



DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

shooting the breeze.

b.steele + editors.

F: In your 2008 introduction to Kengo Kuma's Anti-Object you say: "such an ambition [for the 'erasure' of architecture] couldn't be further removed from the majority of the younger generation of digital experimentalists today pursuing a renewal of formalism not seen within architecture for decades." This is a fascinating statement for two reasons. Firstly, as a co-founder of the DRL, you could be seen as largely responsible for this generation of formalists.

BS: Yes, I have become the poster child for some of their... fair enough, OK-

F: But at the same time, you go on to say that you tacitly support Kuma's argument that digital technology should be used for a greater sensibility in architectural anti-objects. I wonder if we could start from this position.

BS: The Kuma essay is interesting because he uses the writing of the text to dramatically shift the direction of his career. It's a rare thing to see in an architectural career. Kuma does maybe the most horrible version of post-modernism imaginable. But then, as he writes in this beautiful little essay, he became aware in the early 1990s of a renewed aggressive formalism, where an interest in historical form making was being overwhelmed by its emphasis on appearance. He critiqued that by developing an architecture that could be understood in relation to its immediate context, or just by the manipulation, composition & organisation of space on its own terms.

F: Would you, after the Crash, draw a comparison between the end of Post-Modernism & the end of Parametricism?

BS: I've thought of that as a parallel also, I think it's an astute one to make. My hunch is it's probably too easy to make. You would be constructing an argument that says the kind of economic crash that Japan goes through in the 90s aligns with the end of a certain Post-Modernism there, & that can be equated in a larger context with what we have gone through in Western Europe & North America. I think it's too easy a dismissal.

F: Parametricism is a bit different from Post-Modernism because it's not so much about the form itself, not the 'language' of architecture, as data & the interpretation of information sets.

BS: One of the things I'm very interested in is how architecture could so quickly go from a form of knowledge dominated by historical interests, which is what Post-Modernism was in the 80s, to almost overnight flipping into being driven by the tools by which it works - particularly software & visual tools. That flip was made with such speed & such convincing success that the only way I can account for it is to try & say that they are one and the same thing. It was just too quick a shift - almost a staggering transformation for those that lived through it. I have friends, people like Greg Lynn, who went to school in places like Princeton, who were taught history, & then immediately became the forefront of a generation that was arguing for information-based form approaches.

F: Is data & information an extension of the search for an architectural language?

BS: I think it's a confirmation that form making & design are self-referential projects today. For that reason, they can reference forms of history, which is what they were doing 20 years ago, but also reference their own operations for form making. The idea that design is largely a self-referential form of cultural production is the requirement for you to either abstract history, which is what post modernism was doing, or technology, which is what today's Parametricism is doing.

F: The average teaching age is very young at the AA, is that your intention? For example, are you choosing ideas over experience?

BS: The AA is a school in which the teaching age is always quite young. But at a personal level I think the way in which you solve the problems of the world today is you lower the average age of the people in the room. I have more faith in the youth than in experience. The job of students today isn't to solve the previous generations' problems. They created their own problems, and I think your job should be creating problems that become so interesting that they focus all of your own attention.

F: When do you define the half-life of that process? Every year, every 6-months, every time Apple produces a new range of laptops?

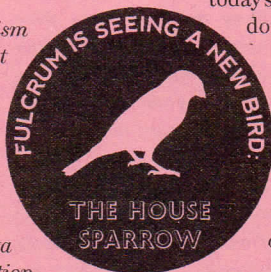
BS: I honestly don't know. It isn't in any way to dismiss enduring & interesting problems that help define the discipline of architecture & architectural knowledge, but I think those always need to be

reconfigured by a generation as they come forward on their own terms. Because you see the world anew, you see it in different ways than those that have come before you. For me that's what the history of someone like Mies tells us. He made an urgent, valid, interesting argument of what architecture should be, but when we died in 1969 that argument ended. If you look at the generation that came of age in the 1960s, when those other orthodox pioneers were exiting the stage, they didn't try & solve that previous generation's definition of what Modernism was, they simply created their own terms for engagement.

F: In the 20th Century there was a parallel between education and profession - as a student or apprentice one learnt directly from a master, to become in turn a master who directed disciples below him. You mentioned Mies, FLW is another. As the role of the architect shifts to become a more fluid exchange with other professionals, how do you think our education will respond?

BS: What you will find is that an educational setting like the AA becomes increasingly a model - not for other schools - but for interesting offices. What distinguishes a certain kind of office from a world full of professionals out there is that they see themselves as producers of knowledge & culture. They structure themselves in a way that ideas can flow in & out. It really does distinguish those places from other offices in the very same way that the AA distinguishes itself from other schools. We don't have a theory for how to teach architecture, we don't have a curriculum for it, we don't have a plan for it. We just have a belief that you create

continued overleaf.



