary Fund required massive cuts in social spending as conditions for loans and as historian Mike Davis has argued this retreat from the welfare state constituted the "Big Bang" genesis of contemporary urban poverty (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2007; Balogun, 1995; Davis, 2006, p. 23).

Neoliberalism takes root within diverse cultural, social, and governmental contexts and as such, the concrete social process of neoliberalization is highly variegated (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2009). Not unique to a particular state-form, neoliberal privatization inhabits various politico-economic hosts from late Communist China, the Muslim world, the urban centers of North America, rural towns and slums of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the traditionally social democratic states of Europe. This latest form of capitalism may not batter down all walls of cultural distinctiveness and national sovereignty as Marx and Engels concluded, but it cuts new doorways for capital mobility and crafts modes of privatization adaptable to local taste and political arrangements. Ideally, within the neoliberal worldview, the economic choices of free citizens should form the central dynamics of markets and prescribe the limits of governmental authority. In a relatively brief period, neoliberal reforms have spawned a global nouveau riche, created wider availability of consumer goods and more expansive playgrounds for tourists and urban elites, but these massive transfers of public wealth into private hands have

simultaneously created unprecedented inequality, new forms of apartheid and vulnerability for the multitude around the world.

For neoliberals, the image of the barefooted shantytown dweller has replaced nineteenth-century London's sooty-faced pickpocket as the walking contradiction of planetary capitalism. The pro-market policies undertaken through the World Bank and IMF have conjured into being a slum precariat of unprecedented proportions and their presence calls into question every canard of freedom and prosperity touted by the Washington consensus (Breman, 2009; Davis, 2004, 2006; Kramer, 2006; Neuwirth, 2006). If precarity is a generalized condition of insecurity experienced under neoliberalism, then the *Precariat* is a class which is fundamentally defined by conditions of labor flexibility, informality, and political marginalization.[1] Similar to the global capitalism which spawned it, the precariat is without borders. The livelihoods of Northern industrial workers have been ruined by new regimes of labor flexibility created under neoliberal trade agreements. In a similar vein, as the traditional means of subsistence for peasants and indigenous peoples has been diminished by export competition, corporate agriculture, and deforestation, these dispossessed rural masses have fled the countryside, swelling the urban slums to unimaginable proportions. For some neoliberals, the solution to this problem of the new urban mega-slum is cultural change.

Neoliberalism is not merely a project of government austerity, but more fundamentally it is a new technology of governance suited to late capitalism (Ong, 2006). Whereas at the level of state policy, neoliberalization entails the dismantling of social democracy, at the cultural level, it necessarily involves the promotion of forms of liberal political subjectivity and autoregulation commensurate with market logics. For neoliberals, the expansion of mass poverty is not a consequence of corporate globalization per se, but rather a longer standing problem of modernity. Poor nations, we are to believe, did not adopt the political, social, and economic institutions that would have enabled capitalist development (Huntington, 1993; Kaplan, 1994). This problem of lag purportedly derives from cultural backwardness – religious fundamentalism or destructive ethnic and tribal identities. Similar to their Victorian era counterparts, latter-day culturalists encourage charity and tutelage of the poor as means of addressing immediate need and refashioning the behaviors of the poor in a more bourgeois direction.

The Cold War liberal discourses around poverty which evolved in the West during the middle twentieth century developed as an antidote

to the Marxist critique of capital which found concrete expression in the world revolutions and left political regimes that spread across the planet from one decade to another during much of the twentieth century (O'Connor, 2001). Cold War liberals' analytical focus on poverty disconnects the social experiences and worst conditions endured by the colonized, the unemployed, disabled, aged, women, and minorities from the broader dynamics of labor alienation experienced by industrial and service economy workers. Moreover, emphasis on "reduction" or "alleviation" of poverty operates from the underlying assumption that liberal democratic capitalism is sacrosanct – the market system can address the needs of most people and the poor are a grotesque, tragic exception whose conditions might be made more bearable through charity. This antimaterialist emphasis on poverty deflects systemic critique of the motors of inequality and reorients the terms of public debate and social policy toward addressing the worse outcomes of market dynamics. The UN's Millennium Declaration expressed aim to "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger" by 2015 implies that less extreme forms of need will be tolerated in the interim. More importantly, this campaign's emphasis seems to suggest that extreme poverty might be resolved without also addressing overconsumption, cultural greed, and systematic waste among the northern middle classes and global elite. Rather than emphasizing structural factors and posing broad political solutions, the liberal poverty reduction discourses embrace technocratic remedies and behavioral modification as central strategies.

In the tumult of pornographic disaster news coverage, tales of heroism, despair and survival, and think tank blueprints for rebuilding that accompanied the 2010 Haiti earthquake, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks offered a culturalist view of the disaster's roots and a proposal for rebuilding which called for paternalistic social engineering. According to Brooks, Haiti suffers from a "complex web of progress-resistant cultural influences" that includes the Vodou religion "which spreads the message that life is capricious and planning is futile." Pervasive social mistrust, irresponsibility, and neglectful parenting are also to blame from his vantage point. Brooks contends that "it's time to promote locally led paternalism" and he suggests exporting programs like Geoffrey Canada's much-celebrated Harlem Children's Zone and Damen Lopez's No Excuses Schools to the disaster-torn nation. Brooks contends that "self-confident local leaders" in Haiti can foster this "No Excuse counterculture" by "surrounding people – maybe just in a neighborhood

or a school – with middle-class assumptions, an achievement ethos and tough, measurable demands."

