

# Anyone

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# I do not mind people being innocent, but I hate when they're naive

PETER EISENMAN: The other night at dinner, Pedro Gadanho, the curator of architecture at MoMA, said that the institution is not going to do exhibitions like the 1932 “Modern Architecture” show and the “Deconstructivist” show anymore. They are not going to show heroic architecture. What’s your reaction to that? Architecture is one of the few disciplines that eats its young, or in other words, eats its heroes. Painting, sculpture, literature, and film all have heroes, and that’s what makes the discipline vibrant. Architecture has always attempted to downplay the hero and move toward the average and the ordinary. I want your reflection on this issue, because it has to do with our attempt at stocktaking.

BERNARD TSCHUMI: You are raising two very different issues – one that has to do with the society we live in, and the other with the institution of MoMA, which is actually fairly central to that particular society. I would address the two things separately. Heroic moments, as we all know, are manufactured. They are artificially edited to appear as “heroic.” They do fill the major role of clarifying which issues are important in the incredible amount of information that we have at our disposal today. It’s necessary to identify certain moments in history, certain groups of individuals, and certain buildings as major points or markers, like signs in a landscape. Otherwise, you cannot articulate a discourse, you cannot oppose issues to others, you cannot develop a dialogue. The question is, who does that editing? Who makes those distinctions? In history, we’ve occasionally seen that it was the protagonists themselves. For example, [Filippo Tommaso] Marinetti does not ask the museum of whatever to publish his manifesto. He does it himself, through friends in a newspaper, and they make a lot of fuss. That’s one way to do it. Another

way is, obviously, through the media. The media does it all the time – it sells magazines, it raises awareness. Of course, museums and educational institutions have also celebrated heroes. If an institution doesn't do this, other people will, like the Salon des Refusés, to cite one example.

Your remark regarding MoMA engages only MoMA. It's MoMA's problem. It's MoMA's decision. I was wondering if it would have made that much of a difference to each of the seven protagonists if the "Deconstructivist" show had not happened. I think that, individually, it would have made very little difference. Each architect would have continued his or her work and engaged in the same kind of research. I would say that almost every one of them would be exactly where he or she is today. However, what would have been lost was an incredible opportunity to engage issues that went far beyond the individual protagonists. That's where it becomes interesting to have those strange groupings and encounters.

PE: You make a very good point. What that show really did was to have the effect of undercutting historical postmodernism.

BT: It accelerated the undercutting. The phenomenon would have happened, regardless. The influence of those seven people and a few others around them was already evident in a number of other institutions. How many schools of architecture were defending a postmodern historicist view at the time? Very few. Something was already in motion, and hence what you could say is that exhibitions, or events of this kind, have the power to either accelerate or slow down social or other historical directions. Another exhibition in New York, the 1977 "Ecole des Beaux-Arts" exhibition, solidified and accelerated the discourse on the return to history. Because of their aura, these moments have an effect, an

influence. But I don't think they change the course of history.

PE: The next architecture shows at MoMA are on Henri Labrouste and Le Corbusier. What are they going to do? Cause a Le Corbusier revival? What do you think of back-to-back Le Corbusier and Labrouste shows, in terms of the current situation?

BT: I'm ecstatic about having both Le Corbusier and Labrouste shows, since I'm really interested in those two characters. Currently, there is a Matisse show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which I saw first in Paris at the Centre Pompidou. Matisse has had very little impact on my thinking, and yet I viewed the exhibition with extraordinary delight. I particularly looked at the idea of doubles and triples and similar sequences – things like that have always interested me. In certain historical shows, you can read parallels with some issues we may be interested in. For example, Le Corbusier and movement and the grid, Labrouste and facade and structure and communication – they're still extremely contemporary subjects. But that's totally different from stocktaking.

PE: It's not stocktaking. The Decon show *was* stocktaking, the '32 exhibition *was* stocktaking. Doing Le Corbusier and Labrouste is different. One is stocktaking and one isn't. Could you comment on that?

BT: Rather than acting as solidified institutions, museums have fairly independent curators. Things do evolve. I would not, at this moment, try to focus the discussion on the issue of what MoMA is or is not. I'm more interested in asking what might be the hypothetical exhibition or event that would constitute stocktaking today.

PE: You said there was a second part to my

question. One was the institution of MoMA, which we are now putting to the side, and the second was the general condition of the social-economic-political milieu.

