CENTER FOR ARTS POLICY
COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

DEMOCRATIC VISTAS PROFILES

NONCONFORMING USES:
ARCHITECT TEDDY CRUZ AT THE BORDERS OF TOMORROW

by Rebecca Solnit

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SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW, DECISIONS WERE MADE FOR US in the United States about how we would live, work, travel, and socialize, the decisions institutionalized as the very architecture and geography of our everyday lives. What were they thinking, those midcentury designers who divided up the world on so many scales as if fearful of mingling, whether it's the mingling of public and private, work and home, rich and poor, or old and young? Who insisted we should keep building houses for a middle-class nuclear family that is less and less common, rather than flexible spaces to accommodate solo dwellers, single parents, and extended families and communities whose ties soften the bounds between public and private? Who privileged the car so much that the parking lot, driveway and garage have almost replaced human-scale architectural façades; who let cars eat up public space and failed to leave room to exercise the First Amendment's "right of the people peaceably to assemble"? Who forgot to build anything for the service sector, even though those workers more than anyone keep a city running?

In recent years, radical architects have begun to question and jettison those decisions. This route hasn't always resulted in high-profile projects, but it has opened up broad possibilities, a more significant if less visible achievement. At its most provocative, this opening up is a series of challenges to borders and categories, and its most inspired practitioner might be architect Teddy Cruz. That he is based in San Diego is no coincidence, for that city's southern edge is only divided from Tijuana, Mexico, by

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the most trafficked border crossing in the world, an ever-more militarized line between the First World and the Third, between chaotic exuberance and beige reticence, and for him Latin America supplies a lexicon of alternative practices from which the United States could learn.

He says of his fellow architects, "We are just working to insert our refined high aesthetic into an invisible city that has been shaped by developers, economists, and politicians. This invisible city is made of height limitations, setbacks [the rules about how far back from the property line you can build], and of zoning regulation that is very discriminatory. So what came to be my interest is what I call urbanism beyond the property line." Cruz would like to knit back together the fragmented places that result from a lack of collaboration between urban planners and architects, and to spur a level of social engagement that he thinks is absent in most American cities. To do this, architects have to cross the property line and venture into public space, and then cross still another divide. This he calls the "the gap between social responsibility and artistic experimentation."

One cloudy Sunday he drives me in a friend's scruffy Miata, the one whose trunkful of blueprints looks like contraband, to his newest work in San Diego. We wind through the city's central green space, Balboa Park, to the museum complex at its heart. A supreme expression of the enthusiastic mix of Mission Revival and Alhambra fantasia that characterizes much Californian architecture, its buildings form a hollow square with, of course, parking at its center, but much of the parking lot is now occupied by Cruz's pavilion for InSite, the transborder biennale also taking place in Tijuana. Installing two tractor-trailer beds and building a tented structure and Astroturf lounge area was relatively easy; getting permission to do so was not. But breaking the rules and opening the borders is what Cruz's work is about. "We closed a parking lot—one of the most sacred parking lots in the city," he says with satisfaction and amusement. "That was the achievement."

Cruz is no fan of the way parking lots dominate the American built environment. The reconquest of space for unfettered human interaction might be what he's after. Or the reinvention of the whole urban fabric. He's modest but hardly unambitious. A professor at Woodbury College in downtown San Diego, he was recently hired away by the University of California, San Diego. His longtime collaborators in his architecture firm eStudio Teddy Cruz moved on to other opportunities at the same time, so his own life is a project under construction these days. At forty-three, Cruz is dapper, sturdily built but somehow slight, perhaps from nervous energy, elliptical in his rapid speech, passionate in his enthusiasms, and usually running late. Somehow as we traverse both sides of the border this Sunday I begin to feel like Alice being rushed along by the White Rabbit, though the rabbit in this case is not so white. Born and raised in Guatemala City and brought to San Diego at age twenty by his stepfather, Cruz has been here contending ever since with suburbia, sprawl, real estate booms, the border and other contingencies of contemporary California.

"THE CROWDED, CHAOTIC RICHNESS AND POVERTY OF GUATEMALA CITY INSTILLED IN HIM A PERMANENT ENTHUSIASM FOR DENSITY OF BOTH BUILDINGS AND ACTIVITIES."

