

“Answer the question; just answer the question.” That’s the first homily issued to students. “First say what you are going to say, then say it, then say you have said it.” That’s the second one. And yet confronted with this EAAE question,¹ I am impelled to break these rules.

This apparent belligerence is not just a reaction to the limits of the question (of which more later) but is perhaps a reflection of the fact that I have never felt fully at home within the house of architecture. This discomfort may be traced back to my very first day at architecture school. “Architecture,” announced the head of year in his introduction to the assembled new students, “architecture sucks you in. You will soon find yourselves looking at people’s skirting boards when you go round to dinner.” There were a few raised eyebrows at this strange pronouncement, but young and impressionable as we were, and desperate to please, we soon found ourselves taking surreptitious glances at the ogees (“gloriously retro”), shadow gaps (much approved) and chamfered tops (“building not architecture” or, from the clever ones, “Bicycle shed not Lincoln Cathedral.”²) in people’s homes.

As a means of inspiration, skirting boards are a strange choice – we wanted pictures of Bucky, Foster’s latest, any stuff to sate of the naïve optimism of youth – but in hindsight its very weirdness as an example of what it means to be an architect was indicative of a process of removal that was to be enacted over the forthcoming

1 This paper was written in response to the question raised by the European Association for Architectural Education for their biennial prize in architectural writing: The question was: “How will the demands of the information society and “new knowledge” affect the demand for relevant or necessary “know how” in architectural education?” I am particularly grateful to the jurors for the comments they made on the first version of the paper. Ebbe Harder and The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, together with the sponsors Velux, must also be thanked for organising the incredibly generous and useful symposium at which all the papers were presented and discussed.

2 Our very first history lecture started with opened with Niklaus Pevsner’s thundering quote: “A bicycle shed is a building. Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture”. For a critique of the elitist and myopic implications of Pevsner’s approach, see Reyner Banham, “A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture,” in *A Critic Writes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 292–299.

years of our education: the removal from a world with others into a rarefied space of strange values, specialised codes and distinct language.

Maybe we were lucky that it was the benign bourgeois values of skirting boards that instigated this removal. I could have ended up at, say, ETH Zurich in Miroslav Sik’s atelier whose members’ “black uniforms and deliberate isolation bore overtones of a clan; in addition, their interest in discredited architecture, such as that of the Fascist era, was disturbing.”³ Disturbing – I should say so, but then even this seems mild compared to Günther Domenig’s description of life at the School in Graz. “The Architect”, he says in a documentary film,⁴ “must have the tools of obstinacy and resistance. I have taught at the University for twenty years and there are to my knowledge at least six students who have committed suicide because of the lack of these traits. That is quite sad but consequent.”

No, Professor Domenig, not quite sad, downright tragic. And only consequent (that totalising word that edits out humanity) if you accept and promote the appalling values that lead to such tragic consequences. His very acceptance of the values is given away in the next sentence – delivered deadpan: “In comparison, only one single tutor committed suicide and that is too little.” (You can see his eyes, no irony, no emotion, just a weary resignation). Now one may dismiss these as the rantings of a disappointed old man, but the terrifying thing is that most architectural educators and students will probably have experienced or sensed such madness to a greater or lesser extent. This essay argues that one must first unravel this state before one can even begin to answer the question set, so forgive me if the direct, studently, response is somewhat delayed.

3 Jacques Lucan, *A Matter of Art: Contemporary Architecture in Switzerland* (Basel: Birkhauser, 2001), 44.

4 Jessica Hausner and Antonin Svoboda, *Kunsthaus Graz: A Friendly Alien*, 2003.

GYMNASTS IN THE PRISON YARD

Tracing a line from skirting boards to suicides via black shirts may stretch the argument to almost to breaking point, but the argument is this: Architecture, as a profession, promotes a series of self-referential and autonomous values. Architectural education explicitly inculcates these values through its processes and rituals. This argument is not new. It was most cogently – even angrily – put by Reyner Banham in his last essay *A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture*.⁵ “Anthropologists”, he argues, “have been known to compare the teaching studio to a tribal longhouse; the place and the rituals pursued there are almost unique in the annals of western education. One of things that sustains this uniqueness is the frequency with which students are discouraged from pursuing modes of design that come from outside the studio.” What Banham identifies so clearly is the way that the studio as setting, and design crit (jury) as ritual, establish attitudes and values that are then played out in the black box of the profession. The sting in Banham’s tail is the association with the figure of the anthropologist. Anthropology, at least traditionally, is concerned with the study of the marginal or of the near-extinct. Banham is thus implying that architecture, caught in its black box, is heading towards the margins or extinction.

So if the argument is not new, why then have we not dealt with it? One reason is that we cannot see the wood for the trees. The world of architectural education is obsessed with *what* it produces, and in this forgets to examine *how* it produces. This obsession with product is not surprising; as education gets increasingly commodified in the global exchange of images (and students), each School depends on an immediate display of its output in order to survive. They need to pump up and pump out their symbolic capital into the marketplace. We celebrate the diversity of this output, from slick to hairy, from straight to curvy. We promote the differences in theoretical approach, from fundamental ontology to technical determinism. The apparent diversity leads us to believe that there is a multiplicity of values being supported, but in fact the diversity only exists on the surface; deep down the

5 Banham, “A Black Box: The Secret Profession of Architecture.”

pedagogic processes and the associated values are all too similar. The seduction of the image conflated with the strenuous arm-waving of the supporting theories are distractions from a critical examination of the underlying value system, which is thus allowed to sit unperturbed. The fixed body of architecture is concealed beneath a never-ending parade of masks and clothes.

The schools play out the autonomous discourses and value systems of the profession, but in a manner that is one step further removed from the realities and contingencies of the world in which the architectural products will eventually be located. The studio, though feted by others than Banham as the locus of creative and reflective action, is in fact a detached and artificial environment, a hothouse in which strange values and forms are allowed to breed and mutate. A linear process from ‘problem’ to ‘solution’ is instigated, unaffected by external forces. Particular events (the crit/jury, the charette, the interim exercise) are introduced to the process in order to create a semblance of disturbance and unpredictability, but these are in fact always determined and overseen by the authority of the tutor. This is why Donald Schön’s identification of the architecture studio as an exemplar of an education that encourages the formation of the ‘reflective practitioner’ is so misplaced.⁶

Schön’s approach is so often quoted because it supports the status quo, and since that support comes from an distinguished outsider it gives it a special credence – but in fact a close reading of his description, and in particular the language he deploys, shows quite how flawed his analysis is. In his description of a ‘typical’ studio project, he outlines how a studio master (Quist) first sets a problem and then guides the student (Petra) through a series of actions and ways of thinking in order to arrive at a solution. Schön interprets the process as one developing “artistry” and “reflective ways of doing”, but what is really apparent is the power structure of the relationship. Quist’s performance is described as “virtuoso”, but at every stage he exerts his authority over the mystified student, cutting into her explanations, tracing

6 Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, vol. 1st, Jossey-Bass Higher Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987), 80–118. This is an extended interpretation of the issues raised in Donald A. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

over her drawings and eventually getting her to draw his preferred solution. Whilst Schön interprets this as drawing out the reflective capacity of the student, it is the tutor's knowledge and his solution that is deemed appropriate; her struggle is patronisingly dismissed (“stutteringly” trying to solve a problem beyond her understanding). It is a classic display of domination, right down to its gendered structure and eventual denouement in the jury.

Far from being Schön's exemplar of a setting for reflection-in-action, the studio is a place removed, and in this removal from the norms of social life it becomes a place where power can be enacted in an unchallenged way.⁷ In effect this mixture of autonomy and power in Schools of Architecture creates a double prison yard for our apprentice gymnasts to perform in: an outer fence policed by the values of the profession and an inner fence policed by the authority of the School. It is maybe not surprising that a sense of fear pervades architectural education, most notably a sense of fear of being found guilty at the final jury. Which brings us back to the madness of Günther Domenig.

Domenig is best known for his ‘radical’ architecture. It is the radical who is celebrated, and in this celebration architectural culture falls into the well-known trap of believing that avant-garde forms represent avant-garde thinking, confusing fashion with thought, form with content. In fact the most ‘radical’ forms of making are often conducted under the most conservative of regimes. Such an argument is deployed to devastating effect by Manfredo Tafuri in *Architecture and Utopia*. He points to the futility of the architectural gesture in the face of capitalism and the way that, in the obsession with internalised, ‘ideological’, discourses, “any possibility of *external*

7 When I first presented this paper, Juhani Pallasmaa rightly criticized me for creating a parody of architectural education, noting that there were many Schools based on humanist and self-aware educational practices where, for example, such untrammelled power would not be tolerated. My defence for the use of the parody is that I am using it as Foucault does, namely through the exaggeration of parody one enacts a critique of normative power structures. Parody is used by Foucault to describe a view of history that is both ‘directed against reality’. See Margaret Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 183.

elaboration of intellectual work is precluded”.⁸ Architects become no more than “gymnasts in the prison yard”. The same critique can be made of architectural education. The most feted Schools of the twentieth century are identified through individuals who have orchestrated their troupe of master gymnasts (the tutors), who in turn cajole their troupe of apprentice gymnasts (the students) into mimetic action. Gropius at the 1920s Bauhaus⁹, Kahn at 1950s Penn, Boyarksy at the 1970s Architectural Association and Cook at the 1990s Bartlett¹⁰ – the product clearly looks different but the underlying processes are remarkably similar. In all cases the model of student dutifully, and often painfully, copying the actions and forms of the master is the model that Paulo Freire so brilliantly argues as being corrupting. “It turns students into receptacles to be filled by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled the better students they are.”¹¹ The fact that these fillings are nicely, even radically, shaped distracts us from the orthodoxy of the method, trapping us still more within the walls of architecture's black box.

8 Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975), 163.

9 Katerina Ruëdi has sustained a brilliant investigation of the workings of both the Bauhaus and the Architectural Association in her writings. The body is contained in her Masters and PhD at the Bartlett, UCL (*Guardians of Sleep* which is about the AA and *Bauhaus Dreamhouse : Architectural Education in the Age of Image Reproduction*, which is about the Bauhaus). See Katerina Ruëdi, “Bauhaus Dream-house,” in *Architecture : The Subject Is Matter* (London: Routledge, 2001), 161–173., for a summary.

10 For a critical review of the traits at the Bartlett in the 1990s, see Nick Temple, “Architectural Education: Fashion/fetish and the Historical Dimension,” *Stoa* 1 (1996): 40–54. The pitfalls of his alternative approach based around hermeneutics is addressed later in this essay.

11 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1996), 53.

MONAD – GONAD

How then can we possibly address external issues from within the walls of the doubled prison yard? How can we carry out the external elaboration of intellectual work that Tafuri says is precluded but which is still necessary? How, for the sake of this essay, can we answer the question in hand, namely how do we respond to the development of new societal conditions such as the so-called information society?

Typically the architect's response to external forces is one of assimilation and abstraction. Take an external idea or an external condition and convert it into form. The late twentieth century spawned a frenzy of such activity. The translation of the complexities of philosophical deconstruction to 'deconstructivist' architecture was a particular nadir, only exceeded by the subsequent rash of folding. Architectural theorists had really struggled with the intricacies of Deleuze and Guattari's earlier work, in particular *A Thousand Plateaus*, but somehow felt it was important. There was thus a collective sigh of relief when Deleuze produced *The Fold*.¹² Now that word is something to do with form, with making. Skip the difficult Leibniz stuff ("monad – gonad", my students would chant), and cut to the quick. Fold and fold again, and feel good that a major philosopher is somehow legitimating it, as if the resultant spatial 'complexity' will somehow summon up the intellectual complexity.¹³ Whether in folding or other philosophical appropriations, the procedure is one of reification, both in the original sense of the word - turning the abstract into matter - but also in the Marxist interpretation – that this procedure is also one of commodification. Ideas are the currency of the academy; in the architectural reification of them, greater value is

12 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). I am referring here to projects such as those illustrated in Greg Lynn, *Folding in Architecture*, Architectural Design (Chichester: Wiley, 1993). The philosophical link is explored with some difficulty in Andrew Benjamin, Time, Question, Fold, Basilisk, Issue 2, http://www.basilisk.com/V/virtual_deleuze_fold_112.html

13 Just as it is wrong to confuse avant garde form with avant garde thinking, it is wrong to assume that formal complexity will be followed by occupational complexity. As Lefebvre continually reminds us, spatial (for which read social) complexity is down to far more than mere formal or physical attributes.

produced for those who take the freshest ideas and reify them into the freshest forms. And of course that greater value, as symbolic capital, is absolutely necessary to survive in the marketplace of global education. The websites of the leading (or rather the most expensive) architectural schools are all about freshness, about novelty, and about the equipment they have to reify that novelty.¹⁴

The appropriation of external ideas found fullest force within the inner walls of the Academy, and the architects associated with it (for example Eisenmann, Libeskind and UN Studio). In contrast, the profession's appropriation of external influences is centres less on the incorporation of ideas and more on the assimilation of technology or aesthetics. Through the course of the twentieth century, spurred into action by the hysterical cries of the Futurists, architects have translated the latest technological advances into their work. There is a will to reflect the spirit of the age, to be seen to be breaking new ground, and so the appropriation is normally of the so-called progressive technologies - those of advanced industry (in the work of the hi-tech architects), of the space race (in the use of new materials), of the armaments industry (Gehry's well-known use of Catia software developed first for warplane design). It is a classic case of technological determinism, and brings with it all the problems identified with such attitudes.¹⁵ For my purpose, the key aspect of the assimilation is its uncritical nature, and with this the way it used to perpetuate the autonomous architectural values contained within the walls of the profession and education; it is used to gild the surface of objects removed from the everyday concerns of society. There is clearly little questioning of the often-suspect values that underlie the

14 This point was well made by Dagmar Richter in her presentation during the EAAE symposium that discussed these essays i.e. potential customers, aka students, take a dim view of schools without 3D printers to make little blobs. Her term 'edutainment' to describe the current state of architectural education reinforces the need for freshness.

15 Jacques Ellul's work still has relevance here; Langdon Winner's writings identify the problem of technological determinism in the contemporary age. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, vol. [1st American (New York: Knopf, 1964).; Langdon Winner, *Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-control as a Theme in Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977).; Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor: a Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

production of advanced technologies in the first place, or of the global environmental disaster that they have created. Instead, progressive technology is appropriated not even to exploit the technical efficacy of the original, but merely to exploit its aesthetic potential.

In the case of the ‘information society’, this process is already well under way. How many ‘media centres’ have I examined in architecture schools across continents in the past decade? A lot; many too many. The argument is appears simple: there is lots of media out there, so lets design a building to house it. Well, there’s lots of poverty out there, but I haven’t seen many poverty centres. Poverty don’t look good; media does. But just looking good ain’t enough, so these media centres are justified with spurious intellectual arguments: with every media centre there is some cliché about the physical and virtual. What happens is that the ‘information society’ becomes a figure for representation, and in the very uncritical nature of the representation, becomes celebrated and dramatically misunderstood. Of course there is a deep irony in the making into solid form of something that is by its very nature a system of invisible flows, but this irony is overlooked because these buildings look so damn good. The information society has provided a whole new arsenal of technologies and materials to be exploited for aesthetic effect – flashing screens, mutating facades, liquidity – and when it is done well (for example in Toyo Ito’s Sendai Mediateque) the results are so spectacular, so beautiful even, that one is seduced into forgetting that maybe not all is so well in the information society.

It is not unfair to say that students are particularly susceptible to such seduction (remember me and my fellow students’ desire for images of freshness and dynamism instead of stories of skirting boards), and thus fall prey to the particular form of forgetting that so-called progressive architecture induces. This is nothing new. Robin Evans in his brilliant unraveling of the complexities of Mies’s Barcelona Pavilion, notes that the beauty of the place ‘distracts ... it is the architecture of forgetting’.¹⁶ He goes on to note that this is a conscious forgetting, a displacement from ‘a

16 Robin Evans, “Translations from Drawing to Building,” in *Translations from Drawing to Building* (London: Architectural Association, 1997), 269.

confrontation with violence and politics’,¹⁷ a forgetting of course of the fact that the Barcelona Pavilion was to celebrate a nation on the verge of the Third Reich.

In this way the very EAAE question is another form of forgetting. In its raising of the issue of the information society, it either panders to the progressive amnesiacs or else provokes the Luddite tendencies of the technophobes. Either way, it is hard to fully engage with the issues at stake in order to set architectural education into the wider social and political context that is demanded. It is not the question is irrelevant, just that it is potentially distracting.

The distraction is reinforced by the second half of the question – ‘how will..... “new knowledge” affect the demand for relevant and necessary “know how” in architectural education?’ It is interesting that the information society is here distilled into new forms of knowledge rather than into new social constructs or new ways of thinking. ‘New knowledge’ out there normally anticipates added knowledge inside the architecture schools. Every week a new edict will cross my desk – new forms of building legislation, new forms of disabled access requirements, new issues of sustainability, new skills needed to cope with the information society, the list is endless And so every week, I feel exhausted on behalf of my students. In each case there is a concomitant demand or inference that these edicts should in some way be reflected in a revised curriculum. Sometimes this is later policed by professional demands in the form of new criteria issued by the professional bodies as part of the validation process, a method through which the profession controls the knowledge that is deemed necessary for Schools of Architecture to provide their students. And thus are Schools of Architecture forced to dance to a prescriptive tune. Recent (and therefore already outdated) practices are being dangerously inscribed into the curriculum. Whilst it is a cliché to say that education should be about the future, we are being asked not to just accept the status quo but to actually consolidate it.

The request for ‘relevant’ forms of new knowledge is therefore distracting, because what is new now is going to be out of date, irrelevant even, by the time our students face the world. Societal, and thus spatial, constructs are emerging with such rapidity that we are can no longer educate for a fixity; instead we must educate for

17 Ibid., 270.

moving targets. Knowledge – at least in its manifestation as *wissenschaft*, a rational sense of certainty – will be of little use if the object it is being applied to has shifted. The radical contingency of architectural practice demands new forms of education, not new forms of knowledge. Positing a scenario of the what the construction industry may be like in twenty years time, Will Hughes describes a world full of people full of knowledge but with no critical faculties with which to sensibly deploy it. He paints a picture of an industry controlled by the market forces of the contractors with the professionals, including architects, completely marginalised. His scenario is at the same time deeply depressing and deeply convincing.¹⁸ Hughes argues that to avoid this what we need to do in education is to develop judgment rather than to package up knowledge in neatly assessable chunks. More specifically for architectural education, what is crucial is to encourage multiple modes of thinking rather than specific methods of doing.

The final section of the EAAE question is closer to the mark, because the use of the phrase “know how” suggests the development and then deployment of knowledge as *erkenntnis* (a human, conditioned, evolving, force of understanding) rather than knowledge as *wissenschaft* (a professional, authoritative, fixity). But even this does not go far enough in preparing students for the multiple conditions they will face, whether it be the question in hand (the emergence of the information society) or another equally relevant question that might have been in hand (say the issues of societies divided by wealth and poverty). What is needed is the development of ways of making judgments, an ability that has been lost in the seduction of form and the distractions of progress.

This proposal to recover the lost judgment then opens up new issues. Firstly it is difficult to assess, let alone legislate, judgment, whereas one can ‘benchmark’ knowledge, something that the professional validating bodies are all too keen to do.

¹⁸ Will Hughes, “De-professionalised, Automated Construction Procurement,” in *The Professionals Choice: The Future of the Built Environment Professions* (London: Building Futures, 2003). His scenario in particular should be required reading for all architectural students and academics. His point about the necessity of the development of judgment in education is made by other authors in the book.

An education that is centred on notions of judgment rather than knowledge is thus an education that inevitably reconsiders its relation to the profession. It also begs the question: on what basis are these judgments made? The rest of this essay will address this question. I will argue the way that an education based on judgment inevitably disrupts the internalised and (in this argument) corrupted value system that the profession has held so dear.

FORGETTING WHO WE ARE

Some years ago, I was knocked off my bicycle and suffered a rare (for which read extremely painful) form of fracture and dislocation. This landed me in a teaching hospital, there to be subjected to the prods of doctors and students. On one occasion the prod of the chief tutor, the consultant, was particularly blunt. “This could be you, one day”, I winced. “No, I would never be so stupid to ride a bicycle,” he responded with that supercilious superiority only hospital doctors can really manage. “No,” I responded, “what I meant was one day you could be a patient.” He went puce, “If you do not want us to help you we won’t,” and stormed off with his gaggle of students in his wake.

