The Architecture Studio — A Self-Educational Style for Everyone

The traditional method of learning to be an architect has been specific to the education of architects only in terms of supply. Only those students who declare that being an architect is their vocational goal get to try it. When they fail, they drop out; when they succeed they are passed on to either a term of internship and licensure or to an advanced degree program where the studio method is repeated, along with courses focused even more on the career choice of professional practice or pedagogy.

What about those who complete much or all of the studio program but don't take up professional practice? Has their time been wasted? Architectural educators apparently think so, since there has been little generalization about the benefits of the studio method in general, without the dedication to getting a job in the field. There are no programs for "failed architects" (unless one considers teachers to come from this class), no redirections, no consolation prizes. Even those who teach architecture are required to produce some case for a legitimate relation to practice, either by carrying on professional practice while teaching, having the ability to do so, or nodding at required intervals in the direction of professional interests. Very few academics are permitted to oppose the ideas or methods of professional practice, or dissent from the general model that subordinates the studio as a means to the end of getting a job as a professional architect.

There are two powerful arguments against this means-to-an-end thinking. The first is based on the statistic of those who complete or nearly complete the studio course of study but do not become professional architects, yet feel that their experience in studio was not only positive but essential to their well-being and intellectual outlook. They did not "waste their time" by foregoing the chance to apply what they learned. Rather they carry the studio method with them into all kinds of experiences and projects. Architecture is not, for them, a professional relation to clients and contractors but, a way of thinking about the world. Architecture is already "in" experience and our relation to it; it is for everybody, not just those who call themselves architects.

The second argument has to do with learning in general. The first argument is based on seeing architecture everywhere and thus not counting the method of learning it as a waste, no matter what one does in life. For learning, the case is more one of method itself. How do we learn? The majority of university learning is based on the idea that knowledge is content, despite our understanding — admitted by everyone — that true knowledge is based on experience. This is not simply about "applying what you learned to real life" but the need for engagement that does not first reduce knowledge to some finished-off state, independent of the ways in which it can be assimilated. A book does not "contain" knowledge; it offers a mode of engaging with the thoughts and anxieties of the writer, of sympathizing with the context in which the writer, as much as the reader, wrestles with the unknown, with limitation, with doubt. A library is not a "collection of books" except in a limited sense. It is an extension of the mode of engaging knowledge by visiting it, provoking it, failing as well as succeeding to make progress in understanding the viewpoints of others.

Despite the fact that the "content model" is false in nearly every sense; and despite the fact that even content requires active engagement; courses, tests, grading systems, rewards, and certifications emphasize an empty-full model of learning, with knowledge being "poured into the heads" of learners. This works as a metaphor under certain circumstances, but it fails to explain what goes on in learning.

We know that learning is based on consent, the free choice of the learner to learn. This is the minimal atom of activity that grounds all others that may seem to be passive. Consent is required to listen to a lecturer, or sit in place reading a book or watching a film. Consent is the active choice to be passive, so even while the learner appears to be silent and motionless, he/she has actively consented to the situation. Resistance is another form of active relations to learning; it is the "so what?" element that challenges what is learned. It is minimally present in all learning, even if it is quickly answered ("I *must* learn this bit of idiocy or I will not become a lawyer"). Resistance is the sub-text of education; it is either subordinated to some other rule ("I don't believe this or understand it fully, but I must pretend to if I want to get a job") or it can be employed to ask questions, provoke sources, test authorities.

The two arguments, the first showing that there are uses for studio education other than professional practice of architecture, the second, "positive" argument that studio education promotes the neglected key component of action, combine to suggest that there should be a *third way* of thinking about architecture studio. In other words.

Not as an exclusive means to the end of becoming a professional;

Not as a by-product of a the failure to become a professional architect that, incidentally, has some alternative uses;

But: a set of practices and attitudes toward learning that are good for *any kind of learning*, *with or without a goal of "doing something useful."*

Even for those engaged in using architecture studio in the "traditional way" — those with full intentions to become professional architects or teachers — this *intrinsic* value, the relation of studio to learning in general, is key. Without knowing studio's relation to learning in general, studio cannot be fully appreciated for its specific applications in professional programs. While the intrinsic value of studio is acknowledge by nearly everyone who has had experience with studio-style learning, the idea of refining this kernel of studio value and promoting it separately from the institutional settings of producing professional architects has not come up. It is as if the *form* of the tool has not been appreciated, only the function. Therefore, the tool's exclusive relation to the one function has kept it from developing its most important power — that of opening up the *one key element* of education that is universally acknowledged as being the kernel of essential value.

