

THE APPLICATION OF CRITICISM AS A TEACHING METHODOLOGY FOR ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN.

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ABSTRACT

Criticism is the scientific investigation and description of the text origins, character, structure, technique, or history of a work of art. Critics and designers in their narrow understanding of the methods of criticism often have an impression that to criticize means to find fault in an architectural design work. This paper through literature review and jury attendance, discussed the application of some methods of criticism, which are the: normative, doctrinal, systematic, typal, measured, interpretive and descriptive methods, with the view of exposing criticism as a behavior and a tool for the generation of better work, not a tool for threat and intimidation of architectural works and the architect.

INTRODUCTION

The most familiar forms of criticism of architecture are no doubt commentaries and assessments in magazines, books and professional journals. Criticisms of architecture are the remarks by teachers in academic designs studios. The teaching of architecture is in fact built around this experience and setting. Criticism is found in many other settings such as, between a designer and the principal in an office, between an architect and the contractor or the built environment and the users, criticism can also take place within the designer. Criticism has received little attention in architectural education, because critics in their narrow use of the term, have made few identifiable contributions to our understanding of the environment or works and more importantly, improving it, because some criticism made are often devoid of facts, dogmas or rules of thumb. The aim of this paper is to document the application of criticism in architectural design. An understanding of some methods of criticism is beneficial to the critic and the designer in order to avoid conflicts and a projection of criticism as a tool for conveying significant positive information in a design jury.

SOME METHODS OF CRITICISM

NORMATIVE CRITICISM

The essence of normative criticism is a conviction that somewhere in the world outside a building or urban setting there is a model, pattern, standard, or principles against which quality or success may be assessed. The norm might be specific and physical. There are Building codes which govern the design and construction of certain elements in a building such as foundation, floors, roofs, stairs and walls, often critics during design jury or consultations make statement like "your floor is not correct" or "your staircase is bad", this kind of approach tends to make the designer lost and confused. The critic is expected to be specific about what is wrong about a particular portion in the work by stating the building codes or principles governing the design of that element. It is important that the critic carefully and logically draws the designer's attention to the issue, only then; the designer begins to see the criticism as useful. Another example that is common in criticism in design Jury is the use of word "your rendering is bad", the critic may have to state to the designer facts governing good rendering as Leslie (1970) identifies some of the qualities of good rendering to be:

- a. It must show surrounding sites such as landscape, people and automobiles.
- b. It must express distance of different part of the object from the observer.
- c. It must have tones to separate areas and masses.

When these facts are being stated by the critic, the designer will seem not to have been judged arbitrary but with facts.

DOCTRINAL CRITICISM

Doctrine as a basis for architectural decision making and hence criticism is a fascinating thread through architecture history. We have been told that form should follow function, that function should follow form, that less is more, that less is bore, that building should be what they want to be, that they should 'express' structure, function, aspirations, construction methods. Doctrinal criticism tends towards a singular point of

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view 'one-best way's' the belief that there is a single approach for accomplishing our purposes and a single standard for measuring our achievements. While an advantage to the designer, for the critic vague doctrines are dangerous, the designer who subscribe to this often feels moral (on the side of 'right'). The disadvantage of this kind of doctrine is that they do not meet a lot of functional requirement of the building, the critic is expected here to educate the designer the implications of holding on to doctrines as a basis for design, instead of outright condemnation of work.

SYSTEMATIC CRITICISM

Depending upon a single doctrine for criticism is dangerous because a single principle is easily attacked as simplistic, inadequate or dated, an alternative to the single doctrine is an interwoven assemblage of the principles or factors, a system for judging buildings or urban setting, systematic criticism is presumably better able than single doctrines to deal with the complexities of human needs and experiences. Among systems for evaluating physical environment are the numerous variations on 'commodity, firmness and delight, systems based on this trio assume that good architecture is not just firm but that firmness is meaningful only when accompanied by proper functioning (commodiousness) and a capacity for enhancing human activities and experiences. Ruskin (1851) summarizes that we require a building to:

- a. Act well and do the things it was intended to do.
- b. That it speak well, and say the thing's it was intended to say in it's best word.
- c. That it look well, and please us by its presence.

Critics use languages like "your design is bad" or "your design is not fine", these kind of comments can ridicule the designer. I have seen designers burst into tears upon such comments on their works, but if Ruskin's model is applied explicitly the designer begins to see how and why the design is "bad" or "not fine", this will provide the designer an insight for the generation of better works.

TYPAL CRITICISM

Typal Criticism, criticism based upon a structural, functional and form types. Is used infrequently in popular critiques of architecture, functional considerations are logically prior to aesthetic and it is pointless to evaluate the second without the first, buildings must have a use before they have style. Typal criticism based upon structural type assesses an environment in relation to environment made with similar materials and support patterns. Typal criticism based upon functions will compare environments designed for similar activities, for example schools are evaluated in relation to other schools not against the standards of the design for a city hall, auditorium, or civic monument, because the function of the school is different and certainly does not necessarily include being monumental. Criticism according to functional type will include a statement about basic requirements, set out standard solutions. In typal criticism based upon form, one assumes the existence or possibility of pure forms regardless of functions. Critical assessment focus on the ways the form itself is modified and variations developed will reflect a variety of goals for a building. Usually goals are described in terms of three kinds of performance: technical, functional and behavioral goals. Only when the critic understands the application of this method can the critic help the designer.

MEASURED CRITICISM

Measured implies the assignment of numbers to various observations in such a way that the numbers can be analyzed by certain mathematical rules. These manipulations by statistical or other techniques will reveal new information about the objects being measured and new insights into their role in the situation under study. What distinguishes strict evaluation from other criticism is measurements which provide standard to which a building or space is supposed to perform, the standards may represent minimums, averages, or preferred conditions. For example government agencies and local building codes describe minimum ceiling heights for habitable rooms, as to have a ceiling height of not less than 7 feet measured to the lowest projections from the ceiling. There are instances where critics make comments such as "that space is too small or too big", often the designer begins to take defensive and sometimes offensive stand on the issue, but if the critic applies the measured form of criticism only then can the critic establish that a space is too small or too big, for example a designer working on a restaurant scheme may be criticized on space allocation in the eating area as being too small or too big if he fails to take into account the number of people required to use the space from some form of calculations. Therefore, for the critic to be just to his comments, he must establish by calculations to designer this fact, if not the designer may have a feeling of the critic being biased.

DESCRIPTIVE CRITICISM

More than the other forms of criticism, descriptive criticism seek to be factual, it notes facts about the building or work which are pertinent to one's encounter with it. The assumption is that if we know what actually happened or what actually the case is, then we can begin to understand the work. For example, there is little point in discussing whether a building impresses observers as 'nautical' if we do not know what it looks like. Descriptive criticism establishes a foundation for understanding through various forums of explication. It does not seem to neither judge not even interpret, but help us to see what is actually there. Descriptive criticism has the dynamic aspect which describes how people move through space in a design or building and what happens there, this may inform the designer some useful information on how to improve on the design.

CONCLUSION

The paper documented some methods of criticism and their application in architectural design. Criticism can be based on certain methods or a mixture of methods which involves the citations of facts, rules of thumbs and interpretation of doctrines, whatever method used the aim of criticism is for the generation of better works in the field of architecture therefore the ends of criticism should be seen as the beginning of better work. For criticism to be understood properly, criticism should be taken as course in the training of an architect to enhance the working relationship between the critic and the designer.

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