Maybe I provoked his anger because I had shown him up in front of his students. But more likely it was because I had reminded him that his professional status was not completely secure. Professions define themselves by setting themselves apart, both epistemologically and socially. In medicine the knowledge base is well defined and thus secure; together with law it is usually defined as the strongest of the professions, with concomitant rewards in terms of remuneration and status. However, for a doctor to be reminded socially that they are also patients-in-waiting collapses the distance between the profession and society; it asks them to be human, and to use their knowledge not just in an instrumental way but also in a way that demands judgment.

The same is true of architects. Just as doctors in their brusque bedside manner often seem to forget that they too are potential patients, architects are prone to deny their experience as users, to forget that they too are embodied citizens. The denial is not surprising from a professional standpoint. Architects will be wary of identifying

with the user¹⁹ because they believe this would threaten what sets them apart. There is the nagging doubt that in dealing with the normal, using normal language, one might be seen as normal. The doubt is reinforced by the fact that our knowledge base is not as robust as it is in law and medicine; the value system that the profession constructs can be seen as a defense mechanism to deal with this potential weakness.

Research has shown how students over the five years of their course become assimilated into the social mores of the profession.²⁰ They gradually take on the language codes, stylistic preferences and rituals of architects (right down to the clothes), becoming increasingly remote from way that lay people describe and prioritise architecture. Architectural education effectively removes students from the world from which they came, instigating a denial of the ordinary in the pursuit of the extraordinary. By the end of their education, students have forgotten that they too are users.²¹

However, it is not just this personal forgetting that is at stake in architecture. It is also striking how in most cases the design process itself delays the involvement of the user for as long as possible. Except in participatory design, the user is held at arm's length; they are only allowed in as abstractions (through functional concerns) or as ideals (through notions of authentic living). If they are admitted in all their contingent and multiple glories, users disturb the idealised patterns of the design process. So they are kept out, promoting the suspension of disbelief that is a condition of design practice. One knows in one's heart of hearts that the suspension cannot last, but the state is hypnotic whilst it does – those clean diagrams, those neatly scheduled

19 Lefebvre notes how even the word user abstracts the citizen for the purposes of architecture, making it easier to subject them to instrumental theories such as functionalism. However, it is beyond this essay to reconsider this terminology. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 287.

20 M.A Wilson, "The Socialization of Architectural Preference," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 16 (1996): 33–44.

21 Rosie Parnell's prizewinning essay in the last EAAE Prize raises these issues, and suggests ways out of the dilemma. See Rosie Parnell, "Knowledge, Skills and Arrogance: Educating for Collaborative Practice," in *Writings in Architectural Education* (Copenhagen: EAAE, 2003), 57–73.

packages of work that defy all construction practice, those empty photographs taken before the great unwashed (users, dirt, weather, change) move in. And when it all goes wrong afterwards, when reality truly does upset the ideals, one can always resort to the publication of a monograph to resuscitate and perpetuate the mythology of a perfected state of architectural production.

So, the first answer to the question in hand, and a pointer to how judgments may be made, is simple. Remember who you were. Remember that you too inhabit this world. Remember that you too use buildings, occupy space. And remember that users are more than abstractions or ideals; they are imperfect, multiple, political, and all the better for it. An architecture (and an architectural education) that remembers all these will also be an architecture and education that begins to break free from the prison yard where the mythology of a perfected state is cruelly allowed to develop.

THE INAUTHENTIC PHENOMENOLOGIST

So, be human. That is the message.

This comes somewhat as an anticlimax. After all my bile, the tabloid sensationalism, the anecdotes, is that all I can offer - a limp liberal humanism?

Well - yes and no.

Yes, because at a basic level architecture is about the occupation of space by embodied, sensate, cognisant, social beings. Indeed to describe architecture without such beings is maybe to describe something that is not architecture. This seems so obvious that one does not need a long word like phenomenology to capture it.

But then no, because one of the problems of the phenomenological approach is that it does not fully consider the political dimension of the world, and thus the humans described are removed into purified contexts. Phenomenology has rightly been adopted into architectural thinking as a counter to the limits of instrumental Enlightenment thought that has dominated architectural production for so long. However, the reaction to one dogma has often resulted in the retreat into another dogma. This can be identified in the architectural interpretations of three key phenomenological thinkers; Bachelard, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

It is a mistake to take Bachelard literally. The Poetics of Space is essentially a literary text; the situations within are metaphorical. And yet, attics and cellars appear as concrete realities in countless student schemes guided by phenomenologically inclined tutors; another form of reification. With Heidegger there is a concentration on the later texts, and in particular Building, Dwelling, Thinking. This is to overlook the problematic of Being and Time. The early sections are essential – the critique of the limits of Cartesian thought, the replacement of the extensio with the twin spatial aspects of deseverance and directionality, the insistence on Dasein as essentially spatial – all of these are compelling, even if the final description of space is full of aporias.²² The final sections on temporality and historicity are equally compelling. It is the central sections when Heidegger dismisses the inauthenticity of the ‘they’ (effectively the great mass of humanity) that are so problematic politically and, by implication, architecturally. Many commentators have noted how Heidegger’s dismissal of the inauthenticity of the ‘they’ and the drive towards the authentic character of Dasein is symptomatic of his association with the Nazi’s and their programme of a ‘master race’.²³ This may be a crude analogy, but its very suggestion is enough to create severe doubts about the propriety of accepting Heidegger’s interpretation of the ‘they’ as some kind of ‘average everyday’ that distracts us from our authentic being.²⁴ As Henri Lefebvre notes:

