

WEEK 07- DISCIPLINE

ARCH-572, ARCHITECTURE THEORY AND CRITICISM

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According to Foucault, heterotopia is a part of reality which brings a sense of utopia, but lies somewhere between utopia (the unreal) and real-world. He believes that “between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror” [1]4, where mirror creates a virtual space that is visible yet inhabitable. He terms this combination of mythic place to reality as “heterotopology” [1]4 and divides it into six basic principles in relation to how this concept applies in a real world society.

Banham, in his essay “Black Box: The secret profession of Architecture”, questions on the fundamental mode of architectural design. Proposing the architectural mode as a classic “black box”, Banham argues that architecture does not necessarily need to have a good design [2]293. He thoroughly point out all the possible factors, that an architect could use to distinguish himself from other professions and reveals that all the other surrounding professions, including anthropologists, artists, engineers, and even draughtsmen can do what an architect claims to be doing in the same way, or even better. Banham tries to distinguish architectural mode from other non-architectural works, by claiming that it is not the product, but the process that makes it different from others [2]294. According to Banham, what makes architecture a noble profession are the unspeakable assumptions, attitudes, work-habits and values at which it rests (294-295). These factors however, are a well kept secret within the architecture society, that if revealed, could result in series of questions that the profession has been confronting since ages. In fact, it may even result in architecture “destroying itself as an art in the process” [2]299. Using Foucault’s theory of heterotopology, I can relate Banham’s theory of architecture overlapping to the principle of “crisis-heterotopia” [1]4, which is a forbidden place, reserved only for the architects, and no other person in the society has the right to enter. According to him, the profession itself is a myth, that is non-existent, and shall only be a mystery to the others for its own sake [2]299.

Tafuri, in his essay, “Ashes of Jefferson”, states that the New York five architects- Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, John Hejduk, Charles Gwathmey and Richard Meier [3]295, “had caught a glimpse of what would result from carrying to its very limit the reduction of architecture to a ‘second language.’ And it is exactly for this experience of the limit, that is to say, for their excesses, that they interest us: excess is always the bearer of consciousness” [3]297. He continues, “If the war is over, it is good to remember that it was merely a war of word in confrontation with other words, a struggle of restricted languages for an impossible rule over that which possesses *other* languages. But that convulsed territory has become surrounded by those who make of Post Modernism a new flag. For them, the only preoccupation is to remain on the stage agitating themselves in an ever more grotesque manner, in an effort to entertain an audience in the pit both bored and in need of sedatives.” [3]301. Have architects become so involved in criticising each other and their works that they have literally forgot the real-world? Seems like even New York five architects got so busy involved in debating within themselves and presenting their own viewpoints that they entered their own world of ‘heterotopia’, where they lost the touch of reality. For them, nothing was anymore antagonistic, everything had become plural. [3]302. ‘Masked architecture’, is a good term to define these architect’s masking their own existence by not facing the reality and protecting themselves from the conditions perpetuated by themselves. In the end, Tafuri concludes by saying that “Upon awakening, the works of fact takes on the responsibility of reestablishing a ruthless wall between the image of estrangement and the reality of its laws.” [3]303.