

## PEDAGOGICAL DRIFT

### Keynote Address

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### Beginning.1

Karl Marx described the blessing and, within it, the curse of modernism with these words:

*All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face . . . the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men.<sup>1</sup>*

Implied here is a complete dismantling of the agenda of a singular history, a disintegration of institutions and their attendant forms of authority and validation. It is an idealistic vision of an intelligent, critical humanity: the utopian blessing of complete freedom. Yet, in contrast to the vision, modernism has not erased those forms of authority, merely created new institutions to house them. Rather than revolutionary upheaval, change comes about through discursive reiteration.

Oddly, it is this rejection of singularity that pervades much of contemporary pedagogical discourse and which presents the architectural academy with the paradox of its own perpetual death and rebirth. The contemporary pedagogical frameworks in many schools are no longer cohesive, comprehensive programs. They are, instead, continuously formed and deformed, often confused, and yet charged with a reminiscence of each program's previous collection of pedagogical prejudices and opinions. And like Marx's remade ambition for human society, any discussion of contemporary pedagogical models becomes unquestionably labyrinthine: a mutable intellectual construct which is exceptionally fluid, often obtuse, and invariably becomes personalized and defended with a subjective bias couched in moral rectitude, falling back on the position of an appeal to traditional authorities.

Such vociferous defenses can be understood as either inherent in the various institutional structures or driven by diverse positions regarding content. In both cases, these defenses are deeply embedded in the nature of teaching and an inertial indifference inherent in the process of institutionalization. The conditions that both restrict and foster change in the various contemporary pedagogical paradigms are complex and interrelated, and they resist a coherent analytical isolation leading to broader propositions for productive change. Pedagogical drift, then, might be said to be analogous to the geological movement of continents -- of opposing geophysical forces beneath the earth's crust, with intense frictions and an apparently random or undirected upheaval. The evidence of this passage of force appears as a growing, indecipherable network of cracks and fissures upon a vast, apparently monolithic surface. Within the context of pedagogical systems then, Marx's mantra of dissolution, in combination with a cultural insecurity about what happens when authority systems dissolve creates the contemporary transitory form of teaching which is both constantly closed and perpetually open.

To preface a discussion of Tulane's recent history of beginning pedagogy, one must first lay some groundwork, in an effort to frame some of the structural or conceptual flaws inherent in the broader pedagogical model, regardless of the particular ideology behind that model. To approach these broader concerns, this paper will look first at larger issues of institutionalization in architectural education, then, more specifically, at the trajectory of Tulane's program as evidenced in the thesis studio, and finally, at both the subtle and more overt changes in the First Year Program at Tulane.

## **I. INSTITUTIONS**

To restate, or perhaps reframe the obvious, one must first apprehend the underlying institutionalized structure of the profession as a controlling bias in the development of the professional curriculum. It exerts both internal and external influences on students in defining their expectations for the future, both academically and professionally. Perhaps more significantly, the institutional authorities of the profession, in particular the AIA, NCARB and NAAB, are equally instrumental in maintaining a professional bias within faculties of Schools of Architecture, even though the model of both "profession" and

"professional" used by these organizations is at least twenty years out-of-date. Such authority exerts a profound influence on the development of a coherent pedagogical framework for both individual parts of the professional curriculum and the curriculum as a whole.

The authority of an outmoded professional bias suggests a second dilemma facing any significant reconfiguration of architectural pedagogy. Such a bias and the attendant demands upon schools of architecture continue to beg the question of the role of the institutionalization and validation of a singular pedagogical method and instructional model. The continued use of, in whatever diluted form, cookie-cutter methods to teach graphic convention in the earlier years, and later, the use of increasingly complex building "programs", rather than active instruction as the principal medium of educational exchange perpetuate the belief in the sacred cow of the "building" as primary. This point is raised not to castigate or extol the virtues of such a system. Rather, one must see this as one of the explicit difficulties inherent in the institutionalization of any educational structure.