BT: Changes in the social-economic-political milieu have always had an energizing role in architecture. You mentioned the “Deconstructivist” show. At the time when those seven architects began the work they got to be known for, New York City was going bankrupt, no architect could find work, and the situation was not much better in Europe. It inevitably gave each of us the opportunity to ask certain fundamental questions that might not have been asked in an economy of affluence. In this sense, there was a cause-and-effect relationship between our questioning and the social-economic-political context.

To turn it the other way, around the year 2000, when an incredible influx of money and commissions started to emerge, that influx had a corresponding but possibly reverse effect on the architecture that was being produced. Certain ideas that used to be formulated intelligently stopped being intelligent and became bombastic. They turned into monumental self-indulgent exhibitionism – or iconism – but nevertheless produced a few interesting monuments that we today refer to still as key moments of that period. So shifts in society do have an effect on architecture. It seems like a cliché that at times when there is less money around, there may be more thinking taking place, and when there is more money around, there is less thinking taking place.

PE: One could argue that the Bernard Tschumi pedagogy of the '90s at Columbia encouraged a climate that led to the proliferation of digital experimentation. The most advanced digital representations and attitudes and developments of software and algorithms

were happening there. It was a heady mix. One could argue that there is some correspondence between what happened at Columbia – and almost uniquely at Columbia – and the bombastic iconicity of some of the products that occurred in the first decade of this century.

BT: I'd like to step back, not looking at just a short period of history. Let me start somewhere in the mid-1960s. You know that period as well as I do, so we might sort of complement one another. There was an absolute solidification of the ethos and recently cataloged ideas of the Modern Movement. The corporate modernism that followed had reached such a point that major irritation started to build up. The demonstrations against the demolition of specific buildings in the center of cities – in Brussels, in Paris, in New York with the demolition of the original Penn Station. For other reasons, but in a similar social vein, the student uprisings in France and in the US. Before these uprisings, there were already a few architects exploring issues outside the codes of modernism, either inventively, or critically, or both, such as Yona Friedman, Archigram, or Cedric Price, among others.

PE: You can't leave Venturi out.

BT: Indeed, you have Venturi in the US and Rossi in Europe. They are both really important, mostly in terms of what happens next. But let's stay a minute with Archigram and Cedric Price, and let's not forget Superstudio and Archizoom, which were saying their purpose was not to show the way to the next step but rather to verify where the system was going – in other words, to articulate a critical, sometimes cynical voice about the negative outcomes of the era. It's an interesting moment because the mood was critical and quite radical in its opposition to the received ideas

of what architecture is ordinarily supposed to represent – order, and so forth. In a sense, its impetus was quite anti-architectural. In a case like this, almost inevitably, there is a conservative reaction. That's why Venturi appears as the savior, because he provides ammunition to that conservative reaction. The same happened in Europe, where Rossi talked about a return to typologies and constants.

PE: We have to preserve that thought as you keep going forward, because you could argue that the same thing has happened today – a conservative reflection on what happened in the '90s.

BT: That's exactly why I wanted to go back one step. You say Venturi in the US, and I could also add Leon Krier, Ricardo Bofill, Maurice Culot, and many others in Europe who advocated a return to history. It all consolidated into architectural postmodernism – not the postmodernism of art and literature but a very specific brand of architectural conservatism. At the time of the “Deconstructivist” show, the mainstream architectural establishment was solidly historicist and postmodern. It was a period of high conservatism. So MoMA marked that moment of change through the show. Of course, all seven protagonists in the '88 show had been doing their thing for a dozen years; the show was situated almost at the end of that conservative moment. MoMA had put a case on the table in 1977 with the Beaux-Arts show. It was now off the table. There were new forces to consider. As it happens, historical postmodernism vanished within just five years. There were no more “good guys” and “bad guys,” but, instead, a lot of experimentation taking place.

PE: It rapidly undercut whatever “Strada Novissima” was in the '80s, so that by 1990 it was gone.

BT: Yes. Suddenly there was no left or right anymore, but there was that incredible fire raging, and it was quite exciting. The effect of computers was enormous because it accelerated the experimentation, allowing certain things to take place that would not have happened so fast or so broadly. You could suddenly do things that you couldn't have done otherwise. I would say it was like the invention of the elevator, which suddenly gave rise to all those towers. As a result, something incredible happened. From the late '80s and around that one particular show, who was taking the lead in creativity in architecture? It's not the offices or the individual architects, it's the schools. The offices, even the large firms, were desperate to hire those hot kids from Columbia. Suddenly the issue of influence – not power, but influence – is really centered around the schools to such an extent that a decade later, just after 2000, a new phenomenon takes place. It's a combination of 9/11 and Bilbao, as well as the economy allowed by the new European Union, a totally uncontrolled possibility of borrowing money, and also the booming economies in Asia and the Middle East. Suddenly, the congregation of all these factors created an exciting, if terrifying monster, which is the icon.

