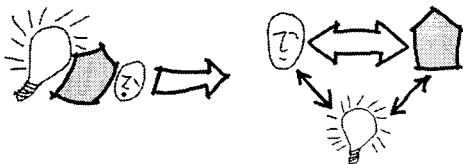


# “Dialogic reciprocity”: Binding form making to practice in first year design

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This studio project represents significant work in academic/professional integration because of its grounding in contemporary practice, its unique theoretical base, and its rare place in an architectural curriculum—first year design. The project depends on an architect-practitioner in the studio to provide a context of communication practice; ideas which are broadened conceptually to embrace 1) the relationships of form through composition, 2) resistance to ego-induced form making, and 3) the proper development of the architect/client relationship as the fundamental basis for design. The communication theory under which these diverse realms can be gathered is called “dialogic reciprocity.”

*The Problem*—Beginning design instruction almost invariably finds the student as ground for action; their attitudes, engagement, sense of conviction, and ego are as much part of studio content as is architecture. But channeling architectural problems through the psyche of the student—long common in architectural education—exacerbates a highly questionable form of professional practice; where the architect’s ego pushes the building problem and the client in a personal, often arbitrary direction. It is the position of this studio project that ego-based architectural practice must be undone at the earliest stages of architectural education.



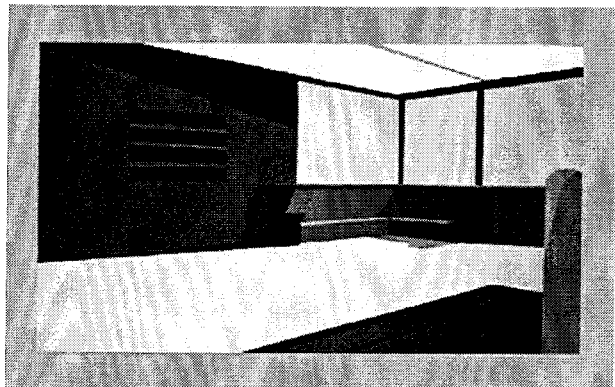
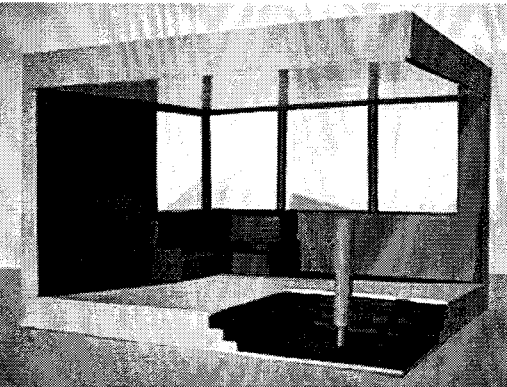
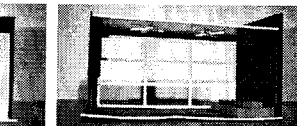
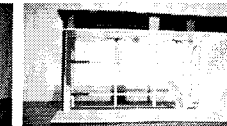
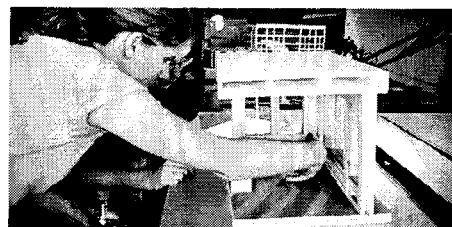
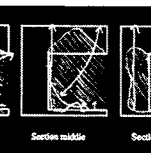
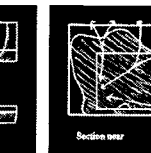
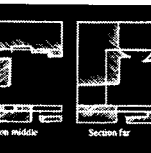
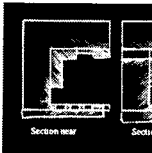
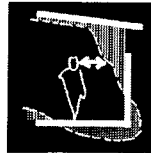
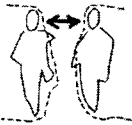
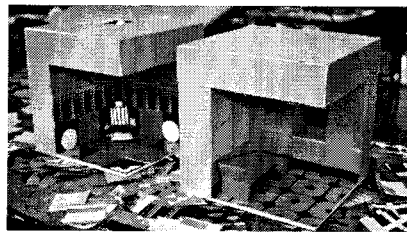
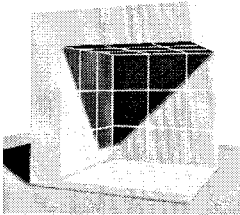
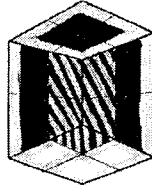
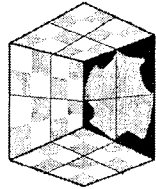
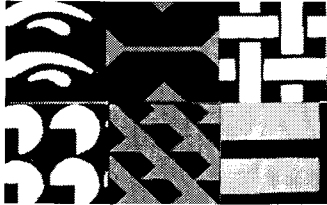
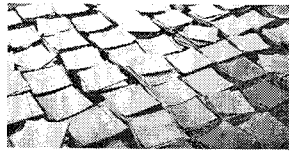
What is the alternative? A more holistic practice sees the relationship between the client and the problem as most significant, ultimately facilitated by the creative activities of the architect. Here ego is checked in the service of a reciprocal and ethically-bound system of dialogue. No longer limited strictly to “building,” this problem-centered reorientation of the architect/client relationship is one of the most important contempo-

rary developments in professional practice. *If this holistic alternative seems desirable for the practicing architect, surely it deserves to be common pedagogy for the beginning design student. Of course, pursuing this method requires an instructional setting wherein the student is part of an inter-subjective architect/client relationship—an admittedly difficult task in the academic studio. How might such reciprocity be achieved in the studio classroom? Can it be encouraged by the nature of form itself?*

*Project Theory*—A model for positive architectural relationships is the theory of dialogic reciprocity. This theory argues for discourse which is properly “dialogic”; that is, characterized by authenticity, inclusion, confirmation, presentness, and mutual equality. This kind of dialogue is inherently bound within a larger set of inter-subjective human ethics.

The same kind of “dialogic” conditions occur within form; for example, composition is the relative comparison of one element to another. This relational fact is present in the most basic aesthetic content, including color theory and the understanding of figure and pattern. These formal effects are all perceived dialogically. Similarly, since the human perception of architecture is always different than its physical reality, surface and space can be seen to induce an “apparent” perception, where its discourse has effects that are analogous to human communication. Not only do the forms themselves appear to communicate, but the intentions of all others involved in its design—client, architect, etc.—are implicitly present as well.

An important conceptual connection can thus be made . . . that the dialogic reciprocity desirable between architect and client—and all of its ethical consequences—is analogous to the inherent operation of aesthetic form and the designed relationships between architecture and its inhabitants. This proposition allows the ethical traits of inter-subjective human communication to be applied to form and its subject-object communication.



*Project Method*-Centered on these broad effects of reciprocity, of communication, the practice-based knowledge of the architect-practitioner becomes key to the success of the entire studio problem. Requiring the integration of theory and practice, the project is team-taught between an architect-practitioner and a studio instructor. Its ultimate educational objective is learning how the principles of dialogic reciprocity engender the holistic binding of form making to practice.

This first year studio project uses the context of dialogic communication to engage color theory, figural composition, and spatial ordering principles in the design of a small space. With peers acting as both critic and client, students apply methods of ethically-bound communication techniques and propose design solutions which work against their own preconceived willfulness and ego. Within a context of academic/professional integration, these strategies argue for a holistic methodology of practice at a moment in design education that historically has seen it the least-beginning design.