

*It's a challenge to the psychology of the profession and maxims of architecture as usual, and to the top-down mass-approach of Governments, Corporates and the Development sector. It is also a sign of the 'Other Globalisation': the network, the distributed, and the web as instrument of communication: of the arrival of a lo-tech, participatory, vernacular, grassroots approaches to building futures with and for the many. This emerging network of practitioners, projects and passion is at last rendering real world architecture visible*



# GROUND UP ARCHITECTURE

**I** It was a cameo moment highlighting the contours of a wider drama. Two young, good-looking and fashionable architects stood on the stage of the Alvar Aalto Foundations' 2009 *Edge: Paracentric Architecture* conference, running through their various projects, exquisite jewels of beautiful spaces, in beautiful places, for beautiful people. The husband and wife pair were speaking about how the Argentinian middle classes were beginning to appreciate and commission increasing numbers of design led individual homes and houses. "We are teaching our clients what good design is," said one of the pair. A short time later, the presentation over, a brief Q & A session began in the Aalto designed Jyväskylä university auditorium. It wasn't the first, but one question, asked by a female member of the audience seemed to stump the architects. "Why, when, so many of the other speakers here have been talking about what they've learnt from working with the people they were building for, do you talk about what you can teach your clients." A ripple of stunned surprise spread across the audience because, the question not only vividly revealed a fault-line difference at the conference but across architecture generally. Up to that point in the proceedings, *Edge's* audience had listened to a string of practitioners talking of how inspirational and humbling it had been to work – and often live – in communities where knowledge was shared and learning was two-way; local knowledge informing the hitherto to all-knowing architect. Examples flickered into life on the screens drawing the audience to worlds apart, from villages in Burkina Faso and Bangladesh, to the vast slums of Bangkok.

Time and again, the architectural energies presented at *Edge* provided a window into a new architectural world strikingly at odds with the public representation of architecture in the media. Much of the last twenty years has been the age of the starchitect. The age of an emerging transnational architectural elite, a few hundred architects, who have marketed their practices and projects as signature brands, and had, by the late naughties, come to represent, indeed dominate, the profession's public face. Projects by the likes of Frank Gehry, HerzogdeMeuron, Daniel Libeskind or Zaha Hadid can be found across the planet, in large cities vying for global attention. Recognised by their signatures rather than by any relation to place or the people of that



Captions: from the top