Tempered by grassroots discontent with global capital, Brooks' posture is one of enlightened neoliberalism which combines ostensibly sincere compassion for human suffering with an unwavering faith in market doctrine. His comments were patently ahistorical, conveniently neglecting the chronic difficulty the revolutionary black republic encountered in securing advantageous trade relations and investment with other nations for most of its history and the role of Cold War US policy in the region which supported anticommunist dictatorships to the detriment of the Haitian citizenry. Also missing from his analysis was any consideration of the impact of neoliberalization on Haitian agricultural dependency. Only 30 years prior to the 2010 earthquake, Haitian farmers were able to produce enough food to satisfy the needs of Haiti's cities, but now the nation was increasingly dependent on imports and the prices set by foreign producers. His comments form the cultural edge of the broader plans already in motion for Haiti. The long range plan for development calls for accelerated maquiladorization of Haiti – the creation of low-wage manufacturing and export zones (Lindsay, 2010). Brooks's vision of post-disaster Haiti was a predictable sequel to his comments after the 2005 Hurricane Katrina disaster. From Brooks's perspective, poor New Orleanians and Haitians all need to be remade in the image and likeness of the American middle class, that is, individualistic, consumer citizens devoid of politically troublesome solidarities. His objective and that of his ilk is to bring the subjectivities of the poor in line with the social and economic conditions necessary for capital accumulation.

Aiwha Ong contends that neoliberalism might be seen as "a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions" (Ong, 2006, p. 2). For Ong, "neoliberal governmentality results from the infiltration of market-driven truths and calculations into the domain of politics" (Ong, 2006, p. 4). Neoliberal efforts to marketize politics and privatize information, life and space threaten the possibility of social equality and meaningful democracy. The conditions of bare life, experienced by the global precariat, do not "dwell in a zone of indistinction" as Ong writes, but rather "it becomes, through the interventions of local communities, NGOs, and even corporations, shifted and reorganized as various categories of morally deserving humanity" (Ong, 2006, p. 24). Furthermore, Ong argues

that such "technoethical situations are an index of the growing power of humanitarian-corporate complexes to grade humanity in relation to particular needs, prioritized interests and potential affiliations with powers-that-be" (Ong, 2006, p. 24).

The contemporary movement of socially conscious design is a crucial component of the emerging humanitarian–corporate complexes that have supplanted the historical social-service activity of the state in many parts of the globe. By creating and circulating micro-social technologies as solutions to structural inequality, the humanitarian design movement often carries out the neoliberal project's core ideological work of managing class contradictions and promoting market logics. The movement is unique because it operates at the nexus of technological development and neoliberal technologies of citizenship and as such, humanitarian design weds techno-scientific solutions to global problems to the promotion of market-oriented modes of self-governance.

Technology is not neutral nor is it merely a means to an end as state socialists often held during the Cold War (Lenin's famous claim that communism was "Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country" summarizes this left instrumentalist view of technology). In contrast to this view, Andrew Feenberg points out that "subjects and means are dialectically intertwined: the carpenter and the hammer appear accidentally related only so long as one does not consider carpentry as a vocation shaping the carpenter through the relation to the tools of the trade" (Feenberg, 2002, p. 63). Technologies are socially developed and implemented. To illuminate how technological development is constituted by conjunctural elements, imprinted by prevailing social forces and susceptible to progressive transformation, Feenberg sketches out this notion of a technical code which is "the rule under which technical choices are made in view of preserving operational autonomy (i.e., the freedom to make similar choices in the future)" (Feenberg, 2002, p. 77). Particular social values, interests, and biases are condensed in technologies. "The technical ideas combined in the technology are relatively neutral," according to Feenberg, but in each form one can trace "the impress of a mesh of social determinations that preconstruct a domain of social activity in accordance with certain interests and values." Feenberg holds that "Capitalism is unique in that its hegemony is largely based on reproducing its own operational autonomy through technical solutions." Furthermore, "capitalist social and technical requirements are condensed in a 'technological rational' or a 'regime of truth' that brings the

construction and interpretation of technical systems into conformity with the requirements of a system of domination" (Feenberg, 2002, p. 76).

Designing Neoliberalism

In her essay "100 Years of Humanitarian Design," journalist and Architecture for Humanity's (AFH) cofounder, Kate Stohr, provides a useful overview of the major architectural and artistic movements of the twentieth century and how each responded to the humanitarian crises of its age. In so doing, Stohr gives a sense of the lineage and influences of the contemporary do-good design movement. Organizations like AFH and Project H were predated and inspired by the work of many individuals, such as the late Samuel "Sambo" Mockbee, the beloved teacher and cofounder of Auburn University's Rural Studio, who crafted elegant houses and community spaces for black residents of Hale County, Alabama; and the internationally renowned Japanese architect, Shigeru Ban, who is best known for the paper log cabins he designed for earthquake victims in Kobe and Istanbul and Rwandan civil war refugees. AFH and Project H are attempts to create a more formalized presence for professional designers in the work of the humanitarian–corporate complex and these organizations also reflect a burgeoning sense of self-consciousness and efficacy among advocates of socially responsible design.

