

Open Conversation as Mode of Learning

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Architecture as a field of study relies on dialogue. As the design studio centers around modes of constructive critique through desk-crits, pin-ups, and reviews, a culture of discussion stands at the core of Architectural study.

The format of dialogue has undergone a process of evolution in Architectural education. Rooting its genealogy after the Ecole de Beaux Arts' academic structure, early design studio reviews in the US typically comprised of a closed jury system; students were left behind closed doors until the jury completed assessment of the students' work. Since the Great Wars, the private nature of the closed jury has slowly permeated to take the familiar format of the design review today, which involves a student presentation with an ensuing critique by the jury. With a number of initiatives and programs that advocated for changes in the Architectural scene in the late 20th century - such as Cedric Price's "Taskforce" at the AA that re-imagined a student's capacity to drive thesis questions, Price's Thinkbelt which captured architecture's social responsibility in the 1960s, as well as Gordon Matta Clark's experimental dinners at FOOD restaurant in SoHo, New York in the 1970s that demonstrated his concept of "Anarchitecture" - intellectual dialogue began to extend beyond formalized groups and traditional spaces of conversation. Paired with shifts in higher education, notably by Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux who developed the philosophy of Critical Pedagogy since the 1980s, Architectural pedagogy gradually shifted to foster a sense of organized social responsibility with agency towards civic change.

Today, the culture of dialogue in architectural education has become more inclusive and diversified. Opening up boundaries in which academic conversation takes place, an increasingly growing number of Architecture Schools have recently begun to launch initiatives that build upon long-held practice to expand its extents beyond the classroom. These initiatives across Architecture schools - Harvard GSD's Talking Practice, Cornell's The Living Room, MIT's Dinner with the in-Laws, and Sci-Arc's Spin Room, amongst others - extend discursive exchange to an open platform of communication in order to articulate shared concerns. The conversations bring in students, faculty, and staff, as well as prospective students,

222	TASK FORCE		TO	See Below
MEMORANDUM	FOR THE ATTENTION OF		COPIES TO	
ENQUIRY	KEIICHI SAIKI		OFFICE	
DATE	OUR REF	YOUR REF		
6 2 95				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. - City always changing - can't respond to demands. - Shows how necessary 2. - Dense water, now - nearly a gap between N & S. of economy. 3. Don't have to build buildings too much. 4. Use system to design city. 5. Explanation of land use - maps 5. 3 hrs. applications of floating bridge. - floor show, marathon - features (these from same) 6. Application methods of joining structure. - natural power? - tidal - wave power. 7. 'Size' and fixing - stability 				
222	TASK FORCE		TO	See Below.
MEMORANDUM	FOR THE ATTENTION OF		COPIES TO	
ENQUIRY	KEIICHI SAIKI		OFFICE	
DATE	OUR REF	YOUR REF		
6 2 95	222/M/st			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The next stage is difficult but VALID & GENEROUS - to provide a virtual PRIMER or 'text book' for others in the future to develop your ideas - in a variety of ways. - Consideration of size, 'anchorage', stability & edge condition of 'floating mushrooms' is worthwhile, but in PRINCIPLE only - Don't forget to refer to and remind oneself of earlier tasks - Three Thameside scenarios could have a further two added. 				
SIGNED	CHECKED	Cedric Price MA Cantab. RIBA AA Dip1. Architect 38 Alfred Place London WC1E 7DP Tel: 071 636 5220		
Cedric Price	[initials]			

Figure 1. Cedric Price's "Taskforce". Candian Centre for Architecture.

alumni, professionals, and in some cases, the general public. Taking place in programmatically flexible areas accessible to wide audiences, the conversations are often livestreamed or recorded to be readily shared via accessible online platforms such as YouTube as well social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter.

A recent initiative at the Boston Architectural College, Boston, MA has created an open conversational forum. Since the spring semester of 2018, the Conversations at the Loft has provided a platform to collectively discuss topics that encompass various



Figure 2. "Spin Room" with Mark Wigley & Hernan Diaz Alonso. Sci-Arc.