The crowded, chaotic richness and poverty of Guatemala City instilled in him a permanent enthusiasm for density of both buildings and activities. The fatherless son of the proprietor of a fashionable nightclub, he grew up middle-class in the bustle of a Third World city, graduated from high school, and planned to become a doctor until a fellow student took him to see a corpse dissected. Squeamish, he backed off from the plan. An aptitude test established architecture as an alternative. But what decided him was the sight of a fourth-year architecture student sitting at his desk at a window drawing and nursing a cup of coffee as rain fell outside. "I don't know, I just liked the idea of having this relationship to the paper and the adventure of imagining the spaces. That was the first image that captured me."

As he was studying architecture, his mother, already opposed to the government's growing brutality, got caught storing weapons for rebels in her basement, went to jail, and then emigrated to the US, where she married a Yankee and brought her offspring over. Cruz moved as

soon as he got his B.A. in architecture, leaving the overstimulation of Guatemala City for the anomie of the brand-new San Diego suburb of Mira Mesa. At first he loved it, and for a year he stayed there studying English. "I was moving from downtown Guatemala, a place full of smog, an overpopulated old neighborhood, into this incredibly pristine, clean, homogenous kind of place. I

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saw that it was incredibly ordered, I thought that it was very nice." The new uncle he was staying with warned him not to go downtown where danger lay, but boredom set in, and he began to explore. "I think it was incremental, this dissatisfaction with suburbia, with lack of social complexity. In retrospect, every time I wanted go out, I couldn't move, and the distances were huge to get to places. It can get to you, that relentless kind of sameness."

He began working in architecture in San Diego in 1984, won his first award in 1986, went back and got a couple more degrees in architecture, spent a year in Florence, and after taking another degree from Harvard's Graduate School of Design got the Rome Prize and spent another year in Italy (another place that has provided him with alternative models of public space and life). Somewhere in there, he got married, had a daughter, now eighteen, and eventually got divorced, started his own practice, and began to teach (and got married again, to the landscape architect Kate Roe, and had two more daughters, now nine and four). In 1993, he founded eStudio Teddy Cruz and in 1994 the LA/LA (Latin America/Los Angeles) Studio for students from all over Latin America at Sci-Arc, the Southern California Institute for Architecture. It was in those years that he began to find his focus—and his dissent.

It came in part from his conflicted experience of Latin America. "I wonder," he muses, "if having grown up in Guatemala makes you like a socialist or a kind of Marxist by default because you are surrounded by so much stuff—by an intense sort of realism… ." His mother's opinion was even more dour: she "wanted us out of there in such disgust with the institutions, and she used to talk about how she hated seeing the Archbishop parading in a Mercedes-Benz in the middle of the favelas." As a student in Guatemala City, he recalls, "I was put off by the fact that this school of architecture saw social responsibility as the boxing of people in these awful buildings, very sterile." Years later, when he went back, "somebody in the audience got up and said, 'Oh, it's easy for you to show these artsy images when in reality the problem here is poverty.'" If the Guatemalans fell into a utilitarian gloom, the Yankees suffered from an aesthetic drive so pure it didn't serve people at all. In the end, he had to start from scratch, looking not just at what could be built but also at how to reinvent the conditions in which architects work.

The conventional media for architects are buildings and building materials, but Cruz's are ideas, images, and conversations with students, developers, colleagues, and citizens—so his greatest influence may be impossible to trace. Though he can take credit for a few dozen innovative structures in Southern California, he can take far more for tearing down old conventions and charting new ways of thinking. His PowerPoint presentations are things of beauty, zooming from maps of the world to details of children at play, combining computer-generated images, architectural models, his lush collages, photographs of buildings, streets, and aerial views, and leaving crowds exhilarated and ready to change the world. It's not a misnomer to call Cruz an architect—after all there are enough buildings out there he authored. But his most important function may be as a visionary, an exhortatory voice.

Another of his innovations is to focus on traditionally overlooked people and spaces. In his prestigious James Stirling Memorial Lecture in 2004, he declared, "At the time when these megaprojects of redevelopment are becoming the basis for the skyrocketing of the real estate market in many city centers across the United States, creating a formidable economic bubble of land speculation, practically no one is asking where the cook, janitor, service maid, busboy, nanny, gardener and many of the thousands of immigrants crossing the border(s) to fulfill the demand for such jobs will live, and what kinds of rents and housing markets will be available to them? Well, they live in the inner city. It is not a coincidence, then, that the territory that continues to be ignored is the inner city."

