CUSTOM, CUSTOM-, CUSTOMIZE

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ABSTRACT

A hard structured, preplanned and well organized approach to teaching is a backbone of educational excellence, an incredibly efficient and resource saving behaviour. Rigorous preparations and linear instructions make skill transfer easy. Evaluation is based on quantitative criteria, feedback is clear, grades are fair, overall in-class anxiety level during the course is low. It is predictable and safe. Ever improving digital time shredding tools make a whole process even more feasible. Everything is practical, a hands-on knowledge is passed further in sheltered environment. Results are satisfying for all – industry gets skilled work force, work force gets paid, educators fortify positions. A cycle.
But more often than not, a one-size-fits-all approach actually fits none. Arithmetic mean, averages and other rationales that led to various standards made to fit – just doesn't.
And what if the cycle gets interrupted and the structure breaks? If behaviour derails and perspective shifts?
When things are open to change and external impact, focus shifts to individual and self. When personal position and subjective reasoning is highly valued, insecurity is embraced in full, anxiety is a companion. Everything becomes open-ended and is free to perform.
Unstructured action is an archaic drive, organic, speculative and curious, it's a human nature stripped off of any fixed objectives. It moves things and grows knowledge, feeds from experience, creates new experience and learns from it. A cycle of a different kind.
Efficiency is overrated. Time is not a resource.

This is a speculative position based on a personal experience, brought from practice to teaching, explored through research, then reframed as a current thought. While the birth of this thought is organic in nature, and unintended, unstructured and vague, it still stands as a defined entity, an idea that drives and shapes the teaching behaviour here presented. So, it is a behavioral concept shaped by experience and personal traits. Far from being universal or conventionally relevant. It's a scrapbook.

Generalised and highly subjective statements and conclusions are being used as a writing tool, a thinking method, to provoke an internal discussion within oneself, and to cause a stronger self-response during the production of this paper.

Disclosure – Action not Labor, Work for Action

To define a starting position, when referring to any kind of a creative activity, and in order to understand the nature of other, various activities of the individuals in a contemporary society, architectural practice is understood in a particular way, by considering praxis[1] in a different context. More specifically, using Arendt's consideration of human activities in the modern age through a reaffirmation of ancient praxis in a contemporary society. By introducing the term Vita Activa, Arendt makes a distinction among three basic human activities: Labor, Work and Action.[2] This division is based on the goal or striving for a given activity.

The term Labor represents biological processes and activities necessary for the basic functioning of a human being. Products are impermanent, requiring a constant repetition in order to maintain life. The aim – survival and subsistence. Arendt claims that, if a human is seen as a species that acts only through Labor, then, being unfree, only fulfils inherent needs.

Products of Work are beyond the basic limits of nature and human existence and are more durable than products created through Labor. This activity directly influences nature because it transforms and shapes it according to human intentions, desires and needs. There's a display of a certain quality of freedom, no longer driven solely by inherent needs.

Action enables the individual to express its unique nature through communication with the environment, creation of claims and oeuvres, thus leaving a permanent trace and lasting memory.[3] The main characteristic of Action is the complete freedom of acting, because neither the cause nor the goals belong to needs and necessities. Through this unique nature, Arendt sees complete freedom as the ability to create something new and unexpected with regard to previous human knowledge and product.[4]

Ongoing – Where I am, What I see

Dedicated to learning, acting, teaching, observing, loafing, observing while learning and loafing, out of the lab conditions and into the live streamed experiment, faced with real, day to day life, rigorously schooled from the birth, taught by family and society, regularly soaped and washed for a finer shine, one needs to acknowledge the ever present truth, lived by many, that —

— a hard structured, preplanned and well-organized approach to teaching is a backbone of educational excellence, an incredibly efficient and resource saving behaviour. Rigorous preparations and linear instructions make skill transfer easy. Evaluation is based on quantitative criteria, feedback is clear, grades are fair, overall in-class anxiety level during the course is low. It is predictable and safe. Ever improving digital time shredding tools make the whole process even more feasible. Everything is practical, hands-on knowledge is passed further in a sheltered environment. Results are satisfying for all – industry gets skilled workforce, workforce gets paid, educators fortify positions. A cycle. The Normative way.[5]

[1] Aristotle's classification – theoria, poiesis and praxis
[2] Arendt, Hannah. *The Human condition.* Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
[3] Fry, Karin. *Arendt: A Guide for the Perplexed.* London: Continuum, 2009.
[4] d'Entreves, Maurizio Passerin, "Hannah Arendt", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/arendt/>.
[5] Stempfle, J. Badke-Schaub, P. (2002) *Thinking in design teams - an analysis of team communication,* Design Studies, Volume 23 (5), Elsevier

It suggests a strict methodology, systematic approach to work with a view to optimal results through rational analysis of the design task, often documented in the form of educational guidebooks. Following the scent trail, there's a convenient found, used here to crudely sketch this behavioural norm – the Pahl-Beitz[6] methodology, in its many forms, here reduced to four basic stages:

1. planning and elucidation of the task
2. formation of concepts
3. elaboration of concepts
4. execution of details

Easy to measure, easy to check and validate.

Still, what do I see when I observe, while learning and loafing? That —

— more often than not, a one-size-fits-all approach actually fits none. Normative way, arithmetic mean, averages and other rationales that led to various standards made to fit – just doesn't.

And what if the cycle gets interrupted and the structure breaks? If behaviour derails and perspective shifts?