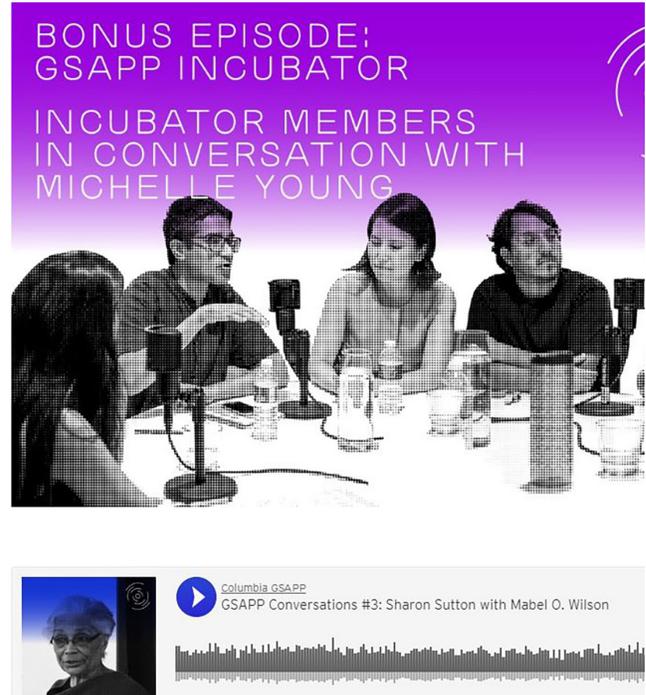


Figure 3. "Incubator" in Conversation with Michelle Young & Conversations with Mabel O. Wilson. Columbia GSAPP.



Figure 4. "Living Room" with Clark Thenhaus featuring Sasa Zivkovic. Cornell AAP.

