

October 4, 1971

Mr. Emilio Ambasz
Department of Architecture and Design
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd Street
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mr. Ambasz,

Thank you for your letter of September 28th and for the project working paper on the Universitas Project.

I found this full of fascinating and provocative observations and proposals. I regret that I will not be able to take an active part in your own program owing to other commitments some of which are along related lines of effort.

Enclosed are a few of my own previous writings that may have some pertinence to your aspirations.

Perhaps my main concern, which must be expressed in a context of profound sympathy with your propositions, is that scientists have usually been accused of too much rather than too little design - that is of unwontedly playing God. I foresee the greatest difficulties in establishing a politically acceptable basis for the implementation of the wisest of proposals. Especially when intellectuals move from analysis to implementation they face extraordinary difficulties.

As your paper already intimates the professional schools already provide the nearest approach to the kind of model for the interweaving of science and design. I would recommend to you some careful thought about the dilemmas of the schools of medicine in the present era for some prevision of what you will also be facing.

The names of a number of people come to my mind as having something to offer for your project and I will remind you of them knowing you have probably already considered them. Already very directly concerned with design are such figures as Constantinos Doxiadis and Christopher Alexander. But I would also remind you of Dr. Bertram Brown, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health. During my recent service on the National Advisory Mental Health Council I found that he and his colleagues had an extraordinary interest in problems of architectural and urban design with which I would recommend you communicate.

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I wish I could so readily give you the names of political scientists who could help you in your inevitable confrontation with reality-principle in the implementation of programs that involve the multitude. I would be the last to decry the formulation of utopias, some of the most idealistic of which have indeed shaped our lives, but nothing would be more fruitless than a false definition of the goals and processes that are actually achievable.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr