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The resultant "globalized" architect must become not just an artful visionary but also a master of the art of the political nudge, willing to act within multiple mediums and at the simultaneous scales of a chaotic new world disorder. Though fearless they must also be responsible, inherently understanding the necessity to align bold visions with the mundane details of the everyday in ways that are culturally flexible and accepting of change. The potential for what must be considered the legitimate practice of the architect must move from a purely material venue to one more directly engaged in the chaos of the larger economic, political, and social spheres of a globalizing world.

The issues and possible interactions with globalization contained in this text exemplify ways that architecture is transforming into a more flexible and fluid interdisciplinary version of its traditional self in order to rise to the challenges of this new international terrain. A theme runs throughout in the form of a call: that architects must conceptually re-construct their frames of reference to better align with the demands of a rapidly globalizing world.

**Michael K. Jenson** is an Associate Professor of Architecture and Current Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado, Denver. He has practiced in Dallas, New York, Paris, and Denver and has worked on urban design/architecture projects in China, France, Germany, and the USA. His teaching and research explore interdisciplinary dialogues that cultivate innovation in architectural technology and urbanism.

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MAPPING THE GLOBAL ARCHITECT  
OF ALTERITY

MICHAEL K. JENSON



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Practice, Representation and Education

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**Michael Jenson** is an Associate Professor of Architecture and Current Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for the College of Architecture and Planning at The University of Colorado Denver. He has published in *Open House International*, *Drain Magazine*, *The Journal of Architecture*, *The Journal of Utopian Studies*, and *MONU (Magazine on Urbanism)* as well as contributing to the books *Design Studio Pedagogy: Horizons for the Future* and *Global Media, Culture, and Identity*. Degrees: PhD. in Philosophy/University of Edinburgh, MARCH/Columbia University, and BSC/Architecture University of Texas Arlington.

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*Michael K Jenson*

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## INTRODUCTION

Mapping the global  
architect of alterity



**FIGURE 1** Office Tower: Beijing Central Business District, China

Photo courtesy of author

## 2 Introduction

*Difficult as it is to pin down, and correlated as it is with profound scientific, technological, and economic developments, a revolutionary transformation in consciousness is taking place. This, in fact, may be the most important consequence of the globalization process. In sum, we are not only transforming the globe, but ourselves as well. What could be more challenging than a prospect such as that?*

Bruce Mazlish – Looking at History in the Light of Globalization  
(Mazlish 2002:02)

Like many students of my generation studying architecture, I was steeped in the tradition and grand vision of the Modern Movement in architecture. The ideas of masters, such as Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Gropius, were presented as testament to modern architecture's capacity to address the complexities of a world rapidly advancing technologically in a provocative architectural sensibility. Its clean, crisp aesthetic, straightforward materiality, and open spatial language while appearing to have a machine-like efficiency was intriguing. Projects like the Barcelona Pavilion, Unité d'Habitation, and Fagus Shoe Factory were etched into our memories with their visual flair and presentation as models of exciting international architecture. These projects exemplified radical ideas, such as the five points of architecture and Mies's glass and steel aesthetic, making them emblematic of globalization and technological advancement – a condition ignored at great peril to contemporary culture. Though early modernist architects were eager to engage this trend, they limited their explorations to the very particular aesthetic lens of functionalism. Social issues, though woven into the modernist narrative at times, seemed only tangential to the argument for the emergence of a *new* architecture that transgressed historically ingrained cultural boundaries to become globally influential.

Further in my education I realized that, because of the reductive nature of its central tenets, the International Style by itself lacked the capacity to provide an appropriately nuanced frame of reference to describe the complex and interwoven networks of globalization. Architecture became increasingly broad through the reading of texts exploring theories from political science, economics, and aesthetics. Eventually, the realization emerged that globalization was truly a fundamental driver in the creation of the global architecture that early modernist architects sought to manifest, and this became the frame for my theoretical explorations into architecture's role in the human endeavor.

Though globalization is defined in many ways, none of its definitions captures the magnitude of its influence on modern society than its definition as *detritorialization*, where cultural spaces are developing with no tangible connection to physical geography. Territory as a conceptual logic to

comprehend the world is being radically altered by technology, forcing the adoption of new ways of conceptualizing space/geography (Scholte 2000:46) and interpreting the cultural meaning of architecture and place. Along with these cultural, political, and economic forces, two additional contributors to this spatial transformation have emerged: technological advances in transportation, and cyberspace. Because space relates to all of our actions and events, the ubiquitous relationship of globalization and technology is often difficult to grasp.

