

Fulcrum

ISSUE 67 - FEBRUARY 18, 2013 - THE END OF CRITIQUE

baubles on pedestals.

o.wainwright

It has become increasingly fashionable to trumpet the death of criticism. Barely a week goes by that there isn't a new blog declaring the end of architectural critique, the slipping of standards, the domination of our screens by an unmediated slew of images.

"Criticism is in crisis," wail the critics, seeing their traditional role threatened by a torrential tide of websites that funnel an incontinent splurge of unadulterated visual stimulation. From Dezeen to ArchDaily, designboom to Architizer, we are bombarded with a never-ending deluge of projects, freed from any sense of context or meaning. It is easy to believe the cries that architectural culture is being flattened into a homogenous soup of saturated colours and oblique geometries – a cascade of effortlessly digested eye-candy to be liked, retweeted, pinned and shared across the infinite social media network.

The act of criticism, we bemoan, has become reduced to 140-characters, or the simple act of clicking Like. Comment threads are barely coherent slurs of abuse and tangential rants, rarely the "forums for debate" that our editors like to proclaim. The once behind-the-scenes culture of the press release, issued to journalists to be lazily rewritten, has become open to all. Sites compete to be the first to upload identical information, their headlines and slug-words "search engine optimised" to ensure their place at the top of Google's rankings.

So what future for the critic in all of this? What need is there for self-indulgent mediation and pretentious posturing, when everything is available, unfiltered, at the reader's fingertips? Are we to believe the claims that we are entering a "post-critical" epoch? Is writing on architecture really being swept away by this flood of blogs, sliding down the slippery slope to extinction that the profession itself is tumbling?

Looking at national print journalism, it might seem this way, as newspaper critics become an endangered species. There are about five left in the UK, writing increasingly rarely, with most

papers giving up on all but the most basic coverage – and the *Times* losing its critic altogether last year. It follows a similar decline in the States, where the *New Yorker* lost its long-standing critic, embittered by years of "fighting for space" in an ever shrinking column. The *New York Times* also dumped its architecture specialist and handed his duties over to the art critic, sparking accusations that the paper could not conceive architecture beyond aesthetics.

But it is not hard to see why national critics are facing an uphill struggle. Newspaper arts sections are in thrall to the hugely more popular subjects of TV, music, film, theatre and books, over and above what is perceived to be the fringe pursuit of architecture and design. Siloed into the arts pages, there has always been an overwhelming expectation for the architecture critic to cover only cultural projects – the new museums, galleries, theatres and other glitzy baubles of the boom, of which there are increasingly few being completed. Rarely will an arts editor's interest be piqued by the idea of housing or schools, town planning or infrastructure – topics banished to the respective fiefdoms of society or education, politics or the economy, where the voice of an architecture critic is rarely welcome.

Yet at the same time that criticism is progressively eroded from the national press, there has been a flowering of independent outlets elsewhere. While the endangered grumble that "everyone has become a critic", this should be seen as a positive step – a democratisation of published opinion that strengthens the debate.

Rather than diluting the authority of the critic on their broadsheet pedestal, the multiplicity of voices increases the clarity of the picture.

The proliferation of quickfire blogs has also led to a renewed interest in long form criticism, with a polarisation to the bite-sized and book-length. As the ongoing Archizines project shows (now with over 100 titles of self-published architectural magazines in its collection) criticism is alive and well. You just might have to look a bit harder to find it.

Oliver Wainwright is the architecture and design critic of the Guardian.

towards a new architecture.

d.basulto

Since the early 1900s, modern architecture has undergone incremental development, where each new iteration has been informed by previous findings and solutions designed by other architects. This process started at a very slow pace, when a young Le Corbusier went east and published his findings and observations in *Vers une Architecture*.

The book became very influential among his contemporaries, who, based on his observations, produced their own iterations, second, third and forth waves, very quickly. These architects then started to unite. CIAM is an instance of where this early knowledge was shared, replicated, and published, therefore advancing at a faster pace.

Since then, architectural knowledge pursued a steady curve of advancement, accelerated by architectural publications that made this knowledge available to different parts of the world. Ultimately, the Internet arrived, making the exchange rate of information so fast that new iterations of modern architecture are today accelerating this curve in unprecedented ways.

But when this general phenomenon met the Internet, it also adopted some of the particular advantages of Web 2.0. Web 2.0 permitted for an Internet where users could interact and collaborate with each other, changing the way digital content was produced, and enabling users to generate their own content. This took the form of blog posts, comments and updates on social networks. This new way of using the web allowed for individual voices to arise, offering architects a channel to express their inner critic.

The voices of established architecture critics from the mass media were now on the same ground as critics from specialised publications, and this new breed of Web 2.0 commentators.

