Has Theory Displaced History as a Generator of Ideas for Use in the Architectural Studio, or (More Importantly), Why Do Studio Critics Continuously Displace Service Course Specialists?

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and places, the second example displays the intricate weave of context and artifact that can yield other insights into a particular culture. If the contemporary designer attempts to use the approaches that these two examples represent as guides for action, there is the risk with the first of emulating architects' roles and actions that may be inappropriate to our time. With the second, there is the danger of arrogating all the possible roles in society that may bear on building to the architect and shedding some of the valuable innocence and humility of that role.

Through these examples, we have scarcely dispensed with the philosophical and methodological issues that arise when one attempts to link architecture and culture more strongly in light of information obtained about the past. Nevertheless, to continue that attempt, we must pursue these and other ideas that will weave a fabric between buildings and culture and that will enable architecture to become integral to a culture's understanding of itself and to express its highest aspirations.

In this light, we at MIT are restructuring the Department of Architecture along the lines of several disciplinary groups traditionally thought necessary to architectural education. In our department, they have even more autonomy and afford for students a much greater degree of specialization than is common in other schools. Outside of the design discipline group, the key to realizing this vision is the "history, theory, and criticism" group, which explores the nature and quality of the artifact, placing it into its cultural and societal setting but establishing conceptual links with the present through methods of analysis that link form to culture. The group complements historical studies with studies of the ideological, philosophical, and artistic currents of contemporary times, not just to inflect the manner of looking at the past but also to engage these as a part of the contemporary world and to make it possible to understand better the artifacts of today and to delineate the roles that architects can creatively play.

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Notes

1. Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism* (New York: Holt, 1988), p. 152.

2. David Friedman, *Florentine New Towns: Urban Design in the Late Middle Ages* (New York: Architectural History Foundation and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 184.

Has Theory Displaced History as a Generator of Ideas for Use in the Architectural Studio, or (More Importantly), Why Do Studio Critics Continuously Displace Service Course Specialists?

From the end of World War II until the mid-sixties, American architectural education was neither particularly informed nor influenced by historical or theoretical models. Architectural design (reinforced and ratified as it was by design education) seemed to evolve miraculously, much in the way that Western theology presents the phenomona of creation. This perpetually fresh attitude was clearly reinforced by the prevailing winds of modernism—a perception that held sway at the Bauhaus fully three decades prior to the mid-forties, with the never-forgotten principle of the cultural (and thus formal) tabula rasa. Most if not all American schools of architecture subscribed to this view because it identified with the optimism coming out of World War II as Americans sought new forms that would convincingly convey the victorious American spirit of the times.

Whether at Walter Gropius's Harvard, Ludwig Miës van der Rohe's IIT, Paul Rudolph's Yale, or almost any other American architectural academy, it was deemed wholly appropriate for design faculties nationwide to encourage their students to feign ignorance of anything reeking of precedent (to say nothing of hinting at any interdisciplinary potential). Fully two decades would pass (1946–1966) before there was even an inkling that architectural, and for that matter cultural, history might begin contaminating a new generation of architectural students.

Then the unexpected occurred: Robert Venturi's seminal book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* and Colin Rowe's fabrication of a new generation of Cornell-educated architectural academics came together and coalesced at Peter Eisenman's New York–based Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies. "Whites" met "Grays" even as "Silvers" met the Chicago Seven, while issues such as abstraction versus representation and contextualism versus a clean slate would ultimately validate the uses to which architectural history could be put in the now-expanded study of architecture. The flood gates opened, and an entirely new and different generation of architects began to emerge who would exploit historical form in a variety of ways, reinforcing the value of legitimation through nostalgia that would mark the emergence of the post-modernist generation. More to the point, architectural historians (led by the preeminent Vincent Scully) began to collapse the distance between themselves and contemporary architects by first analyzing and subsequently debating the designs these architects produced. The inevitable result of this intercourse would skew the trajectory of architecture from an

uninformed innocent present slightly inflected toward the future to an informed cynical present noticeably deflected toward the past.

The American Academy in Rome would regain its earlier potency as postgraduates began queuing up for the Rome Prize. (During modernism's heyday, the American Academy had lost much of its original luster—it seemed pointless to site one's self in a precedent-laden place such as Rome only to conceive of buildings whose pretension it was to disregard history.) Organizations such as the Chicago Architecture Club and New York's Architectural League would encourage architectural historians to engage practicing architects in debate about contemporary design issues so as to vivify indifferences (ultimately, it was the architects who would succumb to historic validation—not the historians who, by their nature, would remain immune to the issues of the day). But even as practicing architects (read architectural studio critics) might appear to submit to the validating process that ennobles history over contemporaneity, an initially subtle and then overtly clear change started to occur: architects began to perceive of themselves as historians! It was as if the architects had invented a position within contemporaneity for the historians in order to displace them as the singular validating authority.