Consequently, architects and designers must seek more encompassing frames of reference as a means toward understanding globalization and its affect on the production of a global architecture. In my education specifically, the quest to discover such frames eventually guided my search to philosophy. Outside of metaphysics, globalization is one of the most universal frames of reference because it influences the majority of human activity. As our capacity to engage this complexity and interconnectedness increases, the globe becomes both exponentially smaller in relation to geographic distance and simultaneously larger in its intricate complexity. Construction techniques, design sensibilities, and cultural identities are being transformed the more technology transports us to places previously unreachable and with a frequency unimaginable to our ancestors. The chapters in this volume are testament to this search for a means of intellectually grasping the complexity and influence of globalization on the architectural endeavor as well as my contribution to the necessary broadening of the architect's interpretive frame of reference.

## GLOBALIZATION: TWO DIVERGENT VIEWS

Arguably, one of the most overused terms in the mainstream media today is globalization. Like other terms such as *sustainability*, *democracy*, and *capitalism*, the more definitions that surface attempting to clarify their ramifications the more opaque their meaning becomes, causing their eventual canonization as authentic descriptors of our contemporary world that are universal to all but the most specific of contexts. (Bauman 2011:01) Globalization is this type of term because it describes diverse and wide-ranging forces whose connection needs extensive theoretical *unpacking*. Two views of globalization will set the theoretical boundaries for this study that are markedly divergent perspectives ranging from the cynical to the hopeful. A realistic definition of globalization probably falls in the middle ground between these views: somewhere between reality and ideal, cynicism and exuberance.

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The global tone of the late twentieth century was dictated by the dueling ideologies of the United States and the Soviet Union: competing superpowers vying for influence and control. During this time, technological advances were driven and supported through the government-funded research and the development activities of their military/industrial complexes. As these rivals battled for ideological and geographic supremacy, technological change filtered into daily life incrementally so its transformation was manageable for the average individual. As the Berlin Wall came down, the Soviet Union disbanded, and economic markets took over where the military left off, the speed of technological development increased as well as the global integration of politics, economics, and culture. The scale, complexity, and pace of this integration has transformed our perception of globalization from being a complete and understandable totality filtered through the propaganda machines of two clear players in control of its forces, to a reality where ambiguity is the norm. (Ibid. :52)

Though globalization is not new and has been a part of human civilization since the time our ancient ancestors began to migrate in search of new food sources, our contemporary society is confronted with a new realization: that globalization's forces are beyond human control. Now it seems that *no one* is at the helm, nor is there a coherent world order; only a new world disorder and growing awareness of the contingent nature of forces at the global scale. Previous generations conceived globalization as a ubiquitous form of universalization, (ibid. :57–59) based on the hope that an orderly process would create a coherent social hierarchy engendering more parity in living standards globally. However, modern society seems caught in perpetual chaos where agents are *acting* globally, but in reality are being *acted upon* by global forces. As Bauman describes:

now globalization (and our perception of it) is largely an awareness of a seemingly infinite series of 'anonymous forces', operating in the vast — foggy and slushy, impassable and untamable — 'no man's land', stretching beyond the reach of the design-and-action capacity of anybody's in particular.

(Ibid. :57–59)

Contrasted to this view of globalization as a *new world disorder* is the cosmopolitan idea of its being a force moving towards global parity within a single world community. Cosmopolitanism emphasizes the potential that our increasingly globalized world has through the creation of transformational institutional schemes that can provide concrete procedures, clear organizations, security, and the protection of human rights. (Hayden 2005:03)

By this, globalization is the quintessential vehicle for contesting social value systems that “privilege moral partiality, national interests and the division of the world into seemingly autonomous state units”. (Ibid. :04) Cosmopolitanism has been criticized for its utopian attitude and overly aspirational qualities, however with the rise of a *global polity* where governance on many issues occurs at the supranational level and regularly transgresses boundaries from the local to the global, this highly ethical view has moved from far-fetched vision to being potentially a plausible alternative to the nation state (Held 2004:365–67; Hayden 2005:04):

The idea of global politics calls into question the traditional demarcations between domestic and the foreign, and between the territorial and the non-territorial, found in modern conceptions of ‘the political’... Global problems highlight the richness and complexity of the interconnections, which now transcend states and societies in the global order. Moreover, global politics is anchored today not just in traditional geopolitical concerns—trade, power, security—but in a large diversity of social and ecological questions... There are now multiple spheres of politics and authority.