Third, while we may claim to believe otherwise, there is also an implicit assumption among most teaching faculty that contemporary pedagogical models derive from a monolithic cohesion of a modernist Bauhaus origin. Such an assumption is as flawed as one which presupposes the singularity of origin in the pedagogical tenets and techniques of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Again, irrespective of ideological content, the Bauhaus operated from a position of authority derived from the Beaux-Arts atelier system. Such a system contains powerful subliminal codes of behavior and action that dissuade students from critical questioning in favor of architectural acquiescence.

A corollary of this last, yet an issue of equal significance, is the continued manifestation of the cult of the individual -- of personality, as evidenced in the venerated status of Gropius, Klee, Moholy-Nagy, and most significantly, Josef Albers, perpetuates the modernist myth of the architectural hero. Each of us was taught by and through some iteration of their pedagogy, and their progeny. There was -- and there remains -- within the individual studio environment an atmosphere of the master's atelier, and an authoritarian territoriality.

Finally, this notion of “progeny” -- of genealogy -- must also be investigated more closely. Each School of Architecture finds itself characterized or labeled according to the particular character of its program. Its program is shaped by the intellectual and formative biases of its faculty. Until recently, most programs and most faculties could be described through tracing a particular intellectual or personal lineage from some fictitious point or personal origin. The network of past associations, of who knows whom, of contact and a venerated recognition of a faculty's particular ancestry continues to play an important role in program development. Pedagogically we continue to reflect the exemplars of the past.

And while the characters of many programs remain embedded in this form of pedagogical incest, there is a more recent form of elitism affecting pedagogical trends: the collective academicization of faculties. Although many programs continue to function as 5 year first professional degrees, the increased number of programs offering post-graduate first professional degrees creates a new form of graduate – individuals with a broader base of cultural understanding and an elevated status in the “professional” community. Commensurate with this drift away from a professional undergraduate degree has been the development of graduate programs with a less conventional approach to architectural education: one which is more theoretically based. These are programs attuned with the agenda of cultural criticism and forays into overtly academic exercises in the studio.

Most significantly, such programs are producing the most recent additions to many faculty, changing the tenor of architectural education from one of engagement in the minutiae of professional responsibility to one of engagement of social/cultural responsibility. Since 1980, fewer and fewer B. Arch hires for tenure-track positions reveal a situation in which terminal degrees are now required for such positions. The academic (rather than professional) elitism inherent in this situation leads to an increasingly distinct form of architectural education.

The myth of the pedagogical monolith, the institutionalization of methods, the cult of personality, the bias of an institutionalized profession, and the academicization of professional education collectively create an extraordinary form of the territorial imperative, one that is most clearly manifested in the undergraduate professional curriculum. The friction of and between each of these factors produces both

vitality and stagnation in the evolution of the architectural curriculum. Yet there is an implicit paradox in the interrelationship of these elements of the architectural institution: that on the one hand there is a general bias of the power of the profession and the ability of a disembodied architectural "program" to impart architectural knowledge, and on the other that the illuminating idiosyncrasies of individuals are paramount in the acquisition of architectural knowledge.

### End.1

The question is, then, without a presumptive and generally accepted origin to the methods and ideology of architectural instruction, and with the inertia inherent in institutional, professional and individual territoriality, how does one establish a coherent critique of the colliding forces and directions of contemporary pedagogy? It is particularly instructive to document the drift of a particular pedagogical program over almost 20 years of instruction and production. In fact, these interactive forces provide the only useful means of evaluating Tulane's First Year program over the past 16 years, from 1980-1996. During those years, the School has produced a graphic document of student work for each of those years, the *Review*. It has served as documentary evidence of the nature of pedagogy and the direction of work, and as a strange form of incestuous propaganda, continuing a process of imitation and tacit validation.