Prequel

The broad field of architecture practice comprises two characteristic domains within the profession:

- the research and education, that is, the art and education
- professional practice

The aforementioned domains of practice are mutually conditioned and inextricable parts of a common whole, and their relationship is one of constant interlacing and activity, understanding and consequence.

Architectural practice is the origin, the place where theoretical knowledge about creation is set into the practical domain of acting. This is the area of research potential in which experience and character of acting of the individual can be taken directly and head on, along with the conditions and circumstances in which architecture-related activities unfold.

Case Sketch – make-believe

In a series of talks over the course of the semester, the teacher and visiting lecturers presented universal, current and contemporary topics in the field of architecture, without a strict definition or framework. Subjective opinions regarding the reality were encouraged. Blended, free form consideration of theory and practice created a healthy base for further advancement. Task was just a hint; problems were to be found and to be refined. New concepts were to be grown in a completely uncharted path.

No one knew what to do or where to go, but still, by the sheer force of the learned response, and to gain some false sense of structure, weekly activities were broken down into three basic units:

1. Thematic talks
2. Practical work
3. Critique

Dynamics of teaching and learning could be shown as a function of duration and overlap of particular units, that is, according to the intensity of each unit as well as their location and number of participants.

Thematic talks and critique took place in the classroom or a professional studio, lasting several hours, with groups of 10 to 15 participants, both teachers and students. Practical work was conducted independently over the course of seven days, in individual working environments, without external influence. Transition between units clearly defined the rhythm of communication, overlapping each other, blurring the borders, integrating themselves into the flow of the teaching.

[6] Pahl, G. Beitz, W. (1984, 1995) *Engineering design,* Springer, London

Critique was based on the presented practical work. This is the crucial segment of the cycle, the most significant point, nominally the last one in the above defined sequence, but also the beginning of a new cycle. Entire segment incubates elements of all three units – dialogue and discussion reveal the potential for further practical endeavour in a new cycle, confronted with reflections regarding the previous steps, defining the new position of the author.

Transitional results were not reduced to their physical manifestation but considered as a consequence of decisions made in the process of conceiving, thinking and creating. The assigned artifact is a visible trace, placed in a relation to the topic in order to be evaluated through the subjective statements. Particular conclusions were reached based on a group discussion, with the aim to achieve a clear authorial position.

The final artifact is not the primary goal, and as such is not decorative but reduced and stripped down. It's just a depiction of decisions made through constant reflection. Its phenomenology, appearance and character carry within traces of the process, while holding authorial consistency and value, as an interpretative answer.

Next Gen

Flexibility defines limits.

When things are open to change and external impact, focus shifts to individual and self. When personal position and subjective reasoning is highly valued, insecurity is embraced in full, anxiety is a companion. Everything becomes open-ended and is free to perform.

Unstructured action is an archaic drive, organic, speculative and curious, it's a human nature stripped off of any fixed objectives. It moves things and grows knowledge, feeds from experience, creates new experience and learns from it. A cycle of a different kind.

Efficiency is overrated. Time is not a resource.

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APPENDIX

Prologue

In 1957, an earth-born object made by man was launched into the universe, where for some weeks it circled the earth according to the same laws of gravitation that swing and keep in motion the celestial bodies—the sun, the moon, and the stars. To be sure, the man-made satellite was no moon or star, no heavenly body which could follow its circling path for a time span that to us mortals, bound by earthly time, lasts from eternity to eternity. Yet, for a time it managed to stay in the skies; it dwelt and moved in the proximity of the heavenly bodies as though it had been admitted tentatively to their sublime company.

This event, second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom, would have been greeted with unmitigated joy if it had not been for the uncomfortable military and political circumstances attending it. But, curiously enough, this joy was not triumphal; it was not pride or awe at the tremendousness of human power and mastery which filled the hearts of men, who now, when they looked up from the earth toward the skies, could behold there a thing of their own making. The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth." And this strange statement, far from being the accidental slip of some American reporter, unwittingly echoed the extraordinary line which, more than twenty years ago, had been carved on the funeral obelisk for one of Russia's great scientists: "Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever."

Such feelings have been commonplace for some time. They show that men everywhere are by no means slow to catch up and adjust to scientific discoveries and technical developments, but that, on the contrary, they have outsped them by decades. Here, as in other

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respects, science has realized and affirmed what men anticipated in dreams that were neither wild nor idle. What is new is only that one of this country's most respectable newspapers finally brought to its front page what up to then had been buried in the highly non-respectable literature of science fiction (to which, unfortunately, nobody yet has paid the attention it deserves as a vehicle of mass sentiments and mass desires). The banality of the statement should not make us overlook how extraordinary in fact it was; for although Christians have spoken of the earth as a vale of tears and philosophers have looked upon their body as a prison of mind or soul, nobody in the history of mankind has ever conceived of the earth as a prison for men's bodies or shown such eagerness to go literally from here to the moon. Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?

The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms. For some time now, a great many scientific endeavors have been directed toward making life also "artificial," toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature. It is the same desire to escape from imprisonment to the earth that is manifest in the attempt to create life in the test tube, in the desire to mix "frozen germ plasm from people of demonstrated ability under the microscope to produce superior human beings" and "to alter [their] size, shape and function"; and the wish to escape the human condition, I suspect, also underlies the hope to extend man's life-span far beyond the hundred-year limit.

~~This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, a free gift from~~

From Arendt, Hannah. *The Human condition.* Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1958. Page 24