While acknowledging this longer history of social and environmental activism within the design professions, the humanitarian design movement is understood here as a latter day phenomenon that congealed amidst campaigns against the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement and similar multilateral trade measures that enabled the more rapid flow of global capital. The recent rise of the humanitarian design movement should be understood within the context of three interrelated developments: (a) the historical defeat of state socialism and Third Worldism, political movements which sought to harness techno-science for the purpose of national economic development; (b) the subsequent neoliberal restructuring which swept the postcolonial world and the corresponding growth of the humanitarian–corporate complexes as the principal social service delivery system throughout the world, and (c) the cultural influence of the anticorporate globalization movement on public and elite discourses on global capitalism. In addition to opening up space for progressive-minded insiders to negotiate within transnational governing bodies like the World Bank and World Trade Organization,

another visible outcome of the Post-Seattle antiglobalization protests and related campaigns against labor and environmental abuses was to prompt the elaboration of more significant patron–client relations between NGOs and progressive-minded architects and product designers.

The April 1999 birthdate of AFH might serve as a useful marker for the christening of the wider humanitarian design movement. As activists across North America and around the globe were already feverishly working on fundraising, travel plans, and ground strategies for the upcoming World Trade Organization ministerial conference slated to take place later that fall in Seattle, Washington, Stohr and her companion, British architect, Cameron Sinclair organized a makeshift "office" for their new brainchild – in reality, a corner of space for the organization's laptop in the cubicle where Sinclair worked as a "CAD monkey" for a New York firm. From its inception, AFH has been shaped by the common zeitgeist the antiglobalization movement, although its approach to addressing the worst effects of global capital is more politically moderate.

AFH was created "to seek architectural solutions to humanitarian crises and bring design services to communities in need" (Sinclair, 2006, p. 11). Some of the most vital work undertaken by Architecture for Humanity and its collaborators has been in the area of public health and more precisely in the creation of flexible modes of health care delivery, especially for those afflicted with HIV/AIDs. In 2002, AFH hosted an international design competition for mobile health clinics in Africa. AFH has completed over 245 projects including the construction of schools in Tanzania, Rwanda, and Uganda and post-disaster reconstruction in Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Sri Lanka, India, and the United States' Gulf Coast. Like Stohr and Sinclair, Emily Pilloton was a rebel within the world of corporate design/architecture whose professional experiences spurred her towards social activism.

At 26 years of age, Pilloton established Project H in January 2008 with a $400 loan from her parents and a growing dissatisfaction with the corporate design world. Pilloton formed Project H to focus design expertise and practice on improving "Humanity, Habitats, Health and Happiness." In an incredibly short time, Project H has evolved from the pet project of a disenchanted young designer into a formidable and sought-after organization with chapters in Los Angeles, Mexico City, London, and New York. Project H's work has landed Pilloton a guest appearance on the popular Comedy Central program, *The Colbert Report*, and garnered

favorable profiles in mainstream design magazines such as *Metropolis* and *Dwell*. During Spring 2010, Pilloton and her coconspirator, Matthew Miller, embarked on the Design Revolution Road Show, a cross-country tour of high schools, colleges, and universities throughout the United States that featured an exhibit of new inventions and lectures on the virtues of humanitarian design.

One of Project H's earliest projects entailed a revamping of the existing Hippo Water Roller device, a 24-gallon barrel equipped with a handle to ease the transport of fresh water. Already in use in parts of southern Africa, the Hippo Roller was conceived as an alternative to traditional methods of load-bearing. Project H's design team identified flaws which made shipping the device cost-prohibitive, so they revised the design allowing the unit to be dismantled and the components stacked and nested to enable easier portability. More recently, the organization has developed and implemented the Learning Landscape in Uganda and North Carolina. Using recycled tires, this playground can be constructed easily and at little cost and provides educators with ways of teaching mathematical concepts through group play. The architects, industrial designers, and engineers associated with AFH, Project H, and other related organizations share a common discontent with mainstream design practices and embrace socially conscious design as their new professional ethic.

Architect William McDonough, Pilloton, and others offer prescient critiques of planned obsolescence and the grim ecological impacts of disposable design and Western consumer culture. Pilloton charges that

> …industrial design has put murder on a mass production basis. By designing criminally unsafe automobiles that kill or maim nearly one million people around the world each year, by creating whole new species of permanent garbage to clutter up the landscape and by choosing materials and processes that polluted the air we breathe, designers have become a dangerous breed. (Pilloton, 2009, p. 14)

This critique of the design professions also calls for a more socially-conscious and participatory practice. Pilloton charges that design firms are "incestuous and insular… obsessed with buzzwords and think tanks" when they should be focused on "the user and 'do tanks'" (Pilloton, 2009, p. 15). She criticizes greenwashing and corporate rebranding ploys and demands a more reflexive design practice that not only addresses ecological crises in substantial ways but also develops a notion of sustainability that

incorporates concern for human welfare. This ethic of social justice is applied to professional practice rather than to politics, however.

The humanitarian design movement is revolutionary in its efforts to reorient the work of professional designers away from industry norms and the excesses of corporate culture. Pilloton even draws on the language and symbols of the antiglobalization movement. Her "design revolution" flag – a black flag emblazoned with a white exclamation point – mimics the anarchist black flag common to antiglobalization demonstrations. The design revolution touted by Pilloton, Cameron Sinclair, and others, however, is a revolutionary philosophy uniquely suited to the "end of history." Theirs is revolution without societal transformation. It is a market-friendly antidote to contemporary inequalities that tosses the radically egalitarian visions guiding the grand historical struggles of sundry left revolutionaries into the historical dustbin. Humanitarian designers express commitment to modified notions of capitalist economics and a faith in social improvement through technological development and conservative social engineering.

