

BEDFORD SQUARE

popping the archibubble of archibabble.

s.morley

"My project? Oh, well it's about the notion of narrative as a juxtaposition of dynamic forms & spatial constructs..."

The distinction between 'drawing as the language of the architect' and 'architecture as its own language' has been discussed for decades, but what of the language itself? Robin Evans, while famously covering the transformative relationship between drawing and building, makes the subtle point that all architects are ultimately communicators. It is thus that the successful deployment of conceptual jargon ('dynamic', 'narrative', 'urban fabric', 'formal', 'juxtaposition') has become a rite of passage for the student of architecture. No more than wee babes, from our first day we absorb the lingo through a sort of strange linguistic osmosis, developing an archispeak that through the years only becomes more convoluted.

For an outsider, the average architectural presentation sounds like another language. At the AA, it may sound more like speaking in tongues. And while the dialect changes from school to school, the nature of communicating spatial ideas inevitably leads to an overlap of similar terms in our vocabulary. But rather than analysing the popular vernacular of contemporary architecture, I would like to focus instead

on the pressing need to unlearn archispeak.

Since we rarely build our own work, only representations of it, our job is to convey ideas not only visually but also verbally. One of the more valuable lessons the AA has taught me is to question the value of an argument beyond the scope of the project – that is, how can the argument be applied to architecture as a whole? Operating at this level, our words carry much more weight and with that, more influence. We must choose wisely.

The architectural community is already drastically insular, with "high brow" architecture accused of being solely academic and self-referential. To free ourselves from the image of being a superfluous profession, we could benefit from a pointed effort of breaking the architecture bubble we often seal ourselves into.

To be more effective we need a broader base of knowledge, constant evaluation of the applicability of our projects, and an ability to communicate our ideas not just to each other for the sole pleasure of hearing ourselves speak, but to anyone – the non-architects, the future clients, the general public.

Like a corruption of the proverbial tree in the forest, without intelligible communication a student's ideas are misunderstood, ineffectual, and generally "unheard," in which case, what's the point?

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NEW YORK

jargon & the fear of normalcy.

e.ting

The most frustrating aspect of architectural jargon is that, unlike in other disciplines such as medicine or law, it is not a set of terms specific to the profession. They are general terms we borrow and inject with multiple meanings, just as we are trained to work in (or at least talk about) multiple scales and contexts.

We prefer to keep our words ambiguous, either to mask the mediocrity of our designs or to convey an idea that cannot be described verbally. Architecture professors echo the same rhetoric, & design publications employ the same language; we become so inundated with these terms we start to believe that architecture requires speaking a coded language.

This is especially true with architectural education. Students and teachers alike conform to the mentality that school is a place solely for experimentation, where the expectation for originality trumps all other factors. Concepts reign supreme; buildability, spatial qualities, and other niceties, not so much. Architecture is all about talk, hence the stress surrounding critiques and final reviews – events that foreshadow the professional shows.

Securing clients and a budget is largely dependent on presentation, and knowing how to construct a persuasive argument for a project is a

necessary hurdle before even nearing the process of building. Thus, the use of architectural jargon is not so much reflective of a divide between academia and practice, theory and building, as it begs the question: Does complicating architecture benefit or limit its potential? Do we need complexity or clarity?

At the moment, I would say clarity. I find that Japanese architects have a tendency to keep their descriptions simple and straightforward. They don't feel self-conscious just talking about doors, windows and columns. Even their theory is directly related to building and the physical properties of light, air, and texture. In contrast, architecture in the U.S always seems to be tied into a range of issues: politics, economy, sustainability, urban context, etc. Social issues become the primary focus of grandiose building and/or development schemes deemed "at the forefront of architecture". Architecture faces the pressure of not only resolving the program at hand, but to make a statement about social organization, such that students resort to architectural jargon to be heard, and architects to get built.

A fear of normalcy seems to be permeating the discipline.

Evelyn Ting is currently interning at C-Lab in New York and spends most of her time lamenting the current state of architectural journalism.

ANONYMOUS

Tell us your deepest secrets without fear of mass ridicule... fulcrum@aschool.ac.uk

fixed-rate education?

Word on the street (code for an unconfirmed report) suggests that school fees are set to rise £800, slightly ahead of the unusually high national inflation of 4%. Anon asks, is it fair that fees keep track with (or overtake) inflation? And would it be better if students faced a fixed rate when they joined the school?

fascist logos?

