



CLIMATE ACTION AND ARCHITECTURE

EPISODE 2 | TRANSCRIPT

00:00 MONA LEMOINE: We acknowledge that Indigenous peoples are the traditional guardians of this land we call Canada in which we gather here today.

00:10 MONA: We acknowledge the historical oppression of lands, cultures and the original Peoples of this country and know we have a role to play in the path to decolonization that we share together.

00:21 MONA: We recognize our duty to fight for Indigenous rights to be restored and commit ourselves to the journey of healing.

00:29 MONA: We thank the 630 First Nations, their people, and ancestors who have taken care of these lands that we share.

00:36 MONA: Let us take a short pause so everyone can reflect on their own acknowledgement and relationship to the land and be grateful for the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors have taken care of the land for centuries.

Theme music

01:04 MONA: This is the RAIC Podcast on Architecture and I'm this season's host, Mona Lemoine. This season is part of a series of activities and events leading into the 2021 Congress on Architecture and the development of a Climate Action Plan.

01:20 MONA: The RAIC 2021 Congress on Architecture will be held On October 4, 2021 –World Architecture Day 2021 – and will address Climate Action and Architecture in Canada.

01:33 MONA: In this episode RAIC Congress on Architecture Steering Committee member Bianca Dahlman talks with Dr. Harriet Harriss about the publication Architects After Architecture and the Climate Crisis curriculum at the Pratt Institute School of Architecture.

01:49 MONA: Bianca works for a DFS Inc Architecture and Design in the field of adaptive reuse and architectural conservation.

01:57 MONA: She strives to preserve resources through honoring and celebrating existing structures. Her student design work at the University of Manitoba was recognized in 2019 by Corporate Knights' Top 30 Under 30 Sustainability Leaders and the Canada Green Building Council's Students Leading Sustainability Award.

02:16 MONA: This work was guided by Indigenous architect, Shawn Bailey, and Bianca's careful application of listening and empathy.

02:24 MONA: While working for Alberta Infrastructure, she promoted net zero energy and net zero carbon design and performance.

02:31 BIANCA DAHLMAN: My name is Bianca Dahlman and I have the pleasure of welcoming Doctor Harriet Harriss to this episode of the RAIC Podcast on Architecture. Doctor Harriet Harriss is a qualified architect and Dean of the Pratt School of Architecture in Brooklyn, New York.

02:46 BIANCA: Her teaching, research, and writing focus upon pioneering new pedagogic models for design education, as captured in “Radical Pedagogies: Architectural Education & the British Tradition”, and for widening participation in architecture to ensure it remains as diverse

03:03 BIANCA: as the society it seeks to serve, a subject she interrogates in her book, “A Gendered Profession”. Additionally, Doctor Harriss is recognized as an advocate for diversity and inclusion within design education and was nominated by Dezeen as a champion for women in architecture

03:21 BIANCA: and design in 2019. Her latest book, “Architects After Architecture”, published in 2020, considers the multi-sector impact of an architectural qualification.

03:32 BIANCA: Thank you for joining us today.

03:33 HARRIET HARRISS: Thank you, Bianca. It’s a pleasure to be here.

03:38 BIANCA: You are the steering committee chair for the upcoming ACSA Teachers Conference. For our listeners who may like to know, the ACSA is the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture.

03:51 BIANCA: This year’s conference theme is Curriculum for Climate Agency Design (in)Action. What can you share with us about the upcoming conference?

04:01 HARRIET: Well first of all, there was a partnership with the European Association for Architectural Education. And I think why it’s important to mention that it’s a partnership is what we’re seeing, in partnerships of this nature, is a very strong collective will

04:16 HARRIET: to respond to what is a very serious situation for all of us, so we know statistically that we are now just a few degrees away from the sixth mass extinction

04:27 HARRIET: and the most extinctions that have been previously. Usually about 85% on average of species were extinguished. So there’s interesting challenge for us.

04:37 HARRIET: When we think existentially about whether or not we will still be here as one of the surviving species, nevermind whether or not, architects will still be here as surviving professionals.

04:49 HARRIET: So, what the conference wants to focus on is not a complacency where we talk about climate change, we talk about seasons changing and that’s the natural process.

04:59 HARRIET: Instead, the conference is very much charging educators with the principal responsibility for taking action which is why we explicitly described this as an action-based conference.

