Research modes

Answering Questions

This presumes that there are 'real answers' to find, that there is a consistent framework for and of knowledge, and that architectural knowledge is an integral part of that, at least in the form of the phenomenal experiences of life and the representations of those in media. These answers have to do with the human subject and its access to truth, the relation of this truth to 'instrumental' or practical knowledge, culture, and personal life. Each answer is related to a paradigmatic enclosure that makes guesses or assumptions about the ultimate nature of knowledge and our access to it.

Developing Techniques

Much of architectural research has to do with improving the means of buildings' ability to provide shelter, safety, comfort, etc. The question should be asked, 'improving for whom?' since the many groups involved with architecture as a performative part of the physical environment can conceal the actual structure of interests. The general question of the technical should be addressed in terms of its ideological and historical conditions and implications.

Improving Delivery

One way of masking the question of ideology is to portray architecture as a 'good' that would be better if it could only discover a more effective way of 'delivering' its already available knowledge and products. The question of good is substituted by examples, implicit or explicit, of known, stable architectural conditions that seem to offer an acceptable good for users, owners, and the culture in general. The question of effectiveness is masked by using some dysfunctional condition — poverty, discomfort, inequality, fear, etc. — as a 'natural need' to be resolved. The question of solution is masked beneath the presumption that architectural problems have architectural solutions, and that, as architects, researchers should focus on explicitly architectural solutions.

Topical Inquiry

This type of research uses multiple modalities and often appears, from other positions, to be incoherent or unorganized. Topical inquiry begins with some questions or question and raises questions about the basis and contexts for the question. It looks at the structure of the problem and considers whether the problem is a symptom of something else. It presumes that human subjectivity itself is not a resolved issue, that no clear line can be drawn between subjectivity and objectivity, and that most key definitions are dialectical rather than determinative. The continuity and integrity of this form of research depends on internal resonance of ideas, a return to constant structures and situations that, in the work of others in other fields, has similar forms.