PANEL DISCUSSION
Panel Discussion
(verbatim from "Cities of the 1990's" Conference)

Cynthia Davidson: We have eight intelligent women here and two microphones. Hopefully that will make it a little more lively than the presidential debates have been. What I'm going to try to do for you in about two minutes is sum up some of the things that we have heard today, from some very diverse presentations and from some very diverse women. After I have finished doing that, I will pose a question to the panel. I want the audience to feel free to jump in at any time. Jump up and wave your hand.

I will start with a couple of questions. It is my hope that we will get the eight women here and all of you involved in a dialogue.

I am a writer by trade, so what I have come up with from these visual presentations is a series of word associations because words are my craft. I think that in everything we have heard today, the idea seemed to be about rebuilding—whether it was rebuilding physical fabric or rebuilding our thinking about women in the city. What is an appropriate role for women—mothers, nurturers, or caretakers of the city of the future?

First, I would like to read a few words for association for you—words such as Exclusion, Repression, Consensus, Politics, Remapping, Collaboration, Fear, Patriarchy, Women's Rights, Street, Streetwalker, Rape, Home, Housewife, Home Plus Street (home plus street equals shopping mall and equals "Born to Shop"), Man's Body, Architecture's Body, Body of the City, Women as Pillars of Patriarchy, Mother Nature, and Virgin Land. And then there is something that I think appeared over and over again in the topics discussed here today which is about Fabric—which is about Weaving, Reweaving, Quilting, Requilting, and Mending. This to me is taking our housework to a larger scale. In both the presentations that Diana and that Ann and Ray did about the Women's Rights Park, Diana mentioned needlepoint and Ann and Ray talked about stitching together. I hope these words might raise some questions in your minds, remind you of some of the things we have heard here today, and help us get involved in a stimulating discussion.

The first question I would like to put to the panel is: What is their sense of what the street is? What is women's place in making the street or in being on the street? Diana Agrest talked about using a street and Barbara Littenberg seemed to me to take us off the street into some interior spaces. Perhaps one of them would like to start talking about women in the street.

Diana Agrest: The first thing I ever wrote (and this is a very long time ago when I was doing my thesis in Paris) was about the street as a system of signification. It was about everything that made the street what I call the street which is "the life of the
street” or which is really a place of social interaction, a place of social struggle, a place of social development, and a place of freedom. I remember when I found myself writing about the streetwalker. What I could say is that the most important place in the city is a public place, a sanctioned place, and for architecture this is the point where everything starts. It’s not a leftover. My point was really a criticism. That’s the reason I did that work on the streets—the object of architecture of public space as a leftover. What it smelled like in the street made people not want to talk to each other, look at each other, look in their eyes, and so I decided that was what was interesting to me. And then I looked at the streetwalkers and really the appeal of the street is the fact that it is outside the boundaries of the institution. It’s always the place of perversion; of a certain marginality. It always takes place in the streets. And so, for me, it has become really a burning and important element of architecture.

Cynthia Davidson: Barbara, would you like to continue? Is the street a safe place? Why are you designing spaces that are off the street, that are inside the blocks?

Barbara Littenberg: Well, I think the street is a catch-all for the notion of the public realm. I think the public realm is composed of elements in addition to the street. It is a complex matrix of spaces of which the street is one—in addition to plazas, squares and parks, etc.—that all come together to form the urban network. If the street is a space, it is a space as is a courtyard. Within the continuum of the city, there are progressions from the most public to the most private (and I think Diana is absolutely right, the street is emblematic of the public realm). There ought to be hierarchies that lead from a street or square into less public places: a courtyard, a private garden, a vestibule of a house, a private house itself. These things can be seen as a continuum that mediate your private space with

Green Ash Court; Minnesota State Capitol Design Competition; Diana Balmori
public space. And you have your choice to occupy either the private or the public realm. Being able to occupy both is what makes cities exciting places. People who are confined to the streets i.e. the public realm, such as the homeless, obviously have a problem. We each need both. We need our private space and our public space. The city is the place of exchange of ideas and it is the basis for the public realm. Where the street as space has disappeared in modern cities has been replaced by a kind of ubiquitous continuum of open spaces, with plazas and overly articulated object buildings. In a certain sense it destroys our ability to come together as a culture because the place has been destroyed. The shopping mall, which is also on your list, has somehow reconstituted that public forum in an artificial and, I believe, somewhat less effective way because it is not truly a public place where exchange can occur. The street and the mall have worked in this country as opposing elements.

Cynthia Davidson: What is woman’s place on the street? Is it a safe place for women?

Diana Agrest: I’m not sure streets are a safe place for anybody. You know, that’s partly because of their publicness. It is energized by the potential danger, perhaps, of the street. I don’t know.

