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1.1. Design methods

Teaching methods, relation between subject and object within the design studio.

In "Dr. Tulp's Anatomy Lesson", painted in 1632, Rembrandt portrays an anatomy lesson that defines a teaching method based upon the observation of a specific action, performed by the master, which the students will reproduce to exhaustion until they reach the level of expertise considered necessary to perform an autonomous practice.

This method was shared by those disciplines to which the thorough reproduction of models or actions were considered indispensable in acquiring the competencies required for a specific work.

In appearance, the teaching of Architectural Design is, to some extent, still based upon craftsmanship, in the sense that individual learning consists in a 'process' where persistent and continuous development of exercises, simulating real life situations, enables the acquisition of specific competencies, as well as design methodologies that constitute the core of future architect's formation.

This is a learning method that, synthesizing disperse disciplinary knowledge, due to an increasing specialization, understands the practice of architectural design as a moment of integration of all the inputs acquired throughout a long training period, a process of continuous disciplinary memory building, at a personal level, which design will ultimately reveal.

On the other hand, this method, relying on individual tutorship, is based on the assumption that learning is individual and self centered, promoting mechanisms of future professional activity within a frame of individual recognition.

Is this model unsurpassable? Are we facing the need for a total rupture in architectural design teaching methods, or is it possible to overcome the current method through an evolution based on group learning within the design studio?

This introduction to the first session of the colloquium, Didactics, tried to unveil the general tone of the three presentations, as well as trying to foresee some of the questions that could arise. From the greek *didaktiké*, the term refers to the art of teaching according to the methods or principles of a given science, or the precepts of an art.

The discussion was precisely around the relevance of the current teaching methods, given that architecture's disciplinary centrality is currently being challenged within schools, not only through a more interdisciplinary view needed as a mean to face rapidly changing conditions within the professional practice, but also by teachers careers increasingly directed towards academic research, somehow neglecting a close relation to practice.

Morgan Flynn's presentation focused precisely on the community-like approach that the design studio enhances, as compared to a formal classroom lecture, as a means to involve teachers and students in a mutual conceptual framework. The comparison with the training of medical students on placement in general practice surgeries added an outside perspective, so as to understand and explain the gradual evolution of students apprenticeship and their approach to the center of the design studio community.

Jan Frohburg presented the design studio as the best suited environment to develop a reflective practice, although stressing the impact of assessment and self-evaluation as criteria to develop standards able to qualify its practice. The setting of qualitative descriptors, fully understood, and used in a self-reflective manner by the students, is presented as the most accurate way of evaluating the creative process within the design studio.

Carolina Coelho's presentation revolved around the concept of space use as a tool in architectural design. Acknowledging a reciprocity between space and use, a sense of feed forward technique will inform design, its options and choices, through the use of space-sintax tools, also dealing with Schön's concept of reflection in action. Although dealing mainly with the process of architectural design at a professional practice level, it raises pertinent questions about current architectural teaching methods.

The debate following these presentations focused mainly on the validity of the design studio experience in the present situation, seen more as an evolution rather than a total rupture with traditional teaching methods. On the other hand, the qualification of the teaching staff, increasingly devoted to academic tasks, raises the need to enroll qualified practitioners in order to accomplish the full scope of design studio. Evolution, rather than revolution, was the consensus reached at the end of the session.