

SCI-Arc

Lecture outline

Oct 26, 2022

Salutations and regards

Thank you, Hernan, and greetings to you all.

Introduction

From the center.

The presentation this evening will be a journey through forty years of teaching and practicing. I will present where my curiosities have taken me, and what I've realized or discovered along the way, through the lens of an "Architectural Mind" that is curious, loves to wander, and to experience the unexpected.

My comfort level increases in proportion to uncertainty. My curiosity attracts me to anything unfamiliar, always wanting to know "*how something becomes something,*" as Richard Feynman would say - always through the lens of my Architectural Mind which moves back and forth between both halves of my brain, taking pause in between, in the center, the corpus callosum, to reflect and sort things out, as I wonder "what the Architectural equivalent is".

Curiosity is the engine of learning. We are learning machines (more on this later), and as Rene Dubois wrote in *Dreams of Reason* about the unexpected in scientific discovery, "Good fortune favors a prepared mind."

Out of my mind

When I was very young, I made things before I knew how. When I was older, I may have known how to make things, but I did not know why.

In my formative years, I may have known how and why, but I did not have a sense of direction. That came later.

What I was certain about, my motivation to draw and model, was to see outside what I was imagining inside my minds' eye.

On storytelling

Pentimento / Rashomon

The Kurosawa film *Rashomon* showed there could be differing accounts of a single event. Framed by this concept, the following story of a teacher-practitioner who has been lots of places, met a lot of people, and has seen and heard many new and surprising things worth remembering, acknowledges that memory is not an exact or accurate archive of past events, but rather it serves as a framework for giving us context, perspective, and guidance for living together in the present.

If anyone here recognizes any of your ideas, and I got it right, you can claim it. If otherwise, it's my problem.

Fact and fiction

My intellect, when it began to grow, was fact-based. Architecture, in my experience, was primarily an intellectual practice based on facts, theories, and metrics. This was essential to a native son living in a city of constant change and little memory, if any, and as many points of view as there were people.

Then things shifted for me when we began a project for an Ibo Nigerian, MD educated at Oxford and Stanford, who saw the world through a hybrid lens of a Western intellect infused with the superstitions of his tribal emotional intelligence. Our long conversations made me begin to wonder—

*What if I integrated intellectual and spiritual practice?
Matters of the mind and matters of the heart.*

I had already checked the box of religion via varsity Catholic altar boy for some years, in middle school. Which I enjoyed - my spatial awareness of grand spaces and rituals captured part of my imagination, which eventually went dormant as my young searching mind began to confront the limits of dogma and how it constrained my imagination and creativity.

That was fully cured when I met Thom and we spent sixteen years in what I would characterize as the formative years for my Ark Mind. Some years later, meeting two people as I approached midlife (as it is referred to) opened my mind and heart in unexpected ways.

Images of my teachers

Stories and my imagination

I believe imagination is fueled by curiosity. Both are an evolutionary imperative, and more fundamentally, biological necessity. As children we have essentially ten years of protected play - why? Simply to grow our capacity to IMAGINE.

For my imagination to flourish, it sets up a symbiotic relationship between fact and fiction. What emerges is a conceptual speculation.

I learned about this relationship from Indigenous people I have worked with; Native Americans, Tibetans, and Nigerian Ibo, among them. Mythical stories and teachings set in real geographical places, South Dakota, Wyoming, New Mexico, India, Tibet,

Nigeria, and Australia. Their stories teach their children by combining myth and reality, practical and profound.

To learn more, April and I made pilgrimages to read certain texts while in certain geographical places. These sets of readings and immersed experiences, in these places, pushed my well-established curiosity into overdrive. I now wanted to know all that could possibly be known before I retired, planned for two years after I die.....(an aspiration).

I am also curious about curiosity.

So, I will show you what I have been most curious about, and what the architectural equivalent is for me.

This is a glimpse into my notebooks / journals rather than a proposition or an argument about a particular position.

An American Story

t h i s i s a n a m e r i c a n s t o r y

told from the point of view of the son of an italian immigrant
who drove to los angeles 90 years ago from new york city
believing that los angeles was america... and it was.
he invented a life and made it possible, in his own way,
for his four sons to do the same.

inside our home, life was based on multi-generational traditions.
outside, life was negotiated and improvised.
no two families were of the same ethnicity.
our neighborhood friends were an eclectic group,
searching for common ground.
it was a young city with little memory and no expectations.

LA was, and still is, a place for inventors
entrepreneurs
storytellers
explorers
gamblers.
and

fast forward: the new school / sci_arc

in our formative years, with confidence and inexperience,

we invented our lives, our projects, and a school,
in a city that was coming of age as we were coming of
age.

we eventually realized that it was one project.
what brought us together and kept us together
would eventually give meaning to our relationships,
and our lives.

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_Sci-arc
_RoTo

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2 works (civic)

_scale
_connectivity

Conclusion

Human civilization has endured for millennia, fostered by its most fundamental biological imprint - survival.

In my travels, I have visited remote villages in the Americas, Middle East, and China that are still vital, having endured for 3000 to 6000 years. Evidence that the human enterprise is a great wonder, and perhaps the most complex of all life forms. It is responsive, adaptive, and innovative to any and all forces that challenge its integrity:

- _transgressions within the species,
- _the speed of change that challenges the depth of our memory,
- _global interactions that challenge our local identities,
- _being confronted by the autonomous logic of human institutional structures and their concepts of power, politics, and money,
- _and forces of nature that are scales beyond real comprehension, let alone preparation.

All of these issues and the potential problems that arise are hugely difficult ones, and possibly cannot be overcome in the long term - so why should we try, we might ask?

Simply because it is the right thing to do, and because creative people like us like big problems. The bigger the problem - the bigger the motivation - the bigger the smile.

It's a gift to be an architect and a teacher, and it's a gift to have so many friends and comrades, like all of you.
Thank you and love to you all.
RoTo

Thank You ALL

m.Roto
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