president's column

david epstein, aia, leed ap
2005 president aiaVT

Last month I mentioned that AIA National has been increasing their efforts to influence Public Policy. In response, Hunter Ulf, AIA was kind of enough to email me the AIA National's "Directory of Public Policies and Statements", 2005, which I thought would be worth sharing in this column. I have excerpted the policy statements only below. For each statement, there are several specific position statements.

For the full text visit:

http://www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/publicpolicyandpositionstatementdirectory.pdf

"Meta" Policy:
Architecture profoundly affects people. The work of architects is essential to human well being, and architects must embrace their ethical obligation to uphold this public trust.

The Architect
As members of their communities, architects are professionally obligated to use their knowledge, skill and experience to engage in civic life.

Design, construction and society are constantly changing. To serve society, architects must commit to continual professional growth through learning, innovation and exploration.

The practice of architecture should be regulated. The privileges and responsibilities of practice should be extended only to those architects who

cont.

aiaVT website: http://www.aiavt.org/

The Production of Architectural Criticism

Pattabi G. Raman and Richard Coyne

http://www.caad.ed.ac.uk/~richard/FullPublications/Criticism.pdf

Abstract
In this article we survey a range of important positions on the matter of architectural criticism. The survey involves an excursion into theories of language and interpretation. In the process we provide an explanation of what criticism is and how recent theoretical explorations can enhance its stature and potency.

CRITICISM AND CONSERVATISM
The usual sense of the word "criticism" is of "fault-finding," implying that there is an ideal position from which the work in question deviates. The purpose of criticism here is to conserve truth or to uncover what is true, beautiful or essential in the work. Following the nomenclature of Gallagher,1 this represesents a conservative position on the theme of interpretive or hermeneutical practice. There are variants within conservatism in architectural criticism. The instrumental appeal to standards and criteria by which a work is to be judged can be construed as also objectivist. The Platonic appeal to an ideal is translated into an appeal to objective criteria, formulas, and

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blast from the past:

from the burlington, freepress
june 6, 149

Vt. Association of Architects Formed
Charter Presented;
Officers Elected

Middlebury, June 6 – *The Vermont Association of Architects chapter of the American Institute of Architects was formally recognized at an organizational meeting in the Middlebury Inn here Saturday night.*

A charter from the American Institute was presented by mail to the new organization by Joseph D. Leland of Boston, New England director of the American Institute. Leland, due to illness, was unable to attend.

Charter members of the Vermont Association are Preston Cole of Woodstock, William W. Freeman of Burlington, John C. French of Burlington, Charles Helmar of Woodstock and Payson Webber of Rutland.

Mrs. Ruth Reynolds Freeman of Burlington was elected president of the Vermont Association. Other officers are: Vice-president, Kenneth Reid of East Dorset and secretary-treasurer, Payson Webber if Rutland.

aiaVT welcomes

susan coddaire, *assoc. aia of burlington*
brian leet, *aia of waterbury center*
rebecca leet, *aia of waterbury center*

demonstrate through education, experience, and examination that they are ethically and technically prepared.

The Practice
With an obligation to the future of the profession, architects must encourage, recruit and inspire those who would become architects.

Regulation of the construction industry shapes the built environment. As stakeholders, architects must participate in the development and application or appropriate regulations and standards.

The financial health of the architecture business is essential to the future of the profession. Architects should advocate within the law for sound business practices and compensation reflecting the architect's value to society.

The World
Leadership in design and construction requires collaboration. Architects must encourage and celebrate the contributions of those who bring diverse experience, views, and needs into the design process.

Architecture expresses the values of society and has the power to enhance the quality of life for this and future generations. Architects must advocate for responsible design that results in beautiful and healthy places that respect and accommodate society's diverse cultures and needs.

The creation and operation of the built environment require an investment of the earth's resources. Architects must be environmentally responsible and advocate for the sustainable use of those resources.

Excerpted from "Directory of Public Policies and Statements", 2005,
AIA National Board of Directors.

measurement: evaluating how a building conforms against criteria of efficiency, economy, suitability to purpose and sustainability, commonly referred to as performance evaluation. Objectivism also emerges in the influence of logical positivism in the modern movement, the quest for a "rational," "value neutral" architecture, and finds its apotheosis in the design methods movement of the 1960s, and its processes of evaluation,2 a topic dealt with in the context of hermeneutics in an illuminating article by Snodgrass.3 In tension with this objectivism is the subjectivist, or romantic, conservative tradition, that valorises the concepts of genius, imagination and the pursuit of beauty as a quest for unity.4 Romantic criticism commonly invokes the authority of the connoisseur, and the aphorism that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," or, at least, the eye liberated by the appropriate education.5 From our point of view, both objectivist and subjectivist criticism present as conservative. [84]

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calender

letter to the president

David -

I took great pleasure in reading about AIA/VT s work on public policy, and commend you and your Board for focusing on such an important part of any organization. I had the pleasure to be involved with the formation of the National AIA s public policies and their ultimate approval while I served on the Board. I have attached a copy of the basic policy framework to this email.

