

## **1 SINCE THE PANDEMIC BEGAN, WHAT FISSURES AND FRAGMENTATIONS HAVE BEGUN TO APPEAR IN PUBLIC SPACE?**

It is less about fissures and fragmentations that have *appeared* in public spaces than those public spaces that have been *hidden* by government policy within the home. Two public spaces I am considering in particular: the sidewalk and the garden or green space. These examples also do not begin with the pandemic; they are symptomatic of wider government defunding of public services over the last decade in the UK as well as discriminatory public policy for many years prior.

Let's start with the sidewalk, or the pavement as it is known in the UK. Many communities have been forced to use the pavement as a meeting place due to lack of access to other social spaces in their communities. The lack of investment in community care and youth social services by the government over the last 10 years here in the UK has meant that many spaces that used to serve, in particular BIPOC, communities are no longer able to function, or in many areas, completely decimated. Younger BIPOC community members now use the pavement as a place to gather and socialise. The pavement is a space where support workers know they can access these community members and provide them with access to other forms of social support. By being pushed indoors by the pandemic, these communities lose this connection and access to the minimal support left by the government's defunding of community social services. This is without a shadow of a doubt incredibly violent to these communities. The home is forced to act as a refuge, as the pavement was — which for many people in these communities, it could never been due to higher rates of illness, poverty and domestic violence within family settings, as well as lack of access to computing equipment to connect more easily to other members of their community and support networks (schools, social services).

This violence continues when we look at the garden. Homes with gardens are more often than not accessible only to people - typically White people in the UK - with access to generational wealth, supported by decades of discriminatory public policy against BIPOC communities. When access to public parks and green spaces is taken away, as it was in the UK, communities without access to these spaces within their own homes again suffer at a much higher proportion than those with access to green spaces. Access to nature has evidenced benefits to support wellbeing and mental health. Lack of access means higher rates of mental health issues including suicide.

These communities have been made invisible by the pandemic. This is an act of state violence.

## **2 HOW WILL THIS CRISIS RE-ORIENT CURRENT MODES OF SPATIAL ORGANISATION?**

At this moment it is not entirely clear. Lockdown fatigue and the incapability of political leaders to cede authority to public health experts has seemed to broadly mean that in the UK lockdown easing equals shifts back to "normality". But the trauma endured by the most affected communities, relegated violently to their homes, will not be able to easily 're-orient' back to 'normal'. There is some hope that the vast disparities in terms of how BIPOC communities have been affected will bring shifts in public policies around access to quality housing, community spaces and green space, but so far, it is much too early to begin to understand if this is a possibility.

Let's continue to discuss the home. Home schooling and work-from-home is one way in which spatial organisation of the home has been forced to change quickly by kitchen tables becoming permanent work and school stations overnight. However, as architects - a profession made up in the UK mainly of White, middle class men - have not been as widely affected by home schooling during the pandemic as women (see [The Guardian](#)). attention is likely to be paid more to the impact of work-from-home on individual workers on spatial re-organisation of the home rather than the

impact that home schooling has had in contributing to increased divisions of gendered labour in the home.

This is a dangerous game. If architects are complicit in paying attention to the effects on their own demographic - and the demographic of their largely middle and upper class clientele - rather than widening the scope, they fully risk completely and utterly designing themselves out of relevance for the majority of the world's population: women and children.

### **3 GIVEN THE GLOBAL CHARACTER OF THE CRISIS, HOW WILL IT AFFECT THE RELOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF LABOR?**

This becomes more clear when stated as a relocation and redistribution of wealth. Again the home can remain a site for contextualising this discussion. If labour that was typically provided by other societal institutions, such as nurseries and schools, is now expected to be provided in the home for extended periods of time, we will continue to see gender inequities and divisions increase. Wealth accrument by women will become more difficult and we will see less visibility of women in spaces still typically reserved for men - positions of leadership and power in particular. As outlined in the article linked above, progress in terms of gender equality could be set back by decades due to this crisis, as "only one in 10 lower earners are able to work from home, and 69% of low earners are women."<sup>1</sup> In countries where gender inequality is more prevalent, this extreme situation will be even more exacerbated. Wealth will become something only privileged men can acquire, women will be ever-more dependent on the capacity of men to not actively consent to these inequalities.

### **4 HOW CAN A 'POST-CORONA ARCHITECTURE' ATTEMPT TO MEDIATE NEWLY EMERGENT DIGITAL/PHYSICAL SOCIAL RELATIONS?**

Any attempt to label a 'post-anything' architecture, especially in a time of global crisis, is problematic. There is no 'post-Corona' architecture - these issues that have been highlighted by this crisis have existed for years. They should not be segregated from the history that constructed them. To do so absolves those responsible for being complicit within the system that enabled this crisis of their responsibility. There should be care taken when understanding digital space as a space that can even begin to mediate the physicality of the social issues which have become hidden, obfuscated or in rare cases made more prominent spatially by the pandemic.

Importantly then the digital space should not be a space that mimics or replaces the physical world. Instead the digital space must reveal things that physical space cannot reveal and cannot enable otherwise in the way it is structured for social interaction. As has been seen the physical environment is not set up to support a culture that repairs the violence and harm done by the pandemic (and its various historical contexts). This is the promise ultimately of the digital, to provide spaces that can support a culture of care, reparations and radical inclusivity.

### **5 IS THIS AN ISOLATED CRISIS?**

No, this is not an isolated crisis. See above. In the UK the crisis is interrelated to widening social and health gaps in BIPOC communities and issues of social justice, gendered divisions of labour and the right to quality homes and access to light and air. These are the result of the major failings of global industrialisation for over a century.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/29/covid-19-crisis-could-set-women-back-decades-experts-fear>