Reflections on the Masterclass

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This year marks the second consecutive year that the Department of Architecture has welcomed Elia Zenghelis to host an intense, week-long masterclass. Similar to last year, the ultimate objective was to, in Elia’s words, “cultivate a particular way of thinking.”

…

“Architecture is in the doldrums.” His glossy, cyanotype blue eyes scan each of our own, slowly stopping at every set while he lets this notion sink in. It is the second day of this week-long event and Elia has been inspiring us and opening our minds up to concepts such as “modernity,” “domesticity” and “public condenser.”

Divided into teams of two, we begin an in-depth analysis on pairs of seminal architectural paradigms that represent the evolution of the modern movement and the concepts that constituted it. These range from Peter Behrens’ AEG Turbine Factory and the Werkbund, to Eames’ Case Study House and Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House, to an End Paradigm of Archizoom’s No-Stop City & Dogma’s Stop City: The Limitless and the Finite.

It is not often that we are provided a prompt in which two paradigms may be considered beside one another. When analyzed in pairs what is particularly interesting/fascinating is to examine one project through the lens of the other; taking the conceptual intent of one project and analyzing the other using this new set of criteria. This method helps to illuminate that which was not immediately apparent before. Under such an intense time crunch, we were able to capitalize on this opportunity to interpret conditions through existing lenses and, most importantly, to take a position. These manifested themselves in the selected images that follow.

On the final day, we stand at the front of the presentation space absorbing the critical remarks pointed at the details and specifics of our images. The ebb and flow of presentation and critique went on for almost an hour before the conversation was shaken up with one question.

“How was this masterclass useful to you?”

What became apparent with this question was the importance of honing one’s ability to analyze lofty concepts in an overwhelming field of information and, most importantly, synthesize in a matter of days. To answer this question simply; To take a stance.
“At the age of six I wanted to be a cook. At seven I wanted to be Napoleon. And my ambition has been growing ever since.” - Salvador Dalí