In 1980 Ron Filson, a 33 year-old Yale graduate, Fellow of the American Academy in Rome and protégé of Charles Moore became the fifth Dean of the School of Architecture at Tulane, a school with the substantial weight of 100 years of architectural education behind it. His tenure lasted 12 years, at which time Donna Robertson, from Virginia, Columbia and the School of *Assemblage*, took the mantle of authority at the School. The *Review* effectively documents the threads of influence and activities of these two individuals in the history of Tulane's program. In both cases the institutionalization of particular points of view were critical in the pedagogical development of the School. In both cases the effect is indirect, through appointments, lectures and the assignment of faculty to various areas of the curriculum. Dean Robertson's effect upon the School is still emerging, though she has since departed for another deanship. Dean Filson's impact bears the relatively clear imprint of hindsight.

In 1980, the influence of post-modernism, post-structuralism and contemporary cultural criticism had yet to be felt in Tulane's program. It was regional, if not local, and the majority of its faculty had first professional degrees (B. Arch). At least half of them were Tulane graduates. Two faculty members who taught and often coordinated the First Year curriculum were artists, not architects. One of them did not have a college degree in any field. The composition of faculty at this time in peer institutions was probably similar, with a strong professional bias in conjunction with artists whose focus was the development of rudimentary compositional and graphic skills assumed to be mandatory for the subsequent study of architecture. The influx of professionals and non-professionals with M. Arch, D. Arch., or PhD. credentials is almost exclusively associated with the years after Filson's arrival. In fact, all faculty appointed after Filson's arrival are faculty with terminal degrees in their field, each representative of an evolving architectural *intelligensia*.

During these past 17 years, tracking pedagogical movement in Tulane's program is most easily seen through the evolution of work at the end of the curriculum, with the School's thesis work. The annual selection of the best work from this studio was, and continues to be, the prerogative of the faculty. Four distinct phases, each with different characters developed between 1980 and 1996. Each of these phases built upon the pedagogical elements of the previous phase. Each of them is emblematic of more subtle changes in the First Year curriculum.

The first publication of the *Review* in 1981, Fifth Year Thesis reveals work under the direction of a faculty and School typical of the 1970's, one which was strongly, if not exclusively professionally oriented. Thesis projects from 1981 and '82 clearly indicate the legacy of the previous regime's professional agenda. Both in the nature of the programs chosen and their graphic representation one finds work best characterized as conventional. Project titles and content are reflections of programmatic type, almost generic in presentation: "Office Building", "Recreational Pier", "Mississippi River Theatre", "Flexible Housing", "Athletic Club", "Wellness Center", etc. *ad nauseum*.

The first significant shift in both faculty and content occurs early in Filson's tenure. Until 1987, all of Filson's full-time appointments were connected, either through the network of West Coast education and

affiliation, or directly through the office of Charles Moore. These individuals brought to all levels of the curriculum methods and programs strongly influenced by the overt elements of post-modern discourse: a concern for architectural language, symbolism, and narrative structures. With the visual evidence of Charles Moore's *Wonderwall* at the World's Fair of 1984 and the seminal post-modern work of Piazza d'Italia, a School based in historic New Orleans was particularly primed for this shift in pedagogical bias.

By 1984, and particularly thereafter, the premiated projects from the thesis studio had clearly deviated from that of the previous professional agenda, moving into a new orbit, filled with a romantic, and subjective affair with form over content, with distinct differences in the nature of the investigation and the form of representation. An "International Headquarters for Nuclear Disarmament", "The School of Continuity, "Industrial Iconoclasm: A Museum of Industrial Archaeology", "Disjunctions -- Towards a New Spirit of Monumentality" (Greenpeace Headquarters), Ideological Expression Through Material Form: A School for Lutherie" and "Associative Mapping: An Archaeology of Memories". One particularly romantic, and untitled, project used the found ruins of military bunkers as a platform for an investigation of materiality in which crete was viewed "solely as a base, or a permanent mold where a more ephemeral world of images can grow, an architectural world of wood."