PE: And the computer.

BT: The computer is part of it, but it's like the money. In other words, these are things that allowed the acceleration. The icon is already identified by the very fact that, whether it is the Opera House in Sydney or the Guggenheim in Bilbao, it can put a city on the map.

PE: It gets media. It gets investment.

BT: Yes, altogether. Someone said to me the day before yesterday, “What about politics, what about the 99 percent in architecture?”

I personally happen to work more for cities and governments that have a left-leaning majority, but they always ask me exactly the same thing as those on the right. They all want an iconic building.

PE: Let's go to the icon. We are in the grips of this question of the icon, whether it's left or right. How does one determine what makes a good icon as opposed to a bad icon? What is kitsch? There doesn't seem to be any way of adjudicating, because taste is out the window. Functionalism is out the window. How does one judge icons?

BT: We both know that, historically, there have been a number of buildings that, due to the wish of the client – whether a pope, a king, or a large corporation – were recognized as incredibly significant for the institution. St. Peter's, the IBM headquarters by Breuer, the Seagram building by Mies, for example. These were buildings that were intended to celebrate the company or the religion, and the role of the architect was to provide an image or identity to that institution, it was branding. St. Peter's would not have been okay if it had been simply a little brick chapel. That, I would say, is unavoidable – it's our history.

PE: But that's not where we are today.

BT: No, it's not. I think that part of our history is still valid. If I'm asked to do a small museum in an almost untouched valley in Burgundy to celebrate a nearly forgotten but very important battle, I'm still expected to create an image that will somehow resonate with what may or may not have happened. It doesn't have to be mimetic at all. It has to pay respect. This has always been the case.

PE: It's the scale on which it now exists.

BT: The question is when everybody wants an icon, when everything *has* to be an icon. As if you choose a meal and you want to have the lobster, the steak, the chocolate mousse, the foie gras, and the caviar, all together on the same plate. Icons can only work if they can be differentiated from the rest. When everybody does icons, then, inevitably, you see that some are better at it than others.

PE: Define what *better* is.

BT: There is an amazing talk by Hermann Broch, from 1950, called "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch." It deals with romanticism, and by the way, romanticism is not completely separate from what we are discussing. He says that most of the work that comes out of romanticism is sheer kitsch. While Tchaikovsky and Wagner may be geniuses, every follower inspired by them makes kitsch. I can't help but think that if Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry are the Wagner and Tchaikovsky of our time, then yes, all the followers, or imitators, may be the kitsch-makers of our time. So we arrive at this situation in architecture where, indeed, there is an enormous amount of ridiculously bad work that will likely be an embarrassment to its authors years from now. But more important is the fact that it is somehow permeating a discourse, a sensibility. Since most clients can't see the difference, it suddenly becomes the central part of the discourse.

The other day, when I saw the buildings in Dallas by OMA/REX and Thom Mayne – which are quite interesting buildings – and then the building by Louis Kahn in Fort Worth, the Kimbell, I was floored to see the extent to which the Kimbell is totally understated, while the two others use figurative means to attract attention, in contrast to Kahn's abstraction. The Kimbell's figurative arches are architecturally derived, while

the Wyly Theater's curtains and the Perot Museum's earthquakes are not.

PE: You've taken two architects from the supposed Pantheon of heroes, two Pritzker Prize winners, Mayne and [Rem] Koolhaas, and said they are leading the movement toward more and more iconicity. Certainly Rem's earlier work was modest compared to Seattle and to Porto. Suddenly we're getting strange incarnations: the scale gets bigger, the gesture gets more active. It is the same with Thom Mayne and Zaha. I may be wrong, and I love Zaha's work, but her early work has a critical idea about the transformation of space and time that I think the later work doesn't.