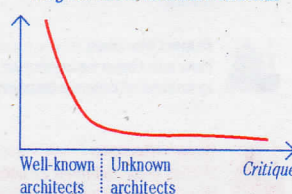
This new critique was able to reach new audiences, not only restricted by those directly related to our field, and the language naturally evolved into something more digestible for the layman.

Don't take this as a simplification of the development of architectural discourse, but rather, a way to effectively adapt and share the tools of the critic for the general population, enabling them to engage in a closer way with the architectural discussion.

Now, this presents a particular moment on the curve of architectural advancement.

Critique is not just something static, but it is also an important way for architects to get feedback about their work, and it accordingly forms part of the iterative and incremental evolution of architecture. Often restricted to a small number of critics (in relation to the amount of buildings and architects), you could say that only a few high profile architects, whose work was more public, were receiving this useful feedback. But with the proliferation of Web critique, more critics were criticizing (and giving feedback) to more and more architects, taking criticism to the long tail of architecture and, again, making architecture advance faster.

Long Tail and Architecture Criticism



Thanks to this new availability of the critic's tools for the general population, they eventually entered into this dynamic of feedback, as architects started to hear the opinions (and critiques, often more in the form of criticisms) from these people outside the field, but who have an important role as the users of the buildings, bringing to the table a perspective that was traditionally left outside of this dynamic.

This flattening of the landscape of critique thanks to the Internet does not mean the end of it, but rather offers a tremendous opportunity to actually reshape its role to become a fundamental part of the process of advancing architecture, with all stakeholders (architects, critics, and the public) on board.

David Basulto is the founder of design and architecture site Archdaily.com

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QE, or money printing in massive scale, causing speculative inflation in oil and other commodities, all hurting recovery, negating intention
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In California. Small ranchers, businesses, etc state, federal regs making desperate, depressed. Talking Wyoming, even Chile, Australia!
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Keystone Pipeline not needed for energy independence. Many opinions, let's discuss. And let's stop wasting money on ridiculous windmills.
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Is Keystone Pipeline really good idea? Bringing lots of heavy, dirty oil across country, when fracked, cheaper, cleaner energy available
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Look at this! Mexico corporate profits equal 24 percent of GDP versus 12 in US. No wonder poor head north for opportunity to prosper.
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Here they come. PC hypocrites scream about Sun publishing pic of murder victim in bikini after Huff Post carries 40 of same subject.
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So Page 3 tweet is breaking news... Typical OTT reaction by the UK PC crew. Just considering, as we do every page daily Buy it and see....
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How can Hagel be confirmed after testimony showed almost total ignorance of defence issues? Maybe Obama equally disinterested.
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Drones okay, but must be used much more sparingly, otherwise every hit a huge recruiter for jihadists.
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How do liberals explain complaints about Guatemala with silence on drone killing, civilians end all, without arrests, trials, etc?
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Chinese still hacking us, or were over weekend.
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Great send off for Ed Koch in NY today. Really important mayor. Never forget that first campaign coming from way behind. Actually fun, too.
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Sure spoke too soon. Seems we have a game!
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Ravens too good, too big, too fast Hops next year's game on Fox a lot closer. Great advts from Jeep tonight.
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Inflation alert, agree with @Soros. Big central banks printing huge sums money, failing to produce jobs or manufacturing. V dangerous times.
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Amazing UK High Court decision recognising rabbinical divorce law, now Sharia law certain next. What sort of society, if any, will emerge?
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At board meeting Harlem Village Academy. 5 great schools doing wonderful things for mostly critically poor kids of mainly single mothers
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POTUS in Vegas to talk immigration but hasn't reached out to Rubio or Jeb Bush or anyone working to build consensus. Why not?
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Gerald Scarfe has never reflected the opinions of the Sunday Times. Nevertheless, we owe major apology for grotesque, offensive cartoon.
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When will a political leader emerge who will expound strongly on the basic morality of free markets and equal opportunity?
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Many governors, legislators, etc here in DC. All talking bipartisanship on great issues of education and immigration, except maybe Obama.
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Let's have petition to keep Piers Morgan in U.S. We need him, as does CNN.
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Back in US. What happened to global warming? London, D.C, New York seem like new ice age! Rockies too.
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UK politics fascinating. Cameron flat footed Milliband with Euro referendum promise, but still faces scepticism in own party.
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Goal! We won't the rights in the UK to show clips of all 380 Premier league matches on the Sun, Times & Sunday Times digital/mobile apps!
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Hopeful good bipartisan immigration reform coming from Senate. Will precede any Obama political initiative.
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Did not mean to be unsympathetic to 400 lb lady, but fact remains unhealthy eating by rich and poor driving up premiums for all.
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Constitution right about guns for self defence and hunting. Founders did not mean modern weapons of war.
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How did fat lady who fell thru street get to 400 lbs? Welfare, stamps, etc? Then leave us all with 20yrs immense health bills.
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Hopefully we'll get some real actions on guns tomorrow, not just some stage managed stunt. This is federal imperative, not for states.
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