He has designed for these sectors repeatedly and is currently in discussion about a project to create a day-laborer center in San Francisco (day labor being the current term for the mostly undocumented painters, builders, landscapers and other mostly Latino workers who line up each morning at informally designated sites in cities across the country, waiting for employers to pick them).

He is also interested in working with the in-between spaces and no-man's-lands that cities generate, the empty space that surrounds each design for a site, and the niches too minor for architectural glory. "Nonconforming uses" is the planning-codespeak for projects that violate the zoning code, and it's a phrase Cruz is so fond of that, he tells me, "I was proposing to change the Congress for the New Urbanism" to the "Coalition of Nonconforming Urbanists." The New Urbanists are a bugbear of his, because what began as a radical project to bring public and pedestrian space, mixed uses and classes back to cities and towns has too often settled into a dressing-up of middle-class housing with more density and some commerce, but no room—again—for the poor and no real transformations in social life. Cruz cherishes human interactions, and none of his designs or critiques overlooks how people actually inhabit buildings and spaces.

At his parking-lot transgression for InSite in Balboa Park, Cruz is delighted that some teenagers broke in after hours to hang out in the pavilion, without damaging anything; their desire to use the space was a real measure of success to him. He proposes that rather than measure density by the number of dwellings or residents per square block, we measure it by the number of interactions, the more the better. With goals like this, the solutions stop looking like ordinary architecture. The pavilion's long reading room, made of a scaffolding covered in clear plastic on two truckbeds, has a front lawn of a sort, a slope of Astroturf, punctuated by blue beanbag chairs. Inside, the lighting comes from ordinary fluorescent tubes arranged in a rather extraordinary lightning-like zigzag across the ceiling. The piece has the severe rectilinearity of much avant-garde architecture of the last century; its innovation lies in the meaning of the materials—the Astroturf references suburban lawns, but the truckbeds signify transience, and the corner upholstered in traffic cones suggests a building that will never not be a detour under construction. Here are the raw materials of San Diego, mingling and exposing themselves in unfamiliar ways. Two little boys are tumbling and embracing on the beanbag chairs while their parents wander across the turf.

On the Astroturf is the two-by-four frame for a little house that will be taken to Tijuana and made into a real home when the exhibition closes. The structure is both spectral—the ghost or rather the skeleton of a house—and fetishistic, its peaked roof being the basic sign for house. So transience, recycling, class, and the varying terrains of Tijuana and San Diego are all present in this construction that was intended first of all as an information center and reading room, but also as an invasion of sorts, an erasure of the centrality of parking, an interruption in the Mission-style fantasia, and a gift to someone across the border. In big red letters on the clear plastic façade run the words "A city is not an object or a phenomenon but a decision."

From the pavilion we head to San Diego's Gaslight District, which is supposed to be the center of a great downtown revival—meaning, mostly, that its grid has filled up with chain stores, restaurants, and highrise condos. Cruz complains that such projects "are ironically importing into city centers the very suburban project of privatization, homogenization and 'theming' accompanied by 'loftlike' high-end housing, stadiums, and the official corporate franchises." He thinks it's great that the middle class is coming back to cities, but terrible that in doing so they make these centers less city-like.

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We drive around and around looking for parking closer to publicly financed, corporately named Qualcomm Stadium than the Gaslight District. Strangely there is no parking or any people—the area by the stadium feels deserted. Or almost no people. We pass a woman wearing headphones and waving a giant sign advertising condos—a common sight in this real estate boomtown.

Back and forth she swings this placard, selling a downtown that isn't a downtown in crucial ways, bored and alone on her corner near the stadium, her sign promising dream homes, her face reporting alienation. The green space in front of the stadium that was supposed to be a public park got surrounded by fencing and annexed by the sports corporations, Cruz points out, another wall he is indignant about. Near it, we find a place to dump the Miata.

Many of the downtown condos, he tells me, are second homes, meaning that they are often empty. The emptiness of affluence annoys him, and one of his plans is a series of drawings showing how "a McMansion can be turned into three houses"—that is, how ostentatious waste and selfishness could be retrofit for ordinary people and more environmentally reasonable living. "Well," he says, "if we were really to look at the factors, the conditions that have transformed in the last forty years, could we anticipate that in the next forty years that the third and fourth forces, immigrations, will be equally transformative?" Clearly, he hopes so.

