Con(form)

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Recommended Citation
Colby, Clark (2011) "Con(form)," Datum: student journal of architecture: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 19.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/datum/vol2/iss1/19

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Great form through architecture is a goal we strive to reach. In the educational world, a professor assigns a topic or project. Design a velodrome, a house, a museum. These are formal ideas with formal identities that allow for shaping, pushing and pulling and, our hope, some innovation. The finished design is theoretically meant to be functional and real.

When restricted by a final outcome, that has a formal purpose, we limit the freedom of our minds, the possibilities of creation, the opportunities to create uninhibited designs. We are taught to study precedents of the project we strive to reinvent. Typically before we even consider the implications of such a process. In researching precedents we start to create a catalog. One that includes dimensions, shapes, materials, construction techniques, uses, and ideas that might not even be applicable to the project which we were presented. These precedents may be located in cities larger than that of our site, with opposite climates and materials that are local. For students this leads to the creation of forms and projects without consideration for the specific site and could be found anywhere from Rome to Miami. If precedent ideas overpower creativity, a full-scale precedent study ensues which students mistakenly call their own. This process has some educational benefits but does not stretch the mind outside of the comfort it finds in the familiar.

An unbiased mind is full of potential to create innovative, unusual and potentially successful forms. On a good day, we are encouraged to derive form from the location where our project is located. Pull the form from realistic site studies, the needs of the area, the local materials, etc. We are not given a fact sheet of necessary numbers, instead we are given a task to design for a client or location and our creative mind goes to work. We manifest and learn how to manifest the projects final form.

Consider a creative freshman entering the program, unbiased, some say ignorant, and tell them to create a place for living. We all live, we know how we live, and we know what it takes to live; though we don’t know how to create architecture physically. Allowing the design of forms that may be unconventional is worth conversation and incubation in the formation of our work. This freshness, of a formally unbiased mind, is a valuable thing. After four years in the architecture program, I realize how pigeon holed I, and many of my classmates, have become. We lost most of our creative expression and desire to create space from instinct. Our education taught us how to stop thinking and just reference a page from the catalog of architectural ideas already in our mind.

After a lack of stimulation from mediums outside of architecture I was in search of some fresh air. I wanted to relearn how to see, how to learn, and how to create form for the sake of form itself. In the architectural world form develops through evolution. I started taking Integrated Studio Arts classes to give my mind a chance to unchain itself and be freed from the catalog of constraints. A ceramics sculpture, for example is not necessary, its only purpose is the form itself. This form comes about from our creative instinct. If a challenge or obstacle arises during this process of creation then the form evolves and can improve through this forced detour. A form comes into existence; its purpose is to stimulate our individual minds. Each person that experiences that form will create the uses, derive new ideas, be inspired and even influenced.

This breaking of our restraints and that of our discipline is extremely important to the future development of innovative forms and design. As architecture students, and I can only assume that professional architects, we work with each other, hang out with each other, and speak a common language that soon becomes circular. Without new input from other professions, personal investigations, or friends that are not architects our designs all start to look the same. Therefore, personal exploration needs to be the focus of our education. Explore, create and take advantage of the creative outlets and resources available to us while in college. To only follow the architectural curriculum is to limit oneself to potentially becoming an architect when the goal is to become a designer.

Learn to think, think to learn.