Phenomenology and existentialism can be defined as philosophies which have fallen to the level of the everyday but which have retained the negative characteristics of traditional

22 As contained in section 24. See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: a Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

23 See for example Stephen White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35–38. for a summary of the issues. The charge was first made in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), reinforced in Victor Farias, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), and reassessed in Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger, 1927-1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

24 The charge is led by Adorno in Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

philosophy: devaluation of the everyday in the favour of pure or tragic moments - criticism of life through anguish or death - artificial criteria of authenticity etc.²⁵

Heidegger’s drive towards a fundamental ontology based around notions of authenticity is reflected in the architectural obsessions with purity, the authentic situation,²⁶ and the retreat from the everyday into elevated or idealised notions of living. In all of these we see a privileging of fundamental belief systems, which can only be developed in retreat from the contingencies of the real world. The authentic phenomenologist remains inside the house of architecture, caught in endless reveries of movement from cellar to attic, seeking that moment of ontological purity, curtains (heavy, velvet, curtains) drawn to the fallen world outside. Personally I enjoy those moments of the ‘they’ that Heidegger dismisses as inauthentic. Idle talk (hence my anecdotes); curiosity (hence my continual optimism as teacher, curious about the world, curious about how students see the world)²⁷; ambiguity (hence my insistence on contingency as the defining feature of architecture). Personally, I am an inauthentic phenomenologist.

So, to elaborate my answer to the question. It is about being human; develop an ontology, but not a fundamental ontology; develop a phenomenology, but not an ‘authentic’ phenomenology.

25 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 1991), 264.

26 The idea of situation in architecture has been developed in Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004).

27 This chimes with Michel Foucault’s almost playful homage to curiosity: “Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatised in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain conception of science. Curiosity is seen as futility. However, I like the word; it suggests something quite different to me. It evokes ‘care’; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilised before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental. I dream of a new age of curiosity.” Michel Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984* (London: Routledge, 1988), 328.

STRONG DOUBT

Which brings us to Merleau-Ponty. Not the Merleau Ponty of *The Phenomenology of Perception* (rightly used by some architectural theorists to develop an understanding of embodiment) or *The Visible and the Invisible* but the Merleau Ponty who opens his inaugural lecture with the words: “The man who witnesses his own research, that is to say his own inner disorder.”²⁸ It is wonderful that a philosopher - philosophy as the presumed harbour of truth should open his inaugural with a profession of doubt. The point is that Merleau-Ponty sees doubt as an essential condition of his life as philosopher and researcher. To understand this, he argues, we must remember Socrates. Socrates who refused to flee the city, but insisted on facing his tribunal, because he does not see his philosophy as some kind of idol that must be protected, but as a mode of thinking which exists in its very living relevance to the Athenians. He is killed in the end because he inflicts on others the unpardonable offence of making them doubt themselves. Seventy-five years later Aristotle will leave the city, arguing that he cannot allow the city to commit a new crime against philosophy. Now is it too much to liken some strands of architecture to Aristotelian retreat, a mode of intellectual protection of the purity of buildings against the stains that society will wish to inflict? I think not. And is not Socratic engagement the better model? I think so. This model is one that proceeds through doubt, in a constant unraveling of what may be wrong in order to make it better. But this engagement is not one of hopeless capitulation. Merleau-Ponty argues for a continual movement between retreat - and radical reflection - and engagement - and intentional action. “We must withdraw and gain distance in order to become truly engaged.”

This doubt is also an essential part of education. Without it, teaching becomes the inculcation of orthodoxy, or in Paolo Freire’s term, the ‘banking’ model of education, “in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits.”²⁹ The orthodox model of education tends

28 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1963), 60.

29 Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 53.

towards prescriptive methods, rule-based learning and the continuation of the status quo. A power structure is established, with tutors, as possessor/makers of the rules, asserting authority over the students, who feel the need to learn the rules. Doubt, on the other hand, encourages the development of what Dewey calls ‘reflective intelligence’, whereby each student begins to develop their own structure of thinking with which to face a variety of competing positions – be it the demands of the information society or issues of divided societies. In architecture, the development of this reflective intelligence is an essential preparation for the contingency of the architectural world. If one accepts that there is no ‘correct’ method, no ideals to be reached, no fixed targets, then what emerges are multiple modes of thinking. One can accomplish this through a teasing and probing which reveals the underlying prejudices and assumptions that the designer may have, and encourages a critical interpretation of those assumptions. It is only when potential architects are aware of the power structures that control both them and society at large that they are in a position to negotiate within those structures. Ideally, the roles of questioner (teacher) and questioned (student) should merge, as the student begins to build a *self*-critical response to the conditions with which they are faced and so begin to form their own judgments and intentions.³⁰