Because it is so difficult to generate a definition of architecture "from within," architects have long been accustomed to defining what they do by things extrinsic to their craft. Be it function or use, form or content, architects tend to look elsewhere for a slippery "other" to satisfy their natural urge to describe what it is that they do. In the sixties, for example, architects unhesitatingly, albeit honestly, became amateur sociologists (only after they had invited them into the studio setting) to better argue the case for seeking architectural correspondence with the social revolution that threatened to change the face of America. Thus, in the seventies, it was just as logical to take on history as a way of causing architecture to rewrite (or to re-right) its origins once more—to discover its roots, so to speak. In so doing, architects displaced historians as a way of legitimating themselves as an authority whose position was assured through the power of history.

The blurring of these distinctions was made particularly manifest in the Academy, where architectural educators and architectural historians alike had become perfectly contented bedfellows, particularly in a time that justified itself through the uses architects would make of referentiality (with the resultant deferentiality). By taking on history through the displacement of the historian, the architectural studio critic could penetrate the studio experience from both sides simultaneously: the conventional one of conceptualization and the "other" one of recording it, the latter of which was exploited so as to validate the former. That is precisely the force that came to dominate the architectural studio during the seventies, resulting in the emergence of architectural graduates who could (and did) make use of history in the design of their buildings.

Inadvertently, however, even as architectural studio critics displaced the unsuspecting historians, making the subject their own, they (apparently) innocently began to pervert the conjunction of history and design in such a way as to assign "values" to history that were not within its tradition. In a word, they began to "theorize" history. We know that history is the chronicle or, more simply put, the record of the past. Historians tend to "lose face" with their colleagues if they editorialize or theorize these records. Architects, however, have no such problem with their peers. Without hesitation, these creatures of concepts take as their prerogative the unalienable right to assign theory to design. It was just that easy for architects to assign theory to history. The architectural theorist was born seamlessly in the eighties out of the amateur historian (read architect) of the seventies.

It was not quite that simple, of course. The architect first had to invent typologically a scholar compositely versed in criticism, philosophy, and linguistics (with just a touch of theology)—a "critical theorist"—and attain a relationship with this invention so as to ultimately displace it. Post-structuralist critics, followed by deconstructionists, deftly provided the amalgam of such a person uniquely suited to comment on the nature of the several crises that loomed large in the eighties: collective amnesia about civilization's problems (the homeless, the aged, AIDS victims, etc.). Architects have always sought cultural correspondence (thus deferring any potentiality of self-definition). I am reminded of Miës van der Rohe's 1923 epistle: "Architecture is the will of an epoch translated into space." Because the eighties were defined by an emerging sense of dislocative tendencies, who better than the critical theorist could architects displace to attain architectural correspondence with the issues of the day?

Thus, architectural theory entered the domain of studio education, but it was a kind of theory taught, not by historians or critical theorists, but rather by architects themselves so as to simultaneously pose contemporaneous questions in a setting that was conditioned to answer questions: the studio. Certainly, there were service courses in the specific area of theory, even as there continued to be service courses in the specific area of history; and these courses were indeed taught by the kinds of specialists that are akin to structural engineers teaching courses in statics, indeterminate structures, etc. However, even as the architectural studio critic has never had a problem in subsuming structures or history into a synthetic operation—the studio—so it was utterly simple for the same architectural educator to subsume "theory" into an operation innately ordered to continuously search elsewhere to perpetuate the dissimulative posture of self-determination.

The question is not so much who is best qualified to teach theory. Clearly, the critical theorist is defining a specialty that is coming into its own. The question is when, if ever, will the generalist-studio critic-architect be prepared to call into question architecture itself (if it even has a "self")? Or will architectural educators and architects alike perpetually defer that admittedly difficult proposition as they continuously look elsewhere for a self-definition that is always just out of reach? Have architects and educators alike run out of time, or are the exigencies of any time so demanding as to cause us to look outside rather than inside for answers to questions about a slippery discipline whose trajectory is cunningly deflected away from itself perpetually so as to avoid the embarrassment of revealing that the innate nature of architecture is not the spoken "present" it has always posited but the mute "absence" it actually is?

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