I think for me anyway, or in my discourse, that there is a difference between the street as a notion that one has to address as standing for something and then the actual empirical reality of the streets that we have to face now. The problem of safety has to do with the very serious political, economic problem. I think that there is a problem in thinking that public space is always dangerous. It has for some reason acquired a negative connotation when it has always been, through history, a positive element. So, I think that we have to keep the development of a critical discourse at two levels and we cannot confuse them. You make a park in the street and then there is safety and all this and my daughter goes out and I worry. Then there is the street as standing for something that we have to re-think and re-use and incorporate.

Cynthia Davidson: What do you think the role of the street will be in the 1990’s? In the city of the future? Are we going to lose control of the street to the car? I don’t want you to just think of Manhattan when we talk about the street. Are we going to lose control of the street to the gangs? What is the future of the street?

Diana Balmori: I’d like to respond a little bit to that simply because I have enormous pressure in all the things that I am doing—to either put bridges across the street or to put tunnels under the street so that they will not in fact be streets but a much more controlled space. There are enormous pressures that are coming to cities now for having these
privatized spaces that supposedly are safer because they can be locked at certain times and are being sold as being heated in the winter and being cooled in the summer. It is in fact a much greater and more dangerous thing because we are entering into a much more restrictive space and one that is very worrisome in how it is being developed. Those corridors don’t become public. They’re not open twenty-four hours although those cities are imposing all kinds of restrictions for keeping them open eighteen hours. Despite those other six hours that they are not open, they change the vital aspect of what a street is and what elements of freedom remain in it. For me, the street has always stood as an emblem of freedom. I think that particularly for the life of women, whatever dangers there are out there, the street is a much better field than the home is for their intellectual and professional development. So I would say that the way that things were going in 1980’s show a very dangerous development towards the 1990’s.

Ann Marshall: I think it is this polarity of public and private which is most destructive to the experience of the street. An example is that our corporate complexes have become much more hermetic. With their health clubs, restaurants, and everything...
that keeps you inside. There is no reason to go out and participate with the street. I think it is the in-between that intrigues me the most. What is the link between the two? It's something that occurs much more easily in a small town yet I would like to see how we can bring this idea, this attitude more into the city. Unclaimed spaces are not necessarily the ones that are seen as thoroughways or what is left over (as Diana was talking about). We can somehow acclimate things to keep our streets alive.

**Ray Kinoshita:** It's a positive aspect that we're trying to do a lot of repair work, trying to bring the quality of our older streets back; but one concern that I have, is that the streets that we have now become conceived of almost as another kind of mall. We see things as such isolated, protected fragments, that one neighborhood will become completely fixed up and completely hermetic from another neighborhood. I think it's important in the 1990's that we embrace the totality of the city on all its terms. The highway, for instance, is a part of our city. We can try to bury it as they are doing in Boston. We can try to get rid of it. But perhaps the experience that you have by car of the city is also a part of life in the cities. It's a matter of accepting certain realities, but also of appreciating the different values of kinds of experiences in the city and not saying that it should all become one kind of safe protected thing.

**Elizabeth Cahn:** One of the characteristics of patriarchal thought that I wanted to address in this discussion of the street is the notion of being able to separate one thing from another. To be able to divide and conquer is really very elemental to the notion of how patriarchal works and I think it relates to the discussion because of the introduction of the idea that there is the street as a metaphor and there is the street as a real space in which we travel, exchange commodities, and so on. Under patriarchy we have to remember that women are viewed as commodities. That they're valuable. Women are valuable only when they are associated with men, or really a particular man, and so that leads to incarceration in the home because that is the space in which women are kept in association with a particular man or with men. So what that means is that the street is a place in which women are fair game (and we all know that from our own experience). How many times have you thought: "I can't do this because I don't have anyone to go with me?" How many times have you avoided a construction site because you are afraid that something unpleasant might happen to you when you walk by? I think that if the street as a reality is dangerous to women, if the street as a reality excludes women from a full experience, then the street as a metaphor also excludes women, and I don't think that we can separate those and say that one is problematic but the other is not, because they are intimately connected.
in reality and our thought process.

Miriam Gusevich: This remark is incredibly ethnocentric. I myself was born in Cuba and Diana here was born in Argentina. I would not consider either one of those places the most enlightened places as far as women’s liberation is concerned. On the other hand, I grew up in a neighborhood where I played in the street and as a child I felt perfectly safe with living in the street because the street was a neighborhood place. It was a place where men, women, children, everyone actually inhabited. In contrast, in the United States we have a paranoid view of what the public world is. It is the refusal to actually inhabit and tolerate a whole diversity of people and ages and nuisances sometimes in order to actually live with each other. It is a particular kind of alienation that we all experience. What you are trying to describe is, yes, most American cities don’t have urban lives. And yes, many women who live alone feel threatened by going out at night alone. Yet, that’s in the context of a particular mode of alienation, a lack of public spaces that really are an extension of your living room. That is what other cities and other cultures have. Your presumption that it is a universal condition of humankind for the last five thousand years is an incredible historical collapse, and incredibly ethnocentric. It is not the case in other cultures.