However, this movement from doubt to action does not fully address the question as to on what basis judgments should be made. I have argued that they should be formed within an everyday, human context. More specifically, they need to be formed in a context that is socialised and thus politicised. This is not political in the party-political sense of the word, but political in the feminist sense (the personal is the political) and etymological sense (as a setting for civic life). The architectural profession often exists in a state of denial about the political implications of the processes and products of practice, preferring to deal to areas which are wrongly interpreted as beyond the political (abstracted form-making or the ‘neutrality’ of

30 See Jeremy Till, “Contingent Theory: The Educator as Ironist,” *Stoa* 1 (1996): 66–79. “The greatest triumph, but also the greatest sacrifice, for a teacher is to be no longer needed.”

technology).³¹ However, the attempt to banish politics from architecture is only to delay the inevitable. Just as King Canute was swept away by the waves, social life will find its way through the cracks in the wall of architectural denial, eventually overwhelming the hopeless purity of the forms within - because those forms, conceived in a political vacuum, can put up no resistance.³² Better then to take on board these contested territories earlier, in education, rather than be disappointed later.

Back to the EAEE question. 'How will the demands of the information society and "new knowledge" affect the demand for relevant and necessary "know how" in architectural education?' The answer is getting clearer. Do not respond to new knowledge with more knowledge. Encourage the development of judgment, but from a human, not a professional, perspective. This perspective is one that acknowledges doubt as a strength. Finally, the judgments are made from within a context that acknowledges the political and social responsibilities of the architect.

AVOIDING POLISHED DEATH

.... *acknowledges the political and social responsibilities of the architect.* This is too easy to say.³³ What defines the social? What type of politics?

31 There is not the space to develop the argument here, but it is neatly summarised by the French architect Jean Renaudie who writes: 'The stubborn refusal of some people to admit to the influence of politics on architecture, and the narrow assertion of others that architecture is politics and nothing else, result in the same thing: inefficiency in practice.'

32 Koolhaas's pithy reminder is apt here. 'Once we were making sandcastles. Now we swim in the sea that swept them away.' Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1995), 971. The problem is his ambivalence in how to deal with the condition.

33 The first version of this paper left this hanging, and ended with a practical proposal that one small way of recovering judgment would be to abolish the standard crit/jury system in the Schools. The 'jurors' of this essay prize, rightly felt that this was a cop-out as an ending and so this final section attempts to address this. Nonetheless, the small practical proposal concerning the crit/jury remains valid. It is something that we have done at the University of Sheffield. See http://www.shef.ac.uk/architecture/main/activities/sr_rev.html for the argument and some alternative methods of reviewing work.

Libertarian? ("This is the Howard Roark media centre. I don't care if you don't like it.")

Neo-liberal? ("This is the Murdoch global media interchange. It's really cool.")

Soft liberal? ("My media centre has a crèche in it.")

Early Marx? ("My media centre subverts the idea of media as commodity as fetish. It is ugly.")

Late Marx? ("Media centres are symbols of global capitalism. I designed it then tore it up.")

Anarchist? ("...and this is my city farm.")

Of course these are parodies, but cut off from the real world, much of the politics emerging from architectural studios is indeed parody, and so best left aside. Stating a political belief is also something increasingly unacceptable in higher education, and so politics are suppressed as a matter for open debate. The resulting denial of the political in architectural schools in fact allows a certain type of politics (I would argue flip-flopping between explicitly libertarian and implicitly neo-liberal) to develop unhindered but unmentioned.

If, then, the political is suppressed as a mode of making judgments, what about the social? This is generally accounted for in the catch-all notion of ethics. Ethics is a soothing term, somehow suggesting moral responsibility without ever quite defining how that responsibility should be played out. It is therefore an abused term, confusing professional ethics with social ethics. Professional ethics, inscribed in institutional codes and societal expectations, are no more than a moral smokescreen behind which the architect or architectural student can abrogate any (socially) ethical responsibility. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, "when 'ethics' appears in the vocabulary of bureaucracy, it is in connection with 'professional ethics'...the modern organisation is the way of doing things that is free from moral constraints."³⁴

Professional ethics is thus not a basis for making social or political judgements. Neither is the type of ordinary ethics often implied as the basis for architectural

34 Zygmunt Bauman, *Alone Again: Ethics After Certainty* (London: Demos, 2000), 7-8.

action. In Karsten Harries's book *The Ethical Function of Architecture* one searches hard to find a specific definition of the term; the argument as to why architecture needs an ethical function, and has so long avoided that need, is lucidly made but quite on what basis to carry out that function is less clear. It is maybe indicative that Harries employs so much of Heidegger to develop his argument. As John Caputo says of Heidegger, "the problem ..is not that he has no ethics, but his ethics are eschatological.... it tells the story of the primordial *ethos* and the great beginning."³⁵ When eventually Harries does define his term, the suspicion of some kind of originary ethics is confirmed: "Architecture has an ethical function in that it calls us out of the everyday, *recalls* us to the values presiding over our lives as members of a society, it beckons us toward a better life, a bit closer to the ideal. One task of architecture is to preserve at least a piece of utopia, and inevitably such a piece leaves and should leave a sting, awaken utopian longings, fill us with dreams of another and a better world."³⁶ Most worryingly, this sentiment is illustrated with a photograph of the US Capitol.³⁷

A number of features can be identified here:

Ethics as a form of removal to a privileged place.

Ethics as utopist.

Ethics as deeply apolitical (in so much as the politics are clearly taken care of through the principles of liberal democracy enshrined in the Capitol).