05:09 HARRIET: And it’s really trying to understand, I think that role construction industry plays in the current heating up of the planet for example we know that the construction industry is directly responsible for 40% of global carbon emissions.

05:24 HARRIET: And, of course, architects, within all of this, whether knowingly or, you know, through ignorance, are doing very little to, to change this. We also know that climate change is a social issue. It’s not just the you can create a segregation

05:42 HARRIET: between climate heating, and obviously, for example local racism, because actually these things are profoundly embedded. We know that we ship our waste off to countries, poorer countries, you then have to deal with the toxicity of our overconsumption.

05:59 HARRIET: We also know that it’s our patterns of behavior, our dependence on fossil fuels in the north for manufacturing but also for transportation

06:07 HARRIET: that is heating up the temperature, more directly and more dynamically in global South regions. So I think that what we have in a way, in the Northern Hemisphere countries such as Canada and the US, is not really an ability to see very directly, the

06:22 HARRIET: impact of the damage that we are doing. So, from my perspective, you know as a, as a dean, who is responsible for a school that needs to set a very clear agenda about what its curriculum should be, one would normally look to a validation, such as the National

06:37 HARRIET: Council of Architectural Registration Board, to set a mandate about how our curriculum should be more responsive, but worryingly I think this has not really been happening.

06:53 HARRIET: So, it really falls upon us as educators to lead a conversation among ourselves collectively about what climate-responsive curriculum can look like.

07:03 BIANCA: So, when you talk about this action that's at the center of the conference theme, that action looks like addressing curriculum, specifically.

07:16 HARRIET: Yes, absolutely. You know, education is not just the reflector of practice, it's the director of practice, and if we want to see a future in which real change will occur in the way that we design and build and from what we build in it going forward, we actually

07:32 HARRIET: need to, if you like empower our students with climate literacy, knowledge, which is something at the moment is not a prerequisite within our validated curriculums and therefore, we have a major shortfall.

07:44 HARRIET: I think, if anything, we have learned through the international lockdown that was obviously brought forth as a consequence of,

07:53 HARRIET: if you like misappropriation of a living resource, in this case the ways in which animals we use for food are kept in unsustainable conditions and then if you'd like our dependence on global travel, and it was the

08:06 HARRIET: perfect storm to create a deadly situation. And in a way, the virus is, to some extent, a proxy for how other forms of degradation, will, if you like, migrate around the world, that are again, a consequence of our behaviors.

08:22 HARRIET: So I think that what we need to understand is all of these things are interdependent. You can't operate as civically or socially responsible but be ignorant of climate and the climate crisis, nor can we focus exclusively on specifying materials that we believe

08:37 HARRIET: to be ethical, not understanding that somewhere, potentially, if we're only understanding embodied energy to be limited to performance ratio is relative to energy.

08:48 HARRIET: What we're not understanding is a lot of the new products are bringing in supply chain slavery or the connected to supply chain slavery or they have vast production value issues that are also environmentally, you know, environmentally damaging. And because

09:02 HARRIET: we have this, we only really look at the problem in a very localized way and don't see the interdependencies across regions and across species. We continue, I think, to have a very narrow view of what that transformative curriculum could look like.

09:18 HARRIET: And this is what the conference is really for.

09:21 BIANCA: And I understand that the conference will be hosted this June and it's a virtual event.

09:29 HARRIET: That's right, although we're going to have a face-to-face next year, the following summer because we do think that by then, having been so starved of these interactions, and because we will be doing so many climate initiatives in the school,

09:43 HARRIET: within the next 12 months and beyond with our partners across the city Governors Island, Alice Austin house or two examples. We want to welcome people to see all of our prototypical attempts within the school to really test models, and if you like fledgling

09:57 HARRIET: pedagogies and curriculum that really speaks to this agenda so yeah, it will be returning a year from now for a reconnection.

10:06 BIANCA: And when you talk about these fledgling models at school, does this refer to the models of curriculum being developed at Pratt?

10:07 HARRIET: Yes, absolutely. 100%. We're very close at the moment, obviously at the time of recording, to the anniversary of George Floyd's murder at the hands of the police, and what's so interesting about the Black Lives Matter movement,

10:27 HARRIET: you know protest from last summer, is it gave many deans such as myself profoundly committed to issues of social justice, a mandate to really push forward.

