

not
white

diversity in beginning design education



Shannon Chance, AIA, Editor

PROCEEDINGS of the
20th National Conference on
the Beginning Design Student
Hampton University Department of Architecture

Copyright 2006 Hampton University Urban Institute
/individual articles produced and edited by the authors

Printed proceedings produced by Shannon Chance, Assistant Professor of Architecture, Hampton University.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher.

Published by:
Hampton University Urban Institute
Department of Architecture
Hampton University
Hampton, VA 23668
757-727-5440
fax 757-728-6680

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chance, Shannon
Not White: Diversity in Beginning Design Education
(Proceedings of the 20th National Conference on the Beginning Design Student)
compiled by Shannon Chance
1. Architecture - Diversity 2. Teaching - Architecture 3. Teaching - Diversity 4. Teaching - Design
5. Diversity - Design

ISBN 0-9785172-0-2

Gender, Memory and (Psycho)analysis

Is gender implicated in the way our students design? If we ask this through the lens of experience (as understood through memory) to belief (as reflected in our unconscious) then the gendered systems we encounter in our culture and society are unconsciously expressed in our design work. Teasing apart the cause/effect relationship is difficult but we might actually find the psychoanalytic process a useful model in further understanding the relationship of memory to production (and ultimately to the meaning of the production) through a greater understanding of the creator as subject.

All discourses in our society are gendered and the schism between mind and body is a binary that often associates and identifies one gender with thought, intellect, and reason, and the other with body, emotion, and intuition. For a designer, in this case a designer of space, it is important to work within a strategic, rational process of design, yet unknown is how the idea came to be- and then how it becomes rationally (and sometimes irrationally) understood.

The seeking of insight, as a design obligation, in directions simultaneously both internal and external, is an undeniable requisite for understanding architecture as both science and art. A natural receptiveness, a quality often associated with beginning students, could include openness to the external, in the material sphere as well as to internal stimuli and knowledge. The psychoanalytic community might refer to the third eye here, the focus being on self- understanding as a means of insight and discovery leading ultimately to the act of creating. Layered onto this is the belief that our individual unconscious knowledge is derived from our cultural stock and experiences.

Maya Lin, the architect of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, the Civil Rights Memorial, and the Women's Table Memorial merges the rational with the transcendental. She refuses to separate east/west influences, reason, and intuition. In the design studio and in public critique and debate, this is difficult and almost always avoided. The architecture student and the architectural professional are not encouraged to recognize, articulate, or legitimize this duality. Our unconscious emerges as preferences, desires and longings finding expression in form and space making. For the design instructor, knowing or even recognizing this connection between gender, culture, and how and what is made by our students. Every student taps into their uniquely defined psychology and in turn it appears in the work produced.

The role of learning from experience clearly plays a large role in how we acquire knowledge. What is learned? How is it learned? Memory involves tasks of both recall and recognition contained within many memory systems. The important distinction here is between explicit and implicit memory systems. The former are what most of us think of as memory, that is, the ability to access information in consciousness. The latter involves information that can bypass consciousness. Memory is the vehicle for the surfacing of unconsciously held beliefs. Like the analyst, the instructor is working closely, (through the work), with the creator, (our students), as subject.

abstract

Elizabeth Danze

Assistant Professor
The University of Texas at Austin
School of Architecture
1 University Station B7500
Austin, TX 78712-0222
512-471-1922
email: edanze@mail.utexas.edu

B. Arch.,
University of Texas at Austin, 1981;
M. Arch.,
Yale University, 1990.

Elizabeth Danze is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas, School of Architecture. She received a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Texas and a Master of Architecture degree from Yale University. She teaches first year, second year and advanced design as well as classes on affordable housing, and building materials and detailing. Previously a designer with Cesar Pelli & Associates, she is currently a principal of Danze + Blood Architects. She was an editor of *Architecture and Feminism* and co-editor of *Center #9, regarding the proper*. Ms. Danze has been guest editor of *Texas Architect* and writes frequently for the magazine.

Memory is a vase
Filled with vivid Words and Places
Mysteries gathered one by one
As petals 'round a timeless sun
Placed beyond where seasons be
Existence held- Internally.

Anonymous

Is gender implicated in the way our students design? If we ask this through the lenses of experience—the students' and the teachers'—(as understood through memory) to belief (as reflected in our unconscious) then the gendered systems we encounter in our culture and society is unconsciously expressed in our design work. Teasing apart the cause/effect relationship is difficult but we might find the psychoanalytic process a useful model in further understanding the relationship of memory to production (and ultimately to the meaning of the production) through a greater understanding of the creator as subject.

Gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life. Yet gender, like culture, is a human production. Gender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of expectations of how men and women act to pay attention to how it is produced. Gender signs and symbols are so ubiquitous that we usually fail to note them- unless they are missing or ambiguous. Then we are uncomfortable until we have successfully placed the other person in a gender status; otherwise we feel socially dislocated.¹

Published in 1995 in the now defunct *Progressive Architecture*, the article "Women in Architecture" describes in general terms the difficulties women still face as architects and students, and suggests that architecture as a profession risks being consigned to the margins of culture unless greater diversity is achieved within its ranks.² And yet many women seeking acceptance in the field disassociate themselves from talk of gender difference in order to escape being tarred by the brush of female otherness of being contaminated by things female. For example, the notion, "woman architect", widely disdained for presupposing an odious distinction between architects and women architects is seen by many as an unavoidable outgrowth of gender consciousness.³

Consider the list Mark Wigley presents in his essay "Untitled: The Housing of Gender": "The active production of gender distinctions can be found at ever level of architectural discourse: in its rituals of legitimization, hiring practices, classification systems, lecture techniques, publicity images, canon formation, division of labor, bibliographies, design conventions, legal codes, salary structures, publishing practices, language, professional ethics, editing protocols, project credits, etc."⁴ We are all— teacher, student, administrator a part of this production of gender distinctions, yet as Nancy Fraser has written, "Although gender dominance is ubiquitous, in sum, it takes different forms at different junctures and sites, and its character varies for differently situated women. Its shape cannot be read off from one site or one group and extrapolated to all the rest."⁵ There exists a collective cultural experience and yet each of our individual experiences is unique— what might be of interest to a psychoanalyst (or a teacher) is the ramifications of this duality- for the analyst the way ones' experiences affect and impact what is created in human relationships; to the teacher, the way these gendered experiences affect how (the teacher/student relationship) and what is created spatially and materially; in this case, by the design student.

Again, why might any of this be important to us? Because gender has an undeniable role in how we experience the world, our place in the world, how we see ourselves and understand and interpret our experiences. This occurs both at the scene and time of the experience- but perhaps more importantly, later, as we recall the world and our movements, feelings, emotions, understandings of us **in** the world; and then as we create **in** the world.

In Jane Jacobs' book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* she does not specifically identify gender as an issue, but she does speak from a woman's experience. Her subjects are mothers, children, the everyday and the ordinary, the informal, really all that which pertains simply and directly to the domestic life.

Maya Lin, the architect of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, the Civil Rights Memorial, and the Women's Table Memorial merges the everyday and the other- the rational with the transcendent. She does not separate east/west influences, reason and intuition. The architecture student and the professional are not encouraged to recognize, articulate or legitimize this duality. Our unconscious emerges as preferences, desires, and longings finding expression in form and space making. For the design instructor, knowing or even recognizing this connection between gender, culture and how and what is made by our students is an important pursuit. Every student works with their uniquely defined psychology and in turn it appears in the work produced.

The seeking of design insight, as a design obligation, in directions simultaneously internal and external, is an undeniable requisite for understanding architecture as both science and art. (Psychoanalysts too describe their craft in this way). A natural receptiveness, a quality often associated with beginning design students, could include openness to that which is external in the material sphere as well as to internal stimuli and knowledge. The psychoanalytic community might refer to the third eye here, the focus being internal, self-understanding as a means of a more universal insight and discovery; this leading ultimately to the act of creating.

Memory

Why memory if we are talking about internal insight and self-understanding? A familiar and often-used assignment given to first year students is to ask them to recall an early personal memory of a space they have occupied. For this assignment I have asked my students to draw in an emotive way their very first memory. Not surprisingly it is often their bedroom they recall- the view from their bed, often looking out- out of a window, out into the space of the room. This assignment is really asking students to recall what they know from personal experience. Peter Zumthor in his book *Thinking Architecture* writes of the importance of his earliest memories of being in his grandmother's house and how these very specific material, spatial, really sensual memories directly and indirectly inform his work now.⁶ As a mature, educated designer it is interesting to note his increased reliance on memory as source and inspiration for his creative work.

Memory involves both recall and recognition contained within many memory systems. The important distinction is between explicit and implicit memory systems. The former are what most of us think of as memory, that is, the ability to access information in consciousness. The latter involves information that can bypass consciousness. Many of us complain about our memories, meaning our explicit memory systems. Little do we realize how effective our implicit memory systems are.⁷ There is a distinction also between short term and long-term memory. The idea behind short-term memory is that at any moment in time, we cannot bring to mind all the information that we possess or even all the information that is potentially available to us. Instead we are limited in our ability to recall and process the information of which we are currently aware. On the other hand, long-term memory is the store of information that you have accumulated over time and on which you can call. It is long term in the sense that it can contain memories acquired a long time ago, for example, of events, experiences, ideas, etc. These memories are inexplicably linked to our cultured experiences- our gendered experiences.

