

## Una fessura sciamanica per catturare una fugace verità

### *A shamanistic fissure to catch a fleeting truth*

*Le scuole di architettura spesso portano avanti ideologie inconsapevolmente. Abbiamo perso le fonti primarie, essenziali al pensare e fare architettura, ossia strumenti per afferrare, intellettualmente e immaginativamente, i dettagli evanescenti e sottili che rivelano verità sfuggenti. I docenti di architettura hanno permesso lo sviluppo separato di architettura e design. La costruzione ideologica di una scala attraverso la quale distinguiamo un edificio dal suo paesaggio, implica la natura frattale delle città, che è una conversione di interno ed esterno — una questione di "emergenze" piuttosto che di sequenza causale. La città incarna l'essenza umana e la volontà di esistere non solo di fronte ma anche mediante l'auto-distruzione. Le origini dell'architettura risiedono nella costruzione sciamanica di fessure che ci permettano di produrre ombre misurabili con geometria musicale per creare la Realtà del mondo.*

*Architectural schools extend ideology unknowingly. We have lost the primary sources essential to architectural thinking and making, that is a means of grasping, intellectually and imaginatively, the small, evanescent details that reveal a fleeting truth. Architecture educators have allowed architecture and design to develop separately. The ideological construct of a scale through which we distinguish a building from its landscape, subverts the fractal nature of cities, which is a conversion of outer to inner — a matter of "emergence" rather than causal chains. The city embodies the human essence, the will to exist not just in the face of, but also through self-destruction. Architecture's origins are in the shamanistic construction of fissures that allow us to make shadows to be measured with a precise musical geometry and sung to create the Real of the world. LB*



**Donald Kunze**

Donald Kunze has taught architecture theory and general arts criticism at Penn State University since 1984. His book on Giambattista Vico studied the operation of metaphoric imagination and memory. As a Shogren Foundation Fellow, he developed a system of dynamic notation based on the calculus of George Spencer Brown, and as the 2003 Reyner Banham Fellow at the University at Buffalo, he extended this system to problems of boundaries in art, architecture, film and geographical imagination. As a Nadine Carter Russell Fellow at the Robert Reich School of Landscape Architecture at LSU, he worked with Kevin Benham redeploing the idea of the surrealist garden as a studio matrix. He is currently developing themes linking the double frame to sexuation and the function of the *pharmakeus*.

Parole chiave: **Ideologia; Verità; Scala; Natura umana; Geometria.**

Keywords: **Ideology; Truth; Scale; Human essence; Geometry.**



What is the most pressing challenge that architecture is asked to resolve today?

The natural world is deteriorating, capitalist (de)materialism penetrates every activity, extremist ideologies distort every institution. Architecture cannot fix any of this, but it is forced to “go along” with the prevailing mania and “weigh in” on issues as if one of its functions was to “do philosophy.” Young architects are taught to respond in a “benevolent way” to fix the problems that capitalism and fundamentalism have wrought. But, this is to “take a theoretical position” without knowing how to do theory. Theory has been replaced by a series of binary signifiers that oppose the good to the bad, the new to the raggedy-old, the green to the polluted, etc. Schools substitute

binaries for real thinking but do not allow study of the binary itself — its logic, its metonymical capacities. Instead, they use binaries polemically to construct fake conflicts and define ways of being “the nice architect,” while, in actuality, they extend ideology unknowingly. The responsibility of prescribing architectural options to fix world problems has been debilitating. Many say that we have arrived at the final hours. Certainly, we are dominated by conceptualized alibis, having lost our connections to the primary sources essential to architectural thinking and making: not the Big Books but, more fundamentally, a means — which must be a different means for each who attempts — of

grasping, intellectually and imaginatively, the small, evanescent details that reveal, in the turmoil of ongoing and illusion-filled reality, a *fleeting* truth. Once we lose the ability to see these — the Form fleeting within the flow of material experience — we have lost everything.



With respect to the design of the contemporary city; what is the role of architecture in managing urban phenomena?