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He said on local television not long before, "I could be in the center right now of one of those new communities in Del Mar and just viscerally when I'm in the middle of that place, I just…feel completely sad. Twenty minutes later I'm in the middle of Tijuana. I feel a lot more charged… . I cannot help but want to escape that kind of sterility in San Diego and then embrace this, what you might call, chaos." Chaos as in a lot going on and a lot of kinds of people present—as social density.

We leave the car to walk into a parking structure where the work of another InSite artist, Aernout Mik, is installed, a huge screen in the sepulchral gloom of the garage showing a video that mixes footage of subdivisions seen from above—San Diego—with images of fictionalized versions of Tijuana's pharmacies. Cruz finds it amusing that the place that was once a magnet for the illicit is now a mecca for people looking for cheap but legal drugs, and the pharmacies that line the Avenue of the Revolution are temples—mirrors multiply the carefully arranged piles of toothpaste, drugs, and toiletries into a confusion of abundance, and employees in white doctors' jackets solicit customers at the open front.

The sight of the pharmacies whets our appetite for something livelier than this abandoned zone, and so we drive south on I-5 to another parking lot—this one a short walk from the militarized carnival zone that is the border. And with that, all the rules are about to change, which is part of why Cruz brings people across so often. There you can see different, see the innovativeness born out of poverty and its sometimes exuberant results.

To enter Mexico is easy; there are no delays, no checks, no armed men sorting out who may enter or who may not. You walk up a long ramp lined with vendors and keep going, until the down ramp spits you out into a pedestrian plaza circled by makeshift buildings. Women and children approach selling crafts—my pale presence is a magnet for them, Teddy ruefully notes—but we walk on to the city center, down streets as gleaming and theatrical as in Dutch artist Mik's parking-garage video. Somehow the very texture changes when you leave San Diego for Tijuana. There's more color and more people, even the texture of sidewalks and streets is different—more potholes and irregularities, a veneer of dust and grime that tints the energy and the vividness of this other world.

Cruz decides on a detour, and suddenly we leave behind the gringo-commodities zone to join a mostly Mexican crowd. A large group of men and women is chanting angrily and carrying placards we cannot read from behind. They march down the middle of the street, and cars and trucks in the one remaining lane honk in solidarity. Street and sidewalk are crowded and bustling. We follow the protesters for blocks, and at an intersection

lined with onlookers and vendors of cut fruit, Teddy asks one of the participants what's going on. It's a demonstration against the Tijuana mayor's decision to eliminate the unofficial transit network, the Blanco y Azul buses that transport workers around the city and its sprawling periphery of slums and sweatshops. For Cruz, this is a sign of the Americanization of the place, the insistence on official monopolies and the banning of the unofficial options, whether they work or not.

It's the improvised solutions to poverty that he seeks out among the slums and favelas of Latin America, starting with Tijuana, and he admits that it's easy to romanticize poverty rather than admire the poor whose solutions are often creative, subversive, and environmentally sound—Tijuana does much to recycle the discarded materials of San Diego. On an earlier tour he took me to see the small houses salvaged from San Diego as an alternative to demolition, homes that had themselves emigrated across the border. Whole structures have been imported to Mexico and resituated, often on raised metal scaffolds so that the first story became the second. The improvised architecture of Tijuana delights him, in the homes built piecemeal and in the retaining walls made out of tires, the squats and guerrilla housing that Mexico, with a very different attitude toward real-estate rights, often allows to become neighborhoods of legitimate homeowners. We saw La Mona, the five-story statue that dominates one poor barrio—a voluptuous, naked plaster-white woman that is not a public monument like the more prim Statue of Liberty but a private home, built by Armando Muñoz in this zone of no zoning codes. Kids running in the dust of the unpaved roads, power lines with dozens of lines spliced into them, houses in vivid lavenders and oranges and lime greens, laundry on the line, and stray dogs are fixtures in this barrio. Just past it is the international border, the new fence being put in, a row of deceptively open-looking off-white vertical strips that look less brutal but are also more forbidding than the corrugated metal landing pads from the Gulf War that were erected in the early 1990s (a recycling suggesting that this too is a war zone). In his presentations, Cruz often shows a picture of Colonia Libertad, this border neighborhood, in the early 1970s, fenceless, with a little boy flying a kite on the undeveloped US side of the line. The border has grown steadily more massive and more militarized over the past two decades. It didn't used to be such a big deal.