Filson's last major full-time appointments from 1989 to 1992, brought faculty with a bias toward the urban. The topography of formalism was moving away from subjective romanticism to the analytical romaniticism of "the city". In the post-Rowe era, these faculty were the products of mentors with urban biases, from Albert Pope at Rice to Mario Gandelsonas and Diana Agrest in the Northeast. The interdependence of building form and urban form were part of an articulated program of retooling the curriculum. Thesis projects were no less romantic. They were embedded, however, in a discourse of form, and more significantly of content, with the contemporary nature of the city. Selected urban sites were often marginal, post-industrial spaces. "Lost in the Labyrinth: Architecture in a Sterile Society", "Edge.Frame.Delusion", "Interstitial Edges -- A Suburban Construct" all evidence this focus.

Of particular importance during this time was a subtle shift in the students' perception of what constituted valid architectural work. The issues of building within the culture of the city are inherently more

complex than the autonomous or generic building program, replete with specific functional dictates. That complexity led to an increased dependence on intellectual and verbal justification for the work over graphic investigation. Graphic representation at the School became synonymous for cultural commentary, with a decrease in dependence on and use of conventional means of architectural representation as a method of investigation. A certain intellectual elitism was evident in the lack of both conceptual and architectural closure of final projects. Evidence of this was not limited to the thesis studio, but pervaded the upper years of the curriculum.

In the spring of 1992, Donna Robertson was appointed Dean of the School. Her three full-time appointments were significant for a number of reasons. Most important of these was that all three came from the intellectual cauldron of the Northeast: one from Princeton, one from Peter Eisenman's office and one from Harvard's D. Arch program. While reinforcing the importance of intellectual, conceptual and analytical grounding of architectural work, the curriculum over the last four years has drifted farther from that professional bias of the 1970's and early 80's. Premiated projects for thesis prizes were intellectually stimulating, but architecturally undercooked. The issues raised continued to be driven by the urban machine, but were increasingly focused on the "marginal" space of the urban environment. Growing social and cultural consciousness and a politicization of design investigation through focus on gender and the body brought projects of increased intellectual depth without a commensurate architectural depth. Bleeding projects -- projects without clear programmatic definition, or efforts to intentionally blur the conventional boundaries between things have been dominant in these recent years. Descriptive and analogous projects such as "The Skin and the Entrails", "Cross-Dressing: Image, Index and Hybrids".

## **Beginning.2**

This discussion of endings should somehow bring one back to the beginning -- to First Year design and its curriculum. Was anything happening beneath this terminal surface which reflected these changes at the end of the program? The answer is an ambiguous one: yes and no. As Venturi might once have said, tongue in cheek, "not only, but also".

It would be platitudinous to say that the First Year curriculum was so wrapped up in “design fundamentals, so “boring” and restrictive that those restrictions led to the expressive baroque-ness of Fifth Year work. It would also limit the broader curricular effects of the First Year curriculum to state that it is a characteristic of all curricula gradually present the student with greater degrees of freedom and complexity, and hence a broader palette of forms and ideas for experimentation.

While these points certainly have some merit, the reality at Tulane was and continues to be more complex, with a more subtle influence of early programs and studio exercises. The foundation studios are traditionally collaborative projects, with groups of faculty working to develop a clear pedagogy for each year of the curriculum. Collaboration implies a certain resistance to any one personal agenda. The greater good of the educational process is subsumed by the collection of individuals involved in the studio team. The fact of the matter at Tulane, and I suspect elsewhere, is somewhat less than ideal. The politics of the studio were such that most of the faculty engaged in the First Year curriculum were temporary, adjunct appointments (from two to three of the five instructors in the year). Based on the temporary nature of these faculty, these instructors invariably followed the party line of the moment. Similarly, while faculty work collaboratively on programs, once written, these programs tend to be institutionalized, and thus ossify. Once seen to “work” in a general sense, discussion on honing or redirecting programs and projects had a tendency to cease. The collaborative effort to resist stagnation disappears along the path of least resistance.