I would like to go back to the comment that Diana made about subversion. There are some cultures, like the Arab world, where women are not allowed in the street but there are other cultures, let’s say Italy, where women in a way dominate the street at certain times, for instance, when the market is going on. The street really is a space where different modes of interaction occur. I am as concerned as you are about the issue of fear and how that subconsciously affects our mode of being, but I refuse
to think that it can be collapsed into a universal condition and therefore streets are dangerous forever. Part of our responsibility as citizens is to recover those public spaces. This is beginning to happen. It’s wonderful that there are neighborhood groups that are saying “We’re not going to put up with gangs controlling our streets; they’re our streets, they’re our neighborhoods. We’re going to get together and we’re going to make sure that we can walk at night whenever we feel like it.” It is a grassroots development, people taking responsibilities for their own neighborhood, that’s really needed. It involves all of us.

**Cynthia Davidson:** That is happening in the neighborhoods, but how do you explain what is happening downtown?

**Miriam Gusevich:** I don’t want to dominate the discussion. I just wanted to point out what seemed like a comment that has interest in women’s society.

**Cynthia Davidson:** Any takers on the suburban street?

**Diana Agrest:** I love the suburbs.

**Diana Balmori:** There is in the United States, as Miriam has said, something about ethnocentrism. I feel looking at some of the developments in the United States, the possibility of abrogating certain rights to private property, which is rather surprising when one looks at both European and Continental developments. All of Latin America has a basic sort of subtext. The basic set of laws (the Spanish laws of Indies) very clearly separated a public sector. I really think that this needs to be studied. The sort of idealization of individual rights has been passed on to property. Those rights passed on to private property have been eaten up into what really is the public realm. These rights need to be separated at some point or other. Given that there is a patriarchal society that is equivalent to property rights, then they count very much. I think this is tied to gender issues. Well, I don’t know if I could ever abrogate for the state ownership of land, but there is a body of laws by which there is a restriction of the private property laws. I think that’s what you see in the European context.

**Cynthia Davidson:** You’ve mentioned citizens groups, which is a direction I’d like to take for a moment, if we could. Something I’ve found very interesting lately and I’m sure all of you who are dealing with citizens’ groups also do, is the issue of consensus in the design process. Barbara has talked a little bit about the issues in her project. Do you think that citizens’ groups (many of which in Chicago are headed by women) and the whole issue of the neighborhood group activity that is happening now, design consensus, etc, is going to involve
more women in the process of designing our cities? Barbara, were there women in that community group you had to deal with?

Barbara Littenberg: Yes, in our community board there have been both women and men who have been heads during the course of the project. The presumption is that citizens’ committees are made up of people who volunteer their time and it’s assumed that women have more time to volunteer because they don’t have full time jobs. I’m not sure that is going to be true in the future.

Cynthia Davidson: It won’t involve more women? It’s not a way that is opening a door that allows more public participation and some of those are women? Do women still have to stay home at night and take care of the kids?

Barbara Littenberg: No, I think that certainly that’s an avenue whereby women can have an influence. The question is whether or not community groups are going to have any influence on how decisions and policy are made. That’s really the question. I could say yes; the opportunity is certainly there in community groups for women to become involved in an equal way, but whether or not those community groups will have influence is always a question of money. Community groups require professional service. They need assistance in order to be credible in a public situation especially when they’re fighting off developers and people with a lot of money and to a certain extent elected officials who seem at times to be the pawns of the developers. So there are always those conflicts. And they need credibility. So where are they going to get that money? In our case, they got it from the local businesses which I suppose were mainly run by men. They, after the commercial interest, were the ones who had the financial backing or the depth to advance those interests. Some individuals in the arts groups, which were mostly women in this instance, didn’t have that resource. Women had a lot of energy and because they were culturally alive they had a lot of influence with certain rather prestigious individuals. They were able to contribute a lot of big names to back their cause. In a way, this situation brought together blue-collar people who had money and women who didn’t have money, but had access to influential people in power.