The city is a question of scale and distinction of “position” (situation) from “ground” (site). Ground is earth and earth’s relation to falling and blood, which is, even today, conserved or spilt in rituals that create cities. Scale, wrongly imagined as a continuum linking small to large, has remained unquestioned, so we retain the limited idea that the city is a matter of density, masking the flows of capital across an extensive (but comparatively empty) landscape. The ideological construct of scale sublates the fractal nature of cities, which is a conversion of outer to inner — a matter of “emergence” rather than causal chains. The city is not a given, not an observable entity: we see its effects and mistake them

for causes. There is little productive thinking about cities because there is no collective will to address presuppositions theoretically. Once we understand exchange as dialectic, we acknowledge the nomadic and priestly functions that have generated cities, first inhabited only by the dead and those who washed and buried, burned, or exposed them (Walter Wheatley, *Pivot of the Four Quarters*). This is not poetic fantasy but an ongoing dynamic for which we lack a proper theoretical vocabulary. The tyranny of the scale-continuum divides urban from rural, settled from wild. But, cities are not reducible to such uniform statistical surfaces, site plans without depth or vertical resistance.

Borges’ story about the barbarian Droctulft, who, in the midst of attacking Ravenna with his fellow Lombards, suddenly grasps the city’s terrible/majestic meaning and joins in the city-dwellers’ hopeless struggle, is informative. The city embodies the human essence, the will to exist not just in the face of, but through, self-destruction.



Architecture and design have established an exchange that is both operational and perceptive; buildings are conceived as objects and objects are conceived by those who design buildings. Between architecture and design, is it possible to define boundaries or intersections?

Architecture educators have allowed architecture and design to develop separately, as competing methodologies justifying specialized education and employment paths. Worse, there are now two “attitudes,” conceived as antagonistic poles: the designer who treats the future of a building as a problem and the architect who crafts the precious work of art. We have profited from this shameful division, so we lack the motivation to fix the polarity — indeed, we enjoy the sham debates that obscure more important issues. Worse, we attach design to a material-reductionist attitude of Enlightenment thinking, allowing us to condemn rationalism on behalf of a

humanistic “poiesis.” Then— even worse! — we deny that we have done any damage, although it is clear that this fake debate has broken schools and relegated theory to the back rooms. Architecture intertwines with, and is often indistinguishable from, the nature of acts and events. Standard methods of representation and attempts to “re-ort time” via analogies and notation systems fall short of grasping the essential temporality of architecture. Architecture’s origins are in the shamanistic construction of fissures — divisions in the continuum of a monstrous cosmos — that allow us to make shadows to be measured with a precise musical geometry and sung to create the

Real of the world. Only a few peoples, such as the Australian Aboriginals, continue this practice, we must learn from them what it means to “design” in order to revive the ever-dying architecture of the world.



When giving advice to students, what is the most valuable tool that an architecture or design student ought to acquire during their studies?

In the Monty Python film, *Life of Brian*, Brian tells a crowd, "We all have to be *different!*" The crowd responds, "Yes, we are all different," but one lonely voice from the back says, "I'm not." This is a lesson in the resistance to ideology. A paradoxical mandate ("Everyone, be different!") can be exposed through comedy. Schools must be about ideas rather than training; students must be taught how to live the Taoist ideal of uselessness. Our highest educational goal must not be to make students available for anonymous exploitation, while maintaining the illusion that they balance things off by being moral and kind. The Cretan Liar speaks through two channels of subjectivity.

In the first, he maintains that all Cretans are liars, in the second, which is a kind of frame inside a frame, he creates a space between the liar and non-liar, a stage-whisper inviting the audience into a space of pure act, pure event. We should not forget how to whisper such invitations. This was Walt Whitman's electric body, the close-up magician's ability to conspire with the unbeliever's misbelief to create, in front of the faces of the audience, actual magic. Or, Socrates' lesson from Diotima, recounted while the other banqueters were sleeping. The double or inside frame has been recognized by every architect, from the shamans who sang shadow cities into being, to Piranesi, Soane,

Scarpa, Goff ... those who are, as the lover the poet and the lunatic, "of imagination all compact." Uselessness is an art, perfectible through drawing. My personal preference would be for architecture schools to be drawing schools, letting theory develop on its own through acts of drawing.

... As long as the drawings are useless.