

Intention and Materiality: The Hut, the Ornament, and Construction as a Bubble

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Architecture, as a built art, is necessarily dependent on the physical matter of which it is made—materials. The course entitled *Intention and Materiality* is founded on the premise that understanding theoretical and philosophical issues which affect and inform architecture's materiality can positively enhance both conceptual design processes and realized built work, and provide a basis for critical reflection on materials use in the built environment.

The objective of this course is for each student to develop an awareness of materials and tectonic issues which may inform architectural design. To this end, the course combines

reading, writing, design, making, and critical reflection toward elucidating a general framework for relating issues surrounding materiality, technology, tectonics, structure, construction, details, and ornament.

The following projects represent the design and making components of this course. Each of the projects—a hut, an ornament (design and full-scale construction), and a wall—explores different aspects of architecture's tectonic significance. The projects represented are samples of work completed with different students over the course of two semesters.

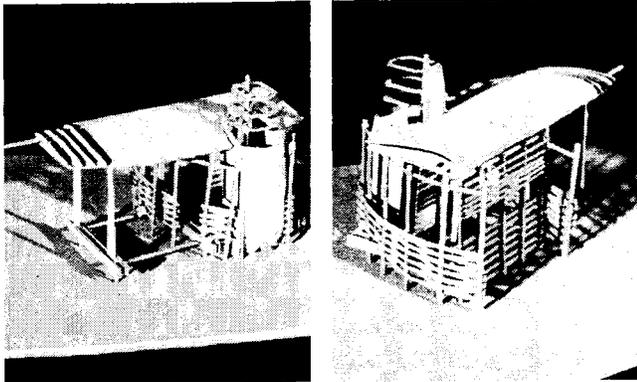


Fig. 1 & 2 Doug Dorney's Hut

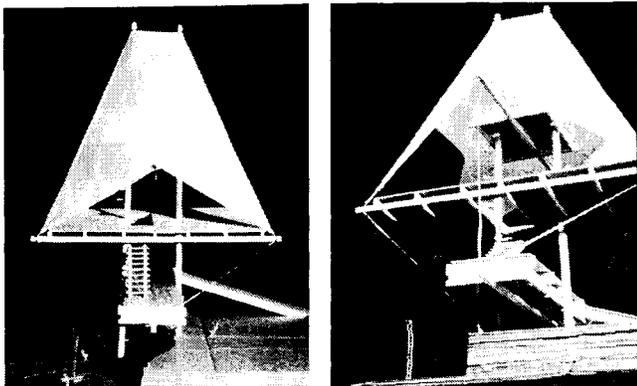


Fig. 3 & 4 Kemp Morhardt's Hut

THE HUT (FIGURES 1-4)

From the earliest extant theoretical writing on architecture, a tradition of origin stories have been told to explain and describe the first architectural construction. As a highly formulaic genre, certain elements are constant in all of these origin narratives. Nonetheless, the unique aspects of each story reveal a variety of intentions underlying their telling—intentions which include the legitimation, purification, and direction of architecture relative to evident polemics which inform each narrative. Each polemic suggests an absolute and primordial significance which has existed in architecture from its origin. Among the various examples discussed were huts which individually represented absolute structural rationality, unadulterated tectonic and artistic expression, geometric perfection, pure architectural form, and the ultimate foil to a reified classical order. Each student derived a scenario (past, present, or future) in which they found themselves without shelter, and with limited means available to create one. The constructed dwelling was to reflect their needs and desires, and the inventive and economical use of available materials (3 maximum, natural or manmade). The hut was to embody their individual sense regarding the essence of architecture which must be present at all times, perhaps most purely in its most essential constructions.

THE ORNAMENT (FIGURES 5-8)

While the modern banishment of excess and outer-referent expression virtually eliminated ornament from discussions of critical, rational architecture, a broader view of ornament's purposes and means reveals certain characteristics still active in contemporary architecture. Broadly considering ornaments as articulated elements within expressive systems, a broader range of subjects come into view. These subjects can be more specifically distinguished by their referent sources and reference modes in relation to their subject matter. Inner (self)-referent ornaments are tectonic, articulating subject matter from within the realm of building. They may poetically amplify construction, structures, materials, process, use or operational characteristics of architecture. Outer (other)-referent ornaments are figural, and extend architectural subject matter by drawing inspiration from such sources as nature, iconography, mythology, religion, ritual, history, or cultural practice. Students were to consider the differing ways which ornament may articulate buildings, and design either an inner-referent or outer-referent ornament for one of their own architectural projects. Following the review of design drawings, each student constructed their ornament full-scale using the actual materials intended in the design.

