

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

A Search for Clarity

Ideally, searching for clarity is a perpetual activity. One might go so far as to say that such a search is synonymous with what we usually call Design. It entails a persistent questioning of preconceptions and the avoidance of any absolute indemnity. A genuine search includes an inevitable complexity and time consumption that stems from a steady maintenance and persistent fine-tuning in order to remain in contact with an appropriate frequency. The world in which we reside is a dynamic and diverse place and is often perceived in illusive and obscure ways. A reliable search can help us breach the obscurity by avoiding complacency, pretense and hopefully, misguided understandings.

This presentation concerns itself with:
the maintenance of a search for the architect's role in contemporary society.
The exploration considers a myriad of factors, but makes no claim to be all-inclusive. There is consideration given to a variety of perspectives on the subject including the layperson, the student, the academician, and the University administrator.

The search also ventures into a variety of common architectural stereotypes that the author has found to be obstacles in defining the profession of Architecture on behalf of the beginning design student. The diversity of opinion concerning our profession is an integral part of our persistent misunderstanding of the architect's contemporary position and our inability to communicate as poignantly and definitively as might be desired. The collective array of architectural roles discussed is impressive and perhaps even excessive, but the diversity is relevant and undoubtedly an important factor in revealing a clarity. In the spirit of solidarity among design professionals ... and because I am an architect, this presentation attempts to expose a hint of clarity within the array of divergent opinions.

The ideas of time and space, being consistent measuring devices throughout the history of Architecture are explored as vehicles for suggesting a clarity.

TIME - By acknowledging our continual displacement and replacement in time, we are able to free ourselves from the many incongruities pervading the profession to practice our art in a way that is both respectful of the tenants of the profession, as have always been and at the same time true to the fresh, unexpected quality of immediacy.

SPACE - Despite the diversity of roles an Architect manages, our professional advantage is the awareness that architecture inhabits a place in a way that recognizes its rich authentic and persistent stimulus. As such, we can be forever reminded that life and consequently Architecture is about the inclusion of such a quality.

abstract

Brian Dougan

Assistant Professor
Department of Architecture and
Landscape Architecture
College of Architecture and
Engineering
North Dakota State University
701.231.7821
bdougan@aus.edu

M.Arch Texas A&M University
M.Ed Texas A7M University
B.E.D. Texas A&M University

Brian has spent a total of twelve years teaching Architecture, Graphics and Industrial Design. He resided in Tuscany for two years working with the Italtart Cultural Study Center in Castiglione Fiorentino. Brian currently teaches at NDSU having spent the past couple years playing music and making baskets in Rhode Island. Brian has a passion for sharing an interdisciplinary reality with curious students. He brings a strong pedagogical bias to the table that strives for curricular coordination among faculty in an effort to build a solid pedagogy that fosters confidence and creative liberation.

His previous professional experiences as craftsman, potter, musician, architect, traveler, builder, basket maker and teacher have provided an awareness of the communion of all creative endeavors. Brian makes pottery because it feels good to be centered. He makes baskets because he enjoys the structural idea of warp and weft. He considers himself a maker because he is an architect and he draws as a means to many ends. Besides teaching, potting, weaving, and building, Brian has spent much of his life making music with a pervasive one-drop in support of Rastafari.

Research interests include design education, sustainability and the pervasive position of human beings in relation to the creation of architectural space. For the past fifteen years, Brian has managed to maintain a steady production of designed products for the sake of public consumption.



Figure 1

As a teacher residing in a university, I am ultimately concerned with education. I am an architectural design professor and, as part of my independent pedagogical stance, have always considered myself obligated to construct a solid and well-articulated foundation on which my students can base their future. Even though I am keenly aware of the rapid pace of change and exchange in an academic environment, it seems only fair to provide every new batch of students with a learned understanding of the direction in which they are heading; to give them an idea of the nature of the place that they intend to inhabit. This is important for many reasons beyond it being the very essence of their enrollment in the University. One being that the myriad conditions that bring students to study architecture in the first place are usually saturated with strange misunderstandings and often-bizarre expectations. On the other hand, the committed, the curious and the youth in general usually come equipped with a strong desire to clarify the unknown. They simply want to know what they are getting into so they can corner the potential for participation. I too appreciate the discourse, for it is a persistent reminder of our assembly. For everybody involved, a working definition seems like it would be a useful reference. (See Figure 1.)