On the Mexican side, homes push all the way up to the fence—"zero setback," Teddy likes to say, adapting zoning language to the layout of international relations. Such shifts in scale are a big part of his language and worldview, which is as interested in the borders that govern the single-family home as those that divide two nations on one continent. Tijuana "crashes against this wall. It's almost like the wall becomes a dam that keeps the intensity of this chaos from contaminating the picturesque order of San Diego. . . . It's a whole country leaning against the other." But he goes on to explain there's more than physical distance at stake, "I'm talking about an attitude towards the everyday, towards the space, towards the way that we use the space, towards ritual, towards the relationship to the other." Not the utilitarian architecture he encountered in school in Guatemala City, but the vernacular, improvisational responses and networks that could do much for more affluent realms.

The ever-more militarized border makes San Diego in his terms, "the world's largest gated community." Though the US likes to consider Mexico a corrupting influence, it's the Mexican city serving the US that is regarded as shameful, weird and not quite part of its own country, while the booming US city abutted up against it calls itself "America's finest city." That's part of the great paradox of the border. Another is the abrupt line where two worlds meet—or rather where one world presses forward and the other shrinks back. Even the ecology has become different on each side. And yet there are countless ways it doesn't divide anything. Mexicans emigrate north with or without papers; Americans who work in San Diego have moved south to buy affordable waterfront homes on the other side, an American dream no

"IT'S EASY TO ROMANTICIZE POVERTY RATHER THAN ADMIRE THE POOR WHOSE SOLUTIONS ARE OFTEN CREATIVE, SUBVERSIVE, AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND."

longer in America; California as a whole becomes more and more Latino, with Latinos due to become the majority population in the next decade, and by some accounts 40% of the San Diego workforce lives south of the border. Tiendas selling Mexican washtubs and other goods show up in San Diego while chain restaurants like T.J.'s spread in Tijuana. It's a dam that builds up pressure without truly stopping the flow, a line that does and doesn't divide.

This reading of the border lets Cruz think about the two great forces of globalization and privatization in relation to everyday life. Globalization as the influx of human beings from other cultures to the US and as the export of dubious US models of architecture, urban (and suburban) design, and consumption, the spread of chains, and the concomitant erosion of local culture. Privatization as the spatial and psychological withdrawal from the public sphere and the collective good that accompanies an ideology of individualism and free enterprise. And perhaps the counter to privatization in the reinvigorated sense of public life and public space that sometimes comes with Latino immigrants.

And though Cruz is interested in what the US could learn from Latin America, it's clear that Latin America and much of the rest of the world is learning from the US—there's an elite development in China he points to in dismay, an exact replica of an Orange County suburban tract, with lawns, boxy stucco houses fronted by garages and driveways, and curvy streets; and then there is the subdivision in Tijuana we went to look at one day, a strange grid of miniaturized single-family homes plopped like a carpet on a rolling landscape. Each home had a driveway out front but there was not enough room for them to be freestanding; instead they pressed against each other in long rows. "The first image is that of a cemetery, these small mausoleums," he remarks. "This is not that different from San Diego, in that sense."

For him, the Tijuana subdivision redeemed itself through the quick customization of each home, painted different colors, with wrought iron safety gates or ornaments added, with small businesses and built additions, so that they began to diverge into something more varied and more expressive—in other words, the dwellers became informal collaborators with the architects, a step he welcomes. Such customization also happens in non-Latino American neighborhoods, he agrees, and it is more because this is where his roots are that he comes back again and again to the world south of the border, that and the fact that what the US is getting from Mexico and from Latinos is highly politicized now.

From the bus protest we go on to wander through a mercado, a cluster of small open shops under one barn-like roof. People arrange flowers at one stand, hover over kitchenwares at another. We sidle down the narrow aisle of a taqueria, past men carrying five-gallon water jugs on their shoulders, to a bend in the labyrinth. Teddy points out the altar to the Virgin of Guadalupe built into the wall, with candles, plastic flowers, and Astroturf, and then we turn past an old man hanging his cap on the nail in the raw wood wall rising from the countertop at which he was eating his Sunday lunch. At the entrance we came to a fruitseller with the small eggshaped fruit Cruz has rarely seen, he told me, since his youth in Guatemala, and he bought a few that he would eventually hand to a beggar kid in the plaza on our way to the border, having realized that this taste of the past wasn't going to be exportable.