The approach to inequality here proceeds from a fairly conventional interpretation of poverty that is rarely grounded within a conscious, mature critique of capitalism. Instead, Pilloton and other advocates of humanitarian design attempt to graft social responsibility onto more conventional notions of capitalist development and progress. Her version of revolutionary, humanitarian design is guided by a "triple bottom line" which expands the traditional financial ledger to measure success in terms of "people, planet and profits." Pilloton calls for "social entrepreneurship" or social enterprise which she describes as "the application of entrepreneurial business practices and principles to organize, create and manage a venture that both incites social change and makes a profit for some or all stakeholders" (Pilloton, 2009, pp. 16–17). In a similar vein, William McDonough's "Triple Top Line," Paul Hawken's "natural capitalism," and Acumen Fund CEO, Jacqueline Novogratz's "patient capitalism" – all constitute formulas for balancing social responsibility, sustainable building design, and profitability (Hawken, A. Lovins, & H. Lovins, 1999; McDonough & Braugart, 2002; Novogratz, 2010). Such claims are descendant from the slum-upgrading and self-help projects extolled by the World Bank during the 1970s and touted more recently by Prince Charles of England and Steward Brand, environmentalist and publisher of the pioneering, Whole Earth Catalog

(Dasgupta, 2006; McGray, 2009). The self-help housing activities of John F.C. Turner, Hernando de Soto, and others were essentially modalities of neoliberal restructuring which combined popular democratic sensibility with tacit commitment to free market principles and the preservation of standing social hierarchies (Davis, 2006; de Soto, 2000; Turner, 1976). In some of the products and projects touted by Pilloton and other designers, the desire to mold ghetto and slum inhabitants into mini-entrepreneurs is clear. In other instances, the technological solutions subtly shift the burden of social welfare responsibility from the state to the solitary individual – leapfrogging from the twentieth-century view of the state as a guarantor of basic conditions for self-preservation and the general welfare to the neoliberal model of autoregulation and atomistic individualism. Although the humanitarian design movement has been shaped by the legacy of failed, statist projects to improve the human condition, organizations like Project H and AFH are guided by a modernist faith in the emancipatory properties of science and invention.

Within the humanitarian design movement and the wider humanitarian–corporate complexes, economic problems are reframed as design challenges and as such, taken out of the realm of public debate and political remedy. Advocates of humanitarian design often fetishize professional design practice and embrace notions of self-help which preclude the possibility of achieving social justice through collective struggle and state activism. In her spirited manifesto, "Design Can Change the World," Pilloton writes fervently:

> I believe that design is problem solving with grace and foresight. I believe that design is a human instinct, that people are inherently optimistic, that every man is a designer and that every problem can either be a design problem or solved with a design solution. (Pilloton, 2009, p. 10)

She contradicts the democratic possibilities implied in this view that all humans are designers. Instead, Pilloton reasserts the privileged place of the specialists when she writes, "Humans have an instinct to seek out better ways, and designers possess the toolbox (and responsibility) to deliver solutions that make those ways accessible and improve life." Power, wealth, and knowledge are unevenly distributed and cognitive workers do possess skills that other classes do not. The concept of design is reduced to micro-social technologies, such as compostable cups made of corn fibers, sugarcane charcoal, antitheft furniture, educational cellphone applications, life straws, and mosquito

nets. For Pilloton and other advocates of humanitarian design, broad environmental and social catastrophes like water shortages, HIV-AIDS, malaria and dengue fever, drought, and deforestation which blanket entire countries and affect millions of human beings can be addressed through smart products and smarter NGO programming. Within the evolving networks of NGOs, do-good architects and designers and public–private boosters, twentieth-century faith in state planning is anathema. The deep global inequalities which are rooted in histories of imperial war, massive expropriation and structural underdevelopment are evoked sentimentally and the very social struggles which have sought (and continue to) redesign society along egalitarian political and economic lines are banished from respectable discourse. Progressive design whether ecological or humanitarian is a willing accomplice to neoliberal privatization. These technologies provide micro-social solutions to deeper structural problems and conduct a softer form of tutelage in the language, norms, and expectations of neoliberal citizenship.

The micro-technologies developed by do-good designers and deployed through NGO programming constitute a form of *grassroots privatization* because they advance neoliberalization through empowerment and civic mobilization. These efforts do not garner the same outrage as disaster profiteering, but they follow the same logic of governmental outsourcing and the creation of markets in formerly public sectors such as education and health care. Such measures further the reach of neoliberal privatization by cultivating consensus in unlikely corners of the populace. Disgruntled residents, urban planners, socially engaged ac-ademics, students, neighborhood activists, and clergy have embraced the participatory allure of these strategies.