10:38 HARRIET: These issues onto the agenda within our schools and to do things collectively as a faculty with students on board, where we really started to question the ways in which we had to address or shortfalls.

10:49 HARRIET: And so I think that you know very strongly that's the plan. I mean I think one of the things that is forgotten is that, you know, histories and even thinking a bit about you know what is.

11:00 HARRIET: If you'd like one of the main challenges that any, where do you begin when you're trying to, in a way, create a climate responsive and climate just curriculum, and it really is entirely codependent on the decolonization movement and what many schools are claiming that they are seeking to do, that we can't segregate these things.

11:17 HARRIET: One of the challenges we have of course is that architecture has been historically complicit in serving the needs of the elite, and we see that very often in in cities and in terms of who has access to what kind of housing for example, what kind of

11:32 HARRIET: spaces of healthcare, the spaces of housing, the spaces of work, and the qualities of those environments. And of course historically architects have been complicit in designing, you know, systems of apartheid systems of separation, not just

11:45 HARRIET: in terms of economic system separation of course communities, but also quite directly in apartheid systems such as South Africa, and of course, in Europe during the Holocaust and being active agents in creating systems of, you know, destruction.

12:02 HARRIET: So, I think that, you know, we have, let's just say we have, we carry with us, the responsibility, historically, to rethink how what we stand for, and to really question on ethics. It's interesting if you look at validation criteria is again, you go back

12:17 HARRIET: and you even and you do a kind of treasure hunt for the term ethics and you do a treasure hunt for the term climate you will struggle.

12:23 HARRIET: And I think that's one of the concerns have often had that we have, you know, we have to as schools generate our own mandate because it's not forthcoming in the prescriptions, we are normally obliged to follow in order to be registered and recognized.

12:34 HARRIET: We need to take a leadership role in decolonizing the practice and decolonizing the institutions which include the universities, and it's great to see, Pratt take a leadership role and the ACSA take a leadership role here instead of waiting around asking for permission.

12:52 BIANCA: As we heard in episode one of this season, Seth Klein emphasized the need to change our mindset. And this is echoed as a theme in the ACSA conference programming, where a change of mindset from design "wants" to design "needs" is promoted.

13:11 BIANCA: Could you explain, Harriet, what is meant by this distinction between "wants" and "needs"?

13:17 HARRIET: Well, I think it's interesting as a question because I think that there's a subjectivity around wanting something and needing something. I mean, I think there's a distinction, I would prefer a tunnel based which is about desire, and maybe need because

13:31 HARRIET: I think that actually many of us of course have aspirations and what we have been if you like

conditioned to believe are the hallmarks of success in life, to have a certain quality of housing to have certain objects, and so on.

13:46 HARRIET: And we are all conditioned to pursuing these artifacts of self-assurance and external acknowledgment that we have in some way succeeded professionally personal or whatever.

13:58 HARRIET: And I find it interesting, this obsession we have with growth and expansion, and the symbol was of affluence and success of have now become really preoccupation of where architecture services situated.

14:12 HARRIET: And I think that one of the challenges that architecture has is really understanding itself as far more of an agency initiative and, in a way, an artifact initiative. In other words, it needs to start understanding the ways that can operate to support

14:34 HARRIET: who have needs to address acute need, and less about meeting wants or desires. It also needs to step back from, I think, aligning itself with questionable political, social and ecological activities and behaviors. It also needs to understand that,

14:46 HARRIET: and this is a big problem for schools in my view, that as we continue to define architecture just as a building, and not necessarily as a system of thinking or a strategy for community engagement.

14:59 HARRIET: So, if we think about architecture for a moment as, in terms of what it stands for educationally architecture is the love child of multiple epistemologies, knowledge frameworks,

15:08 HARRIET: and of course if you like the cousin of a complex inter-marital family of disciplines. So, in many ways, it's actually not really a discipline at all. It's much more like a practice as many theorists have said, because it's actually just this hybrid refrigerated

15:23 HARRIET: cake of lots of different ways of doing and thinking. So, for example it rolls in history, social sciences, obviously natural sciences to some extent material science,

15:34 HARRIET: math, arts etc etc. So, it's the ultimate STEAM dream as we would call it, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics. And there's some ways that hybridity is, no surprise perhaps, in that we have an identity crisis, sometimes about what how

15:50 HARRIET: amazing we think we are which accounts for so much for egotism. But on the other hand, I think we're under utilizing about we are like the iceberg industry insofar as we under utilize about 90% of our training, if all we do is express that training as

16:04 HARRIET: a building artifact, when in fact, of course, we could use that three dimensional problem solving and that epistemological richness to come up with far more strategic spatially determined solutions that don't involve any kind of materiality at all.