During the decade of the 1980's the program was coordinated, and dominated, by two individuals, sometimes as conjunctive coordinators, sometimes separately. The first was a local professional, an M. Arch graduate of Yale and a B. Arch graduate of Tulane in the 1960's. Many of his teachers were still on the faculty, and some were directly involved in the First Year program during his tenure as Coordinator. (All of this generation had retired by the end of the decade). The second was an MFA graduate of Florida State who had transferred into the architecture program in 1982 from the Art Department. Much of the formal and elemental biases in the program derive from this collaboration.

Variations on the theme of the curriculum they established were still in place until the 1994-95 academic year. Yet it underwent a gradual transformation with new faculty and the broader shifts in pedagogy and cultural discourse discussed above. The basic premise was articulated in the first *Review* of 1980-81, and was essentially recapitulated in each of the subsequent editions until the most recent:

*A unique and innovative program has been developed over the last two years which seeks to integrate basic design and architectural issues. During the course, students are asked to develop their abilities through projects given varying and increasingly complex architectural significance. The problems assigned incorporate the concepts of pattern, organization, built and landscape forms, and solid and void, along with the issues of color and texture, rhythm, scale and proportion. (Review, no,1, 1981, p.2)*

The basic format of the pedagogy seems very much "of convention", one which derives much of its structure and content from Bauhaus principles. The introduction of specifically architectural problems into a program designed to develop visual acuity and graphic skill is distinctive, however. It is significant that the projects reflect the same qualities of the generic, of typologically driven programs evident in the thesis projects being developed during the early 80's. First semester projects were graphic: "Found Object", not driven by program; or idealized types, like the "Ideal House". The landscape/building project, "Garden for an Architect" was simply a variation on the restrictive compositional strategies employed in the infamous 9-square "Cube" project.

These projects, evolving as narrative constructs, were dangerously autobiographical and again driven by external desires rather than any coherent form of analysis or application. On the one hand the heroic demiurge of creative intuition was embedded in the explication and content of the programs. On the other hand, the term "basic" was understood as a rational construct -- as something inherently elemental, restrictive and formulaic. While not explicitly stated, these two notions often manifested in student work as decidedly distinct classes of response to given programs. A conceptual framework was rarely in evidence.

Oddly enough, it was the ubiquitous "cube" project that underwent the most dramatic changes over the course of the 80's. In large part this can be attributed to the resistance of the faculty themselves to the usefulness of the problem, and an effort to reconfigure the problem in some way which would address more

relevant "architectural" concerns. From conventional beginnings (so much so that Cube Projects were rarely represented in the Review until more recent editions), the Cube Project became the "Facade Project", then became the "Habitable Cube", gradually moving from compositional exercise to a crude form of programmed space. Issues of color, texture and light were developed as a part of this exercise. This motion toward "occupiable" and material space coincided with the development within the School of a broader definition of architecture, again evident in the evolution of thesis projects of greater intellectual and cultural depth.

While the cube moved toward occupation, the garden moved away from it. Artificial at the outset, through the limitations of a kit a landscape parts and restrictive geometries, it was at least programmed for habitation, and it had a real world site. In its last incarnations it had replaced the cube as an exercise in composition, its site a generic, abstract construct.

The single variant on these first semester exercises came in the mid-1980's with the addition of a new member of the full-time faculty to the First Year team. Again, a protege of Moore, this faculty member, too, contributed to the shifts over the coming years, but also, in the way of institutions, became vested in the pedagogy, and continues to teach in the First Year studio.

The variant contributed by this new member of the team was known as the "Hometown Analysis" -- an innocuous title for the beginning of a significant shift in pedagogical intent. A short beginning exercise, this project introduced the idea of urban, or communal form combined with ideas of formal and spatial hierarchy: in effect, the important interrelationships between different components of real space in the city. The project was based on something known intuitively by each student, but far enough removed from the individual to permit objectification. Through this objectification, a more significant element of the design process was introduced -- that of analysis as a fundamental tool of an architect's vision.