Two projects highlighted in Pilloton's *Design Revolution* compendium which attempt to reduce poverty by molding the subjectivities of the poor are Sweat Equity Enterprises (SEE) and the Los Angeles–based Homeboy Industries. Spearheaded by clothier Mark Ecko along with Damon Butler and Nell Daniel, SEE is a New York City program that offers internships for urban, working class youth at retail clothing companies. The project is a variant of latter day product development strategies like "cool hunting" where clothing designers routinely patrol youth and countercultural social scenes in an effort to discover the next big fashion trends. SEE employs young people as insider-consultants who participate in the vetting of new products, packaging, and marketing campaigns and in some cases, the development of their own product ideas. Students are provided college

scholarships from the proceeds of successful protoypes. Participants also gain work experience, marketable skills (project management, marketing, design fundamentals, etc.), and perhaps, a pathway to the creative class. Like SEE, Homeboy Industries also provides tutelage in job skills and middle-class values, but it is targeted at ex-convicts and former gang members. Jesuit priest Father Greg Boyle created Homeboy Industries in 1992 when Los Angeles was the center of a staggering rate of gang-related murders. That year alone there were 1,092 homicides in the city of Los Angeles proper with 430 of those officially identified as gang related. In collaboration with the Detroit Collaborative Design Center, Boyle created a haven for former gang members where they could receive job training, camaraderie and a fresh start. Homeboy Industries has fostered various businesses including a silk-screening operation, a bakery and café, a landscaping venture, and a tattoo removal service for former gang members. Within an urban context of desperate social conditions and slim opportunities for upward mobility, these projects are celebrated for their ability to produce visible results and at a deeper level, such successes help to publicize the view that private institutions are better suited to addressing poverty than state activism.

Denver's Donation Meter Program which addresses homelessness is touted by Pilloton because its approach is one of "design thinking rather than turning to legislation or bureaucratic methods" (Pilloton, 2009, p. 22). This particular program, however, illustrates the intimate connections between government austerity and the project of behavioral modification of the poor (Pilloton, 2009, pp. 278–279). The Donation Meter Program was enacted after researchers found that 99 percent of street corner donations to the homeless were allegedly spent on drugs and alcohol. This program used clearly marked, but nonfunctioning parking meters as donation "piggy banks" to re-route panhandling funds directly to the Mile High United Way's programs to reduce poverty and unemployment. Anticipating donations of $100,000 per year, this scheme promises to open up new revenue streams for private charitable institutions and effectively undermine whatever means of nominal autonomy and subsistence previously available to the city's homeless population. The Donation Meter Program acts as a "middle-man," between the middle-class citizen and the homeless panhandler, for the expressed purpose of discouraging illicit drug activity and public alcohol consumption. The behaviors of more mobile, affluent citizens are also modified away from personal acts of compassion and urban sociality towards more formal support for charitable institutions.

Other projects initiated under the banner of humanitarian design attempt to bring public attention to the worse conditions of the poor, but these strategies lack political resonance. The Mad Housers project in Atlanta and the ParaSITE shelter are well-meaning efforts to address economic hardship that fall short of addressing the root causes of the problem. In the late 1980s, the Atlanta-based Mad Housers project began erecting small dwellings for the homeless in wooded areas without building permits or permission from landowners. Once discovered, such urban encampments are routinely dismantled by police, but the practice has been taken up by socially conscious designers and activists in other cities as a means of providing short-term shelter. The ParaSITE shelter is the creation of artist Michael Rakowitz and it combines the guerilla art sensibility of culture jamming with an ingenious means of providing emergency shelter and warmth. The ParaSITE is an elongated, tent-like structure which is placed over the external heating duct or exhaust vent of a home or building. The warm air from the vent inflates the structure and provides radiant heat to the inhabitant. The device is intended to meet immediate personal needs while also publicizing the plight of the homeless, but in some cities like New York City and Boston where it has been implemented, users have been met with repression and "homeless-proofing" of heating sources – a practice already common in some North American cities. The Sleeping bag project undertaken in Baltimore suffers from similar problems and like the other projects described here, it succeeds more as public relations triumph for local charities and resume-building exercise for volunteers than as a viable and systematic attempt to address the problems of joblessness, the lack of affordable housing, and the provision of effective treatment for drug addiction and mental health that are all subsumed under the "problem of homelessness."

The notion of empowering the poor at the heart of humanitarian design is grounded in assumptions about liberal citizenship. The various expressions of empowerment practised by humanitarian designers, such as volunteerism, citizen design, DIY (do it yourself) modalities, etc., are essentially neoliberal inasmuch as these activities are narrowly confined to market activity and civic life rather than social movements and state policy. The humanitarian design movement engages working class and poor clients through charettes, workshops, and other methods of collaboration common to professional architecture and design firms. The fact of participation or inclusion, however, does not always equal meaningful power. In some instances, these rituals of participation, in fact, conceal substantive inequalities governing interactions between

metropolitan design professionals and Third World denizens. Such interactions cultivate legitimacy for technocratic proposals by enlisting the opinions and input of local clientele without altering norms and expectations of expertise that shape and influence decision making. Third World inhabitants are often the recipients of technologies and development schemes that have already been vetted and sanctioned by celebrity benefactors, non-profit boards, developers, politicians, and architects. Design professionals, workers, activists, and residents can be transformed through their engagement with each other and these interactions may foster more substantial political activity. This is unlikely however, in organizational contexts where large-scale social malaise are framed as problems that can be addressed through personal technologies or bootstrap self-help. Nonetheless, the humanitarian design movement is still in its infancy and the current activities may give rise to more substantive, critical, and openly political forms of activism as designers continue to wrestle with professional and political contradictions.