From two sides, one side involving a liberation of an overly restricted method, the other side the opening-up of the one element of learning that, everyone acknowledges, is the key, the idea of an "architectural studio for everyone" seems not only natural but essential.

The question is … "Why architecture?" Why is not architecture generalized into, for example, "human-environment relations" or "spatial thinking" or "the fundamentals of fabricating"? This would seem to be the minimalist gesture required to invite non-architects into what has, up to now, been a methodology that has qualified the study of architecture as such.

And, what about the objection that architecture studio is not the only kind of studio — in fact that it is only a minor category of the broader notion of studio, *viz.* the "artist's studio"? Architecture studio differs in key ways from other studios. Each way offers some evidence that architecture should be retained as a definitive component of the studio idea extended to personal learning projects.

1. The artist's studio works best in relation to the individual artist. Even when working as a group — for example, the cliché of students at easels set up around a model, each constructing a drawing, painting, or sculpture — the emphasis is on individual work. The "problem" to be solved is one of representation and production. The space in between the artist and model is made problematic, something to be considered in light of the frame, perspective, media, atmosphere, and many other issues. In other words, the artist's studio is not *inherently collective*.

2. Doesn't this individuation of the artist's studio relate directly to, and support, the project of converting the studio idea into something that can be employed by the solitary learner? In short, no. The collective of the architecture studio has to do with alternative points of view that are liberated methodologically as well as perceptually. The claim behind each approach is a claim *made to others*, who have made their own attempt to solve some problem. The community of the studio — with or without actual people populating this community — is the *rhetorical quality* of the activity, its desire to produce an account, to establish a legitimacy. In architecture studio, this quality is carried forward to the "critique," an institution of presenting work and inviting "outside" authorities to review and comment on it. Without the critique idea, there is no studio idea. The critique is intrinsically present in attitude of working, as it forms a public side to its private insights.

3. In architecture studio (as well as most landscape architecture studios), the emphasis is on the "success" of the proposed project rather than (as in art studios) the personal development of an individual artist's vision. It would be silly to talk of an artist "solving a problem" outside of the context of this individualized vision, which supersedes issues about what is objectively the case in the "external world." Even if objectivity is an illusion needed to make such a case, the architecture or landscape architecture studio is tilted toward objectivity rather than subjectivity. It seeks to make a difference in some "out there" way. So, the idea of "architecture" as a means of seeing this world is essential.

4. Is "architecture" required? Isn't it the case that "landscape architecture" works just as well, and (all the better) includes broader ideas about the environment, economies, history, etc.? On one level, this is all true. The case for "architecture" however relates to one key, indispensible point. Architecture is nothing without the idea of the house, and the house in the matrix of human experience is a "home." This is an alloy, a composite. Within the notion of life in the human home is the uncanny sense that there is always a residual element of the un-homely, the *Unheimlich*, as the German word for the uncanny reveals directly. This is possibly due to, or at least revealed by, the ancient use of homes as places for burial. Later, when this practice was given up, the hearth became the representative place of the dead ancestors, who continued to offer advice and bring good (or bad) luck to the living family. This home/un-home element defines other experiences in other spaces. A landscape can be un-homely or homely; an airport — where no "client" is allowed to dwell for very long — can be un-homely or homely. "Hospitality" involves both sides of the home equation. The word *hostes* produced both host and hostile, being nice to strangers and being not so nice. Places accommodate us to varying degrees, and this accommodation puts the house idea into the center of the studio idea. Even in the landscape, "architecture" involves the house, and the house regulates the relations between the living and the dead. It doesn't get more "essential" than that!

If the idea of architecture can be taken to mean the issue of home-*ful*-ness or home-*less*-ness in all kinds of circumstances and physical conditions, then it is the best means of saying why "studio" is also, in all kinds of circumstances and physical conditions, the best way to learn. Disconnecting the architecture studio from its professional obligations is the beginning of a new understanding of the studio as a *private study method*, akin to the practice of meditation or yoga — i.e. something good in its own right.