

Theorizing Inequality and Cultural Diversity: The Politics of Disciplinary Boundaries

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Introduction

The study of architecture has long been associated with society's elite - recurrently in form¹ and content² and consistently in demographic composition.³ Recently, at least in the Midwest, architecture seems to have discovered the populist notion of "diversity" and the discourse that surrounds multiculturalism.⁴ My fear however is that just like 1992 was considered the "year of the woman" in mainstream U.S. politics, this "drift" will become the architectural equivalent of six women in the senate. The politics of optimism is precarious for those educators among us who have long taught, practiced, and written from a marginal position (at the discipline's boundary,) relative to architecture's elite. In addition, some of my fears are realized when we hear those others among us servicing their personal aspirations by essentially, co-opting the inclusive goals and discourse of identity politics in what they must consider to be trendy theory-of-the-moment. As six women in the senate does not amount to an institutional transformation in politics, a few sensitively-titled initiatives sponsored by our universities and professional organizations does not insure an ideological shift welcoming a diversity of cultural values in architecture. Currently, women and men of color are cautiously welcome in architecture schools- as long as we assimilate, thereby appropriating dominant's culture, and repressing our own.

Considering part of the title, "The Politics of Disciplinary Boundaries" and that this paper is situated in a conference under the theme of *Emerging Pedagogies*, this paper would seem to be one about expanding architecture faculty's pedagogical styles outside their traditional disciplines, perhaps with the goal of generating teaching that is student centered, effective, or applicable to the needs of diverse learners. It is about that, pragmatically. But, with this paper I explore issues less immediately obvious - including culture, power and indoctrination of both students and faculty. So at the outset, I argue that expanding the teaching styles handed to us by our discipline is not just a nice idea because it serves some students who have been missing out, but it is a political challenge to the existing order and one way to truly welcome diverse others to the study of architecture. Just as refusing to examine and reevaluate how we have been teaching means the perpetuation of that order, one in which the relations of ruling⁵ preserve systems of domination based on individual identities bound up with sex, race, and class.

One may argue that a competent educator is one who unfailingly communicates course content. In other words, education does not occur if students do not comprehend the subject mat-

ter, theory, design principle, etc. Rather than expressing dismay that "some of those students don't produce what I expect," we should expect instructors to investigate how they teach what is expected. I argue that this reflective and then expansive move is a necessary one if we are to become competent teachers of architecture. Because not to make it insures that we continue to provide some students with education that moves them into or allows them to maintain their positions in dominant groups, while we simultaneously undereducated those students who belong to groups that are politically, economically, or socially disadvantaged. The myth of equal opportunity and equal access to education in the U.S.⁶ allows us to blame the victims of an educational system expert in the disenfranchisement of minority students,⁷ including women.⁸ I argue here that we, as teachers of architecture, need to look at how our actual classroom practices perpetuate the systems of domination in our society and how schooling transforms social privilege into personal merit. Particularly today at this conference, I want to address some of the ways that: (1) a "hidden curriculum" is carried in something as apparently innocuous and idiosyncratic as "pedagogical style;" (2) how discipline bound styles serve those in power instead of the project of student empowerment; and (3) how we might especially encourage architects to think carefully about the politics of style in the studios and classrooms they enter as critics and teachers.

Disciplined Pedagogy

First, I argue that the concept of pedagogical style is very much bound by the conventions of particular disciplines - it is disciplined as it were. What I mean by disciplined style is the tendency for faculty within a particular area of study to organize the courses they offer into formats similar, if not identical to, one another. This means that we expect structures courses to develop in one way, design studios in another, theory seminars somehow else. We do not expect to be shown slides in engineering mechanics, or to use statistics as the basis for knowledge claims in a history course on Renaissance architecture.

Further, I suspect that architects early in their teaching careers, make their courses more congruous with the cultural expectations of the discipline. Why might this be so? I argue that these pressures may be observed and understood at a social-psychological level, at a disciplinary level, and ultimately at a structural level.

At perhaps the most politically innocent level, we might use something like a social learning theory model⁹ to explain why new teachers especially reproduce traditional pedagogical patterns. Social learning theory argues that we learn by observing, and that though we seem to have no need for a certain behavior, should a need arise, we are able to reproduce the behavior because we have previously observed it. So, what would a new architecture faculty member, after 12 years of public, parochial, or private education, five years of college (four of which he majored in architecture,) then graduate school, do when told that he will, in a month teach a survey course on architecture for non-architecture majors? Our junior faculty member is far more likely to reflect on the experiences he had as a student for models of how to teach, than he is to go to the library to read up on educational philosophy or criticism. It is not a bad survival strategy, and it does help to explain why educators reproduce a discipline's pedagogical style, particularly in the absence of rigorous intervention, support or training that allows the teacher to look at other options.