16:24 HARRIET: And then of course, one can look to some of the most remarkable architecture practices that are out there, ROTOR is one in Belgium, where instead, and a bit like, you know, and to borrow from their model we shouldn't be telling students design a new

16:35 HARRIET: building into a void of blank canvas urbanism instead look at ROTOR's model which is deconstruct a building, then figure out what you're going to do with 2000 roof tiles and 600 hearing-shaped wooden hardwood flooring from the classrooms, whatever

16:45 HARRIET: it is and, and how do you repurpose all that stuff into a new kind of adaptive reuse so there's, we should start not from saying just here's an empty building repurpose it but literally deconstruct it before you construct, make that an obligation.

16:58 HARRIET: It's kind of like "The Karate Kid" of architecture in a way you know spends ages, like, not realizing the painting the fence is actually part of his karate expertise training and in a funny kind of way, and adopting that humility, within our curriculum

17:12 HARRIET: may even address some of, I would say all humility crises within professional practice, not just in relation to our clients but the design team too.

17:28 BIANCA: I wonder if this analogy of deconstructing the building and reconstructing it into something new as an analogy we can apply to our practice, as you say to shift our mindset from producing a building to producing agency.

17:40 BIANCA: What role does adaptive reuse play in prioritizing needs over wants.

17:51 HARRIET: Well, I think that's an excellent question. First of all, I think that adaptive reuse is one strategy. I think there's a lot to be said for actually not doing much adapting at all. You know, in some ways, as you'll recall from the title of the conference "Curriculum for Climate Agency: Design (In)Action"

18:04 HARRIET: but then, obviously, there's a parenthesis around "in". And so in other words, one could read it as "Design Inaction" so in other words not designing not actually designing anything, but understanding how do we work with the designs that we've inherited,

18:17 HARRIET: how do we work with the spatial assets within an urban environment? How do we interpret other forms of use for them? And I think that a lot of that has to do with less about acting at all.

18:27 HARRIET: It's about in fact stepping back and understanding a different way of engaging with the raw materials the resources we have. And I think that's something we do not teach we always emphasize some sort of intervention.

18:40 HARRIET: Over inaction, and that, if you like, intervention can often be badly considered or inappropriate because that's how we value and look at students' performance.

18:51 HARRIET: So in other words, our metrics in design studio privilege, as Dana Cuff would say, from UCLA, the primacy of the individual this emphasis on individualization of output within student work, and of course that's not how anything works in the world.

19:07 HARRIET: You know, I mean it's insane to think, of course, even if we have large architecture practices that have signature architects, whether it's, you know, the Gehry and the Hadid's of this world, they have huge entourage of people doing most of the work.

19:21 HARRIET: So, it's often a myth to even assume and subscribe to notions of the architect is a kind of fallacy and that's entirely dependent on disproportionate and economically and equitable hierarchies, that actually can often be quite toxic environments because

19:36 HARRIET: they don't allow people, the acknowledgement that they deserve for the work and the role that they contribute to any one project. So I think what we need to see more and education but also verification and hopefully as a consequence of shifts in it in education will see in practice, far more horizontality.

20:08 HARRIET: So, how do we, and this is something we've been doing at Pratt, how do we bring in a more equitable space for thinking about how we co-create curriculum, how do we,

20:04 HARRIET: and actually, rather than start thinking about redesigning the curriculum, but just giving everybody a role within it, just to start off with, right? So what we've done is empower students with their own lecture series, give them a budget.

20:13 HARRIET: I would say that, "Pratt Futures", as it's known, because obviously the students are the future, is far more well attended than any of our lecture series. They seem to pick topics and pick speakers that engage audiences from all over the world. One of the

20:26 HARRIET: ones I went to recently in the chat we asked was everybody from and there were 54 countries represented. It's extremely moving in fact to see such a well-attended event, and also so many other young people from around the world who are engaged.