(Held 2004:365–67)

By this, a new globalized social polity is in the process of being created, blurring traditional boundaries and politics from within the residual structures of the Cold War system. The intensification of connections founding the perception of the *shrinking of our world* also illustrates the possibility of cooperation and governance emerging at the metanational level, both in scope and operational infrastructure. This globalized civil society is a realm where:

world citizens exhibit a consciousness that global goals can be promoted and that globalization and global governance are susceptible to change through the cooperative efforts of transnational networks and coalitions. Citizenship then, conveys the development of a cosmopolitan public sphere consisting of trans world solidarities.

(Hayden 2005:07)

The juxtaposition of these divergent views of globalization might seem theoretical folly, but the *new world chaos* of the post-Cold War era is a condition essential for the emergence of these globalized social networks. The contemporary *manufactured jungle* founded on the ruins of the Cold War system coupled with the sophisticated infiltration of telecommunications



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technologies has encouraged new global polities to develop that are strengthened as demands for political transparency increase worldwide and social systems transform unevenly, affording opportunities for new systems and hierarchies to emerge. Danger also lies in this chaos as exemplified in the increasing frequency of regional wars, the brutality of repressive regimes, and magnified acts of terror. As testament to the double-edged sword of globalization, media outlets continuously beam news of tragic acts of terror and violence alongside triumphant events in art, science, and economics. Both these types of events, the beneficial and the tragic, are outcomes of circumstances manifesting as more culturally integrative and technologically advanced systems emerge globally.

### GLOBALIZATION AND ARCHITECTURE

The influence on architecture by globalization is increasing because it finds both the creation and maintenance of culture by the creation of material records that contribute greatly to a strong sense of cultural identity. The discipline's strength lies in its relationship to tradition and how it influences the material manifestation of cultural convention for future generations in ways strongly linking the present to the past. Like most arts, architecture resides in the present, past, and future simultaneously within a culture's collective imagination through social values and conventions that serve as a platform for future innovation. However, its strength is also its manifest weakness because the very same traditions providing the foundation for invention can also ensnare architecture's power for positive change in the trap of entrenched and outmoded convention. Tradition and social convention are effectively frames of reference enduring centuries, allowing for consistent historical interpretations to influence the potential of contemporary life.

With the increasing affect of globalization, our ability to comprehend its complexity has emerged only recently as our technological sophistication for gathering and processing information has increased exponentially, impacting the interpretive ideological constructs that order our perceptions of today's world. As the physicist Murray Gell-Mann points out:

we human beings are now confronted with immensely complex ecological and social problems, and we are in urgent need of better ways of dealing with them. In this sense there is truth in the old adage that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Unfortunately, in a great many places in our society, including academia and most

bureaucracies, prestige accrues principally to those who study carefully some aspect of a problem, while discussion of the big picture is relegated to cocktail parties. It is of crucial importance that we learn to supplement those specialized studies with what I call a crude look at the whole.

*(Gell-Mann 1997: 23)*

Architecture, like many other disciplines, is still coming to terms with the ramifications of the cultural and intellectual shift Gell-Mann describes by relying on conventional concepts and practices as foundations for defining its purview and disciplinary identity. Though this reliance is a powerful attribute, it can also be a recipe for obsolescence. Architects frequently envision their discipline as innovative, but when compared to other disciplines that create electronics, cars, or airplanes it seems behind though its role in globalization is unique. While airplanes and computers are culturally generic, architecture can be far more culturally specific if its constructs move beyond mere functionalism and efficiency as definitions of innovation. Architecture influences the more broad-ranging cultural aspects that define our modern existence, forcing innovation to be generic – reproducible en masse – yet specific enough to contribute to the unique and diverse cultural identities found around the globe. Given this duality of goals, the futility of relying solely on past conventions within the intense demands for innovation in this present stage of globalization is increasingly apparent.