Many university sponsored Centers for Teaching Excellence¹⁰ identify a three tiered teacher development model that explains that instructors are first teacher centered, then content centered, then if we are lucky, student centered. Beginning teachers, suffering from a wide range of anxieties, tend to be teacher centered - concerned about their classroom image, their popularity with students, their control over their studio's productivity, and their authority. It makes sense that a result of this concern is a reliance on the pedagogical models most apparent and entrenched in a discipline because these are accessible, visible, and conventional. Teacher-centeredness requires so much attention to trying to match one's socks with one's jacket that little is left over for pushing the boundaries of the discipline's pedagogical traditions.

Even if there were time or energy for a critical look at pedagogical style however, this reflective possibility is unlikely in newer architecture faculty members, because at this point most of us are developing not only as teachers, but as practitioners of architecture or as historians and theorists. Further, most architects seem uncertain in the belief that it takes a lifetime to become respectable architects and even then there is no clear criteria or body of knowledge upon which to base professorial claims. Because of this, and the insecurities associated with the development of a professional identity, the classroom or studio becomes a stage upon which one might establish one's role as an authority in the field.

As a result of immense pressures to prove oneself a competent critic, architect, structural engineer or whatever, classroom style becomes something both linguists and feminist postmodernists call "performative."¹¹ In linguistic theory, performatives are those words or phrases supplied in a particular manner at a particular time to fulfill a particular social function. So, when I say "good afternoon" to you at ten in the morning, the performative value of the greeting exceeds in meaning the technical content of the message. You are unlikely to cor-

rect me, having felt acknowledged. Behaving in a particular manner, the manner associated with professors in architecture, allows a rather new instructor the performative value of communicating legitimacy to her students, colleagues, and at a social-psychological level, most importantly, to herself. She will think, "this is a design studio; it looks like one, smells like one, behaves like one, and does what architecture studios always do. Thank goodness."

In terms of professional development, architects are attached to recreating our discipline's pedagogical style, no matter how ineffective, stilted, or oppressive, as a means to reduce our insecurity over career longevity. "I teach names, dates, and slide identification, therefore I am an architectural historian. If I use music in a computer aided drafting class, what am I?"

This reviews several social-psychological reasons why individual architects might reproduce the styles favored by tradition: social learning theory, early teacher centeredness, and professional development models. But, at a collective or social level, what role do systems and institutions play?

Disciplined Bound Pressures

Many sociologists and cultural critics in education are currently writing about why professors don't experiment more with liberatory, or at least, alternative pedagogical styles.¹² They are implicating structurally induced inertia, as one reason teachers teach in the same trite way they were taught. To summarize their point: there seems little incentive for faculty, especially those whose professional identities as teachers/scholars/experts are only being formed, to take classroom risks. This is an important point, and one to which those mentors, department chairs, or administrators in the room should attend. If you are looking for ways to encourage the new faculty you train and mentor to expand the discipline's pedagogical boundaries: give them permission: make it meaningful; reward success.

I might offer here, as an illustration of the "inertia theory of perpetual pedagogy" an example from my own experience as a new assistant professor. A couple of years ago, I received my first senior course assignment. Earnest about meeting *my* standards for a graduate level theory course, I drafted a syllabus that included several monographs to be read during the course of an academic quarter, thinking that such a course should not center on either a textbook or a lecture format. My Chair informed me that the course had always been taught as a textbook only course, that I should follow suit, and that to do otherwise would jeopardize my own progress in a system that rewards not teaching excellence, but creative work or research productivity. She certainly was right, about the tenure-driven-probationary-faculty-defined system's response, anyway. While I proceeded with my plan, and found that intrinsically rewarding, "intrinsic reward" pales against departmental recognition and support. It is easier to conform than reform the system. This is the essence of inertia.

But, inducing inertia is not the only explanation I might offer

for the tendency of architects to begin their careers in the classroom or studio with a pedagogical style that mirrors that of our discipline. In addition to inertia, which looks at the absence of structural support for developing curriculum and teaching styles, we might think of the pressures directly imposed on junior faculty to follow tradition. Inertia reflects neglect. Attention is paid to architecture-the-discipline as it suffers social forces that become explicit pressure on teachers not to deviate from pedagogical norms. This is where the ironic use of the word “discipline” to refer to a set of intellectual practices becomes most apparent.

In their struggles for legitimacy, academic areas of study, like new faculty members, engage in a variety of rhetoric and practices designed to establish their authenticity and their legitimacy within the Academy.¹³ A couple of examples close to home for me involve sociology’s efforts to legitimate itself as a science by using, as rhetorical performatives, the language of natural science. We do statistics therefore, we are scientific. Or architecture’s exclusive use of historical style or hero architects to prove, through rhetorical performatives, that it is an art – e.g. that building is of an identifiable style designed by one man. We might think about the separation of structural engineering from architecture or architecture from interior design or interior design from art as disciplinary power struggles reflecting the impetus for particular fields of study being accepted as legitimate. These power struggles have real consequences for intellectual pursuit, public policy, theory, and of course, for jobs.