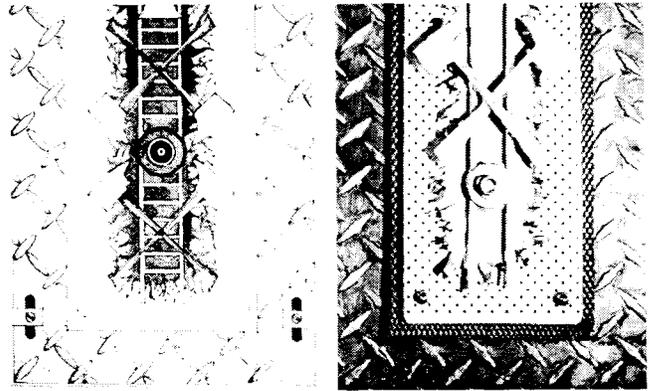


Fig. 5 & 6 Ahmed Zaidan's Ornament

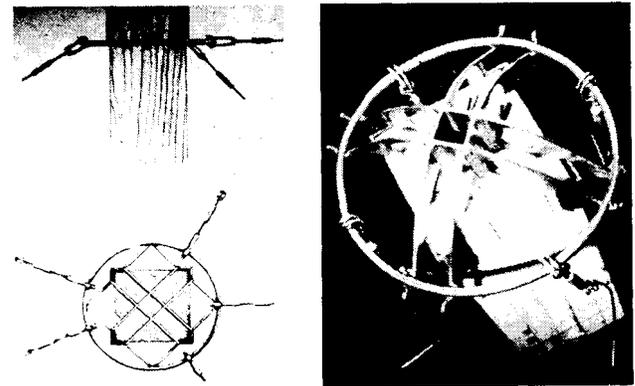


Fig. 7 & 8 Kemp Morhardt's Ornament

CONSTRUCTION AS A BUBBLE (FIGURES 9-12)

"A building is like a soap bubble. This bubble is perfect and harmonious if the breath has been evenly distributed and regulated from the inside. The exterior is the result of an interior." (Le Corbusier) Le Corbusier suggests that a building, at its best, is like a soap bubble whose outward expression is reflective of its internal use and spatial volume, rather than a formal conception of an appropriate or beautiful appearance. This notion of internal / external consonance applies equally well to the expressive potential latent in many inherent aspects of architecture. Similar inspiration led structural rationalist thinkers to explore the expressive potential of architectural structure. The analogy of the bubble may further encompass the expressive possibilities of contemporary systems of construction and assembly, which are most often understood and applied practically but rarely considered or expressed poetically. If we imagine construction as a bubble, we might begin to think of it as a means of understanding the inside from the outside at the scale of the detail, joint, or wall surface; we might begin to understand the purpose, composition, and relationship between the various elements of standard architectural construction as interesting or compelling in their own right. These internal / external walls, designed to explore the premise that construction might become a revelatory "bubble", modify normative construction types found in such publications as *Architectural Graphic Standards* in order to discover their latent expressive possibilities.

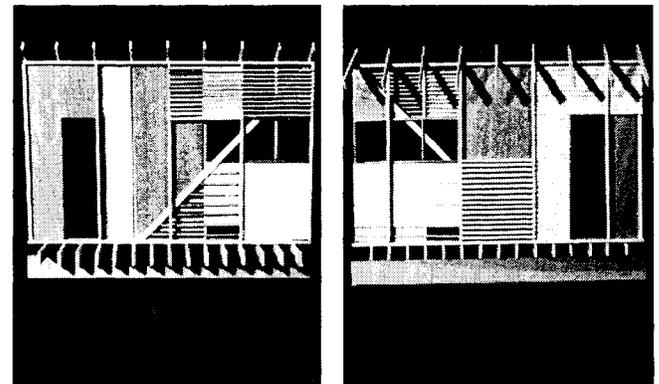


Fig. 9 & 10 Steve Atkinson's Wall



Fig. 11 & 12 Doug Dorney's Wall