

Changing course: A critique of habits

Proposal for an interdisciplinary research project

An initiative by the O'Neil Ford Chair in Architecture
School of Architecture
The University of Texas at Austin

Critique of habits

Current concerns to find ways by which to limit climate change have brought every anthropogenic activity into the analytical purview of scientists and commentators.

The research project intends to structure and expand on these analyses such that future uses and designs of objects in the environment are understood in terms of their relative and absolute impact on the use of resources and the production of emissions.

The result of these analyses will form a **critique of habits**. This critique will outline the changes that societies will have to undergo in order to bring about an effective change in course so as to limit climate change.

Western civilization has made itself independent from temporal, topographic and climatic conditions in a long process of autonomization. This process predates the intensive consumption of fossil fuels and its results, including those in the built environment, have become integral to the pattern of life of western civilization and its cultural diffusion amongst regions aspiring to a similar life style.

This level of autonomy is achieved and maintained by means of a high degree of grey and direct energy. The persistence of this autonomy is upheld by concrete patterns of behavior and cultural ideals. The **critique of habits** has to begin its investigations here in order to derive insights into the necessary changes in the pattern of behavior.

Research fields

From the perspective of architecture, there are five fields in which changes in the pattern of behavior will have an impact:

- regions,
- transport and infrastructure,
- settlements,
- built fabric,
- new build.

Existing patterns of behavior and cultural values will be analyzed in each of these fields; a matrix for the impact of a changed course could be modeled for each field as well as overlaid for the combined fields.

The urgent changes required in post-agro-industrial and post-industrial life styles cannot be confined to technological solutions. On the contrary, the latter may perpetuate the habit of “eating and having the cake”. The thesis of the research project is that a transformed cultural consciousness is required to evolve a new ethic of resourcefulness, that is, of being aware of the resources that are called upon in enacting given habits.

Research teams

Within the evolving university wide initiative of the “Global Change Studies Center”, experts from diverse interdisciplinary fields could be invited to assist in the five research fields. Each of these five research fields would be led by faculty from the School of Architecture.

Experts from other institutions will be sought. The following have indicated an interest in collaborating on such a research project:

- Prof. Dr. Uta Hassler, Institute for Preservation and Building Research, ETH Zurich. Switzerland
- Prof. Dr. Niklaus Kohler, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany
- Prof. Dr. Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, Potsdam Institute for Climate Change Research, Germany

- Prof. Bernd Hamm, Regional and Environmental Sociology University of Trier, Germany

Research program

Given the urgency of the subject, the duration of the research should be limited to a maximum of two years.

Public outreach

The result of the research should be part of a wide public outreach program that should include the following:

- interactive web site,
- DVD
- traveling exhibition
- book

Budget (estimate)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Research: 5 teams @ U\$ 50 000 each | U\$ 250 000 |
| Travel | U\$ 40 000 |
| Web site | U\$ 20 000 |
| DVD | U\$ 40 000 |
| Traveling exhibition | U\$ 150 000 |
| Book | U\$ 50 000 |
| Total | U\$ 550 000 |

WW/BH 10 Dec 07