A faculty member in nursing recently shared with me his concern that academic nursing is increasingly cut off from patient care, and that if this trend continues, nursing will have no *raison d’être*; “the only thing we do that others don’t is patient care,” he said. If patient care secedes from nursing, in nursing’s struggle to become scientific, nursing may become social work, or biology, or sociology and nurses will become obsolete. Academic disciplines discipline their practitioners into pedagogical practices that create consistence in an effort to maintain disciplinary integrity.

I may teach students about the relationship between the feminization of poverty and the design of so called “public housing,” using numbers generated by the general social survey that gives statistical proof that women of color are over-represented in poverty and under-consulted about their needs in housing. Or, I may teach them the same thing by playing the song by Me’shell NdegeOcello called “Into the Projects” that expresses precisely what the surveys tell us, only in another format. I press the boundaries of social science and architecture, challenge its claims to authority, invite musicians to do sociology and to critique architecture and call question to *my* legitimacy as a sociologist and an architect. When teachers color within the lines of the discipline in which they are situated, it is not only about our insecurities, it is about the insecurities of our professions and their interest in disciplining us.

Because I am an architect and a sociologist, I put this within the broader contexts of systems of domination and control that

serve as the forces of stratification within our society. Wider cultural messages about the nature of power as power over and as a commodity in limited supply foster disciplinary rigidity and competition, which in turn foster teaching that encourages deference to authority and competition, rather than collaboration, among individuals. Just as the most privileged groups in our society seek to control popular interpretations of social reality for all of us, the systems of domination produce pedagogical styles that reinforce the interpretations favored by those in power. For instance, the positivist belief that reality can be deduced from objective social facts translates into education by authority, not as discovery or empowerment. Such an education encourages students to distrust knowledge situated in their own experience and to reject perspectives that challenge received knowledge. The positivist voice from nowhere or the voice from “professional experts” that replaced the voice of God during the Enlightenment creates pedagogy that prepares students to adjust to the society they find, not to readjust their societies. In practice, the barer of the voice from nowhere is the omniscient professor, a knower, not a leader or facilitator, one whose job it is to impart to students the truth of the matter, not to facilitate for them the discovery of their own truths.

It is hardly surprising, given how systems of domination are reproduced in our classrooms, that social stratification persists as a result of educational inequality. The idea that knowledge is abstract, apolitical, and objective serves the people in power because it argues that their knowledge, their truths are the only truths. As a result, teaching from this position privileges those in power and continues to disadvantage those who are disadvantaged. Teaching a studio with individual projects fostering competition advantages those who recognize competing as a legitimate cultural practice. Teaching that promotes individuality over community does not speak to the experience of those whose learning is predicated upon group progress. Not surprisingly, the learning styles associated with the under-represented in architecture, women and minority men, tends to be associated with values and epistemological processes antithetical to those communicated by teaching that reflects the dominant paradigm. The challenge is not to make American Indian students less group oriented or white women students more authoritative when they make statements in studio, the challenge is to change how we teach, so that: (1) students do have true equal opportunity; and (2) our teaching is not an effort at adjusting individuals to existing systems of domination.

The Politics of Style Revisited

This is where I circle back to talk about how to practice cross disciplinary teaching for both the purpose of reaching students with diverse learning styles and, in general, giving substance to diversity initiatives that too often intend to assimilate students into disciplines that maintain the status quo. As I have already argued, learning styles, as knowledge, are socially and politically situated. So, while you may think of expanding the peda-

gical repertoire of architecture as meeting the needs of hypothetical students with hypothetically diverse learning styles, it is important to recognize that learning styles may be closely associated with political identity. So, for the purpose of becoming better teachers for specific individuals, and for the purpose of reaching groups traditionally alienated by the educational process in architecture, I advocate one strategy - that is expanding on the received styles of our disciplines.

By simply using song lyrics in a housing studio, for example, we allow all of our students opportunities to connect with what we hope they will learn in more ways than we do when we rely on the pedagogical styles of our disciplines. We legitimate for students who learn things better poetically than statistically that they can learn architecture and we offer students who relate to sound as well as to visual representations opportunities to examine how rhythm might be relevant for architect, and architecture relevant for music. This is, I argue, good for all students. For those whose learning styles are most compatible with dominant pedagogy, their cognitive repertoires are challenged, expanded, and elaborated, as are their visions of legitimacy; for those who feel alienated by the dominant pedagogy, alternatives create a more welcoming environment, an environment in which a space is opened for their legitimacy, an environment in which their experiences are honored, no longer silenced, and ultimately, holds the prospect of enhancing architecture the discipline. Until we recognize the dominant pedagogical structure in architecture as something maintained by the politics of disciplinary boundaries, we will not enjoy an inclusive field of study. The practice or architecture will remain out of reach for most of our population

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