"We have two minds then- two ways of knowing, two kinds of memory- one above the surface, in our moment to moment awareness: the other is below the surface, guiding us through life operating on autopilot"⁸ What you know, but don't know you know, affects you more than you know. That's the bottom line of more than 300 experiments on our powers of unconscious learning. A person's unconscious learning can anticipate patterns too complex and too confusing to be consciously noticed. The value to us as educators and architects is what role this plays in inducing creativity in our students. "Creativity's intuitive dimension stems from unconscious processing."⁹ Our unconscious creates a reality for ourselves depending on our assumptions. "we don't see things as they are, we see things as we are."¹⁰ Going back to Maya Lin, in her book, *Boundaries*, she says, "I feel I exist on the boundaries."¹¹ Her work consistently embodies this. She, like Zumthor understands how a buildings' material act on our perceptions and experiences. Louis Kahn in the British Arts Center and the Kimball Art Museum meant to stimulate our imaginations through the careful and combined use of materials and detailing. He was recalling an earlier place and time, and both of these buildings are quite specific and at the same time emit a universality- if one is to believe it possible. At the very least his buildings enable a shared emotional response.

In the photographs of iconic modern buildings by Hiroshi Sugimoto he is trying to capture emptiness. His attempt is to create an image of unreality. This emptiness or unreality then opens the way for a new interpretation of reality in the eyes or the psyche or the imagination of the viewer. His photographs are intentionally **not** factual and specific. The blurring makes them unstable and not readily recognizable. There is an attempt to create emptiness in order to re-create a different fullness in the imagination; to imagine an existence full of potential creativity. I have asked my students who I have taken on extended study abroad trips to consider seeing and **how** seeing affects what are seen. This is an attempt then in trying to capture something else, something beyond, or something that only they might see while looking through the lenses of the camera. There is a tendency for us to see buildings as strictly objects, or as strictly an interior. I ask my students to try to look beyond the exterior formal and material qualities of the building to see and capture the intangible- the psyche of the building as experienced by them. These fuzzy photographs, if you will, recall other experiences, other possibilities that they've had. They transpose our socially defined selves to another place and time, uniquely their own. This act opens up for them imaginative possibilities that spring from their unconscious with its biases and past- bringing them to the surface of consciousness and directly into view. Like the psychoanalytic process, it is an



Fig. 1 Kunsthaus, Bregenz, Switzerland by Zumthor, photo by Heather Weiler

attempt to bring forth what lies within. (See Figure 1.)

Psychoanalysis

“The process of creating- whether it be writing, speaking or building, is making manifest, in an outward expression that which we imagine within.¹² In her research Frances Downing has found that images architects draw upon carry emotive, experiential and objective information. These images have strong sensual qualities – light, color, texture and scale. “The mental image is a self-portrait of secret wishes and desires, as well as ground for common cultural values and assumptions. The mental image presents a personal biography as well as a vehicle for the designer to manipulate future projects.”¹³

The relationship between analyst and analysand (the patient) is remarkably like that of the teacher to student. Language is the means of expression in analysis- between analyst and patient- it is the bringing from within to the outside through speech, much like drawing or other means of visually communicating is to architects- language to one and drawing to another- both are symbolic.

“When we move through space with a twist and turn of the head, mysteries gradually unfolding, fields of overlapping perspectives are charged with a range of light- from the steep shadows of bright sun to the translucence of dusk. A range of smell, sound and material- from hard stone and steel to the free billowing of silk- returns us to primordial experiences framing and penetrating our everyday lives.” (Steven Holl 1996)¹⁴

This depth of experiencing the world from an architectural point of view is analogous to the depths of recollections of an analysis. The studio instructor critiques the work of the student but like a good analyst, the instructor will help draw out patiently the unique insights each student brings to the work. The analysts couch, like the drafting table or computer station is like a magic carpet floating through space and time, imagining and creating anew (together) from a constructed past. The marks left in the world, through design, tell us much about who has made them.

NOTES

¹ Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), p.6

² *Architecture and Feminism*, ed. D. Coleman, E. Danze and C. Henderson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996) p. x

³ *Ibid*, xi

⁴ *Ibid*, xii

⁵ *Ibid*, xv

⁶ Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture* (Baden: Lars Muller Publishers, 1998), p. 9

⁷ Nel Noddings and P.J. Shore, *Awakening the Inner Eye: Intuition in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1984), p. 69

⁸ David G. Myers, *Intuition* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 51

⁹ *Ibid*, 61

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 73

¹¹ Maya Lin, *Boundaries* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), p. 1

¹² Karen Franck and R. Bianca Lepori, *Architecture Inside Out* (Great Britain: John Wiley and Sons, 2000), p. 22

¹³ *Ibid*, 23

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 21