I often wonder however, if it is perhaps contrary to the purpose of education to think that we even need a working definition for our specified course of study? Maybe the slate is better left clean so as to construct an understanding free of preconceptions? I try to maintain an appreciation and even a celebration of the thought that our relation with life is in constant flux and am therefore well aware of the idea that pausing in time to render an understanding as if it were a still life is far too limited of a vantage point. The cubists have successfully proven that such a position inaccurately represents reality based on its static relation with time. We now know that as time and space corroborate, it is our obligation to acknowledge the often-neglected temporal dimension, occupy it and, most importantly, invest an interest in it if we sincerely desire an environmental understanding. This quandary of definition would truly be a simple matter if our ability to understand an issue was simply a function of recognizing the effects of time. However, a definitive understanding either in or out of time is always more difficult when we have no apparent limits to confine the understanding. Without parameters, the playing field is large, multifaceted and seemingly unruly. We usually welcome the lack of limits. It is probably the very reason for our fundamental engagement in most creative adventures, but the absence of limits also presents us with quite an obstacle if we desire to “wrap-up” an idea like Architecture into a neat, tidy, communicable package.

I can say with some experience that a discussion concerning the definition of our professional duties has more than enough space to develop a complex and multifaceted debate. History has persistently plagued me with dispute when I exorcise my conviction to provide foundational support. The expectations explode into the atmosphere and sometimes, morale gets lost in the excitement. While I could attribute the confusion to the persistent debate between the profession and the academy, the fact is that the uncertainty is pervasive and profound in every milieu.

I have heard it said that: The architect (*such as Mies van de Roh*¹) is a **conductor** who keeps track of the various factions of a construction project. He is the one who prompts the appropriate task at the appropriate time and controls the chain of events that lead to a completed and successful project. He is in possession of the proverbial big picture. He sees the interconnectedness of all the parts and of the parts to the whole as well as their underlying logic, all the while maintaining the fundamental purpose of the project. He is uniquely capable of delegating assignments in a timely and efficient manner so as to make the dream, a reality.

The architect (*such as Phillip Johnson*²) is a **leader** responsible for providing a team of designers with the necessary vision for a successful project. She is the one with the answers and the one who articulates the bottom line of resolution. Such an impression leads to the fact that an architect is also a governor who might be seen as a ruler of workers. Under the Architect are those who are void of the understanding that lies only in her possession. The architect contributes to an intellectual science, not manual labor. This hierarchical understanding places a keen distinction between the workers who engage in manual labor and the Architect who has transcended practice with a knowledge that includes implications of an unquestionably profound, theoretical nature.

The architect (*such as Renzo Piano*³) is an **Inventor** who reliably redefines what is new by giving birth to the previously unknown. In pursuit of a meaningful existence, the Inventor intentionally places convention under scrutiny in hopes of overcoming preconceptions

and revealing a superior relationship with not only our profession, but with life. The Inventor recognizes that within the infinite nature of time and space, we have not yet exhausted the range of opportunity that awaits our attention. He walks into the future anticipating change rather than routine, views life as a challenge and is anxious and willing to take risks when engaged in creative pursuits.

The architect (*such as I'Corbusier⁴*) is an **Artist** who exercises creative spirit and meaningful expression for the celebration and delight of life. While the motives often appear cryptic to those who are unwilling to participate in the game, Architecture becomes a formal expression of our collective position within Time, in the cosmos, or in relation to our gods. It provides civilization with a tangible beacon of contemporaneity. The artist manages to communicate using an architectural language, that cannot be expressed with words or any other means of communication.

