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Methodology of deconstruction in architectural education

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Abstract

The challenges of modern times demand high levels of creativity from the architect. Creativity, with all its social and physical connotations and implications, should therefore be a guiding concept in the revision of architectural education. In addition to the basic design courses and studios in architectural education which some have deemed to be the sole mediums to elicit creativity, a history course which underscores and examines creative leaps in the past of architecture can be useful in that regard.

This article proposes an architectural history course designed based on a deconstructionist view of history which highlights major creative leaps of the past. The study thus focuses on the philosophy of deconstruction and its interpretation through architecture as a creativity fostering agency of thought, corroborating this stance by means of renowned examples of the adoption, sometimes unknowing, of deconstructionist philosophy.

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1. Introduction

Several dilemmas face architects today arising from the competition between humanitarian values and the universal language of money. The conflicts and conundrums of modern times demand high levels of creativity from architects, intensifying their responsibilities and rendering their tasks more difficult than ever by requiring a completely different logistics of architectural practice and education.

The success of architectural solutions rests in the quality of the metaphors by which these oppositional states are resolved as forms in the imagination of architect-designers. For this reason, the subject of creativity must be handled within the logic of an architecture course, and its semantic associations studied.

Some educational philosophers may argue that creativity is inborn, and that it cannot, therefore, be taught. While it may be true that talent, inclination, intention and determination help realise creativity at an early age, through conducive and evocative teaching methods anyone can be sensitised towards a rich variety of ideas, outside influences, knowledge and creativity at a later age (Bruner, 1962; Illich, 1970).

Medawar posits that “creativity is a rapid intuitive deduction, which owes its power to the infirmity of our powers of reasoning, an illumination, or a kind of awareness, or yet a generative act in architectural discovery, which obviates an image of a fragment of a possible world... That creativity is beyond analysis is a romantic illusion we must outgrow. It cannot be learned perhaps, but it can certainly be encouraged and abetted” (Medawar, 1969: 57).

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Although the part played by tacit knowledge in the intuitive leaps that precede rigorous construction of knowledge in architecture is not fully understood, most design researchers agree with the assumption that designers arrive at brilliantly rewarding solutions by way of analysis through synthesis. Creative designers somehow know when an idea is the right one (Davies & Talbot, 1987). Elements of solutions emerge quite early in the design process (Agabani, 1980; Eastman, 1970; Lawson, 1997). The architect's reasoning is based on synthetic and formative design ideas rather than on an analysis of the problem (Rowe, 1987). In short, these authors imply that architect-designers experiment with solutions as soon as they conceive of a design problem, rather than merely following concrete methods.

Derrida's theory of deconstruction must be brought into the discussion at this point. Deconstruction, which can be considered a method to seek the new and question the existing (the current), includes a functioning logic similar to the concept of creativity. The strategy of deconstruction that can be applied to the problems of meaning and the possibility of meaning can be expressed via Derrida's concepts. The dates of Derrida's work notwithstanding, deconstruction - in other words, the questioning of conventional ideas and meanings - is an old model of behaviour within the evolution of architecture, having arisen throughout history (Gur, 2008). In fact, the rationale of Derrida and his philosophy of questioning facilitate a re-reading of traditional constructions and concepts of architecture at the same time. That is to say, the philosophy of deconstruction can be used as an instrumental and operational method in architecture (Durmus, 2009).

Throughout the course of history, creative breakthroughs have continually emerged, and their causes have always required an accounting as a dominant metaphor in history (Megill, 2008). In order to design the breakthroughs of history, it is essential to regard history as a movement and interpret the subject within this evolutionary process. History courses in architectural education can be redefined and composed from the standpoint of creativity just as design studios can. However, we need to first inquire further into the matter of creativity.

2. Creativity

In architecture the term *creativity* pertains equally to subheadings, such as design practice and design education, and to the apprehension of social issues with which architecture is entangled. Also, different phases of the architectural design process require a particular creativity, each in its own right (Gur, 1978). Therefore, one can definitively state that there are many aspects of creativity in the discipline of architecture. Hence, creativity bears significance in the theory, practice and criticism of architecture, and is the subject of many ongoing discussions in architectural education.

Systematic inquiry into creativity occurred from the 1950s onwards and aimed towards a more fundamental understanding of human creativity. Such research adopted psychometric, cognitive, psychodynamic and pragmatic approaches to defining creativity (Durling, 1996). Only the last category, that of the pragmatic, has dealt with design fields to any extent. In fact, very few researchers from a design background have undertaken studies on creativity and investigated underlying intellectual and social drivers of creativity (Durling, 2003).

Creativity is a broad and vague concept. The criteria of creativity vary from one discipline to another. Some kinds of creativity, for that matter, may constitute a systematic affair with serious implications for its success and failure, as opposed to creativity in artistic domains, which value the different, the eccentric, and sometimes even the frivolous. The role of creativity in the sciences, on the other hand, is best understood via Henri Poincaré: 'It is by logic that we prove, but by intuition that we discover' (Poincaré, 1908: 129).

Creativity has been defined in the past as 'an illumination', 'a kind of awareness' by Polanyi (1958: 123), as 'effective surprise' by Bruner (1962), and as 'the unexpected', 'the extraordinary' and 'shock' by Deconstructionist architects such as Tschumi (1991; 1996). In any case, creativity is the ability to produce work that is both novel and appropriate. Departing from these definitions, however, one can obviously argue that creativity has theoretical and practical aspects, and therefore can be easily brought into the agenda of a course on the history and theory of architecture. Students may benefit equally from design studios and from history and theoretical discourses in architectural education in enhancing their concept of creativity, provided that the course is revised at the outset.

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