Centrally important here is the assertion that though modernization is important in raising material living standards around the globe, it must be balanced against the attributes that are nourishing to the spiritual and intellectual aspects of life: beauty, history, culture, and religion. If not, the homogenizing aspects of globalization will overwhelm the cultural diversity providing the richness and uniqueness of our globe by gentrifying all nuance and difference to a state of flattened sameness. More specific to architecture, if its practitioners attempt to distill its activities to only being the efficient production of buildings, it would be better placed in the hands of contractors. This type of mindset is exemplified in the YouTube video (Broad Sustainable Building Co. 2012) where a 30-floor building is erected in 15 days in China. Though the speed of construction and integrated systemic design phenomenal, the finished product is less than inspiring as a cultural manifestation of Chinese architecture at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This video underscores the importance of maintaining the balance between efficiency and artful making founded upon a cultural sensitivity.

Because many contemporary architects have failed to first comprehend, and then argue for the unique necessity of the profession within globalization,

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it has become marginalized in many instances. Recent figures in the US for architects in the US are indicative of this marginalization; unemployment figures are twice that of other disciplines, and growth rate forecasted to 2020 is slower than for many other employment sectors. (Lockard and Wolfe 2012:93) To overcome this, architects must reframe the public's perception of the discipline in ways similar to Gell-Mann's call for societal "redirection":

The ideological transition to a world view that combines local, national, and regional loyalties with a 'planetary consciousness,' a sense of solidarity with all human beings and, to some extent, all living things. Only by acknowledging the interdependence of all people and, indeed, of all life can we hope to broaden our individual outlooks so that they reach out in time and space to embrace the vital long-term issues and worldwide problems along with immediate concerns close to home.

*(Gell-Mann 1997:25)*

A primary goal here is the realignment of several conventional referential frames for architecture that could develop into new paths of influence regarding its disciplinary identity within globalization. Given the scale and complexity of such a task, the exploration of these possibilities will be in the spirit of Gell-Mann's "crude look" with the chapters in this text falling within three broad-ranging themes relating to globalization – transformative disciplinary contemplation, emergent material consequences, and re-strategizing architectural and design education. Each theme explores subjects in architecture, design, and globalization from simultaneous trajectories that frequently diverge, run parallel, touch, or cross. These explorations exemplify ways the discipline is presently transforming or is in need of further transformation. The chapters can be read in order or more piecemeal as separate but interconnected explorations of globalization; either way, their aim is to encourage architects and designers to conceptually reframe their conceptions of architectural practice to increase the discipline's relevance by discarding some and radically rethinking other conventions that have traditionally defined architecture and design.

As transborder entities gain influence, architects, artists, and urban designers will increasingly have more significant roles in the political networks of the new global polity described by cosmopolitan theorists. There have been flashes of this potential influence for architects in the activities of *starchitects* like Norman Foster, Rem Koolhaas, and Frank Gehry, but to date their activities have remained largely transnational corporate image-building exercises with infrequent forays into the political sphere.

The discipline must move beyond these in scale and frequency to successfully adapt architectural practice to the standards that globalization demands. Radical change must occur at the *rank and file* level of practicing architects worldwide to bring about significant change and the real promise of modernity: architects affecting the everyday lives of individuals of all socioeconomic and cultural groups, not just the creation of a fashionable and expensive aesthetic.

More exploration and imagination involving modern architecture's potential for socially minded enterprises such as Habitat for Humanity globally is necessary to fulfill a new potential agency for contemporary architects. The possibility not only to construct materially, but also to define concrete strategies of execution influencing a variety of disciplines will only serve to broaden the architect's purview. So, in the *nowhere* of this new global realm, where the material and virtual are increasingly blurred to forge new networks and operational infrastructure, what defines the modern architect and what mediums will be the operative mode of choice?

## THE GLOBAL ARCHITECT OF ALTERITY

In the last chapter of his book *Architecture Depends*, Jeremy Till presents a metaphor for the contemporary architect akin to the earthbound angel in the Wim Wender's movie *Wings of Desire*. He imagines contemporary architects as:

Angels, androgynous imaginers of possibility, with dirty faces, which are always engaged. Angels, the original messengers, with dirty faces, human and slightly flawed. Architects modestly bound to the earth but with the vision, environmental sense, and ethical imagination to project new (social) futures on behalf of others.

*(Till 2009:195)*

With this, Till is arguing for a visionary architect founded on a pragmatic outlook; one whose imagination is transformative, but also intrepid when faced with the complexity and restrictions of real sites and their social and political contexts globally. In other words, an imagination that creates visions projecting new futures while accepting the inevitability of their being riddled with faults and hidden dangers. The architecture project becomes the site for openness and curiosity, but only for the contemporary architect willing to filter the chaos of a real context to make sure their "intent is guided by the aspirations to reform space in the name of others." (Ibid.)