35 John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 238.

36 Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997), 291. My emphasis.

37 Writing this passage on the third anniversary of the establishment of Guantanamo Bay prison camp may have made me especially sensitive to the actions of the US Capitol. There is no doubting that Harries includes the picture without a trace of my concerns or of irony. "What Heidegger says of the Greek temple, that it lets the god be present, has its analogue in the ... in the presence of shared values in civic monuments – think of the Capitol, of the Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln memorials, or of Civil War monuments." Ibid.

These features remind me of no more than Ernst Bloch's description of modernist architectural utopias: *Polished Death*.³⁸ This is no position from which to make judgements.

I started with suicide and now am ending with polished death. But I am only going to these desperate places as a warning as to what may happen if one, in Roberto Unger's terms, ends up "taking for granted received ideals or recognised interests (or) searching for a more transcendent perspective."³⁹ Unger's alternative way is clear: work out from the given context, be both practical *and* imaginative, critical *and* visionary. In every case there is a formative context that can be transformed, and in every case there is a productive tension between realism and imagination: "we must be realists in order to become visionaries and we need an understanding of social life to criticize and enlarge our view of social reality and social possibility."⁴⁰

In terms of the question at hand, the context is the information society. Be realist: it is here with us, and no amount of beauty, poetics or craft will efface it. It must be engaged with. In terms of architectural education that engagement is two-headed. The first head is sheer expediency: equipping our students with all the skills and techniques that the information society has thrown up. Only then will they be able to survive in the marketplace and only then will they be able to transform that little bit of context that comes their way. The second head is one of judgment: developing a critical awareness of how one might enable that transformation for the better. This is in the end an ethical issue, but not an ethics as we have thus far encountered. It is in an ethics, following the lead of Zygmunt Bauman, that "means to assume responsibility for the Other,"⁴¹ an ethics that "recasts the Other as the crucial character

38 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 737. "The bogus freshness of 'modernity' with which polished death is administered like the gleam of morning."

39 Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 331.

40 Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Social Theory: Its Situation and Its Task* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 15.

41 Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 13. These cursory quotes do not even begin to do justice to the extraordinary power of Bauman's work. For readers who do not know him, do not be put off by the 'postmodern' in the title. Bauman's postmodern is far away from

in process through which the moral self comes into its own.”⁴² For Bauman this demands a shift from the modernist model of the expert as legislator dreaming of ordered rational worlds to that of the expert as interpreter, participating with and acting for the Other. The Other for architects is the one or ones who will be part of the social space our buildings help construct. In this way we can be the architects Unger would wish us to be, “enabling people as individuals and as groups to express themselves by changing their situations. ... (the architect) lives out his transformative vocation by assisting someone else’s.”

But let us be clear. This two-headed figure of the transformed and transforming student/architect is not some beast from Grecian mythology, switching manically between expediency and ethics. It is the twin heads of the Tsimshian masks (Fig. 1),⁴³ one slipping inside the other, expediency inside ethics. However developed the skills and techniques, the final filter to the world must be that of a responsibility towards others. Only then can we effect “the replacement of the dream of the legislator with the practice of the interpreter.”⁴⁴

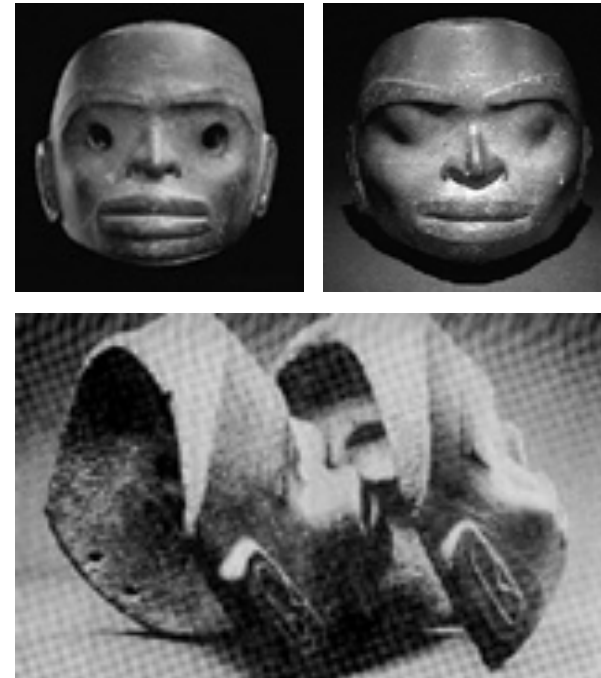


Fig. 1

Jenck’s: it is best summarized by his argument that “Postmodernity is modernity without illusions”. I intend to develop the discussion of Bauman and Unger in my book *Architecture and Contingency* (forthcoming, e.t.a. late 2006).

42 Ibid., 84.

43 This refers to the two stone masks from the Tsimshian people in NW Canada. One mask, now in Paris, has eyes open; the other, now in the Canadian Museum of Civilisation has eyes shut. The two were brought together for the first time in 1975, when it was discovered that the ‘seeing’ mask fitted exactly inside the ‘dreaming’ mask. One interpretation is that the two faculties (of reason and of imagination) represented by the masks are complementary and interdependent.

44 Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), 204.

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