

## Teaching and practice

### Remembering Rowe

#### A high standard of ordinariness

Dean Hawkes (arq 4/1) makes a strong case for critical practice rather than research being the tool for advancing architecture and architectural theory. What we certainly need is a profession which accepts the need for critical practice, and sees it as a matter of course that any practitioner with ambition should be required to be involved in teaching. Hawkes cites the way in which English literature built up critical theory to support their discipline, but when F. R. Leavis commented upon a work, he left blood on the floor. This would be unprecedented in our journals, whose editorial policy is emasculated by the powerful interests of a building's clients, the construction industry who buy advertising, and the architect who will seek to censor any adverse comment. The Schools are where real criticism can and does naturally take place: it doesn't happen anywhere else.

There is a danger, however, in raising expectations that all Schools can expect to attract luminaries such as Kahn, Scarpa or Zumthor, whom Hawkes quotes as exemplars. In specifying who should teach, Hawkes says that it is 'essential that their practice should meet criteria which will distinguish it from what might be called "ordinary" practice', but this might seem to favour the star system, and avoid what Bob Maxwell notes (in his article in the same issue) as aiming for a 'high standard of ordinariness'. This in my view is a highly desirable target, and we should encourage and possibly even require 'ordinary'

practitioners to try to teach it. We would need to continue to develop a strong critical tradition in the Schools which would help to educate the practitioner. The students will soon detect any self satisfaction, and sort it out.

Hawkes quotes Kahn as saying 'really I am teaching myself', and at a time when 'life-long learning' is heavily promoted, we should encourage many more in the profession to do this: for free, as they benefit. As for the students, in a good critical environment, they 'get what rubs off'.

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#### A missed opportunity for practice

It is hard to disagree with the main thrust of Dean Hawkes' paper, 'The Architect and the Academy' (arq 4/1), in which he calls for a more vital role for practising architects within schools. Unlike some other European countries, where many of the most prominent architects are fundamentally committed to teaching, the nature and structure of both universities and practices in the UK tend to be resistant to such engagement – though a number of schools have nonetheless managed successfully to use the talents of innovative practising architects.

The relationship between practice and teaching is fraught with enormous complexity, requiring further exploration and clarification. Unfortunately, Dean Hawkes' paper runs the risk of

reiterating some of the well-rehearsed dualisms between theory and practice. One of the problems with this line of argument is that it valorizes the experience of construction and of practice, without placing it in a larger theoretical framework. Even though Hawkes on a number of occasions acknowledges the contribution of theoreticians and of architectural theory, the unqualified nuances of their relationship reinforces the distinction between those who do and those who theorize. I do not believe this is necessarily the case. Nor do I see the introduction of practitioners *per se* as being important in contributing to the discourse in architectural education. Rather, it seems as important to discuss the specific attributes and frameworks of particular kinds of practice as it is to acknowledge the significant contribution that architectural theory has made to the development of architecture.

All those architects whose writings are quoted by Dean Hawkes – Hertzberger, Kahn, Zumthor and Scarpa – have not only strong theoretical positions but also definite pedagogic approaches that in turn affect their work. Given the tendency for architectural practice to naturalize its own activities, its lack of critical engagement within the academy is a missed opportunity not only for schools but also for practice itself.

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### A practitioner's perception

The subject of Dean Hawkes' illuminating essay, 'The architect and the academy' (arq 4/1) has been the focus of the Association of Consultant Architects' attention for some time.

I agree with Hawkes' thesis that the academic study of architecture should be based upon the 'literature' of architecture, its buildings, the spaces defined and created by buildings, and the technology and processes used to achieve them, and that learning is perhaps most effective when the teaching is by practitioner architects of quality. While there are notable and highly regarded exceptions, there is no doubt that some schools have not been preparing young architects to meet the 'evolving needs of practice'. The cause of this is, I believe, the academicization of architectural education.

Hawkes is surely right in his belief that 'All worthwhile practice demands some degree of invention in which, theory is questioned, extended ... in the quest for an appropriate solution'. I also fervently agree that in the learning environment the architect practitioner can, and indeed must, bring 'unique insights to bear on the process of interpretation and invention'. It must also be a truism to say that when a practitioner architect is teaching, what is imported must be profoundly influenced by that personal experience of practice. It is essential, therefore, that such practitioner architects who teach are not only at the 'coal face' in experience, but also distinguished. This will be hard to achieve.

While I have some sympathy with Yeomans' view (quoted in Hawkes' essay) that architecture is unlike some other academic disciplines because it has to meet demands of clients and very specific conditions, both site, economic and others, there are huge areas of applied research barely tapped. There are massive arguments about the pragmatic definition of sustainability when applied to buildings. More research has to be done here for example. Academics might expect practitioners to be more interested in science, technology and the business of architecture and in research related to these areas. However, while this may generally be true in the research context it is not true for architectural education where

we expect a design studio based integrated approach, which must include evolving curriculum subjects such as sustainability, the integrated process of design and construction, construction technology and business administration.

In conclusion, to quote Hawkes 'it seems folly to exclude practising architects from the academy'. However, to 'exclude' may be the smaller problem when compared with what I believe is the much greater one of encouraging, and properly remunerating the calibre of architect practitioner that I believe we must have in our education system.

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### Rowe residency for Rome

Following the Commemoration for Colin Rowe at which a number of us made tributes in Washington last month, it was timely and highly appropriate that he should also be duly commemorated in arq (4/1). John Sergeant's obit was entirely redolent of the short years that he taught at the School at Cambridge, especially for those of us who experienced the aura of Causewayside as a welcome supplement to the first floor studios at Scroope Terrace. The School itself perhaps never could repeat the combination of Sandy Wilson and Peter Eisenman in First Year with Colin already pervasively looming in Second Year. The geography of the studios supplied an existential *mise-en-scène* with the climacteric departure of the latter two for Italy. The atmosphere was electric, arguably thus followed by a power cut in the afterglow.

It was possible, however, to catch up with Colin and I for one was lucky even without following to Cornell. To Tom Schumacher's famous Texas Rangers anthem we could then add as of last November (and to the tune of the Yellow Rose)

*Its noon in Caprarola  
Those two facades there be  
Still night back there in Ithaca  
Git no transparency...*

Bob Slutzky and Fred Koetter and Judy di Maio from Yale spoke movingly of the critical role he had played in their lives. Bob Maxwell

offered a lifelong perspective. At the commemoration Peter Eisenman spoke (only) of Italy and the famous Terragni visitation. There remained still and for always to be undefined the elusive essence of a quality with which Colin could not but endow all with whom he had developed a friendship and a discourse. His permanently iconoclastic whiggish disposition still saw that he stayed tolerant of their distractions, mindful to advance their capabilities and careers (while his own remained unpremeditated) sharing wryly in their hard won triumphs.

Your columns have compensated for the weakness of our London daily obituary columns with the exception of two newspapers. *The Times* could not even recall the Royal Gold Medal and mislaid Richard MacCormac's text. *The Architects' Journal* and *The Architectural Review* were better as was *Architectural Forum* where Peter Eisenman rightly claimed Colin to be 'always one of us' and American for all his Anglo-eccentricities.

But we should safeguard his posterity here in Europe too. There will be the Colin Rowe Residency set up at the American Academy in Rome. Contributions or pledges from Britain should be sent to:

American Academy  
c/o Elizabeth Gray Kogen  
7 East 60th Street  
New York NY 10022-1001  
Tel (212) 751-7200

Colin stayed one of us too.

MICHAEL SPENS  
St Andrews, Fife

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