The architect (*such as the anonymous monk*) is a **public servant**, in that she provides a service to the community for the sake of accommodating human beings. An Architect engages in sustaining the pursuit of improving the quality of life by providing the public with the essential attributes of health, safety and welfare. As a bottom line, the architect works and is paid according to the social value of his work. This social dimension separates the work of an Architect from that of an Artist or a designer. The public servant has chosen his path based on a belief system that supercedes the self with the collective. The Architect is known to exploit his professional specialization for the sake of the larger context of which he is merely a part.

The architect (*such as Aldo Rossi⁵*) is a **historian** who works in the present and walks into the future with a keen understanding of our inseparable connection with the past. The historian refers to the precedent of the past and brings its relevance forward to the present. He works in the continuity of time to acknowledge the joy the past has provided so that we can relive the pleasure forever more. The historian goes beyond relishing nostalgia to a redefinition of the past in today's light. He knows that history is not a vocabulary of form or material, but rather a complex of spatial dimensions and juxtapositions waiting for their contemporary re-manifestation.

The architect (*such as Frank Lloyd Wright⁶*) is a **professional** who acts with respect, carries the attitude and proudly advocates the heritage of the profession of Architecture. A professional maintains a posture concerning the sustenance of quality. He is the datum from which the ideal of quality is arbitrated. The passing of time cannot faze the professional. Style and fashion rise and fall while the professional is able to see through the surface, confronting the substance that transcends time. He represents the profession in all his actions and stands as an icon for the social, ethical, and aesthetic responsibilities associated with our trade.

The architect (*such as Daniel Liebskind⁷*) is a **politician** who is competent in the interaction with government officials and intimately aware of the codes and policies that govern every building project. The politics of architecture includes those activities such as the necessary lobbying and gerrymandering entangled in securing and executing a commission within the complex interactions of the designers, the manufacturers, the legal sector, the general public and of course, the client. A politician might be mistaken for a figurehead, but transcends the stigma by truly being able to find value, responsibility and pride in kissing babies and smiling at cameras.

The architect (*such as Fillipo Brunelleschi⁸*) is a **humanist** who sustains a historical lineage and acts on behalf of the inhabitants of planet Earth by providing a recognizable scale and culturally rich dimension to the built environment. He holds tightly to the idea that Architecture is ultimately for addressing human needs, whether they be physical, intellectual or spiritual. Scale is an issue for the humanist because it pertains to every facet of our lives; from what we eat, the size of our residences and cities to the technology we utilize and the speed at which we travel. The humanist wants to insure us that the world in which we reside appears as it is and not as an illusion masking the truth. He proudly occupies a distinct vantage point and dependably measures the world from a human perspective.

The architect (*such as Charles and Ray Eames*) is a **fortuneteller**, friendly with the zeitgeist and able to predict future trends so as to consistently occupy the cutting edge. No matter how experienced or wise, the act of creation is a mysterious activity, even to those of us who engage regularly. Some approach the mystery of the future as would a scientist imagining that the process can be controlled in a rational way. Others approach the enigma, as would the alchemist thinking that there is an appropriate combination of ingredients that result in creation, similar to how one bakes a loaf of bread. The fortuneteller however, engages the process by surrendering her ego to the mystery of the universe and welcomes its assistance in every creative venture. She knows that a creative act is not hers alone. She attributes success to the recognition of the spirit that carries the truth and knows that it is only with the assistance of the spirit that the unknown can be revealed.

The Architect (*such as Frank Gehry⁹*) is a **technologist** who essentially inhabits a virtual world. Despite a pale complexion and sometimes even atrophied social skills, he stays abreast of the latest technology and has an extreme appreciation for the network of digital convenience so pervasive in our contemporary media-savvy society. It might be that the technologist is easily seduced by the moment, placing complete trust in whatever the system has to offer, but he has voluntarily embraced the digital environment as an appropriate means of creating, presenting and producing our built environment ... for better or for worse.