20:38 HARRIET: I think that you know this is the challenge, right? So, I think that we have to kind of before we adapt to anything there is a pre-question, or a prerequisite maneuver, which is not a passivity.

20:49 HARRIET: It's actually I would suggest, more of a reflection and a more profound willingness to look carefully, and also to listen to others, right? So, how do we give others the platform and the recognition to shape something and again? You know, not only in this

21:03 HARRIET: conference will we be doing that having these kinds of conversations but certainly within the school we've been looking at Indigenous pedagogies and how that could shift the dynamic in in our reviews for example we've been using talking sticks, which is

21:15 HARRIET: an African tradition that allows only the person with the stick to speak, and we sit in circles the models and drawings are on the floor in the middle where we'll cross legged on the ground.

21:25 HARRIET: And that way, having a conversation where everyone professors and students is equal opportunity to make a comment there is, you know, there's no kind of adversarial jury where it's literally terrifying sweating terrified sweating student, you know who

21:38 HARRIET: hasn't showered in three days. And you know, stood standards to their in front of their work and what appears to be a hybrid of pajamas and clothing

21:51 HARRIET: having 10 people, you know, shred their work or whatever they want to do we don't do that kind of thing we're not that's not a model we're supporting and we've still got some residual, if you like, habits like every other institution that need to shift

21:57 HARRIET: but you know we are the way to create the opportunity, a space to move into is imagine that space right so again comes back to this and action things start by speculation about what you want to be different, how do we move from that not to say it's bad,

22:11 HARRIET: let's stop doing reviews, but it's like how can we what could a review be if it did not have that adversarial obligation. So, I think, coming back to your point, you know, I think that's really the way that we want to look at it as you know of course adaptive

22:25 HARRIET: reuse is, is where all the energy and attention is because it's conceptually comprehensible maybe but it's also still action, it still comes with a monetary dimension of the everyone gets paid and there's ways in which you can still be economically generative

22:40 HARRIET: but I think one of my concerns is if, if that's always the obligation before we even, you know that it has to be some sort of financial kind of action taking place relative to our intentions that we miss an opportunity to create speculation space

22:56 HARRIET: and if education, could be anything. It should be opportunity offer this opportunity for the speculation reflection and this kind of imagining of alternatives.

23:05 HARRIET: That's the privilege of an education institution in some ways we're not running proto-practices, we do to some extent but that's not the priority in education, it really needs to shift into something that's far more about the speculation space and that's how we'll find the innovative impact that we can make on the industry.

23:20 BIANCA: Yes, I think if industry is to become more healthy we need to engage communities and give communities more agency and activism within design, whether that be designing nothing new, or adaptively reusing or designing something completely new.

23:39 BIANCA: If we expect practice to promote agency among the community, we need to foreshow students that they have agency in their architectural education, and I think these new models that are being practiced at the Pratt are really exciting.

23:55 BIANCA: I'm wondering about the history of these models is this a long-standing tool, or is this something new and innovative?

24:10 HARRIET: Actually, you know one of the things I say about practice is, it's been a treasure trove since I arrived. I mean, who knew that there was so much going on necessarily externalize and that's something I've been working hard to do.

24:16 HARRIET: But interestingly Pratt was very radical school in 1960s, it had a lot of activism, a very very powerful and creative Black students movement on top of that within my school specifically we had the Graduate Center for planning an environment which

24:32 HARRIET: was incredibly connected to community issues very very strong. And as a resident of that we have a governing group, which was really about distribution of leadership within the school even some, you know, which was set up for several decades ago

24:46 HARRIET: now, and still has influenced an agency of the decisions we make, and it's not only supported to me in terms of a mandate, as well as providing institution essentially institutional memory.

25:11 HARRIET: we have an additional Student Council we have, you know, faculty council as well which is a more diversity represented group as well as a diversity, equity inclusion committee. So it's interesting looking at the ways in which one can as a dean come in

25:15 HARRIET: redistribute power, in some ways, do what most deans you know, would never do because actually most people who applies to dean job is actually want the power and I've been trying to give it away since I arrived, because it comes back to this idea

25:27 HARRIET: of redistributing, the agency of curriculum development but also setting the school's agenda. So absolutely within this long history of community engagement activism and climate activism has is an enormous residue of ideas information and precedent that we use to enrich our teaching and to inform us and signpost us now.

