



Architecture *Studio* for Idiots

This is an idea for a series of short workshops that offer students advice and guidance on how to succeed in the Architecture program. The title, in case some might misunderstand, is taken from the popular series of guide books about sometimes complicated subjects, intended to reach a broad audience. The spirit of the offering is to make the notion of the sometime esoteric studio style of education more approachable and, for the student, more successful. These workshops will address matters that, if covered at all, can only be addressed independently and discontinuously in the present program of courses and programs: how to manage time; how to present ideas; how to engage critics; how to make the most of an instructor's advice; how to learn from history; how to consider the various contexts of a site; how to tailor a personal critical method ...

Any architecture program is threatened by the tendency to reduce architectural education to the methods of communicating content. Inherent in the traditions of teaching architecture is the principle that the most significant component of education is self-generated. Only the student who learns how to be self-disciplined, curious, original, and independent can succeed by breaking away from the instructive field. With independence comes the responsibility to be sensitive to the needs of others, and to the environment, on more inclusive scales. The true goal of architecture education is to create students able to construct their own study programs. No program can teach this independence literally, but it can offer the means by which students can optimize their chances of determining their own professional, intellectual, and artistic futures.

This workshop on presentation tricks, critical thinking, use of analogies, etc. does not adopt any position about architectural values — no favorite architects, no position on technology, etc. The intention is to focus on how participants may cease to be trapped by an "us-them" mentality, with presentations of their work reduced to promotion. The basis of this view is the tradition of the critique as a dynamic event in which, out of the exchanges of the audience, critics and presenters, new concepts emerge. Optimizing this event through personal action is not simply a matter of improving "presentation skills" but of understanding the dramatic and social structure that opens participants to new possibilities. Skills are required to re-conceive this traditional means of evaluation, and the responsibility for acquiring and using those skills belong almost exclusively to students whose work develops through such encounters.

Workshops

1/See Ourselves as Others See Us: This workshop looks at the use of space in the classic critique, the function of objects, representations, and participants. It looks at the structure of time, the rhetoric of presentation, and the rules of engagement. The aim is to manage time before the critique to improve the value of the event for all, and to see the critique as transformative rather than evaluative.

2/The Site of Exception: The context of architectural work is the site, historically and culturally conceived, generalized into the function played by other works of art, professional practices, and events that bear on the program and use of the proposed buildings. Too often the site is reduced to its physical qualities that, once set by the "site model," play no role further than as a checklist for how well the proposal matches its environment, as if the former were an organ transplanted into the latter, in need of immune-suppressing drugs. The re-conceptualization of the site uses interactive techniques to activate the idea of the site as a renewable resource for the architectural project.

3/See What I Say: Architects are not famous for their literariness or philosophical/critical correctness, yet architecture as a subject and a profession engages ideas that are among the most complex and difficult. Any project runs the risk of being over-run by the ideas that the student feels are important. To discredit these ideas is defeating, but to allow the project to be over-determined by any conceptual program forecloses any opportunity to use architecture as architecture. This workshop focuses on means of "thinking through forms," using spatiality and temporality to frame issues of importance and means of representation to avoid reducing spatio-temporality to clichés unable to inform creative inquiry. The workshop focuses on the necessity to use architecture as a means to discover and develop ideas, not express pre-formed or borrowed fragments.

TIME-FRAME OF THE WORKSHOPS: Workshops use evening sessions, weekend sessions, and on-line components to avoid conflict with the ongoing program or work demands of other courses. Faculty must not be faced with any time conflicts or other interruptions of their course designs. Workshops are offered as the on-going semester schedule permits, with special multi-workshop sessions offered over holidays. Student participation is free, voluntary, with no course credits (certificates could be given). The benefits of participation should be evident in improvements in work done in studio and other courses. Landscape Architecture students and others would be invited to participate.