The architect (*such as Walter Gropius¹⁰ and Sambo Mocabee¹¹*) is a **teacher** responsible for educating the public about issues of quality. The primary task of the educator is to provide the client with a designerly understanding that satisfies the choice to engage a collaboration with an Architect. Consequently, the client / Architect dialogue serves as a vehicle for the Architect to remain in tune as well as refine his own understanding of the profession. The architect acts as educator in the office while she accepts the responsibility of mentoring interns, thus supporting the profession. She is an educator in the University as she introduces concepts and theories and provides instruction and guidance to hungry students. She is educator to the construction industry with consistent demonstration of expertise and desire to push the conventional envelope. Even if the education process occurs anonymously without

notice or announcement, the completed work is didactic in its ultimately gathering light and casting shadows for all to see.

The architect (*such as Carlo Scarpa*¹²) is a **craftsman** involved in a creative activity of “making”. What architects do in the absolute most fundamental way, is make - things. Whether it is drawings, walls, details, or just decisions, Architects are makers. Like most crafty endeavors, Architecture is a one-of-a-kind artifact. It is of course bigger than a weaver’s rug, a basket maker’s basket, a blacksmith’s horseshoe, or a potter’s t-pot, but Architecture is hand-crafted by artisans in a very similar fashion. Architecture is about the melding of ideas, materials and disparate energies into the material reality of a habitable environment. The quality of an architectural product is a simple function of how crafty is the Architect. He must be keenly aware of the execution of details at every scale and be able to distinguish between precision and expression ... between a mechanical accuracy and a Human endeavor.

The architect (*such as Victor Papanek*¹³) is an **ecologist** who acts as steward for our planet. A recent consideration finds the Architect as both a local and a global resident. She is well versed in maintaining a broad focus and therefore protects our precious resources from those whose vision is too shallow or perhaps tainted by a vision of economic opportunity. An architect is empathetic with the harmony of the Earth’s ecosystem and acts with caution and respect in her environmental collaborations. She is not influenced by fashion, trends or technological acrobatics and at the same time, she is not a ludite. She is guided by the desire to do the most appropriate thing for the sake of the residents of spaceship earth. Every thing and every time is her responsibility. She maintains a unique holistic perception by focusing on the future while engaging in the present and learning from the past. There is an urgency to think and act locally so as to take control of immediate circumstances with a participatory agenda unaffected by the increasingly pervasive doctrine of disengaged apathy.

(See Figure 2.)



Figure 2

I have no desire or reason to disagree with any of the above architectural characters because I am quite sure that the diversity has an important relevance. The collective array of versatility is certainly impressive, but naturally leads to the question of whether it is <how much> of each role is portrayed or simply <which> role is played that defines the Architect? Vitruvius could answer that question without hesitation, as could Palladio because they each inhabited a different world than the one in which we presently reside. Their world was finite, centered and seemingly comprehensible. With time, we have ironically lost much of that clarity and can no longer be so sure of our relative cosmological position, which tends to make most every definition we seek these days, a difficult assignment.

The irony lies in the construct of our global village. Today there is much more available space to derive understandings and misunderstandings ... more geographic space, economic space, cosmologic space and even fantastic space to mention a few contemporaneous opportunities. If the understanding of an Architect’s role was simple and clean once upon a time, today we can no longer make such a claim.

While I know it is not true, I like to think that our considerations concerning the role of an Architect have always been in flux? *I imagine that our understanding of the profession as it evolved with time, reached a point when it became so congested with inflated expectations and multifaceted obligations that it fell victim to a structural failure and violently exploded.* It is not too unlike any concept that endures the likes of time. As the idea is forced through the many various forms of expression and communication that belong to different moments in history, the idea changes and we consequently interact with it differently. Perhaps this hypothesized structural failure came as a result of the world eventually becoming vast and complex enough that it could simply no longer facilitate such a pretentious, all encompassing profession? (See Figure 3.)