25:50 HARRIET: In, you know as new challenges and even long established but unchanging challenges continue to present the construction industry with an almost impossible remit.

25:59 BIANCA: So, I understand that there's a building at Pratt that's being refurbished as a teaching tool for climate action among the architecture students. So, can you tell us a bit about the refurbishment strategies?

26:14 HARRIET: Yes, absolutely. And it really ties into this adaptive reuse question, I suppose. So we had a big vision, and the budget to cover this vision to have much of the entire Institute's facilities upgraded in the next couple of years.

26:29 HARRIET: As you can imagine, like many institutions we've had to rethink what we can and can't afford, as a consequence of COVID, and so my rather beleaguered but much loved buildings Higgins Hall, which is you know let's just say, got some fairly historical

26:41 HARRIET: challenges regarding access but also building performance and so on, you know, it would have otherwise been overlooked it because we couldn't afford to refer there but rather than see it now as some sort of external problem, requiring, you know, independent

26:55 HARRIET: and unaffordable contractors we're now looking at our own space in a somewhat parasitic way and thinking how can we literally, you know reconfigure this as part of our curriculum, so the students can actually have a role in changing the entire building,

27:11 HARRIET: and it's performativity, relative to climate action as a task it's embedded within their curriculum. So, at the moment we're looking at, you know, creating addressing food poverty, both among students and food shortages in the community of course

27:25 HARRIET: in Brooklyn, by activating edges of our sidewalk on the perimeter of our building by activating facades or roofscape thinking about honeys and multi species habitats.

27:36 HARRIET: So we wouldn't want to be the only species and everything the building where there's always been mice and rats same over somewhere else.

27:42 HARRIET: And especially when students leave their food out in the classrooms, but you know it's for us it's about how many other indigenous native species can we support through the building and in some ways the buildings problems start to become its assets so

28:04 HARRIET: might think that bats. So there's all these rules that mean once a bat is determined to be living in a structure, then it's protected in some way that's certainly the case in UK. And of course, so they often find a way in creating egress through if you like declining mortar, or whatever it is, or in a deep fascination lamination

28:14 HARRIET: masonry or timber for that matter. So I think what's interesting of course, is that this if you like decline starts to become natural habitat so what things that we would normally, identify as being degraded structures and my view is as long as they're structurally still functioning.

28:32 HARRIET: They might look a bit shabby but then that shabby is basically a penthouse for a bee and so that's another way of looking at it you know again it comes back to this notion of perception and framing and that's stepping back before acting,

28:47 HARRIET: the inaction question. So, obviously, we are looking at how we can relate all this back to our curriculum we all say by the way of just about to announce that we're going to be launching a brand new master's in landscape architecture program which is going

28:59 HARRIET: to be the graduate school and deeply connected to all of this, and very specifically looking again at issues of how we responded embed our curriculum within our community.

29:09 HARRIET: So how do we blur the boundaries between the building and our campus and all of the community needs that we know are out there, but certainly that's the idea that's the thinking because at the moment.

29:19 HARRIET: People talk about climate literacy it's a huge buzzword buzz word or buzz phrase, but no one actually knows what that means is no understanding about how practically if I, if I'm currently in oxygen practice how will apply climate literacy.

29:32 HARRIET: So we are positioning ourselves to be the school that defines it, and that's how we are orienting our curriculum, but we're doing it, as I mentioned before, in a way that does not segregate issues of social justice from climate crisis and understanding

29:45 HARRIET: the two to be inextricably linked and and of course as part of that you know in completely subscribe to notions of environmental racism and how we can through ecological action address issues of racism and discrimination too.

30:00 BIANCA: When you talk about this design inaction. It makes me think of the recent recipients of the Pritzker Prize, Lacaton & Vassal.

30:19 BIANCA: They were tasked with redesigning a public square in Bordeaux, and told the client, nothing needs to be done here, you just need to put down some new gravel and that was seen as radical.

30:26 BIANCA: I'm personally inspired to see practices like Lacaton & Vassal receive the Pritzker Prize, and it makes me curious to know how many more practices are out there taking radical action like this. Do you know any examples in New York, or in London or elsewhere.