SHARP & SHIP SHAPE

Even the infrequent reader will have noticed several changes to *Fulcrum*, not least of which the colour of the page.


Amongst other things, this term will see us get more specific about the subject of our issues.

In fact, we will be focussing almost exclusively on contemporary architectural education, its modes of representation, & its modern value.

We are also asking for more student writing & pressing for ten issues in an 8-week term. So get ready for something of a *Fulcrum* overload!

THE EDITORS.

THE POWER & GLORY



Fulcrum is now 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!

TELL US ABOUT IT

Fulcrum is looking to provide more student editorial, & we need your voice. From public events to the quality of unit agendas, tell us what you think & help build the AA of tomorrow. Please email us.



LONELY HEARTS

Fulcrum will be taking personals ads from next week. Whether you're looking for love or just a roll in the hay this summer, write a pithy epithet and put yourself in the saddle...

BIRD IS THE WORD

The global population of the House Sparrow continues to grow — with birds recently discovered as far afield as Iceland (1990) and the volcanic island of Rishiri, Sea of Japan (1999). But while elsewhere it thrives, in our fair capital the House Sparrow is in chronic decline.

Although still spotted in Bedford Square, most Sparrows cannot afford to settle their nests in Bloomsbury. As a result, the population is increasingly split between East and West London.

Cockney Sparrows often fall victim to fixed-gear bikes & empty flat white cups. Coupled with consistently rising rent and tuition fees, it is no wonder that (as the RSPB notes) the East End Sparrow is now virtually extinct. Kensington & Chelsea have seen a steady population over the last few decades, with numbers all but unaffected by the Global Financial Crisis.

The future of the London House Sparrow relies on their ability to form strong communities. Academics dispute that a large population may actually be counter-productive to the formation of Sparrow identity.

Red-listed in London, it is nonetheless comforting to see the bird thriving in foreign climes like Seoul and Spain.

YEAR OF CHANGE

2011 will be remembered as a year of global democratic groundswell. Get a slice of the action and remember to vote for School Council.

You can cast your ballot by seeking out the rep. "on campus" (before 5pm, Friday 6th). Alternatively, emulate the cool kids in the Middle East and harness the Internet's power for change. Also, of equal importance, a reminder that the AV referendum is tomorrow.

FROM FRONT:

a place where people with an incredible diversity of experience & ambition come together, for the most part in small rooms, & work long hours, & weird things happen.

F: Can we know what we need to teach about architecture?

BS: We can get people together into a room & see what they talk about. Honestly, you can't have a plan beyond that. Rather, I don't believe you should. Think of a mind like Cedric Price & his idea that architecture would be an open-ended, flexible infrastructure, or platform, & nothing more than that. You can't possibly teach that as an idea & if you do it just becomes a formula, & once it's reduced to a formula, it has no real interest or capacity to affect the world in the way that Cedric was arguing for.

We are seeing today the end of an architectural culture developed in the late 19th Century, first in Europe, then North America, in which the professional world sits to one

side & the educational world is a sort of vocational realm to prepare us for a profession. Architecture at that point was professionalising itself. It wasn't happening again, it was happening for the first time ever. In the early 20th Century the modern office as we know it emerged as a regimented, legislated setting for the professional pursuit of architecture. Schools are created to try & train minds & skills that can support those offices. By the middle of the century it's already industrialised & being emulated country by country. By the end of the 20th century, its worldwide project is complete. All countries have professional, carefully licensed, carefully regimented offices. That project is now over & what resulted was a great cost to what we think of as the culture of

architecture as a form of cultural production. What we are living through now is a period in which we all sense the need to try & recover that possibility of architecture as culture, as public discussion & debate.

F: I want to pick up on something Mark Cousins has mentioned, that during this process of the emergence of the profession in the 19th century, the architect, unlike the doctor or lawyer, never managed to fully monopolise their chosen field, in that they never managed to monopolise all buildings. Iain Sinclair said at a lecture here last year he felt the architect was on the verge of obsolescence & that we had become marginalised.

BS: That argument is often made, that somehow architects have worked themselves out of a job — because we keep handing over what we do to engineers, cost consultants, project managers, etc. But if you see architecture as the production of knowledge, not the production of buildings, I think there is no more durable model of a discipline than there is of architecture.

The thing that architecture has really invented is the idea of the design studio. The studio system as a form of knowledge, where we produce ideas not by sitting down & reading texts & then getting questioned about it, but by producing projects, has become a model — you can look at many industries today that have adopted it, particularly software & high technology industries. Architecture's real contribution is the way in which it actually produces new ideas. Its not thinking or knowledge, it's learning. In an era that's been defined, for better or worse, around this idea of a learning economy, or an information economy, that capacity for learning is what makes architects the very opposite of obsolescent. Today the architect is being taken on as a model for everything from the writing of fiction to the writing of software to every kind of design culture imaginable, whether it's web design or shoe design.