



LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

BEDFORD SQUARE

with, not for.

c.halsted

Architecture has a great – but also dangerous – quality, which is a kind of utopian idealism. The problem with being utopian is that you're never really satisfied, & you always want something to happen that is truly extraordinary. But the extraordinary is sometimes not what is needed, nor asked for.

It's fine to be visionary, but one can't forget that an important social role of architecture is building to the capabilities of the user, not the architect. That's the fear of being really utopian, that the architect designs something no one can relate to, thereby imposing a model of living completely opposed to that desired (or required) by the inhabitant.

This becomes especially evident when architects do development work in cultures they aren't familiar with. After a natural disaster, the earthquake in Haiti say, locals are seen as victims, not as professionals. People forget that before the disaster Haiti had a lot of architects, builders, & engineers, all suddenly made useless by their categorisation as victims.

Architects want to get right in & sort things out, without taking the time to ask what the people concerned might really need. They build Western-style buildings (four walls, living rooms, tiled bathrooms) even when cultural norms ask for exactly the opposite. In this context, the social role of architecture is to respect the needs & wishes of the people it is intended to serve. Architecture must ask, 'how can we work with, & not for people?'

Many places worst hit by natural disasters can't afford

professional services, & don't have organisational structures to raise funds. The role of co-creational charities, like *Architecture for Humanity* or *Architects Sans Frontiers*, is to form development links between skilled professionals & local communities. Architects involved typically spend 1-2 days/week on a project, similar to a tutor at an architecture school. In return, they get an immense amount of experience & cultural knowledge, which acts against the generic kind of modernisation through architecture that makes all buildings everywhere the same. Co-creation proposes a different kind of globalisation – one not based, as it is now, on Western interests. I think that's an important agenda for architecture in general.

The whole project of modernisation has been at the core of global development for at least the last 50 years. It hasn't been about providing water, or shelter, but about markets & money. Both technologically & economically, modernisation imposes Western ideas onto people who are not really interested in a 'modern' way of life.

Obviously, one can't be against some things, like raising national health through standards of living, but I think we have to be careful about what we wish other nations to be.

Unless one acknowledges what architecture is really about (shelter) & what it is capable of achieving, it becomes limited as a discipline & removed from social reality. This is the last thing I would like to see happen to architecture.

Christian Halsted is completing his masters at LSE, & is one half of the London-based social think-tank Doublethink Studio.

to whom do i owe the pleasure?

j.self

Sharp on the heels of the Royal Wedding comes news that the Scottish National Party has won a massive majority, and has formally declared their intention to secede from the UK within 5 years. This is only the latest event in a string of national & international affairs that indicate just how far we all are from a state of political and economic stability.

What began four years ago with the collapse of the sub-prime lending market has snowballed: first the banking crisis, then Labour's signominious defeat & a hung parliament, then a flawed coalition driven by aggressive Tory austerity measures. The economy has flat-lined and the construction sector is still falling. Throw into the mix our uncontrollable inflation, spiralling costs of living and the rising popularity of extremist groups like the BNP and you've got a real mess.

I haven't even touched on the Arab Spring, the car crash we call the EU, or the deeply suspicious death of Bin Laden.

The current government is due to last until 2015 – frankly, good luck getting much built before then. But all this raises the question: just *who* is going to commission a half-decade's worth of architectural students to actually build things? To *whom*, as it were, do I owe the pleasure? And perhaps more pointedly than *whose* building is it, comes the question *why* am I building it? In a moral, and not simply an economic sense, what are the frameworks I operate within and what is my position towards them?

Given these imperatives, the *in what style should we build?* discussion fails to hold my attention. I'm not eschewing 'style' because of some Modernist hangover; it isn't a dirty word, it's a vapid one (as Mies tells us on the reverse of this issue). Someone like Patrik Schumacher deserves respect, if for no other reason than for his indefatigable work in trying to rally a profession behind a recognisable cause. But, at least for me, the arguments he makes for *the new style* are overshadowed by the unsavoury origins of the movement.

Parametricism will always be tied in my mind to the boom years, when each week brought new and ever less credible announcements of some imminent glory to be erected in the Gulf/Orient. Imaginations were fuelled by the starchitect's seductive imagery, but the economic realities rather predictably resulted in canned jobs and still-born skyscrapers, half-buried by dunes. Brett Steele would disagree, but I do see Parametricism as the tail end of Post-Modernist thinking, not just because it continues the logic of an architectural language (albeit with hard data replacing ironic classicism) but because of its dogmatic assertion in the existence of absolutes.

There will almost certainly never be a movement of architecture again, because the plurality of the post-Internet world cannot permit it. That said, I do feel architecture is due for an overhaul of its *raison d'être*, a fresh, new perspective on itself. Make no mistake; I am not interested in *the new* for the sake of novelty. The value of *the new* is wholly its significance as a rejection of *the old*. I am disillusioned with the *status quo*.

Jack Self edits Fulcrum.