Diana Agrest: I think that’s obvious, for volunteering professional advice to community groups, if you want to have an influence, community groups are great. I’m a little bit skeptical. I mean, that should not be the only way. I think that’s asking too much of people to have to be put in a position of always fighting. You know, you’ve got those powers that are totally established and for the most part community groups are given a fantasy. For the most part, the fantasy is that they can
influence things, but in fact, many times the community groups (at least in New York) have the best intentions and they even vote for things but they have no power. They have no legal power. So in fact, you have people that come from the city planning commission who are just actors. They’re just making the decisions or following some decisions that are made somewhere in some lobbying environment whether it’s city hall or Washington or God knows where. This is where the real powers are. So you can see that there is a conflict, because there is the appearance of this very worthy democratic process. But the reality is that it really doesn’t have the power. So in a sense, you can give the advice and I think that’s good but I think the professional advisors as consultants should try to get closer to the sources where the real decisions are made wherever they may be. I’m sharing my experience in New York. I don’t know how it works here. As I’m saying, I think it is a good idea, but in my experience you become a little bit cynical. But my experience, firsthand, in these groups (and I’ve always admired people who get involved in the community) is unfortunate. In reality it’s not where decisions are made. Sometimes they become very powerful because they use the press and then the press becomes important too, you know, like Trump in New York. They made Trump. They made it very hard for Trump to develop this very big piece of land on the West Side where he was going to make this construction. Talk about phallic. But the community groups are making it so hard that he is selling now for a big profit but he’s not going to do it. What I’m saying is that it shouldn’t be left to the community because I think that wouldn’t be fair. I think there should be support from the authorities that should be doing it and it should not be left to a group of private citizens to be against these administrations.

Cynthia Davidson: Well, these private citizens get back into the privatization of the city. The politicians who are public officials are failing to do their jobs.

Barbara Littenberg: The question is “How do community groups know what is in their best interest?” I think, Diana, you brought up this business of covered bridges over streets and someone mentioned they’re going to build one in downtown Milwaukee to cross the street. Is that so? Now, you’re making a very important connection between the relationship of the life on the street and hermetically sealed internal environments which are in fact taking the energy off of the street and putting it into private bridges. People could travel in the city and not go on the street. Now, this could be a very dangerous trend. You know, it’s happened in other cities. Can the community be made to believe that the street is something to be protected? Maybe this is an issue that ought to be taken up publicly. Who’s going to bring this up? Is it the
professionals? Is it the professionals working with the community? Who is going to go in there and challenge a proposal by a developer to build a bridge over a street, which has become quite commonplace in this country, in small downtowns; like Milwaukee. This is certainly one that is very valuable and worth preserving at all costs. Its balance is so fragile. It can be ruined so easily. All the good parts can be ruined. So, who’s going to be sitting here making very clear judgments in terms of whether this is good or bad? It takes a rather sophisticated position and beliefs about what is good for cities and what is bad for cities, etc., rather than being sold a bill of goods by a developer who wants to do what is in his best interest. It’s a complex issue and I think that feeds back to your point. Well, it requires very sophisticated, complex advice about what is good for the public versus what is not. Who’s making that determination? A lot of times it’s very difficult for private citizens to do that.

Miriam Gusevich: I’m not advocating for everybody to go out and do things by themselves, without professional advice. I’m suggesting that as citizens we can exercise pressure. The ability to actually implement is a whole different thing, and if one wants to be effective as an architect in the urban environment, one has to get involved with the political and economical powers that make things happen. I agree with Diana, but we do not have to feel powerless. There are other modes and other ways in which power works; and one of them is public opinion. This doesn’t mean that you are going to go and have your dream community be designed just because you want it or you demand it. It’s not so easy, but if (I brought this up in the context of the safety of the street) we are afraid of living in the streets and if we give up the streets, that will guarantee that they will be unsafe. If we insist that the street is for everybody and we are willing to tolerate a mix of people (desirables as well as undesirables) maybe the street will become a real urban place that people can live in.

Cynthia Davidson: I’d also like to observe that
think a lot of the social activism you’re talking about is more negative reaction than it is positive. It’s against development. Those people are not necessarily the majority that are against development but they can really shut down a lot of projects. But let’s move on to another question here.

Barbara Littenberg: Freedom is a funny thing. It’s against the law to be homeless in the Soviet Union. It’s one of those funny, double-sided things.

Diana Balmori: Just to tell you sort of very minute details, I’ve been told that the whole client at PDC is rethinking putting any benches in precisely for that reason. I was in Los Angeles last week. I was told to go see some benches that had been designed in the park that’s by the ocean. They had been given to an artist to design to be anti-vagrant so that people can’t sleep on them. There is a real thing going on about benches. I think that they might just disappear altogether. There were a couple of designs that I’ve done that were on the street that had benches and the developer removed them because the vagrants came in. The ULI was giving figures of twenty million homeless by 1995 (I think), which means putting together all of New York and Chicago and Los Angeles. This is the beginning of the erosion of this. But as Barbara says, the only way of getting around is by somebody setting the priorities of what the street is all about and dealing with the problems that it has. I think in the case of

West Hollywood, if the PDC decides not to put the benches in, it really belongs to the PDC. The West Hollywood town hall can pressure that developer to put them in. They can say to the owner of PDC that he has to have benches, that this is a public thing. This is coming under the greatest scrutiny of every piece of work that you do: whether you can accommodate vagrants or not. If there is a little nook, vagrants can hang out there. These are the benches they can use. You can lie down. If it’s over five feet you can lie down and sleep. So, make them shorter than five feet. It’s getting into very specific guidelines—design guidelines.