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Within the context of the transformation of architectural agency by globalization and in the spirit of Gell-Mann's "crude look," the metaphor proposed by Till needs one addition: that the potential of what is considered a *project* for an architect broadens immensely. The agency of the global architect must expand beyond the familiar reality of the conventionally defined architectural project and engage globalization more directly in the social and political sphere. Key skills for this emergent global architect are the ability to quickly master organizational hierarchies, communicate innovative visions, and mobilize varying constituencies. At times these skills may be exhibited through projects that are architecturally conventional because they involve the construction of a building, but other times *building* might be concerned with consensus rather than with structure. It may also, for example, concern the application of technological advances that achieve more parity or alleviate unhealthy conditions in less fortunate areas of the globe.

This *globalized* architect must become more than just an artful visionary, but also master of the art of the *political nudge* willing to act in multiple mediums and the simultaneous scales of the chaotic new world disorder Bauman laments. Utopia is to be found within our existing global turmoil, by audacious individuals who can critically analyze issues and then propose strategies that pull existing resources and contingencies together to form strategies that pull together resources and mobilize workforces more efficiently. Though fearless they must also be responsible, inherently understanding the necessity to align bold visions with the mundane details of the everyday in ways that are culturally flexible and accepting of change. The potential for what must be considered the legitimate practice of the architect must move from a purely material venue to more directly engaging the chaos of the larger economic, political, and social spheres of a globalizing world. This reconceptualized architectural practice doesn't necessarily exist entirely within a particular culture, but in the potential of the skill set of architects within all cultures engaging their surroundings towards positive change, at all scales from the local to the global.

Finally, this globalized architect must be sensitive and empathetic to alterity or difference, whether it manifests in a particular site, culture, or agenda. Innovation within globalization will not emerge from the latest fashionable aesthetic trend or technology. Within the disciplines of architecture and its allied arts, innovation will emerge from the ideas generated from speculating upon how conditions are interpreted at a myriad of scales, the traditions engaged, and the sanctity of unique cultural identity respected. Globalization has the potential to engulf uniqueness in a ubiquitous sameness, or its forces can be focused to actually heighten difference and cultivate variation. The key for an emergent architect of alterity is to value the difference that

provides the cultural and environmental richness of our world through the creation of strategic agendas supporting its manifestation. Though architecture has always been and will always be about constructing basic yet beautiful and innovative shelter from the elements, the integrative nature of this present stage of globalization demands that a more wide-ranging agenda of critical thought be included as a central component to any design strategy as well.

The chapters in this volume range in topics – the education of the architect, the representation of discipline, the evolution of practice – and are presented as departure points for contemplating the effects of globalization on the architect, architecture, and the built environment. They enter these perennial discussions through clearly defined theoretical frames and emergent trends involving the design process of the architect of the twenty-first century. Given that much of the difficulty of understanding the nuances of globalization stems from its scale and complexity, the strategy for this text was to avoid clearly articulating an oversimplified theoretical structure like the one that doomed the modernist project to failure in the eyes of many. Instead the strategy was to allow the subject matter to exist on simultaneous planes but to coalesce under broad themes. It is left to the reader to identify potential theoretical collisions and overlaps in relation to their beliefs and experiences. One or all of the essays can be read in order of presentation or by the preference of the reader. Each chapter stands on its own as a particular exploration, but also relates to prevalent issues explored in chapters found in other sections. When read together, these chapters explore a wide range of issues facing architecture and design globally, at present.

In short, the overall exploration of globalization has as much or as little focus as the reader desires, not unlike globalization in general. Its overlaps are apparent, but reliant on interpretations relating to personal agendas and past experience for specificity. At a minimum, the text is a call to consider the broad range of issues involved and the forces influencing architecture's role in our modern globalizing world. It is intended to serve as a starting point for readers to contemplate what the term "Global Architect of Alterity" may entail and how architects and designers operate in the twenty-first century. As is the case with architecture and design in general, every individual's journey will be different, but in the end will contain many universal threads connecting them to the experience of others.

## FRAME I

Twenty-first-century global design processes, practices, identities, and philosophies



**FIGURE 2** Acropolis: Athens, Greece

Photo courtesy of author