EXCELLENCE IN WRITING

"I have no need whatsoever to draw my designs. Good architecture, how something is to be built, can be written. One can write the Parthenon." These sentiments, expressed by Adolf Loos, are most often lost in today's fixation on look and performance. In a culture where image rules and sound bites are king, an appreciation for a more thorough form of thinking and communicating is easily overshadowed.

Yet it is exactly this that architecture needs most, considered work that has the weight of ideas behind it.

Through writing one deals directly with ideas, crafting, honing, refining them. Through the struggle to articulate them, a greater relevance becomes apparent, clarity emerges, along with lines of argument and persuasion. Later, they may find expression in a plan or an image or some other form of representation, or they may remain as words, a timeless expression of some past thought. Twelve examples of this were presented last Friday at the Sharp Prize review, a new award intended to promote, strengthen & celebrate writing at the school.

The event offered a brief respite from the intense end of year production to focus on the importance of writing within the architectural project.

The annual award will be organised by the previous recipients, forging a legacy of literacy across the school.

The winners of the Sharp Prize for Excellence in Writing for 2011 are: Scrap Marshall, Aram Mooradian, & Sylvie Taher.

The writings will be published in Projects Review.

S.WHITTLE

GOOD VERSUS BAD

Sir Winston Churchill, in his book *Great Contemporaries*, wrote of the British WW1 Prime Minister H.H. Asquith as "...a man who knew where he stood on every question of life & affairs in an altogether unusual degree."

I am the opposite of Asquith. I don't have much of a view on what is good, or what is sinister.

But perhaps that is down to timing.

We live in a world where events are formatted into an overly-simplified world view of good versus bad. This model sells papers, & gets viewers.

Enormously complicated geopolitical situations are reduced to score lines: "Obama 1, Osama 0". This reduction makes it easier to digest, comprehend and emotionally engage with information, but what is lost is the fact that this is no longer - if indeed it ever was - a world where things can be reduced to such simplistic terms.

To break down the morality of Bin Laden's

death is necessarily to go into depth about the Taliban, the violation of Pakistan's national sovereignty (not to mention their involvement), as well as question the sortie itself. Was it an assassination mission, or a capture gone wrong? Running parallel to all this would be a discussion of Al-Qaida's future & the events unfolding across the whole of the Middle East.

My point is, it is increasingly hard to come to a firm opinion on something, in an age when we are increasingly pressed to do so. Will I work in China one day, even though they detained Ai Wei Wei? Maybe, but I haven't really thought enough about it.

G. SMITH.

INDIVIDUAL STYLE

After listening to the discussion at the Sharp Prize for Excellence in Writing, I became interested in the potential of style in writing.

I suppose style in this sense, should not be thought about as something that is just applied or created, but something latent, and prospective.

Speculating on both the subject of 'style in writing' and my reaction to the writers who spoke, I formed this concept for the measure of style against the content being addressed:

Style forms its weight or power in its associations. I speak of associations as these allow a piece to be open and relative and relatable, while still maintaining an astute specificity.

The work must no longer reflect a mere interpretation of its precedents, nor propose a truth as if fixed or determinate.

These qualities, though distracting on the outer (more visual) layer of a narrative, are what in turn weaken its individuality. When writing through modes of association, precedents can be hinted or reflected, but never restated or reworked, as this is often banal in writing and can never be seen or read as anything more than a generalization (or worse, as a reflection of the author's naivety).

So we ask ourselves, how does one measure a writing style as unique or of merit?

We must look, not to the aesthetic layers of nomenclature and distractive content, but to a more interdisciplinary format.

A format that does not exist on one trajectory bound firmly to its structure, but to multiple structures along multiple trajectories. So that when a formal narrative is composed, it represents something larger than a topic and its definition, but multiple topics and multiple definitions that all resume to different truths, while simultaneously reuniting into the same.

G. BALDWIN

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LONELY HEARTS

Given the underwhelming snowdrift of *no* responses to last week's announcement about our new Personals column, Fulcrum can only conclude that there are *no* lonely hearts at the AA.

But I know that's not true. Don't think I haven't seen you all eyeing each other up over post-jury drinks.

Frankly the pent up passion is palpable. And sickening.

Get it over with, and get it on with your fellow members (of the Association, that is).

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AN AGONY AUNT?


Alternatively, send us your questions about architecture and/or love, we've got an ace agony aunt lined up to answer them all. Same email.

COUNCIL RESULTS:

Fulcrum would like to congratulate the following on their election to the School Council:

- JULIA BARFIELD —
- FRANK DUFFY —
- MERLIN EAYRS —
- ARAM MOORADIAN —
- JULYAN WICKHAM —
- JULIA KING —

THE POWER & GLORY

 Fulcrum is still looking for a production assistant, to help with distribution and digitisation of the publication. The gig will involve one morning of non-manual labour each week. It might also involve graphic design, and/or editorial work. It's pretty much up to you. Preferably Foundation to Second Year (TS and Tables makes the older students tend to drop off the radar in final term). Drop us a mail and let's talk it over on the terrace. There's no money in it — but boy! think of the glory!