> "THE WALL BECOMES A DAM THAT KEEPS THE INTENSITY OF THIS CHAOS FROM CONTAMINATING THE PICTURESQUE ORDER OF SAN DIEGO.... IT'S A WHOLE COUNTRY LEANING AGAINST THE OTHER."

IT HAS BECOME TIME TO RETURN TO AMERICA'S FINEST CITY, and so we reverse our route through the Avenida de la Revolucion and the flagstoned plaza to cross the bridge over the many lanes of traffic so we can join the line to enter the United States, which is alarmingly long this Sunday afternoon. An hour later, we've moved perhaps a hundred yards and we're sitting on a bus stuck in the massive traffic jam at the border. We had jumped on the bus hoping it would move faster than the thousand or so pedestrians winding away out of sight on the sidewalk, inhaling the bus fumes and mostly ignoring the peddlers of lamps and churros

and other trinkets. Surrounding us at the back of the bus are blue-collar shoppers, women with bright fingernails, squirming children and, amassed around their ankles, plastic bags; a black man who sits imperturbably with sunglasses on in the dim bus. These are not the people who have rediscovered the city, the people for whom downtowns are being redeveloped, nor are they suburbanites. They are the people who never left the urban zones, the service-economy workers who keep everything running and yet remain largely invisible to most architects and urbanists—which is why Cruz is preoccupied with them in his work, though on this ride he's more concerned with getting home to fulfill a promise to drive one of his daughters somewhere. And he is indignant both that so many are stuck at this border this afternoon and that the border has been built with a disregard for the needs of people with lives on both sides.

This is one of those in-between zones that preoccupy him. As he says, "The immigrants bring with them their sociocultural attitudes and sensibilities regarding the use of domestic and public space as well as the natural landscape. In these neighborhoods, multi-generational households of extended families shape their own programs of use. . . . Alleys, setbacks, driveways, and other 'wasted' infrastructures and leftover spaces are appropriated and utilized as the community sees fit." Or as his friend and fan, the urban critic Mike Davis, has written, "Immigrant homeowners are indeed community heroes. . . . Latino immigrants are confronted with a labyrinth of laws, regulations and prejudices that frustrate, even criminalize, their attempts to build vibrant neighborhoods. Their worst enemies include conventional zoning and building codes (abetted by mortgage lending practices) that afford every loophole to developers who airdrop oversized, 'instant-slum' apartment complexes into formerly single-family neighborhoods, but prevent homeowners themselves from adding legal additions to accommodate relatives or renters."

But just across the border in San Ysidro, Cruz has found his ideal collaborators. There, in a low-income community that's 89% Latino immigrants, Andrea Skorepa directs Casa Familiar, an organization whose low-key approach to community service disguises its radical aims—which are Cruz's aims as well: to break through the rules that prevent the creation of an urbanism that truly serves the public good. Cruz has designed two projects for Casa that will be built in the next few years. One is titled Living Rooms at the Border. It takes a piece of land with a disused church zoned for three units and carefully arrays on it twelve affordable housing units, a community center (the converted church), offices for Casa in the church's attic, and a garden that can accommodate street markets and kiosks. "In a place where current regulation allows only one use," he crows, "we propose five different uses that support each other. This suggests a model of social sustainability for San Diego, one that conveys density not as bulk but as social choreography." For both architect and patron, it's an exciting opportunity to prove that breaking the zoning codes can be for the best. Another one of Cruz's core beliefs is that if architects are going to achieve anything of social distinction, they will have to become developers' collaborators or developers themselves, rather than hirelings brought in after a project's parameters are laid out. Casa Familiar has provided his first opportunity to work exactly as he believes architects should. The San Francisco landscape architect and city activist Jeffrey Miller commented, after seeing Cruz present the project, that he is designing spaces similar in some ways to the old courtyard housing projects that failed in the inner city, and that if this one works it will be as much because the Latino residents inhabit that space differently as because the scale is far more humane.

