



SPACES OF UNCERTAINTY

Kenny Cupers . Markus Miessen

MARGARET CRAWFORD_Situate Yourself

Dear Markus and Kenny,

156 Thank you for your manuscript! I spend a lot of time reading manuscripts (from publishers, journals, colleagues, students, etc.) but none has given me more pleasure and hope than yours which unexpectedly arrived in an electronic version of over the transept. You present yourselves in a disarmingly humble way, as young architects who lived in Berlin for a few years and who have some questions about public space. But your book demonstrates an extremely sophisticated understanding of the theoretical and empirical realities in which current debates about public space exist. I applaud your devastating but not unkind critique of the existing theories of public space. Your rendering of the possibilities of voids and margins inspires me. This will be a wonderful book, both poetic and intellectually convincing. I hope it finds a broad audience. I don't want to say anything more about it since people will read the book for themselves. Instead, here are three general lessons I took away from it, addressed to your readers:

1) Discourse is a game anyone can play. You don't have to be a professional academic, architectural critic or famous architect to produce meaningful interventions into existing discourses. As you have demonstrated, you just need to apply your intelligence and experience to the questions at hand. For me, and probably for you, the way in which they have reformulated some important questions about public space has moved a discourse that seemed stalled forward. Nothing is stopping you from doing the same thing. This should be good news for professional discourse producers and for all of the young architects out there who are no longer in school but are still thinking.

2) Situate yourself. Markus and Kenny ask questions that they continually identify as the product of their experience as young architects in Berlin. This clarity about their subject positions differentiates them from much of the writing on public space, which is written from an impossibly omnipotent and arguably disinterested position. Rather than an impediment to their understanding, situating themselves in fact provides a great deal of the intellectual and poetic power that propels this book. Throughout the book, they insist that their arguments do not have direct implications for architectural practice. But they illuminate a set of cultural conditions that every architect must face, which is perhaps even more important.

3) Certain cities raise certain questions. The physical and social realities of Berlin almost automatically challenge conventional notions of public space. At the same time the city's emptiness, desolation, and discontinuity propose, if not answers, new possibilities. Without falling into the various intellectual and professional traps contained in the concepts of local, placeness, or placemaking you underscore the importance of a thorough spatial and social knowledge of a specific place. This doesn't mean this knowledge doesn't have more general implications. Today, more cities in the developed world are emptying out than are filling up. Nostalgia for this loss can prevent the development of new ways to think and feel about them. Sometimes, outsiders, by experiencing cities in the present, have the ability to discover and capture them.

All the best. Talk to you soon, yours Margaret Crawford.

157 Margaret Crawford is currently Professor of Urban Design and Planning Theory at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University. Educated at UC Berkeley, the Architectural Association Graduate School, and UCLA, where she received a Ph.D. in Urban Planning, she was formerly Chair of the History, Theory, and Humanities Program at SCI-ARCH, Los Angeles. She is the author of *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Architecture of the American Company Town* (Verso, 1990) and edited *The Car and the City* (U. of Michigan Press, 1989) and *Everyday Urbanism* (Monacelli Press, 1999).