BT: The Casa da Música in Porto and the Seattle Library are remarkable pieces of work that raise a whole series of important architectural questions. There is a substantial quality and invention, in the sense of pursuing goals of the discipline, pursuing knowledge. At the same time, I'm seeing a shift toward the use of a narrative that has very little to do with architecture – the return of metaphors and analogies that are suddenly the inevitable means to explain, sell, and develop a project, even to oneself. Take the Yokohama Ferry Terminal by Foreign Office Architects: a wave. Herzog & de Meuron: a bird's nest. Toyo Ito: trees. You, Peter, have used certain analogies in this way. Even I have a hard time avoiding it completely. The press and the general public expect these analogies, and it's hard not to let them do so. That changes the nature of the discourse tremendously. I remember coming to America for the first time when I was 17 and going to museums to see abstract expressionism, and the guide would almost always tell the group what forest or clouds they should see in the paintings. I think we are in exactly that predicament now. Populism has entered.

I recently lost a major competition that was judged only on a three-minute animation, by a politician who had never judged any architecture before. In other words, the rules of the game have been shifting.

PE: That still doesn't answer it for me. We are architects stocktaking. Our clients want something new, and they want it different. They don't want the old Bernard Tschumi or the old Peter Eisenman, they want a new Bernard Tschumi. Everybody now wants an icon. And everybody wants media. These outside influences have become corrosive. It's even gotten into the schools, into the pedagogy.

BT: We should get back into philosophical discussions. Hegel talks about architecture as the supplement.

PE: But in [Jacques] Derrida, that is a good thing.

BT: Yes, but when the supplement is there only in order to provide the icing on the cake, then you are in the period of the late-Rococo modern.

PE: Facading, or surfacing.

BT: Facading. With surfacing you start with a shape or a functional assembly, or a geometric assembly, and then you add the wrap around it. You know Frank is very elemental, very functional, and then he throws a blanket over it. The reasonable people work like Gehry; the less reasonable people start with whatever and then try to fit the functions into it, but the outcome is often pretty much the same.

PE: How do we tell good from bad, since the outcome is pretty much the same?

BT: I have a simple way. The first thing some architects do these days, whether they do it

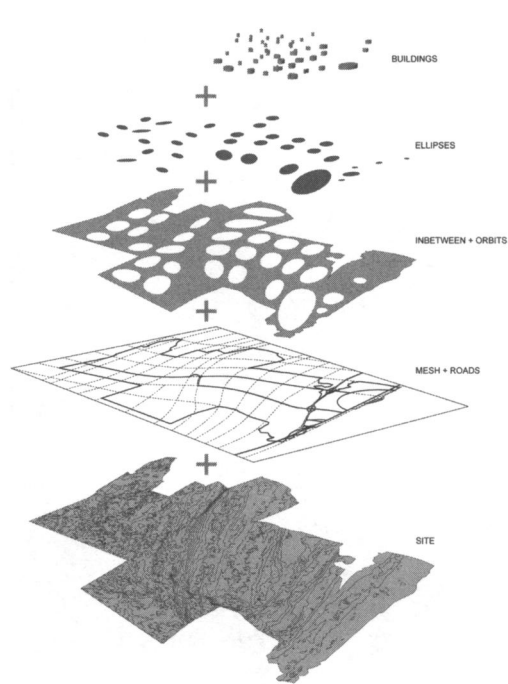


fundamentals by again understanding orientation, climate, and even transportation.

PE: The next question: urbanism. We have had no new architectural urbanism that I can think of since [Colin] Rowe's collage city and [Oswald Mathias] Ungers' dialectical city. There haven't been postulates in almost 50 years. People are building new towns in China of two million and three million people, kitsch reflections of suburbs, and towns like Seaside and Celebration. Is there room for thinking this? Is there a scale that one could think this? Are there potential models?

BT: I'll talk about tabula rasa a bit. Are the Middle East, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, areas of Shanghai, many places in China, tabula rasa? What is tabula rasa today in comparison to ideas that have already been proposed – in the 18th century by Ledoux and others, in the 20th century with the Russian constructivist cities, or with Tony Garnier, for example? There are plenty of those models, many of them fundamentally fascinating. We have to go further than just tabula rasa. The question is, what is a concept for the city today? Different demonstrations that work both on the level of a strategy and on the level of an architectural statement are possible. By strategy I mean that cities today are built over a number of years and cost a lot of money. Governments are going to change during that period, so finance is an issue. Yet some architects simply think that they will be able to design a city somewhere in the middle of the desert from scratch. That doesn't correspond to any real examples.