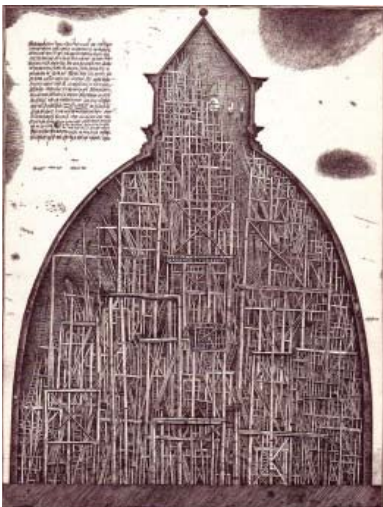


Figure 3, Brodsky and Utkin,

Whatever the reason, *it might be that the various understandings and compound liabilities that resulted from the structural failure’s explosion flew through the air and landed in a broad variety of diverse places. These assorted places then each adopted a different way of understanding the role of an architect and consequently the architecture in each place became a reflection of that unique understanding.* So it is that we have become descendants of an architectural catastrophe that has left us with an incomplete and often confusing comprehension of our professional heritage?

While we are all well aware that the aforementioned eruption theory is a considerable stretch of the truth, what we can say with some certainty is that first and foremost, an Architect is a designer. Ironically however, a designer is not necessarily an Architect. That lack of

reciprocity presents us with an incongruity because automatically, an Architect is more than one thing. She is at least a designer and something else that a designer is not ... necessarily. In addition to that particular irony, another broad swooping certainty is that she is also one who carries an attitude that sustains contact with every aspect of her life. An architect's designerly actions are 'usually' governed by a posture that carefully considers a rather broad perspective of concerns and leaves very little space for being idle, neutral or disengaged from critical thought. Without such an attitude of persistent engagement, the professional edge of an Architect dulls, becomes diluted and its status is compromised. (See Figure 4.)

Architectural ideas are not abstractions. They can be seen as products of the places we inhabit. An Architect must reside in a state of consciousness that includes a big enough horizon to render the environment - clear. While the space around us is dense with all sorts of pollution and congestion, and the predominantly concrete and asphalt surface on which we walk is also dense and not easily penetrated, the Architect must be knowledgeable of the many ways to access the seemingly impenetrable breadth of our environment. I like to think of the architect as one who is primarily responsible for recognizing opportunities. One who walks through life with open eyes and identifies potential ... occupying the edge that separates convention from invention, the present from the future, the simple from the complex and the beautiful from the ugly. She has a highly refined skill in reading above, below and between the lines. (See Figure 5.)

The super heroes residing in our psyche, capable of achieving such feats as seeing through that which is opaque, envy the architect's keen perceptual skills. Like the super hero, the architect is also a good neighbor because she has a knack for utilizing this keen perception to benefit others. She is a soothsayer and translator of stories. Her stories are told by investing ideas in material. She is able to express and subsequently foster a quality of life by transforming material into space and time. The architect is fluent in many modes of communication. She voluntarily constructs the communiqué. In addition to telling stories, she draws ... writes ... models and of course, builds. She is fluent in plumbing, electricity, physics, and Italian. She employs metaphors. She articulates with kindness because as was mentioned earlier, she is a maker. She realizes connections between seemingly disparate entities and discovers the potential for unity because she is a builder. She carries a keen respect for materials and tools as she does for history and the entire breadth of allied arts because they are her partners in the realization of meaning. If not a super hero, an Architect is at least a crafty entrepreneur. (See Figure 6.)