"MARVELOUS THINGS CAN HAPPEN AT THE INTERSECTION OF MODERNITY AND CONSCIENCE….WHAT'S EXCITING ABOUT TEDDY IS BOTH THE FIERCENESS OF HIS TALENT AND ITS YOUTH."

"What sets Teddy apart," says the distinguished New York architect and critic Michael Sorkin, "is his quest to realize the social through the beautiful. He's an exceptionally talented architect who devotes himself to projects for people for whom most 'artistic' practitioners show little interest. Teddy, on the other hand, is not simply politically dedicated, but he is able to produce tremendous

innovations from the very exigencies with which he deals. The work is not about foisting some arcane and incomprehensible aesthetic on unsuspecting subjects but about finding the measure of beauty in the actual circumstances of their lives and situations and in responding with authentic sensitivity to the particulars of site and need. The work is not 'popular' in the sense of some phony channeling of the ineffable wisdom of the people but in the sense of offering a genuinely artistic collaboration with no compromise on either side. This is incredibly empowering. His vision is strong for being flexible, for a certain panache for hybridity that never lapses into surreality or parody, and for being squarely rooted in a still-lively set of modernist formal traditions that are globally shared. Marvelous things can happen at the intersection of modernity and conscience. . . . What's exciting about Teddy is both the fierceness of his talent and its youth, the fact that none of us know what he'll be doing in ten years' time."

Living Rooms at the Border is part of a larger scheme by Casa Familiar, spearheaded by Skorepa and architect David Flores, to create a community that works. The day after our detour through Tijuana, I went down to talk to Flores and Skorepa, who work out of offices in a low-slung, shady house and speak with passion of the long, slow process of transformation they have set into place—not the utter transformation of the whole fabric of a city section, but a few catalytic interventions into how it works and how people might perceive it. Toward this end, they've been trying to formalize the paths people use to navigate this hamlet of about 45,000 people, asking homeowners to set back their fences so that safe walkways with benches and lights can be built apart from automotive spaces—a radical reorganization of public and private, organizing meetings where people can talk about what they'd like the place they live to be like. San Ysidro is an immigrant community—Skorepa says, "One thing that identifies our community as more Latino than Chicano—the Latinos here say hello to you, teenage kids say hello, when you're walking down the street they greet you." People are still pedestrian, though they're increasingly reluctant to let their kids run free—but a system of jitney buses runs through the community, since nearly half the households are without cars. They are also seeking to get density ordinances waived so that people can build (or legalize the already built) second and third units on their property. "San Ysidro," Flores tells me, "was the only community in San Diego to say we don't have a problem with density: our houses are full of cousins, aunts, grandparents, anyway." If these and their other innovations work, they and Cruz can make a case for relaxing or revising zoning codes throughout the vast expanse of San Diego (if not for abolishing them altogether; some of the wildly precarious cinderblock houses of Tijuana serve as reminders that municipal codes serve a purpose). They share Sorkin's enthusiasm for Cruz, speaking of him as the visionary they had been waiting for.

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Around the corner from Living Rooms on the Border, on a triangular parcel with two large trees Casa Familiar recently acquired, will go Cruz's second prototype of an alternative urbanism, Senior Gardens—Housing with Childcare. The structure addresses two often-overlooked facts: that seniors often care for their grandchildren and need spaces that accommodate the young, and that the young and old have in common a need for secure spaces for socializing, playing and walking—safe from cars and from crime. Twenty housing units will open on to a communal garden promenade, with frontages that can either be opened up for informal socializing or closed down for privacy. A childcare facility can be used by both seniors and children and adapted at times to other community uses. The archetypal architect is supposed to aspire to build something grandiose, a big civic or cultural institution, an airport or, these days, an upscale flagship store, but Cruz's quixotic ambition is evident in these small housing projects for society's most vulnerable in an overlooked border barrio.

The projects grew in part out of a series of community meetings about how spaces could be designed and how they are designed. For community members who were not familiar with the language of planning, moveable three-dimensional models were set up so they

could see how many ways a given space could be used to open up or close down access, accommodate many or few. Cruz and Skorepa were delighted when one old woman from Guadalajara, Mexico, exclaimed in surprise about a classic suburban structure, "This house is selfish!" Their designs look toward how spaces can be less selfish and more sociable. These two projects will house perhaps a hundred to a hundred and twenty people, but architect and developer see them as prototypes to argue for another urbanism, one that opens up how we live. It's a beginning. ✴