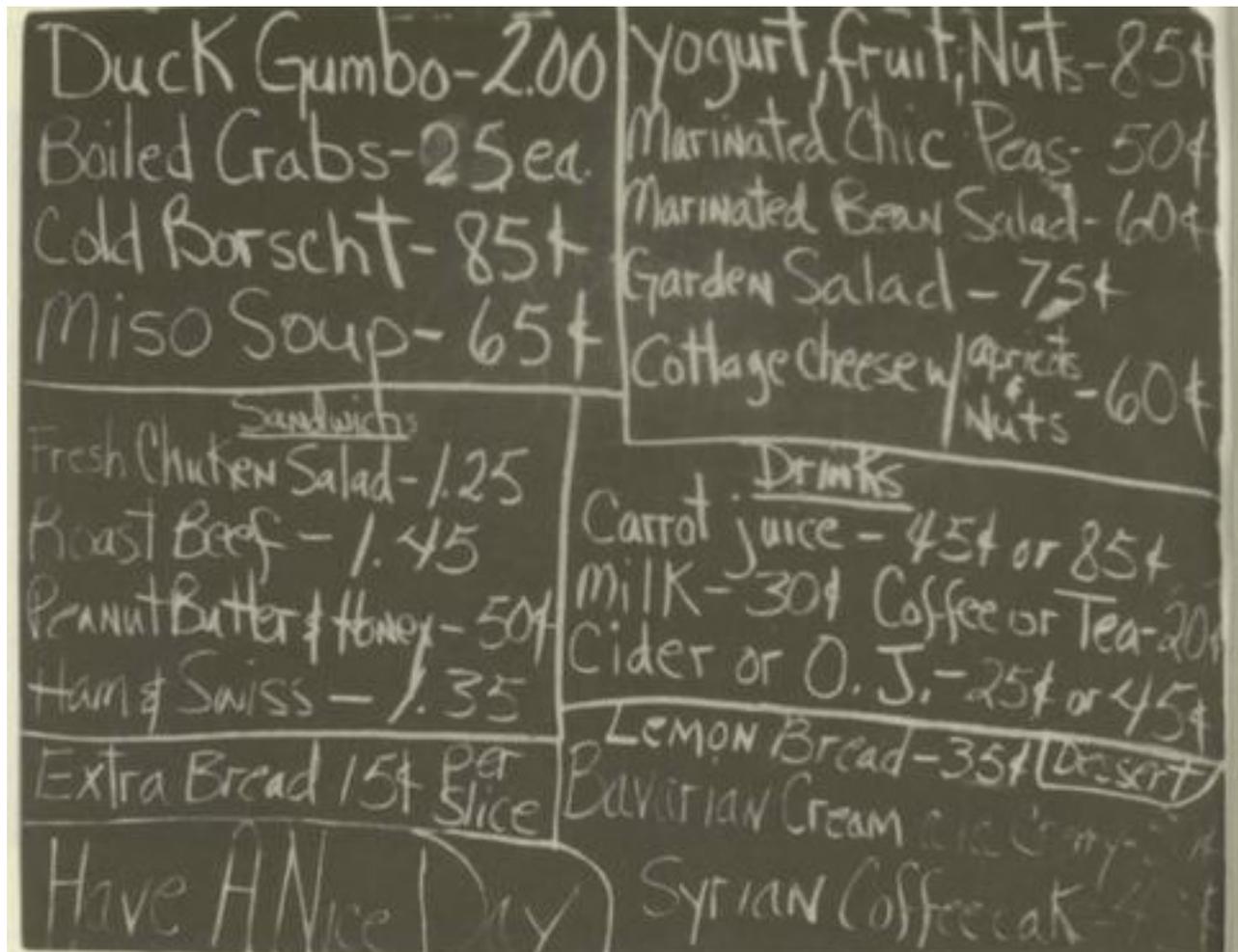


Figure 5. Gordon Matta Clark's FOOD Menu. Candian Centre for Architecture.

spheres of life. Topics and issues are purposefully selected to collectively question, examine, and re-imagine terrains of thought and thought-making. There is no presenter and audience. Instead, each person drives the conversation; any person interested in partaking in the discussion is welcome to add voice. With little to no hierarchy amongst the crowd, a system of collective intelligence that builds upon the knowledge and energy of the crowd manifests the conversation floor. As a result, the Conversation differentiates from a traditional format of presentation and ensuing Q&A that academia has long held. Instead, this is a time for discussion, provocation, and exchange. Whether by two-way conversation or discussion with multiple members, a moderator and a heterogeneous group bring in multiple strands of cultural considerations and perspectives. These conversations foster variegated topics and methods to garner increased possibilities for intellectual intersection. This is a time to churn through what we know, what we think we know, and what is aspired to be known.

The Conversation provides moments to understand variegated contexts of living. With a diverse group of people offering personal mementos and individualized perspectives on a topic

of discussion, a degree of mutual understanding is embedded as a student, alumni, staff, or faculty shares outlooks on different strands of the discussed topic. As the College encompasses a globalized student body, different cultural, geographic, and social contexts also present wider scopes of understanding a single topic.

At a practice-driven open-admissions College, where the majority of the student body work full-time while simultaneously balancing their studies, the conversations have been effective in raising criticality. Participants of the Conversations have assumed leadership roles amongst the student body to raise issues and initiatives timely for the College. Students have become an agent of their own learning, often weighing in feedback and posing provocations in classrooms as they do at the Conversation sessions. With more vocal engagement in their studies, students have been demanding more opportunities to intersect intellectual curiosity across and beyond parallel tracks of the curriculum – architecture, technology, historic preservation, and professional practice – and to shape a culture of open dialogue. A number of requests to pursue double



Figure 6. Installments of “Conversations at the Loft” at Boston Architectural College. BAC Logue.



Figure 7. “Conversations at the Loft” at the Boston Architectural College. BAC Logue.

majors have propelled the College’s Curriculum committee to review courses and support interests to pursue paths of study that intersect across Schools within the College.

Lastly, a sense of togetherness has formed at the College where lack of studio space has meant lack of studio culture. As today’s consumer media culture relies on the value of personal preference and individualized connection, affinities towards the topic in discussion weigh in as much as the pressing importance and societal significance of the discussed topic. Matching interests as well as the ability to share those interests in an organized, yet casual format allows space for deeper relationships to form – a hallmark of collegiate experience.

The form of an open conversation provides opportunities to imagine a shifts in pedagogy – to critically engage diverse communities in expanded contexts. Pioneering different approaches not only to instruct, but also to cultivate ways of learning that allow for more open and variegated approaches, constructive conversation warrants a closer look as a mode of learning in Architecture. Furthermore, the culture of open communication – with a variegated audience that acknowledges

multiple contexts and embraces differentiated perspectives - may be a stepping stone towards engaging learning environments that expand the local physical classroom towards a globalized setting online.

