

Architectural Flirtations, formerly known as critique

Dethroning “the serious” to clear ground for generous architectural conversations

Transvaluation Symposium in Göteborg 21-22 May 2015.

BRADY BURROUGHS

Teacher/researcher/architect

PhD Candidate / Critical Studies, KTH

Stockholm, Sweden

brady@kth.se

Abstract

With this chapter, I aim to briefly describe and position the key concepts that form the central idea of my forthcoming dissertation, *I hate architecture <3: Architectural Flirtations, formerly known as critique*. It explores the words I use in the (working) title, “architectural”, “flirtations” and “critique,” in relation to ideas about architects and their formation, staked out by Dana Cuff in her chapter “The Making of an Architect” from 1991.¹ Although it was written almost 25 years ago, around the time of my own design education, I am struck by the degree to which my Master’s architecture students still recognize elements of their own education in Cuff’s text, when reading it together as recently as March 2014. Cuff writes, “The ethos of a profession is born in schools.”² For me, it’s obvious that the effects are lasting! In revisiting the central aspects that contribute to making a culture of architects, what Cuff describes as ‘enculturation’, “...a process that transforms layperson into architect through the knowledge, experience, and authority gained over the course of a career,” with a specific focus on education, I propose an intentional and continuous displacing of “the center,” as a strategy to “clear ground” for more ethical, socially-conscious and generous architectural conversations.³

Situated within what Jane Rendell describes as one of the five thematics of current feminist critical spatial practices- *performativity*, my work is most often a joining of feminist, literary and architectural disciplines with a theatrical guise.⁴ In a re-application within the context of the culture of architecture, I take Gavin Butt’s call for *scholarly flirtation* seriously, while Susan Sontag’s ideas on Camp are revived for their ability to “dethrone the serious” and for their strong relation to queer performativity. To instigate a different mode of operation from what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick labels as the “paranoia” of critique and critical theorists, I look to Sara Ahmed’s act of “reorienting” or decentering that I believe the architectural flirt can achieve.⁵ bell hooks describes engaged pedagogical settings, not as so-called “safe spaces” where everyone agrees, but rather as spaces that “know how to cope in situations of risk.”⁶ Flirtation is risky, and architectural flirtations complicate things, in order to resist habit and offer another “way of doing things” and “alternative ways of understanding.”

Keywords: architectural, flirtation, critique, Camp, queer



Images from an “Architectural Flirt Aid Course” event (my 50% PhD seminar) on 28 May 2014. Photography: Håkan Lindquist

Key references

- Ahmed, S, 2006. Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology. In: *GLQ*, 12:4, Duke University Press, p 552-554.
- Butt, G, 2007. Scholarly Flirtations: The Serious Scholar. In: summit: non-aligned initiatives in education culture in collaboration with Goldsmiths College, London University. (<http://summit.kein.org/node/234>, 2014-04-28).
- Cuff, D, 1991. *Architecture: The Story of Practice*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- hooks, b, 2010. *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom*, NY and London: Routledge.
- Rendell, J, 2011. Critical Spatial Practices: Setting Out a Feminist Approach to some Modes and what Matters in Architecture. In: Lori Brown, ed., *Feminist Practices: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Women in Architecture*, Surrey, UK: Ashgate.
- Sedgwick, E. K., 2003. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Sontag, S, 1964. Notes On “Camp”. In: S. Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1990 (1986).

¹ Cuff, 109-154.

² Cuff, 43.

³ Cuff, 153.

⁴ Rendell, 37.

⁵ Sedgwick, 131. Ahmed, 552-554.

⁶ hooks, 87.