

Integrating Cultural Research into the Design Studio

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This poster presents research to integrate culture into the design process and studio, undertaken with fourth year undergraduate BFA and Liberal Arts Architectural Studies students.

“Culture” (exists in architecture) in two senses. One relates to activities that are often understood as specific to architecture. The other is inextricably connected to the realm of human existence and demarcates the ways in which human life differentiates itself from nature. Taken in isolation each is potentially problematic – holding to the exclusivity of the culture of architecture denies its presence as part of human society, while thinking of architecture as nothing other than cultural precludes any consideration of, for example, the way different materials realize different effects within architectural practice. What matters is the way concerns of one understanding can – perhaps should – intrude into the other.”

(<http://architectureau.com/articles/essay-architecture-and-culture/>)

THE CULTURE OF ARCHITECTURE VS. ARCHITECTURE AS A PART OF CULTURE

In the mode of Comparative Literature or Cultural Studies, we introduced a project that would provide both a window into another culture and a foil for our own. Accepting that “culture” can be fraught when used as an instrument of chauvinism or nationalist myths of origin, we recognize that it is also what gives depth to our societies and sense of being in the world.

The International Style was a call to neutralize what was viewed as the idiosyncrasies of the historical and the regional—i.e. culture—and to impose an abstract “functional” aesthetic. Since the 1980’s Critical Regionalism has stood as a strong critique of the International Style as well as the more superficial tendencies of Post-Modernism. (Frampton, Kenneth. “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six points for an Architecture of Resistance” in *The Anti-Aesthetic, essays on Postmodern Culture* edited by Hal Foster. Bay Press, 1983.) However, methods for achieving a cultural awareness of sufficient depth to practice Critical Regionalism effectively, is often neglected in architectural education. Architectural precedents are often the extent of the research, which, while

rich, overlook deeper considerations that only emerge from a broader historical study, not only of material culture but of modes of thought, social structures, rituals and even policy.

Our pedagogical goal was to provide a studio condition in which this interface of architecture and culture could be explored in an accessible and fruitful way. We developed an assignment sequence where research topics and readings segued into analytical writing and diagramming, then further into making exercises. In this way, students “channeled” the thought processes, techniques and values embodied in the individuals, artifacts or issues they were examining. Initially students researched an artist or designer and selected one artifact from that artist for analysis, be it a ceramic vessel, a paper lantern, a woven basket, a dress, etc. Students ruminated on the processes, patterns, and materiality of their objects as the starting point in a three-dimensional making exercise combining bamboo skewers, fuel tube and paper. Subsequently, students are introduced to a specific site and cultural program to develop a project proposal enriched by the cultural awareness acquired.

INTEGRATING CULTURAL RESEARCH INTO THE DESIGN STUDIO

Naomi Darling – Five College Assistant Professor (Hamshire College, Mt. Holyoke College, University of Massachusetts, Amherst)
 Ray Kuschia Mann – Associate Professor (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

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bamboo joint/paper
Anna Julia Plichta

voids
bamboo joint/paper

transient - incomplete
ephemeral
patient
organic
rhythmic
honest

The Other (in this case the paper) becomes the primary visual form paper

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CONCEPT DIAGRAMS

Reference Sites: THE BELLEFAY LIBRARY, THE BELLEFAY LIBRARY

Programs: Library, Performance Space, Studio

Materials: Bamboo, Paper

Site: The site is located in the center of the block, with the library and performance space to the north and the studio to the south.

SECTION 2-1-50
STUDENT: ANNA JULIA PLICHTA

TEXTURES/MATERIALS

1. A paper lantern, which has the look of a traditional lantern, but is made of paper.
2. A piece of bamboo, which is used as the structural frame.
3. The base of the paper is made of a printed sheet.

Michael Schreiber

NITobe MEMORIAL HALL

Site Plan
The site is located in the center of the block, with the library and performance space to the north and the studio to the south.

Floor Plan
The floor plan shows the layout of the building, including the library, performance space, and studio.

Hiroshima, JAPAN
The map shows the location of Hiroshima, Japan, which is the site of the memorial hall.