The attention given to contextual circumstance is a reliable dimension of the profession of architecture. The idea of context is big and spans many dimensions, perhaps the most important being temporal, which provides us the opportunity to interact with contemporaneity. An architect today cannot expect to act, as did an architect fifty years ago. Time flows, and is incessantly taking us on a ride without conclusion. If we dare notice, the ride has brought us to a unique place in time that provides an opportunity for liberation from the many dogmas that often plague our profession. I suspect that time always provides a place for us to question that which we are given, but we usually ignore the opportunity because the interrogation is often uncomfortable. It requires a maintenance that consumes energy. We tend to perpetuate the well-known myths of our profession simply because we are able to do so... because we are able to do so, simply. Maybe we do not want to have to deviate from the understanding that has been so clearly articulated in our textbooks. Maybe we do not want to admit that despite our professional devotion, we might be clinging to an anachronistic comprehension. We remember and appreciate the story as told and celebrate our authority over it.

By acknowledging our continual displacement and replacement in time, we are able to free ourselves, despite the confusion and disorienting complexity, to practice our art in a way that is both true to the tenants of the profession as have always been and at the same time true to the fresh, unexpected quality of immediacy. Our optimum vantage point therefore is certainly not static and at the same time, not necessarily kinetic. It might instead be considered an intersection. We reside in a place that is conducive to dreaming. Our advantage is to inhabit a place rich with an authentic and persistent stimulus so as to remember that life is about the inclusion of such a rich quality and it is the Architect's contract to perpetuate it. What Architects are able to do well is that which segregates them from those people who tend to be 'clients'. They know how to devise a plan and execute it ... to materialize it ... to realize it. Such a trait is an attribute to the profession of Architecture and



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6 Paolo Grimaldi, Metamorfofi Onirica.

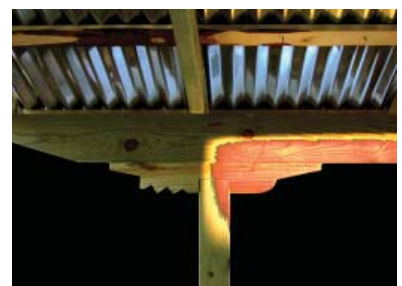


Figure 7



Figure 8

envelops everything else they do. It is a trait that we all, despite our livelihood, could use a little more of. The biggest obstacle for students to overcome when learning to be Architects, is to bring their ideas to fruition. There is often a tremendous hesitation by students because they tend to lack the self-confidence necessary to find fruition. There are numerous reasons why we rarely arrive at a bona fide conclusion, but the fact that the idea is carried only so far is a denial of the very definition of design, which I understand to mean the development and transformation of an idea to a refined and meaningful state.

What Architects do is change a mental construct into a physical construct. The ultimate conclusion of a design process is to build, so that we are able to interact with the idea on a physical scale. The objective is to be effected by the idea ... to be physically consumed by the idea.

The fundamental evolution of an architectural design goes from the idea residing in you - to you residing in the idea. (See Figure 8.)

REFERENCES

- ¹ Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New, The Hundred-Year History of Modern Art, Its Rise, Its Dazzling Achievement, Its Fall* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.1980).
- ² Nory Miller, *Johnson/Burgee: Architecture* (New York: Random House, 1979).
- ³ Paul Goldberger, Renzo Piano and Building Workshop, *Buildings and Projects 1971-1989* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1990).
- ⁴ H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- ⁵ Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the city* (New York: Opposition Books, 1982).
- ⁶ Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, *Frank Lloyd Wright Drawings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990).
- ⁷ John Hejduk, *The Mask of Medusa* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1985).
- ⁸ Eugenio Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi, The Complete Work* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1981).
- ⁹ Cristina Bechtler, Frank O. Gehry Kurt W. Foster, *Art and Architecture in Discussion Series* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 1999).
- ¹⁰ Winfried Nerdinger, *Walter Gropius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 1985).
- ¹¹ Maggie Toy, "Samuel Mockbee, The Rural Studio" *Architectural Design* 68 (1998): 72-79.
- ¹² Maria Antonietta Crippa, *Carlo Scarpa, Theory Design Projects* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986).
- ¹³ Victor Papanek, *The Green Imperative Natural Design for the Real World* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1995).