In some instances, however, the remedies proposed by humanitarian designers neglect local knowledge and the long-term implications of how new technologies will affect the social order and daily life. Celebrated projects like the hippo roller and Nicolas Negroponte's One Laptop per Child program constitute a form of soft cultural imperialism. Unlike the historical forging of empires where Western nations engaged in war, conquest, and administration of indigenous peoples and territories, these micro-technological projects entail the soft insertion of market values and biases into communities at an individual, personal level. Contrasting the historical encounters between colonizer and the colonized, where the terms of conquest were mitigated by resistance movements, kinship systems, local governing institutions, military prowess, and other social factors, the personal technological solutions crafted by do-good designers circumvent and enlist such social forces and institutions. This criticism is not driven by either post-modernist cultural relativism or the multiculturalist desire to preserve quaint indigenous cultures, but rather my objection is animated by the need to illuminate those power disparities that shape poverty-reducing agendas, technological development, and implementation. As a labor-saving device, the introduction of the hippo roller in South Africa and Namibia might have progressive outcomes – the creation of leisure and more collaborative work. Proponents of the hippo roller routinely assert this device's perceived health benefits. Their claim that the wheel-barrow motion used to advance the hippo roller is a

healthier and more biomechanically sound alternative to bearing items on one's head, however, contradicts academic studies which note the osteogenic benefits and efficiency of centuries-old indigenous practice throughout Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Even if we concede the health benefits of the hippo roller and its immediate virtues for communities with limited access to potable water, the device itself may have the unintended consequence of deferring public-spirited discussion among affected communities regarding their shared challenges. The technological fix surrogates and stalls a broader political solution that might require more substantial redistribution of wealth and resources within the developing nations themselves and between the North and South.

In all fairness, some corners of the humanitarian design movement are already bumping up against the limits of design solutions. The humanitarian design movement may spawn more radical, substantial commitments to democratic design in architecture, planning, and design schools and professional firms. In a 2009 talk delivered at Oxford, Sinclair lamented that while working with a group of Qatari students, his eyes were opened to the "dark side" of the construction industry. He was referring to the exploitation and precarious conditions endured by 1.1 million indentured, migrant construction workers, mainly from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal working to build the post-modernist pyramids and corporate palaces of Dubai. In response to their plight, Sinclair said the following:

> The question is, as a building professional, if you know this is going on and do you choose to accept this practice as the norm are you complicit in the human rights violations? *Forget your environmental footprint, what is your ethical footprint?* What good is building a zero energy, carbon neutral complex if unethical labor practices are jeopardizing the lives of those who build this architectural wonder? (Sinclair, 2009; emphasis added)

He then encouraged his professional peers to support organizations like Build Safe United Arab Emirates, lobby for stronger legislation to protect migrant labor in the region and use the contract process to ensure better conditions for workers. Sinclair called on designers to move from private work to public activism and in a few words, he marshaled his clout and stature to effect change in ways which went beyond charitable work and design competitions.

In their essay, "An Architecture of Change" (2008), José L.S. Gámez, an architecture professor at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte,

and Susan Rogers, director of the Community Design Resource Center at the University of Houston, offer one of the most critical and insightful arguments for a left progressive architecture. Writing from within the humanitarian design movement, they contend that "What is needed is an architecture of change – an architecture that moves the field beyond the design of buildings and toward the design of new processes of engagement with the political forces that shape theories, practices, academies, policies and communities." Gámez and Rogers decry the culture of political avoidance which pervades some architecture and design circles and society writ large noting that "To stake a political claim is to run the risk of clashing with the divergent set of cultural values and alienating potential clients, prospects that few find enjoyable" (Gámez & Rogers, 2008, p. 21). They call on other design professionals to "question the tendency to blindly accept the market as a guiding principle" and instead they encourage the need to "challenge capitalism from within." In sharp contrast to talk of a triple-bottom line or "archepreneurs," Gámez and Rogers conclude the following:

> We can refuse to play unquestioningly by market rules that insist on the profitability of design; we can investigate the market's spatial impact and look for ways to circumvent its negative influences…We have to reconceive utopianism not so much as a practice but as a process, one that has the potential to transform both the production of space and the distribution of social and political power. (Gámez & Rogers, 2008, p. 24)

The future character and direction of the humanitarian design movement will be determined by how professional designers and other activists perceive their role as intellectuals and how well or poorly they reconcile their own class privilege as knowledge workers to the broader dynamics of structural underdevelopment which govern life and death in the megacities of the Global South. As Gámez and Rogers rightly conclude, "Architecture should empower architects, designers and more important, citizens to build their own future" (Gámez & Rogers 2008, p. 24). The work of Waste for Life in Argentina and Lesotho provides a concrete example of this ethos (Waste for Life, 2010).

Design and Social Struggle

If one strolls the streets of Buenos Aires' San Telmo neighborhood when night fades to dawn, as the last night club patrons stagger homewards

and the first shopkeepers amble about preparing for the day's work, you are almost sure to encounter a band of cartoñeros, each hauling a small mountain of bottles, cans, or plastic bags in a commandeered shopping cart or rusted hand truck pulled rickshaw-style. These materials are sold at recycling centers for a subsistence wage. In 2001, Argentina defaulted on its debt, unemployment reached 25 percent, and over half the population plunged below the poverty line. In the years after the economic collapse, somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 people eked out a living on Buenos Aires streets as cartoñeros. Unable to survive on the meager wages provided for their work, many cartoñeros joined the piquetero movement – essentially those who set up blockades of flaming tires paralyzing freeway traffic and demanding social relief from the state for the unemployed. Others created worker cooperatives in the spirit of the broader popular movement of recovered factories that spread after the 2001 collapse (Lavaca Collective, 2004; Monteagudo, 2008; Sitrin, 2006; Vieta, 2009). The Argentine government moved to formalize the work of the cartoñeros, providing train service, *el tren blanco* to ferry these workers, many of whom are Paraguayan or Bolivian, from the *villas miserias* that ring the city to the wealthier enclaves of Central Buenos Aires. Officials also provided child care services while the workers plied the city's streets.

