

Urban Think Tank, Caracas

One of the most politically outspoken of this new kind of practice is the Urban Think Tank (UTT) in Caracas. Led by two Columbia University-trained architects, the Venezuelan Alfredo Brillembourg and the Austrian Hubert Klumpner, UTT has shifted its attention from the formal city of master plans, commissions, clients, and international attention to the informal city, with its slums, its millions of impoverished “clients,” its isolation from global capital, and its illegal status.³ UTT states that in “the global South” this urban condition is ubiquitous and requires serious study and new design tools. UTT does not condemn the slums as illegal and dangerous, as do Caracas’s planning agencies and real estate entrepreneurs. Neither do they pity slum dwellers as trapped in refugee camps for the disenfranchised that need to be replaced by something else, as do NGOs and development-aid agencies. Instead, they describe the slums as another city: just as rich, exciting, and sociologically and economically fertile as the formal one, maybe more so. Klumpner and Brillembourg maintain that the informal city is not illegal, it is extralegal; having no city hall, post office, or telephone company, it falls outside the standard organizational networks. But it is here to stay; its economy is huge and deeply rooted; it is more sustainable than the formal city, being almost 100 percent pedestrian and producing less than half the



URBAN-THINK TANK, Vertical Gymnasium, Caracas, Venezuela, 2004. Courtesy of URBAN-THINK TANK.