Diana Agrest: But I think that this is a false problem. I think it’s a disgrace that one has to adapt design to the issue of homelessness. I think the issue of homelessness is a national disgrace and I
think that developers, in great part, are responsible for the homeless in the cities. I think there’s enough wealth around that the homeless should not exist as a problem. I don’t see that design has to be adapted to a problem of real national, economical, social, and political problems. I think it should be addressed. I think it’s like giving up. How can one design a bench...? I’m not attacking you.

**Diana Balmori:** No, no, I agree, I agree.

**Diana Agrest:** I think it’s outrageous, the idea of designing a bench for the homeless to stretch or not to stretch. It’s a disgrace. I mean, I think it’s totally outrageous that one should come to that. It’s like defensive design. I mean, if there were no drug dealings there wouldn’t be people attacking people on the streets. That’s what it is. The streets are not the problem. The problem is the people dealing these drugs. That is the problem. And that is a national problem. So some issues are not design issues (and I am sure that women are not in charge of the drug dealing by the way). I’m saying that there are issues in which one has to have clarity and not fall into a false humanity. I mean, I’m terribly sorry for the homeless. I don’t wish anybody to be in that situation, you know, but there are homeless that are a problem. Paris has always had bums. You know, it’s like a tradition. You go and buy a postcard with a bum. It’s like a picturesque card. It’s part of the thing. There are always bums because it’s a part of society. You know it produces some marginal types and they’re alienated and they live under bridges or whatever and they are there. Nobody cares. But there are now this type of homeless bum that is a result of all the different forces that have gotten the situation to what it is. I think we should be very careful. I think that it’s the same problem. It’s all in the same package. It’s all about greed. Drugs are about greed. The developing that creates homelessness is about greed. And the airplanes that are over-booked, airline companies that have deregulation; that’s all about greed. So we’re talking about the same package.

**Cynthia Davidson:** Are there any other questions from the audience right now? Yes. Miriam, you want to say something?

**Miriam Gusevich:** Yes, I want to go back to the issue of cultural values. The issue of the bums is about tolerating other people that might have different values and different priorities than we have, different options for their lives. The same thing happens with regard to attitudes about what you are talking about. We have a particular attitude towards aging; that basically buildings are not supposed to age, women are not supposed to age, everything is supposed to remain without a wrinkle forever and ever. There is a possibility of questioning and challenging those values. Aren’t we sometimes treasuring things precisely because they have aged in an...
elegant and graceful way? Isn’t that one of the hallmarks of real culture? Things are treasured because they last and they last because people care. I think we have to design environments that are beautiful enough that people would want to be there and they want to care for them. It’s not going to happen because we worry about whether things are going to last and we refuse to maintain them. I have the same problem working for the Parks. You build something and it’s guaranteed that it’s going to be destroyed in two years because of the lack of care by the maintenance crews. They do maintenance with the least possible care as opposed to actually caring for a garden as if it was part of the culture (again it goes back to cultural values). It’s something that should be done with joy; caring for a building is something worth doing, it’s not just menial labor. It is what creates day-to-day culture in the texture of our lives. Until we learn that lesson, this country is just going to go down the drain. We’re going to continue with this ecological disaster, because everything is built so that it lasts forever (which means it’s plastic and totally indestructible and therefore creates an impossible environment). We really have to learn to tolerate diversity and how to tolerate the fact that things age and that things need care. They need maintenance. That’s what life is all about. The gardeners who took care of Versailles were not intellectual giants, but they took care of the gardens, and they did a beautiful job. Somebody cared, it’s part of a craft, it’s a part of a culture. As long as we treat people who do that kind of work as just menial laborers and refuse to give them dignity, you create conditions that alienate the laborer. You are going to end up with a really screwed-up environment.

Ray Kinoshita: I think the architect can take an active role for pushing for those qualities. There was for instance, a builder who said "Oh you can’t use brick laid with a finer joint. This is going to cost too much. The skill isn’t there any more." But then you push for it, try it. And you discover that the workers actually enjoy getting the training again. I mean, the architect has a very strong role in society of reasserting those values in the construction and in the quality of the making of buildings.

Audience: I would like to know if you feel that the female architect has in any way a different role to play?

Cynthia Davidson: I particularly would like to hear from the women who practice with men about that. Diana, why don’t we start with you.

Diana Balmori: Well, in the sense of all of the discussions in the 70’s about women architects versus male architects and being different, this is shaded by the kinds of forms that they produced. I think that this is the result, and a very valuable one, but simply the result of social conditioning. So
once that social conditioning disappears, we don’t know what kind of forms will result. Therefore you know women are going to be interested in one thing and men are going to be interested in another thing; that is the result of social conditioning. I am hoping that that kind of division really won’t exist once that social conditioning has disappeared. I’ve never found any sympathy with saying that women do womb-like forms and males do phallic forms. I really don’t think there’s much narrative in pursuing any of those kinds of arguments coming from a society in which you’ve been conditioned in certain ways. As far as the way in which they can work, I think it’s going to be enormously important for women architects to work by themselves at certain periods in their lives and eventually reach a point in which they are working on their own and preferably doing that as soon as possible. In my own work, I’ve now reached the point, rather late in my professional life, of being ready to open my own office. I think that that is totally essential.

Barbara Littenberg: I think more women working on their own is a very important frontier in a way. I think it will be the next threshold for women in this profession. I think they’ve been accepted so far in the schools as students and less so as faculty. I think that’s been a major transformation. I think the number of women coming into the profession has changed radically. I don’t have any statistics. I think women who are willing to or able to go into business by themselves will be an important breakthrough. Again, I think from my own experience working with a male partner, as you would hope in any partnership, that you can augment each other’s strengths and cover each other’s weaknesses. I wouldn’t say personally that that follows a preassigned set of sex-related preferences. Who does the business end or the books and who yells at the clients so they pay the bills. It’s not necessarily a male role because I do that. And it tends to divide up along the particular areas of where one’s concerns are and where one’s strengths are. And I think that’s what you would hope for in any successful partnership. That you would complement each other.

Diana Agrest: In fact I was thinking that. I don’t think it should be taken for granted that when there’s a female and male partner that the woman works with the man. I think you should think about all these men working with women. So, I think something should go just like that. I wouldn’t want to follow up on the prejudice.

Audience: It seems like there’s no position for us to grow and it takes longer for us to get a partnership; that we all have to leave and start our own firm. We can get out and start our own firms but that is where the problem is. You go to these firms and what there is is 60 guys and 10 women. In architecture schools it’s now up to half women, half men.

INSIGHTS BY WOMEN ARCHITECTS
Why is that balance not in the big firms?

Diana Agrest: You know the women's struggle and that reflects what happens in every other level of society. And I think it also has to do with the issue of women at a certain point developing a family, having children, having to make a career in a big corporate office environment, and having to serve not herself but the office for 16 hours. You know like the traditional male role—he's never home, he's always late, comes home and sleeps.

I think that's what women kind of naturally avoid, to have to last for years and years in a very competitive environment, male environment. There's no child care. Everything is against women. It's like "what are we going to do?" Because if you go there and there's no child care, what does it mean? If you are a woman and you want to have a career, you can't have a family? You can't have children or whatever? That's ridiculous. That's like taking out one of the essential things of being a woman.

Cynthia Davidson: Shouldn't women be challenging more on that fact? I think suddenly the reason women are not working in big firms is they don't like the way the big firms are doing business. Number one, they want to find a new way to do business. Number two, I will tell a personal anecdote. I have a three year old and when I was pregnant I approached my boss and I said I want to come back to work in six weeks and I can't do it unless I bring my baby with me. He thought about it and said "That's a good idea." And I brought my child to work with me and established a nursery in the office with a nanny. And I had him there with me for eleven months. We can challenge the system. I work in an association with a mid-sized architectural office, with a boss who no one would ever think would allow me to do something like that. I think we have to challenge the system before we accept defeat.

Ray Kinoshita: I think it's important that we continue to challenge the system because I think it's wrong to assume men are universally stone-headed and bad or something. Men and women are products of this culture. Both men and women perpetuate certain discriminations against women. We're all part of that. I think that to treat a man as sort of a symbol of all men and all the wrongs throughout history is a mistake. I think that people can think in different ways if you keep at them, but they'll never think in different ways if you never challenge them.

Cynthia Davidson: Our time is running short. Several of our panelists have to leave for the airport at 5 o'clock. Are there any pressing questions from the audience. We must get to them quickly. Yes.

Audience: What should we do about developers who think all apartments should be two bedroom apartments when we have so many single and one-
parent families who want to take care of children and grandma? Why isn’t there more intergenerational design so these people can find a convenient place to live and take care of the older people and the kids so they don’t become street gang kids? Why should grandma and grandpa be living way out in the suburbs when you have to take care of them? Why can’t you all live in the same apartment so it’s convenient? Can’t the developers put their money into a decent kind of apartment?