Anon e-mailed: "What's with Fulcrum's fascist eagle logo? In fact, what's with the fascist graphic design of this school in general?"

I noticed someone scrawled "Resistance is Futile" on the stall door of 36's top-floor men's. [Ed]

In a related discussion, a second Anon added that the AA's fascist aesthetic is an inevitability of a "see no evil" mentality.

Touché. [Ed]

spatial sweepstakes

Anonymous from Diploma is vexed, not really by the differing sizes of the Dip studios, but by the way they have been assigned (with the more established units all together in 36). Anon proposes we hold a lottery for unit spaces in the future, which would defuse a sensitive planning battlefield.

turning the tables

"Picking up on something David Green said at the space planning meeting last year (I find the whole concept of 'planning space' suspicious) I want to suggest a school jury for the architects Wright & Wright, chaired by Rem & Zaha." Anon.

church and state?

Anon from fourth year reminds us that the Association Chairman and School Director (now known as the Directorship) have not historically always been a single position.

how cool are we now?

In response to the recent assertion "I doubt anyone would consider... building an exhibition dedicated to the AA under Brett's reign" Anon from the DRL reminds us that amongst Mr. Steele's numerous achievements he is co-founder of the DRL – arguably the first digital lab for architecture in the world. Now more than 12 years old, the international importance of this lab in the evolution of C21st architecture is well-recognised. Anon thinks we're as cool now as we ever were in the 60's.

down the toilet?

Anon from second year asks: "All the bathroom signage has changed, from the old brass lettering that was quite nice, to generic plaques. Who actually makes these visual decisions? And why?"

Did you also notice that the heavy silver handle of 36 (which was broken) has been replaced by a generic aluminium one? As a first contact with the school what does this say? [Ed]

chunk of change.

"Rather than higher fees each year, we should get a reduction for showing loyalty, because I'm just not sure this school is worth £16,000 a year." Anon.

aa loyalty card.

"Rather than higher fees each year, we should get a reduction for showing loyalty." Anon.

UNLEARNING ARCHISPEAK

juxtapositions or superimpositions?

"It was because of these superimpositions and, I believe, the idea of dynamic organization, too. For me, in the beginning, it was the whole idea of the explosion and how this could shatter existing organization – and how, if you organize the interiors of buildings and go back to the level of primitivism, you free the plan from certain rules. I think dynamic organization is interesting."

Z.Hadid

"new city"

"Instead of one globe with a fixed position, we broke it into seven toroids that moved through each other dynamically and generated points of intersections."

G.Lynn

the architect as god

"Architecture is a dangerous profession because it is a poisonous mixture of impotence and omnipotence, in the sense that the architect almost invariably harbors megalomaniacal dreams that depend upon others, and upon circumstances, to impose and to realize those fantasies and dreams."

R.Koolhaas

the process of making.

"Story board the narrative of the programme of your project."

An unnamed AA tutor

so tell me a bit more about what an abstract potential would be.

"In the design process, you have to find a kind of currency within architecture, some vehicle to express change in the development of a project. And that currency is generally manifest for us in the way that geometry and materials work with each other. So in contrast to a more classical way of thinking, in which a geometric diagram defines the lineaments of a building, here we are looking at the way in which matter and force can inform geometry and actually begin to develop a notion of organization within space that's based on those issues."

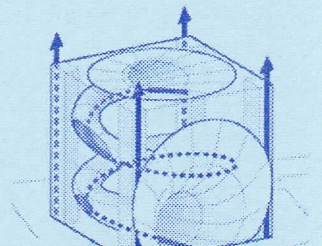
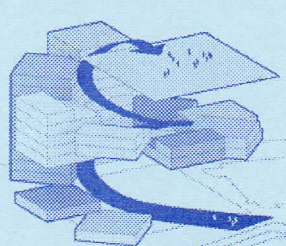
J.Reiser

in conclusion:

The root of the problem with these quotes... is that we understand them and accept them.

A BIG MISTAKE

The ostensible purpose of archispeak is to help clarify an argument. But in the wrong hands it almost always serves to falsify the design process. This is true of certain drawing techniques – say, the way BIG has bastardised OMA. Through a million project ideas BIG argue "you take your client's program requirements, you put them on the site and bam! Crazy, no?" What really grinds my gears is the lie implicit in this – that a Stark Trek warphole form is an inevitable consequence of the design problem... *J.Self*



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