School of Architecture
Syracuse University

ARC 107
Introduction

Fall 1992
Bruce Abbey

"Architecture is built meaning, so get close to the meaning and build."

Aldo van Eyke - quoted by Colin Rowe in
Five Architects

It is our premise that in coming to a professional undergraduate architecture program that you have chosen to be educated as architects and not merely to be "exposed" to the study of architecture. You will, therefore, not only become skilled problem solvers, but also capable of understanding the meanings inherent in two dimensional and three dimensional formal and spatial organizations. You will need to personally develop the capability to manipulate form and space in order to express your specific intentions but also to develop the professional and technical skills to make your intentions a reality.
Notes:

1. "People in their movements are influenced and directed by three-dimensional confines and by the structural lines of such confines...If these confines are architectural structures, their volumes and their scale exert pressure and resistance and stimulate and direct our reaction to the space around us."

   -Zucker, TOWN AND SQUARE

2. "Man may build to control his environment, but it is as much the inner, social, and religious environment as the physical one that he is controlling–the ideal environment in cultural terms."

   -Rappaport: HOUSE FORM AND CULTURE

3. "A garden connected to a house can be a second home more real to the inhabitants...We need these two homes, a green one and a brown one, a grown one and a built one, two worlds in tension."

   -Harbison: ECCENTRIC SPACES

4. "No landscape garden of the eighteenth century was complete without its hermitage."

   -Hunt: THE FIGURE IN THE LANDSCAPE

We will focus on the establishment of an objective and rational understanding of architecture to which will be added more subjective and personal preferences. This will involve, by means of the architectural studio, a reiterative investigation into the relationship of form and meaning through analysis, invention and evaluation. This semester a series of short problems will be given to expose to you the complexity of the architectural 'act'; to develop skills of form manipulation; to give you self-confidence in making valid decisions within set time limits; to develop the skills of graphic presentation necessary for interpreting and communicating architectural ideas; and above all to instill the ability to combine insight with rigorous analytical study in a 'design process" that is efficient, personally effective and which becomes second nature to you as a working methodology.

At the same time that you investigate form manipulation for solutions to specific programs, it is necessary to explore the relationship of form to meaning and specifically what 'meanings' are associated with the making of architecture. It is at this point that a major problem arises. Verbal logic and formal logic are not the same process. A specific shape (space may for example be given several different functional/programmatic meanings and its quality as form (shape plus meaning) is dependent upon its context (historical), formal, intellectual, etc.) Furthermore, its correctness as solution may be verbally convincing but not so formally. It is this investigation of the relationship of form and meaning and the technical means to achieve them that will consume the bulk of your educational experience in architecture as inventive and creative architects to be.

"Architecture is the reduction of the ideal to the circumstantial"

Louis I. Kahn

"Architecture is the elevation of the circumstantial to the ideal"

Mies van der Rohe

"Architecture is the confrontation of order and reality"

Charles Moore

If architecture is seen as a dialogue between values or themes ascribed to an ideal order versus those of a circumstantial order, and if the meaning of this relationship is made manifest through the juxtaposition of formal and spatial relationships then it appears necessary to:

1) Identify the cultural, architectural and programmatic values or themes capable of being ascribed to ideal and circumstantial notation.

2) Identify the physical characteristics of "ideal" and circumstantial form and space.

3) Identify modes of perception of "conceptual vs 'perceptual' form and space.

The problem solving process (methodology) in architecture is rather similar to that used in any other discipline. What is different is that insight, inventiveness and creativity is an individual quality, partially inherent and partially experiential. All of us are sufficiently inventive to be here and indeed have by desiring to come into architecture we have already given strong indication of our capacity to create in the visual arts. What is needed is for the school to provide you with the structure and the experiences to productively solve problems of an architectural type of ever increasing complexity.

It is therefore necessary to discipline one's self to a usable approach to design problems - an approach that can be applied to the design of a chair or that of a complex architecture problem. The issues or scale of a design problem may change but not the method of attack.

The general order for decision-making is as follows:

1) problem identification
2) information gathering
3) analysis
4) solution generation or 'fit' - a 'parti'
5) evaluation
6) choice and elaboration
7) evaluation of solution in terms of original definition

For most of you, the experiences of being in a school of architecture will be considerably different from your prior academic training. It will challenge your perceptions of yourself and the world with which you are familiar. This is on one hand a professional education and there are design skills and technical information which you must master. We cannot teach you in five years all that one must have in order to practice architecture, nor, unlike the sciences, does there exist a body of approved agreed upon knowledge or specific method that lends, if correctly followed, to a successful conclusion. This is also a creative discipline that leaves the ultimate responsibility for design decisions and the ensuing product with the designer. Yet architecture is not seen merely as an exercise in free play or a willful manipulation of shapes, ideas, economics, etc. in order to "feel good," "make a buck" or even "save the world." Rather, as an education this is only the beginning of a process that should sustain you the rest of your professional careers.

We believe that architecture can be taught, that there are cultural issues and values manifested by architecture that are universal, that there is in our historical architectural past potential information that is applicable to present day needs, and that architecture is above all an art from of incredible sophistication, difficulty and satisfaction.

To begin the process of your acquaintance with the critical literature on and about architecture, I am recommending readings in several books during the course of the semester. We will be discussing this material as well as using it in the design studio. All books will be on reserve in the library.

Syracuse University
School of Architecture

ARC 107
Reading List

Fall 1992
Professors Abbey,
Griffin, de Noble,
Sloan, Damiani

Arnheim	Art and Visual Perception
Eliade	The Sacred and the Profane
Ching	Architecture: Form Space & Order
Le Corbusier	Towards a New Architecture
Norberg-Schultz	Existence Space & Architecture
Sherwood	Principles and Elements of Architecture
Vitruvius	The Ten Books of Architecture
von Meiss	Elements of Architecture
Zevi	Architecture as Space

Other references will be named as required