Cynthia Davidson: I’ll give you a quick answer. The way capitalism is going to grow, it will break up the nuclear family. The more households you have, the more consumers you have. But perhaps some of the designers could talk more about that. It makes it very hard for us to remain extended families.

Ann Marshall: I don’t think it is part of our cultural base here in America so it is probably something that’s not addressed that often. You know, we think of moving out of homes as our parents get older. We do not typically take care of them in the same way it is done in other cultures. The idea of a throw away society extends into every aspect of our
being.

_Cynthia Davidson_: We did but things have changed. The immigrants who moved here were extended families. But it’s this whole sociological evolution. The developers are just accommodating that evolution. I would hand that back to you. It’s up to you to bring social pressure. The designer is going to design what the clients want. I imagine that’s what the architects here will tell you.

_Miriam Gusevich_: Just a comment. Again it goes back to the issue of tolerance. It may be true that some older people are excluded, yet as we know there are a great number of developments that are just for old people. Some old people don’t want to be around kids. They are very intolerant to kids because they see them as nuisances and again it has to go back to cultural values. Everybody is an accomplice in the value system because everybody wants to have privacy. They want to have comfort and quietness when they go into their house. It means changing priorities. I don’t know if people are ready for it. The first thing we have to do now is to understand the extent our values create the kind of environment that we have. It’s not by accident, and it’s not that developers are evil people. I mean, developers build retirement communities because there is a market for them. It’s simply not children abandoning their parents. There are a lot of parents and older people who just don’t want to be around younger people.

_Cynthia Davidson_: It’s just developers responding to the market. An interesting example is in Chicago where there’s a lack of housing in Chinatown. The Chinatown Association is developing new housing and because of the Chinese tradition, all of the housing units have mother-in-law apartments. So the extended family is still important to them and they are not giving it up when they build new housing. So it’s a social group and a tradition that is continuing. But the rest of us have given it up.

If there are any other questions, I’d like them to be taken now because I’ve asked Elizabeth and Pietra to sum up the day. They have seven minutes in which to respond.

_Ray Kinoshita_: I would like to add one thing because when you asked the question, “do women, per se, have something they have to offer to the design field,” the general response as I understood it is that we are simply equal to men. In a way I would disagree with that, because (and I can’t pretend to be an expert on women’s issues) I think that women have certain sensibilities that may come out. I don’t think it’s a matter of taking different forms (i.e. womb-like versus phallic). It may not be about a different symbolic language but about differences in the processes of design. One
example, I would say, balance and create intercon-
nections between many different concerns. It is one
quality I think more prevalent in the design work of
women. At the moment, I think that is something
many people could speculate about. Virginia Woolf
spoke about the fragmented consciousness of
women and how women have not always been able
to pursue ideals in the same way as men because
they have had multiple concerns---how do you
nurture your child, how are you going to please
everyone else first. I think that sort of conditioning
in women won’t necessarily change in ten years or
whatever. I think that it can be very strong, positive
quality in design that should be recognized. It
should be nurtured.

Elizabeth Cahn and Pietra Kooiker: I think it is
recognized but it is devalued. And in response to
your question, this is a real problem that feminists
have. And this is not to criticize your question, but
there is no recipe for saying, OK women think this
way. No one knows how elemental women would
design buildings if we would design buildings like
the womb or instinctually not make phallic towers
or anything like that. We can not say that. What we
mean by how women can design as women is like
we were saying. We receive a very different
education from men. We come out pink and blue so
it’s not a matter of human rights. It’s a matter of
women’s rights versus what men have and what
they can expect to have. And so by that, we mean
that by the time we get to college in architecture we
are already at least seven years behind the boy
students because women are not encouraged to
build things, to work with their hands. We’re
counted to play with dolls, to have tea parties, to
not speak loud, and to behave like ladies (and by
that point we feel that we’re expected to have
shaven legs, to wear pantie hose and heels, and
everything else). And that is what we disagree
with. What we’re trying to say is about how women
design. It is in terms of a different outlook on life
that patriarchy does not allow. I would vehemently
disagree with you saying there are diverse attitudes
of people sitting at this table when people talk about
challenging the system. Well, we’re challenging
the system and we’re not being received in what I
would say a relative positive way overall. And so
it’s not so simple as just saying "challenge the
system." We adamantly disagree with the idea that
the streets are safe. I mean, they clearly are not and
patriarchy is very good at dividing and conquering
and separating to the point where you wouldn’t
believe that men rape at least 2000 women every-
day in the United States and men rape over 40,000
women everyday in the world. And we’re hearing
essentially the streets are safe. Problem? What
problem? There is no problem?