Materials scientist Caroline Baillie and Fashion Institute of Technology professor and photographer Eric Fienblatt's implementation of the Kingston Hot Press represents a progressive, democratic approach to creating greater economic security and self-determination for cartoñeros (Loftus, 2008). In some respects, the format and modes of collaboration of Waste for Life are similar to other socially responsible design projects. A key difference, however, is the organization's sustained engagement with social movements in the Global South and the relations of mutuality that continue to guide its work. Waste for Life was born in 2006 out of Baille and Fienblatt's work with the Maseru Aloe Multipurpose Cooperative Union in Lesotho. Waste for Life works in partnership with Argentine recycling cooperatives, such as Abuela Naturaleza and Cooperativa de Trabajo Avellaneda Limitada, and engineers, students, designers, and activists at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina; the Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Industrial, Argentina; Queens University in Kingston, Ontario; the University of Naples, Italy; the University of Western Australia in Perth; the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence and Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Baillie and Fienblatt developed the Kingston Hot Press at the request of cartoñero and recycling cooperatives. This technology is not proprietary. Rather it has been shaped and innovated through a collaborative process of engagement and interchange involving designers, workers, educators, and activists. The Hot Press is a low-tech, highly functional device that can be locally sourced and constructed through DIY techniques at relatively little cost. The Kingston Hot Press binds plastic bags and fibrous materials to create a new composite sheet material that can be fashioned into durable handbags, wristwatch bands, wallets, or galoshes among other things. The production and sale of these commodities transforms low-wage activity of the cartoñero collectives into more income and economic security. Once more, the implementation of this technology promises to provide cartoñeros with some measure of autonomy from the neighborhood bosses, larger recycling collectors and paper mills who reap larger profits from the trade in these hard-won raw materials.

The cooperative organization and social movement context of this project constitute an advance over the more entrepreneurial approaches offered within mainstream humanitarian design camps. Some of the economic development projects touted by the humanitarian–corporate complex are also designed to provide the poor with modest forms of capital through microcredit loans for market women or other forms of low-technology means of production, e.g., organizations like Maya Pedal in Guatemala which provides open-source designs for bicimáquinas – pedal powered machines made from recycled bicycle parts. Unlike the work of Waste for Life, however, such projects are too often predicated on an entrepreneurial model that seeks individual economic mobility rather than broader, more substantive forms of collective empowerment. In contrast to the entrepreneurial model, the cooperatives and worker-recovered firms in Argentina comprise a broader solidarity economy that provides individual coops with access to capital, technical support, and knowledge through bartering and exchange networks and provides workers with greater means of defending their shared interests through movement politics (Vieta, 2009). The horizontal decision-making practices and equitable distribution of revenues that define the cooperative movements embraced by Waste for Life in Lesotho and Argentina constitute a more promising means of achieving genuine autonomy and empowerment for working people. The Waste for Life project models the kind of progressive development and circulation of technology that might create some measure of power and self-determination for the urban precariat. Technological

development is precipitated and guided by the evolving needs and interests of particular communities of working people. Rather than advancing neoliberal citizen-making activity by promoting individualism and entrepreneurship, collaboration between Waste for Life and worker cooperatives contributes to the advancement of political movements that challenge the demands that transnational governing bodies and multinational corporations make on societies and natural resources.

Mike Davis' (2004) analysis of global slums and Loic Wacquant's (2007) ruminations on the precariat share a common pessimism about the political possibilities of the global poor. Davis sees Pentecostalism and radical political Islam as the more powerful forms of subjectivity emerging in global slums. Davis laments that "for the moment, Marx has yielded the historical state to Mohammed and the Holy Ghost. If God died in the cities of the industrial revolution, he has risen again in the postindustrial cities of the developing world" (Davis, 2004, p. 30). Oddly enough, his description of political subjectivity in the new global geography of slums resembles Robert Kaplan's dystopian premonition of a "rundown, crowded planet of skinhead Cossacks and juju warriors." As Richard Pithouse (2006) notes, Davis may pose too much of a "Manichean distinction between religion and political militancy. . ." In the militant struggles to defend squatter settlements and improve conditions in places like Caracas and Bombay, Pithouse writes that some of the protagonists are religious and others are not and "[i]n many instances these struggles were not in themselves religious but their organizing in social technologies developed in popular religious practices" (Pithouse, 2006, pp. 19–20).

Wacquant is reluctant to see the precariat as a fully formed political subject. Focusing primarily on the post-industrial US and France, he notes that this new class emerged through the decomposition of the industrial working class, but it has not reached a point of self-consciousness as a class. Wacquant points to the proliferation of conceptual labels to describe the urban working classes (i.e., "new poor," "underclass," "zonards," etc.) as symptomatic of the "state of symbolic derangement afflicting the fringes and fissures of the recomposed social and urban structure" (Wacquant, 2007, p. 245). Moreover, the traditional mechanisms of urban working class politics – trade unions and left parties have withered in importance. The precariat, however, is not "stillborn" as Wacquant claims, but rather there is ample evidence of progressive and radical working-class politics in the favelas, ghettos, barrios, and banlieues that scar the

landscapes of global megacities. Diverse protest and social improvement movements – too often crowded under the banner of "antiglobalization" – have challenged the dire social and environmental consequences of neoliberal world-making and the notion that market values should take precedence over human needs, political equality, commons, and environmental integrity. The movement of recovered factories in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Montevideo where industrial workers, the poor, and redundant middle class have reclaimed their working lives and proposed democratic alternatives to capitalist production; local battles over the privatization of water resources in Lagos; the creative, vernacular building practices borne of scarcity in Kinshasa and Mumbai; daily efforts to guarantee the "right to the city" for squatters and migrant laborers; and the struggles of guerilla technicians in Soweto and Rocinha to bring electricity to neighborhoods darkened by privatization and other struggles against neoliberalism – all constitute fragments of a progressive urbanism.