I'm doing a small city for 40,000 people near Santo Domingo. The whole strategy is to create a reverse archipelago, to use a word that Pier Vittorio also uses, after Ungers and Koolhaas. In other words, it is a series of individual entities that have a certain level of autonomy, nevertheless the whole still



BERNARD TSCHUMI ARCHITECTS, ELLIPTIC CITY IFCA, SANTO DOMINGO, 2005. EXPLODED AXONOMETRIC.

works and can take into consideration the economic speed or lack thereof. You have to combine the circumstances of the site into the plan, and by site I mean not only the land but also the economic and political circumstances.

PE: Take the archipelago idea. Whether you're using it or not, it started with Ungers and Koolhaas in Berlin almost 40 years ago.

BT: Yes, but in their case, it was a selective way to determine what was to be kept or not in the existing city, which is not tabula rasa. In Santo Domingo, the site appears to be 7,000 acres of tabula rasa. There is just seemingly endless forest. But a forest is not tabula rasa. I kept it and carved voids into it, so it's sort of an archipelago in reverse. What I'm talking about has more to do with a discontinuous network of autonomous territories.

PE: So you believe, then, that it is possible to consider other alternative urban models for development today that are generative or have transformative possibilities?

BT: Yes, I'm convinced there are – I know there are. But you cannot disengage the economic and political circumstances of these ideal models, and you have to be clever enough to choose the right one and to adapt and reinvent it.

PE: Let's turn to Bernard Tschumi the teacher and pedagogue. Do you believe that a curriculum in architecture could be formulated that involves the necessary incorporation of precedent? There are people who think there are no more precedents, that the digital revolution has said all we need to learn is how to make algorithms. How do we teach precedent, or history and theory, and how do we teach design in an age when anything goes?

BT: I think the question is important, whether you are in education or outside of it, since inevitably architects have to learn something somewhere. I'm of an age that when I went to school in the '60s, the idea of precedent, just as it has for at least the last 100 years, would constantly refer to certain palazzi and major plans from different cultures and periods of history, and so forth. It included the modern era: Villa Savoye, Palace of Nations, etc. That created a general architectural culture, a common denominator, an understanding about oneself. At the same time, it also created somewhat of a straight-jacket, both formally and ideologically. Projects were expected to fit within a given number of types, and some of those types became literal clichés that were used again and again. And by the '70s, the attitude of some of us was, "No, let's reject these a priori models. Let's reject the catalogue of received ideas. Let's reject them because they have

become canons and unavoidable reference points, and see to what extent one can write an alternative history."

So began a rejection of many of those precedents, certainly among some of the most interesting people of my generation. Still, there are a number of issues in architecture that are not any different today than they were in 1813 or in 1613, certain constants – like gravity, or the depth of a building in relation to daylight – that define the territory in which we operate intellectually. These constants lead to a number of possible solutions, or maybe "types." Sometimes you can invent a new type or creatively transgress an old one, or turn it upside down, but nevertheless, much of the spatial vocabulary and grammar already exists. Not knowing about it at all is a sign of complete ignorance, of naivete, and it forces you to reinvent everything all the time, which is a fantastic waste of energy. It costs a lot of money and a lot of time, and it's also an impoverishment of architecture. This has nothing to do with shapes or forms. History is here as part of one's background. It's inevitably part of what you are *because* you are an architect. It's an important part of understanding architecture. I do not mind people being innocent, but I hate when they're naive.

PE: Derrida said that architecture will always look like architecture. That doesn't help one to define what is critically or culturally important today.

BT: Then I have to add one thing, which is talking about what a building is and what it is not. I reread [Nikolaus] Pevsner not long ago, and when he claims a bicycle shed is a building, a cathedral is architecture, I would reply that a bicycle shed with a concept is architecture, a cathedral without one is not. Architecture is not only about forms; architecture is about concept and ideas, and, alone among many other disciplines, it has

to materialize them. An architecture that does not have a concept is not architecture. Some of the works that you see around with extraordinarily complex algorithms and a stopping point, or whatever, have a shape but no concept. They are not architecture if they don't have a concept or an idea.

PE: Are you suggesting that all of our pedagogy revolves around the evolution of concept development?

BT: I teach a seminar that originally covered 1968 to the present, but has slowly evolved in terms of the various architectural concepts involved. I discuss concepts and use works as illustrations of those concepts. That's how I teach. I think it's absolutely fundamental. When you have students who show you great shapes, what can you say? It looks like a bird, it looks like a dove, it looks like a fish.

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