I think that the point that Elizabeth is trying to make
is, not that there is anything wrong with your
question, but that you shouldn’t ask us the question.
You should ask yourself the question. Because we’re not in any position to say: “These are the ways we should think, these are the actions that you should take.” Precisely, we think that all women deserve to respect themselves and to be respected in that way. And so that’s why we turn the question around a little bit and maybe phrase it in a different way, so that it isn’t, “What is the recipe for our solution,” but “How are we going to think; how are we going to be” in order to begin to ask those questions.

I think that the comments that you just made are a perfect example of how patriarchy trains women to devalue themselves, to become disconnected from themselves. Furthermore, it trains women to be harsher judges of other women than even men are. You are performing a function for patriarchy here through what you said.

Most certainly, for reevaluating the educational system for architecture, we want to start an architecture school by women and for women that values earth, body, and cosmos. It is not about domination and control or about manipulation or about built structures, per se, if that is an answer to your question. The city does not necessarily concern us as we tried to stress. We very strongly feel, as we are beginning to see what the greenhouse effect might do, that if we continue on in this way there will be no city, no anything. And so by that, we are taking it upon ourselves, as are many other women, to at least separate from that and not contribute to it, to ultimately try and change it.

Ray Kinoshita: One aspect of women’s rights and the whole idea of women seeking a kind of place in the world right now is that there are many different ways of thinking about what our reality is. We’re all here to question ourselves. Cahn and Kooiker’s view of the world oppressed by patriarchy contains many truths though it also excludes others. We’re all, as women, part of the system. We’re also outside of the system simultaneously. This condition created a much more complex issue than simply having two groups (men, women) that are totally different and totally apart. That’s why there is such a diversity of opinions, even within one group of women speaking. There can be a lot of different truths and we need to be open in order to sort through them. It has to be that way until history changes.

Diana Balmori: I find this discussion very good. I think that we lack it. We lack it among ourselves as women. We need it. What has been brought up here today by the two people (i.e. Elizabeth Cahn and Pietra Koiker) who are summing this up are things that are only too true. I think that we need to hear them. We don’t want to hear lots of things that are very painful to us. We try to avoid them and we have very, very few forums such as this one. I’m
enormously grateful for being able to talk about such things. So I find this of great value and I thank the questions and the discussion.

Diana Agrest: I wanted to follow also in a similar line. I think that this conference is extremely important. I don't know, I've always been a political person, not an activist. It's part of my upbringing. When I was in Paris in May, '68, there was something that I learned that I will never forget which was the problem of the left fighting for power and what Lenin called Leftism—the infantile sickness of communism. Now that is forgetting, leaving aside what place you stand politically. It can be applied to many things which is forgetting the main focus and having little groups fighting with each other. I find that a little bit infantile, if I may say so (and I say this because I think that in the case that was brought up, I think there is a bias). I think Elizabeth and Pietra came with an idea that everybody else here was trying to do architecture like men. I heard that earlier this afternoon. I was shocked that somebody would dare say that to a lot of people who are very different; who come from very different backgrounds, who do different things, and who are speaking very differently. I think it's a prejudice. I think it's not very smart politically, frankly. And I think this is a political struggle we're talking about. I think in a political struggle you unite forces and you don't divide it. You're doing
exactly what you're saying patriarchy does; which is divide and conquer. So, I don't get it. I think you have contradictions.

Elizabeth Cahn: We don't want to conquer anything.

Diana Agrest: But you're dividing in a place where the discussion has to be dialectic in the sense of productive. Like economic production, there are negative forces and positive forces and you produce. You don't go yes or no and create a division when you still haven't gone ahead in the struggle. You have to find a point where you can enforce things rather than break them.

Cynthia Davidson: Don't forget that all the women here are a product of the same system. They're all coming out of the same system. There isn't a different system yet. You wanted to say something?

Ann Marshall: In agreement with that, I think that standing back, pointing the finger and saying "You've done this to us" is not the best way to bring about that change. I think that probably the best way is to keep moving forward. We cannot expect change to happen overnight. We cannot expect everyone to understand our points. But I think that slowly by people seeing our progress, seeing that we are capable and seeing that we can do anything we set our minds to do, is the loudest statement we can make. I think that we really can hold ourselves back. It is just as much our responsibility to bring about that change as it is the men's or whoever else's. I think that often-times we don't see clearly the face we ourselves put forward. I think possibly if you ask many people in this room whether simply by listening to this reactionary talk, whether they would more likely support the cause or whether it would alienate them further, I think you might find the latter.

Cynthia Davidson: There are many ways to effect change and change happens at different rates. We are now going to have to change the discussion. Several of the people here now have to leave for the airport. There is a reception. I'm sure that any of you who are interested can continue this discussion with any or all of the panelists who are able to stay behind. Thank you all very much for coming and thank you panelists.