Conclusion

In its present form, humanitarian design is an inadequate means for abolishing poverty and precarity. With some exceptions, its advocates most often conform to neoliberal narratives about the causes of poverty and poverty-reducing strategies. In other words, they emphasize the need to cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit among the poor and provide them with nominal forms of capital (microcredit, recycled materials, affordable technology, etc.). In this regard, humanitarian design operates as a modality of neoliberalism which subtly promotes market values – economic rationality, individualism, private property, bourgeois consumerism – often in contradiction to competing modes of economic activity (bartering, cooperativism, mutual aid), social identities (family, ethnicity, neighborhood, religious, class), and political organization (trade unions, neighborhood associations, political parties). Rather than serving as a conduit and consultant to NGOs, the promise of humanitarian design might be realized through more active engagement of design professionals with local social movements in the developing world. Within the context of social struggles that are guided by immediate working-class interests and values of mutuality, solidarity, and horizontalism, progressive-minded, professional designers, and their collaborators in local communities might give birth to a new more egalitarian, democratic technical code.

Some corners of the humanitarian design movement fetishize design and engineering in claiming that all problems are essentially design problems. In making this assertion, proponents of humanitarian design reassert their own privileged place as intellectuals and by extension, as entrepreneurs in today's knowledge economy. Problem-solving which can (and should) be a deeply social and public process is lifted out of the realm of political struggle and state planning and restricted to the drafting table, conference room, and charette. Pilloton and others who claim that all problems are design problems are basically correct, but their technocratic manifestoes imply that these are problems to be solved by professional designers, and not by unions, social movements, neighborhood assemblies, worker cooperatives, and political organizations through the process of debate and public action. The grand historical questions that will define this era of megacity urbanism – How do we build and maintain megacities? How do we abolish poverty? How might we provide clean water to humankind? How do we meet the needs of billions of inhabitants without destroying the earth? – can only be addressed by marshaling the collective energies and resources of humankind. Socially conscious design may satisfy the temporary needs for a limited group of aid recipients, but the broader challenges posed by privatization are societal and global questions which inevitably require rethinking the way we have divided up the world's resources.

NOTES

1. The term has its origins in the New Left discourses of Italy, France, and Spain and analysis of working-class subjectivity during the formative era of deindustrialization (Waite, 2009). Pierre Bourdieu is credited with the first use of the term "précarité" in referring to contingent workers in Algeria, but the impact of deindustrialization in Europe and North America made the term applicable to the developed world (Bourdieu, 1963, 1998). Neoliberalism has helped to universalize the precariat and the concept increasingly describes a generic set of social and economic conditions of insecurity and risk experienced by workers around the globe in the megacities of the developing world as well as the advanced industrial West. Whereas the term "the poor" describes conditions of relative material depravity, the precariat acknowledges and describes the new conditions of living labor within the circuits of high technology global capitalism whose labor processes are defined by brutal flexibility, interchangeability,

and insecurity (Davis, 2004; Denning, 2010; Dyer-Witheford, 1999, 2001; Nielson & Rossiter, 2005; Wacquant, 2007). This is true for redundant middle classes and obsolete proletarians of the post-industrial North and the new industrial proletariat and informal working classes who populate the megacities of the Global South. Though obviously linked and at times used interchangeably, precarity and precarious work are distinct from the precariat. Middle class, cognitive workers experience conditions of *precarity* under global capitalism – layoffs, loss of union representation, increasing occupational hazards, minimal avenues of recourse in the advent of discrimination or wrongful treatment, etc., but they may escape the more dangerous forms of work endured by migrant workers and the less-educated in society. *Precarious work* might refer to a range of legitimate forms of work such as construction, offshore oil drilling, mining, etc., where livelihoods have been made more insecure by labor arbitrage and workers made more vulnerable to death and injury due to the relaxation of industrial safety standards and regulatory enforcement. Precarious work might also encompass informal and criminal activity, such as off-the-books manual and domestic labor, drug trafficking, hawking pirated media, trading in stolen goods and bodily organs, and various forms of sex work, where abuse, deportation, imprisonment or death are all probable scenarios for workers. Under legitimate forms of precarious work, the notion of "accidental death," once mitigated in some national contexts by labor rights and industrial regulation, has become increasingly common (e.g., The 1984 Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India, which killed an estimated 15,000 people; the 2010 British Petroleum's Deepwater Horizon accident which claimed 11 lives and endangered the livelihoods of thousands more connected to the seafood, maritime trade, and tourism industries of the US Gulf Coast; the 2009 Impala Platinum Mining disaster in South Africa which killed 9 workers; and the 2010 Upper Big Branch Mine disaster in West Virginia which killed 29 miners). In the formerly mentioned, criminalized forms of precarious work, "accidental death" is inapplicable. It is a terrible misnomer in urban contexts where human life and social welfare – especially those of immigrants, women, minorities, children, people with disabilities, the aged – are sacrificed to satisfy the libidinal and consumer demands of more mobile, privileged citizens.

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