30:46 HARRIET: What I love about what they're doing is this emphasis will never demolish or that they're absolutely that you know as we've just said, you know, it's this humility of approaches the fact that they will, you know they have a commitment to just understand

31:01 HARRIET: spend invest time in understanding ordering, whatever it is, what already exists and that that's really their role, you know, to sort of work with what they have not to somehow assume that the, or if you like they're carrying as architects, the role that

31:17 HARRIET: reuse is problematic because within that bandwidth people can do vast and unnecessary alterations which are likely an environmentally not justifiable, so we have to be careful not to assume that adaptive reuse is all

you know kings and queens kind of thing.

31:44 HARRIET: So, coming back to “Architects without Architecture”, obviously, there was certainly ROTOR I mentioned earlier, the work that Robert Mull is doing, working with refugees, I mean there’s a, there’s an absolute ton of references I could waffle on and do a

31:56 HARRIET: a self-promo but I’m rather uncomfortable with that kind of thing. But certainly the intention behind the book of course was to really underscore the ways in which, you know, again this point about if we still think the architecture is principally about

32:08 HARRIET: buildings we do not understand the real meaningful impact we can have in the world that in the book in in many ways is a directory of practices, who are very much operating on the edge, if not completely, you know, extracted from the architecture

32:23 HARRIET: industry and having far more impact using architectural skills, and if they’d stayed within the architecture, industry and done similar work so is it you know we’ve got people in there who were obviously doing work with refugees I mentioned, people

32:36 HARRIET: working with the homeless all these kind of really interesting initiatives, what makes these projects so profound is their ability to be incredibly effective using architectural thinking without a single piece of brick, a single steel beam, a single million

32:50 HARRIET: being moved or even detailed. And actually, that it’s about utilization, and that ability to transpose architectural thinking into again looking more at the need rather than the desire, what’s the real need, why should we assume that every need

33:04 HARRIET: has a built solution, you know that’s often the mismanagement of architects and instead it’s that restraint.

33:11 HARRIET: And that ability to operate with humility and work with rather than above or beyond what it is we’re presented with the architects still need to learn and again that implicates curriculum pedagogy because without that mandate without that in that space

33:26 HARRIET: to consider it we’re not gonna be able to change much about the construction industry itself.

33:31 BIANCA: Yes, I really liked that you emphasized restraint and humility. I’m curious to know what unique skills can architectural thinking, bring to the challenges of climate and the inequity crisis.

33:45 HARRIET: Yes, that’s an excellent question. Well certainly you know if again, and this is potentially a bit of a repeat of violence earlier, you know, we have this interdisciplinary richness that other disciplines simply do not have.

33:58 HARRIET: We certainly have the ability to solve problems in three dimensions which again is another way and will rarefied way of understanding challenges than thinking in a very linear and, and two dimensional one dimensional way.

34:10 HARRIET: I think that there is also the ability because of this exposure if you like so many methodologies that come with the different disciplines to which we are exposed to have a much more kind of problem-driven appropriation or adaptation of, of which tools

34:26 HARRIET: and which processes we want to use we might decide. Oh, this is a very much a problem where I will draw from the methodology in social science, where I can, and work with that particular method in order to find a solution or actually something more artistic

34:40 HARRIET: or creative or whatever it is. So I think it’s, those are the some of the skills I also think though, because of this exposure to other disciplines in other ways of doing things.

34:49 HARRIET: In some ways is that, you know, I think a willingness and ability to work effectively with in an instant instinctively interdisciplinary way. So when there are other collaborators.

34:59 HARRIET: We haven't, at least some basic understanding of what those skill sets and those knowledge frameworks can bring to a particular problem. I also think that, you know, I think for us we are one thing I'll say that architectural education has been doing very successfully

35:13 HARRIET: it certainly for the last 100 years, is to really understand its role in relation to social change. So, as an illustration of this, certainly in the UK, after the Second World War,

35:23 HARRIET: and this was across all of Europe, in fact, that are obviously my memory and all that was alive but at my historical understanding is very much based on the London as an exemplar.

35:34 HARRIET: So, in London for example or and the whole of Europe impacted understood the inequality and that meant also spatial inequality, so you know people living in poverty in slums and people living in affluent gated communities, created in equity created on

35:56 HARRIET: and we know this right there's been books written about expert level etc etc. So, what that of course triggers, if you go take social unrest to its if you like to the final conclusion.