The development of rudimentary visual and graphic skills thus accomplished, the second semester of the First Year has been devoted to more conventional investigations of building design. While more directly "architectural", these projects followed the same general pedagogical strategy of externally imposed limitations, from material to form to program to site. Such limits usefully serve to frame a project through

a restriction of the student's focus. This strategy continues to be in place in Tulane's First Year curriculum. What emerges over time is the direction of that focus. It is here that one finds the drift of pedagogy most manifest.

The early years of the 80's produced projects consistent with the School's focus on basic compositional problems working from generic types: house, garden, studio, cafe. The sites were generally contrived abstractions that ended at the end of the piece of paper upon which they were so carefully drawn. Again, after 1984 there is a clear movement toward projects with a less idealizing focus. Sites in New Orleans' nineteenth century warehouse district, and on the levee along the Mississippi River manifest an increasing engagement with the city. The focus on object-making in the first semester, however, continued to reinforce physical distance and strategies of formal organization over critical engagement.

Similarly, the texture of material and light on real and imagined surfaces became increasing apparent in programs during the second semester. Wall making and frame making were directly connected to structural and architectural space-making. Delving into the romantic realm of the sensuous, however, continued to be constrained by the "kit of parts", and by an underlying precedence of formal composition over conceptual depth.

External pressures on the First Year curriculum at Tulane at the end of the decade were increasingly apparent, in large part because of the introduction of new faculty and the pedagogical discourse nationwide. The disillusionment with and rejection of a diluted Bauhaus pedagogy and the wider infiltration of the contemporary interest in language, on the one hand, and narrative on the other, led to growing faculty criticism of the School's First Year curriculum. Low-end work in the Thesis Studio revealed two significant problems attributed to the apparent lack of project range and intellectual engagement of the First Year program. While unfair in its focus, the criticism brought to the fore an awareness in a general lack of discipline and graphic skill combined with lack of intellectual rigor and engagement of reality in the First Year Studio

Three statements from program introductions or program summaries reflect the increasing trajectory away from the static programs in place during the 1980's. From 1990 to the present that

movement into other forms of foundational investigation reveals a continuous attempt to reframe the architectural debate derived from the increasing influence of post-structural criticisms systematic dismantling of traditional pedagogical structures. Each enters that debate tentatively, straying from and returning to that traditional structure with the erratic motion of Foucault's Pendulum, never crossing the same space twice, yet always attempting to describe the architectural center without occupying it. A difficult task, to say the least.

We begin with the opening lines of a second semester program from the First Year curriculum of the 1980's:

*Each group will be assigned a site and a program in response to which a building is to be designed. . . . Together with a stipulated structural system and set of materials, the site and program constitute the givens of this exercise, "given: both in the sense of being "already there" and in the sense of being freely bestowed as opportunities rather than as "problems". . . . When the desing process is at its most authentic, a design scheme will grow organically out of these givens rather than being imposed on them; that is when commodity, firmness and delight will come to pass in the process and the product alike.*

From the same time frame in the semester, but from this current semester's crop of programs we have a clear, fundamental shift from the Vitruvian virtues to the age of representation:

*You are called upon, explicitly for the first time, to read a system that is larger than can be perceived in a single scope. You will subsequently be asked to react to this reading -- to employ it as a design criteria. We will be dealing explicitly with issues of scale, and constructing links between scales.*

*You are asked to coordinate a series of movements through the site and document your movements' coordination with respect of a series of coordinates. Your system of coordination will involve the use of several ways of mapping. The site itself was constructed across several systems of representation, formed at the juncture of several modes of mapping. . . .*

**End.2**

Lack of specificity in favor of diverse, but ultimately personal and subjective points of view. That any point of departure, particularly those completely outside the conventional underpinnings of the "architectural" was as good or valid as any other. The use of the verb "to read" introduced a predilection for words over things, speech over action or process over product. Such shifts, rather than reinforcing the importance of such alternative positions in relation to the making of buildings, merely inverted conventional modes of thought by front-loading an alternative, and highly seductive pedagogical singularity, and a shift in pedagogical authority.