

Composing Composers: Design Instruction for Student Empowerment

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This paper develops topics on architectural instruction in three ways: (1) analysis of authenticity in the design studio, (2) evaluation of high- and low-level intentions, and (3) proposing an advanced studio developing design sensibility. Design education balances technique and sensibility. Students need skills to communicate their work effectively. They also need freedom to be creative with their ideas. Learning self-reliance empowers students' connection to discourse. Methods for design instruction need to be robust enough to accommodate alternative approaches for production.

Architecture defies singular categorization. As architecture instructors we can capitalize on this attribute by fostering diverse methodologies for design studio results. To develop this topic, three strategies are considered: First, an analysis of authenticity in the design studio; second, an evaluation of high- and low-level intentions, and third, an example of an advanced studio proposal developing design sensibility.

Nelson Goodman's text, "Art and Authenticity," addressed how knowledge about a work affects aesthetic judgment, which raises important distinctions regarding decisions for results in architecture.¹ Goodman described conditions that differentiate autographic from allographic mediums. Goodman explained that an autographic work, like a painting, delivers a unique sensibility with respect to its author. Counter to an autographic work, Goodman described an allographic work, like music, which interprets a primary source such as the composition. It is debatable if architectural training operates autographically or allographically. Most studios rely on the brief, or the syllabus, which usually outlines parameters such as program, scale, and site; and sometimes even materiality and specific techniques to generate form. Autographic and allographic qualities are also affected by how feedback from instructors dictates studio outcomes. Ideally, the instructor's syllabus and feedback empower students to learn how to make decisions for progress relative to the student's ambitions. If students' actions, instead, are based on the decisions of their instructor, whose sensibility developed the work? Architecture,

especially in an environment for training and education, brokers sensibility and authorship.

Students should not define their curriculum, but they should be encouraged to locate how they can channel their interests relative to the technical and/or disciplinary concerns of the studio. Rather than adopting the techniques and sensibilities of their instructors, students should learn how to engage their sensibilities by executing design explorations guided by the accumulated knowledge of their instructors. The goal for this kind of educational strategy, if successful, would reveal to students that they have power to not only generate architecture relative to a set of personal interests, but that they also participate in architecture's progress through conviction and commitment to realizing how their ideas relate to the discipline.

Considering design instruction relative to a project's intentions offers considerations for instructor and student roles. Randall Dipert described a way that conductors reconcile methods and styles of composers in his essay, "The Composer's Intentions: An Examination of Relevance for Performance." Dipert queried if a conductor for a performance should maintain aesthetic consistency (high-level intention) with respect to a composer's intentions, or historical consistency (low-level intention) with respect to a composition's reproduction.² Dipert's terminology for intentions relates to how architectural instruction can establish a critical view on what properties influence the development of a work. If high-level intentions produce preferable outcomes, which they should, the analogy for design education could be revised to suggest instructors direct students to realize their intentions through architecture, balancing the development of the student's aesthetic sensibility to guide its affect while understanding how to use design techniques to execute the projects effects. Conceptualizing work relative to its intentions shows how various considerations drive successful outcomes, and also creates opportunities to realize when those considerations need to change or modify.

Re-classifying Dipert's terms, high- and low-level intentions for architecture reveals the value of a work and its contributions with clear understanding of the properties needed for its execution. A simple example of a high-level intention for architecture could be using the low-level intention of walls to realize a high-level intention that comments on the concept of privacy. A more complicated example

could be how the low-level configuration of forms within a composition of an architectural artifact establishes a circulation path that accomplishes the high-level concept of mystery. Allowing high-level and low-level intentions to become points of negotiation provides a method to evaluate architecture's performance. Foregrounding design this way avoids simplified reduction while mediating architecture's significant attributes.

The premise for an advanced studio with a strategy focused on sensibility development relates architecture to Kant's idea of purposiveness with the goal that students develop their understanding of what architecture ought to do, meaning they are responsible for the criteria involved in determining its result. Kant's treatise on aesthetic judgment dismantled the aesthetic differences of delight as residing in concepts (good), objects (good in itself) and utilities (good for something). He claimed that only that which is agreeable is beautiful, which must be disinterested and free. Need, or "purposive representation," he argued, supposes an interest with an end in mind, which blocks beauty, as do concepts of what is good. Purposiveness, instead, reveals an object in its pure form and is objective, by suggesting purpose without making claims about that purpose.³

Without an a priori program defined, the students in this studio would choose a program and/or typology to develop. Instruction would help them identify and isolate specific characteristics to assemble a cohesive concept that straddled ideas about how architecture relates to and addresses purpose. In this case, Kant and purposiveness operate as an alibi to question, discern, and produce qualities that have and preclude a basis in purpose. Doing this also raises the question, "What is architecture supposed to do?"

Throughout the semester students would be asked to continually revise and evolve how they visually and verbally communicated three things:

1. What it is. This means that their work should be identifiable relative to a particular context of design and that the student understands how their work participates in a particular conversation. For example, is the project representational, typological, formal, and/or theoretical, etc. Each project can, and likely does, embrace multiple conversations. Helping them make decisions regarding what it is would take place through discussions that ask them to determine qualities related to understanding how their project revealed virtual and actual properties, or considering what needs and desires were relevant, or how it performed relative to motives triggered by functions and abstract concepts. Decisions for the project would be open to the student through how they developed the ability to make a claim for where architecture resides and how their work throughout the studio exemplified that position.

2. How it is what it is. This means that their work must demonstrate an understanding of methodology that allows the student to evaluate successes and failures. Methodologies in this studio would not be a step-by-step explanation for how a project was made, but rather how the methodology aided the students' decisions for progress. Methodologies can be unique, but are oftentimes indicated through

analytical diagrams, argumentation and logic, tectonics, poesis, or qualitative and quantitative analysis. Their methodology would develop how they worked on more specific attributes of their respective projects. Several terms would be examined to consider the project's development, which would consist of its physical and intellectual characteristics, knowing what the work included and what it excluded, and how integrating information and qualities for experience would provide a basis for their architectural response.

3. Why it is relevant. Relevance shows how their work is in dialogue with or advances its subject matter. Aiding the students' understanding, they would be asked to demonstrate how their work contributes to the knowledge of architecture and/or culture at large, or show the ways that it provides criticism or establishes methods for progressing certain topics, or if it is a project that speaks to the discipline or the profession. Parsing out these nuances grows the student's ability to articulate the value of what their work does.

Design education instigates vision. Analysis provides critique. The synthesis of vision and critique establishes domains of value that architecture addresses. We can help students, and architecture, by teaching them skills to communicate their work effectively, and also by giving students the freedom to be creative with their ideas. Balancing techniques and sensibilities we provide the means to participate in a productive discipline.

ENDNOTES

1. Nelson Goodman, "Art and Authenticity," in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. 2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1976, 99-112.
2. In Dipert's essay he used the discordant sound of the harpsichord in a Gluck score, which he said was used "probably to startle an audience and to make it aware of a musical line by stating it in an unfamiliar timbre." His argument was that the high-level intention to startle the audience was produced through the low-level intention of the harpsichord's jarring sound. Dipert described that an audience today would likely not be as startled by the sound relative to our ears being more familiar with it than that ears of Gluck's audience. Randall Dipert, "The Composer's Intentions: An Examination of Relevance for Performance," *The Musical Quarterly* (January 1980).
3. Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment," in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007, 33-189.