

Foreword: Changes in the Education of Architects

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In many academic institutions, the teaching of architecture, apart from the one-to-one relationship of teacher and student in studios tailored to develop design skills, has been informed by branches of learning grouped together as History, Theory and Criticism (HTC), sometimes generically called “theory courses.”

History refers to the past, Theory is meant to guide practice addressing the future and Criticism, implicitly circumspect, represents the present. Even though these three areas of knowledge seem to join together to form the basis for non-studio teaching, they share few commonalities as regards professional objectives and modes of operations. The only common denominator is that all of them belong to the “literature” of architecture.

History, by employing the time and experiences of the past, becomes the laboratory of what happened previously, the forces and influences that resulted in the formation of the subjects of concern to historians. Historical research relies upon determined facts; when propositions cannot be proven, they then belong to the realm of fiction, not history.

Criticism informs the profession on the validity of solutions. It can be personal, speculative, or biased but has value so long as it has originality. The more objective criticism becomes, the more its theoretical value is increased. In many ways criticism, with its discursive method, belongs more to the experiential universe of the arts than to the objective realm of science. Even though there are many interesting fact-based analyses aimed at bringing objectivity to their contents, architecture lies closer to the field of the arts and can never be reduced into the hard facts of life.

Theory is a completely different issue. The theory of architecture, as with theories of any art or science, in itself needs to inform practice. A reliable theory is one which tests its assertions through practice and informs itself accordingly. In architecture, theory is very “soft” and stuck in between the narrow space of scientific “hard” facts and the ever-changing values of socio-psychological existence. In short, what has been denoted by the acronym HTC is basically the literature of architecture that forms the intellectual basis of inference located somewhere outside the sphere of design practice.

Architecture, since its inception as a profession during the Renaissance, has always had a very ambiguous theoretical structure. The beginnings of the theory of architecture comprised a very dogmatic set of undeniable rules which were a representation of ancient Greek norms later refined through Roman architecture. The book, *De Architectura*, by Vitruvius, written during the reign of Julius Caesar (first century AD) became, through its reissues, the main architectural guide for theory and practice. Like many other aspects of the Renaissance, the flow and availability of information was closely linked to the invention of the printing press by Johann Gutenberg (c.1397-1468). As Marshall McLuhan has put into a nutshell in his *Gutenberg Galaxy*,¹ the

invention allowed people to conveniently share ideas and impressions in printed form. Since then, print on paper, even though technology has developed by leaps and bounds, has remained the essence of direct consultation of images and text. It is no coincidence that the theory of architecture emerged with the development of printing.

Steven Harnad refers to a fourth revolution in the means of knowledge production as the Post-Gutenberg Galaxy.² He characterizes the earlier three revolutions as those of: Language, Writing, and Print. While the first revolution took place an unknown number of millennia ago, the second one is only couple of millennia earlier than our time, while printing has a much more recent history, little more than five centuries. The recent innovation of electronic print medium, even though it is less than two decades old, not only embraces the products of the previous means but also adds its own potential.

Harnad's vision, which, a decade ago, was already self-evident and reflected in the process of our transformation into an "information society," soon became common sense. Due to its charm and convenient access, "paper" will perhaps remain in our lives for pleasure and tradition. However, as an information medium, it is very quickly becoming obsolete; its very physicality has already been superseded by the new electronic medium.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture has ventured into this pervasive new medium not only to distribute existing educational materials but also to invest in the production of new materials. This meeting, bringing together a group of people deeply involved in the issues of architectural education, has aimed to explore how to make use of the electronic medium that Harnad calls "skywriting".

At the same time, the meeting provided an overview of current questions on educational experiments and approaches in many countries where the Aga Khan Trust for Culture is also actively involved. The *8th Architecture & Behaviour Colloquium* at Monte Verità was an occasion to focus on these issues and the publication of the Colloquium's proceedings will hopefully take the debate even further.

Notes :

- ¹ MCLUHAN, M. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, (1962) *The Making of Typographic Man*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press
- ² HARNAD, S. (1991) Post-Gutenberg Galaxy: Fourth Revolution in the Means of Production of Knowledge, *Public Access Computer Systems Review*, (pacs-1@uhupvm.bitnet)