36:02 HARRIET: And that of course is some form of conflict, whether it's a revolution or a war.

36:03 HARRIET: And so what Europe had recognized was that in order to create the stable society where was became historic and not something to you know seasonally enact was to create a fair societies they'll be less reason for things to destabilize enough to create

36:17 HARRIET: or generate conflict. So, from a from a kind of British historian perspective, that meant architects suddenly through what will work or local planning offices.

36:29 HARRIET: And in my case, you know, the great Greater London Council was suddenly you know very much part of, they were social. Yeah, there were social workers they were, they were employed by local government and they were given is astonishing wonderful projects housing healthcare infrastructure.

36:45 HARRIET: And in a way is you know very much a kind of case study for the green new deal, and and obviously Biden's \$2 trillion pledge to address infrastructure crises across the US which is exciting.

36:54 HARRIET: And I think that, you know, that's what happened suddenly health care was equitable it was free but all of this needed all of these policies needed some form of built environment in which these, if you like these acts of social equity could be could take

37:06 HARRIET: place everything from theaters you know you look at the Moon Festival in London. And that was designed right not with a traditional with this when people, the audience tends from the front and all the poor people see at the bottom of all the rich people

37:16 HARRIET: the top right and the actors at the back but you could enter from every single side, that there's spaces in there that are tiered and intentionally theatrical to make everybody feel that they are somehow, an actor, not just an audience member so all of

37:29 HARRIET: that architecture was about democratizing culture, and it was also free and it remains free to go in. Similarly with the galleries and so on.

37:37 HARRIET: But certainly a lot of social housing at that time so I think the architecture, you know has this ability to be profoundly equitable. And so I think that somewhere in our disciplinary and professional memory is an understanding that, of course, through

37:51 HARRIET: an economy of resources because obviously there was a lot of post-war poverty, people in Britain, were rationed for at least three years after the war concluded.

38:07 HARRIET: You know there is an ability to address inequality and crises of some sort and the climate crisis isn't in equity crisis in the same way that an economic inequity is, you know a form of crisis, I think that, you know, this is what's so interesting about

38:16 HARRIET: the ways in which we have the blueprint in our history, about how to use these skills in this way, we just kind of have a little bit of let's just say collective amnesia, about the ways in which we could return to these methods of equity driven production

38:32 HARRIET: and have been really quite honestly co-opted too often into far more desires and wants-based production than needs-based production.

Theme music

38:50 MONA: Thank you for joining us. That was an RAIC Podcast on Architecture episode featuring Doctor Harriet Harris and RAIC Congress on Architecture Steering Committee member, Bianca Dahlman.

39:02 MONA: In this episode, Harriet Harris states that the construction industry is directly responsible for 40% of carbon emissions. The 2019 Global Status Report for buildings and construction, prepared by the International Energy Agency and coordinated by the

39:18 MONA: United Nations Environment Program states "building construction and operations accounted for the largest share of both global final energy use of 36%, and energy related co2 emissions, 39%, in 2018". Harriet also mentioned, the term supply chain slavery.

39:36 MONA: The 2018 Global slavery index found that Canada imports approximately 14.6 billion US dollars of consumer goods with production supply chains that use modern slavery practices. The federal government is currently working to address this issue, Bill S-216

39:55 MONA: an act to enact the modern slavery act and to amend the customs tariff is in its second reading in the senate of Canada. If passed into law, the bill will require certain entities to publicly report the measures they have taken to prevent and reduce

40:09 MONA: the risk of child labor or forced labor used in their supply chain. The bill will also restrict trade in imports of goods manufactured or produced by child labor and forced labor, we as consumers can become stronger advocates, learning to identify goods

40:25 MONA: originating from areas of risk and asking key questions of companies importing these goods into Canada.

Theme music

40:31 MONA: The third episode of the RAIC Podcast on Architecture will be released on June 29. Wanda Dalla Costa, director and founder of the Indigenous Design Collaborative, will be joining me to discuss the role of Indigenous leadership and pedagogy in climate action.

Theme music

40:57 MONA: You can access RAIC Podcast on Architecture on the go through your favorite podcast app. For more information on the RAIC Congress on Architecture, and for future episodes, visit www.raic.org/congress2021.

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