As you know, public policy becomes a written record of what an organization stands for, and serves as a compass to help guide the organization when faced with taking positions on public actions or events. These policies apply to legislative affairs as much as they do to annual operations. Prior to the newly adopted policy framework of AIA National, there were several dozen policies that dealt with everything from sustainable design practices to the support of Washington, DC s height ordinance. In reviewing all of these policies, it became clear that not only were many of them obsolete, but most were not really policy statements. They were position statements. This is an important distinction. They were almost all individual and independent expressions of a position on one-time circumstances.

In the end, the Board developed a framework in which to create lasting and over-arching policies, and then organize positions under them. As you will see in the attachment, we created three broad categories of constituents with policies applying to each. These policies are meant to be timeless and enduring, and convey the essence of what is important to us. The larger version of this document shows many positions that fall under appropriate policies. The positions can be more event/action specific, change or be modified, and basically be nimble in their message.

cont.

LIBERAL RESPONSES TO CONSERVATIVE CRITICISM
Objectivism has pitted itself against orthodoxy and tradition, and subjectivism has set itself against rule in the cause of the freedom of the individual. So both invoke a liberal Enlightenment rhetoric. In the debates of the Enlightenment, liberalism is commonly associated with the legacy of Rousseau6 and others of the romantic school. Liberal educational theorists, such as Dewey,7 were inspired by Rousseau's appeal to the release of formal strictures in the education of the child and the development of the informed and active citizen. The appeal to the "natural spirit" is both a romantic and a liberal aim.

Critical Theory[8]
As we shall see, the anti-conservative agenda of architectural criticism has been rehabilitated and vigorously promoted by adherents and descendants of the Frankfurt School. Karl Marx and then the Frankfurt School (the critical theory school) generated a form of criticism that positioned itself against the tenets of objectivism, positivism, and

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One of the events that initiated this policies re-work was a request from the National Trust to contribute a large sum of money toward the purchase of the Farnsworth House in IL. This house was being put up for auction, and the final price was an unknown, but it was critical to purchase it, or it would be lost to development. The board was divided on how to handle this, and it became clear that there was no policy for how the AIA approached preservation and preserving architectural icons/landmarks. We could not vote unanimously for the expenditure of organizational/member funds by citing a policy that stated our position on such matters. (We ended up contributing anyway). Should we be spending money on this, or other things???

Process and Collaborators are important mechanisms for communicating, implementing, and developing policies, but should not be confused with policies themselves. In addition, your list of policies/issues is excellent, but I would recommend the development of a framework that organizes these into essential constituents, primary policies, and adaptable positions. It is the framework that will allow you to most effectively create positions, then communicate or take action on them, and keep the document current.

I would welcome the opportunity to assist with the further development of public policy, if you feel I could help. Otherwise, keep up the great work!! This effort will surely move AIA/VT into the profession's leadership role that it needs to have.
—

M. Hunter Ulf, AIA
UK Architects, P.C., Principal

aiaVT values feedback from its membership and other associated constituencies, please keep it coming!

concepts of valour and heroism, and also what it saw as the weaknesses of liberalism. The subscribers to critical theory attempt to rescue libertarian aspects of Marx's thoughts, especially opposing the idea of value-free social sciences, crude materialism and the notion of immutable dogma as practised by the communist state.9 Only open ended criticism and a self-criticism can avoid the intellectual paralysis of Marxist theory, and they maintain that it is important to return to the Hegelian sources of this theory. The imperative to be suspicious is at the heart of critical theory, and although philosophy and science tend to be suspicious of mere appearances they are not suspicious enough to offer any penetrating critique. Freud and Nietzsche, as well as Marx, have been marshalled in support of critical theory. They were profoundly suspicious of the obvious, of what passed for truth, which readily conceals the forces of domination, by one social group over another. For the critical theorist, domination is evident in every cultural practice, from the way soap powders are marketed to forms of architecture, according to Barthes.10 Beneath the appearances of impartiality, value neutrality and even reason, lie the hegemonic structures of oppression and domination.

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excellence
in sustainable design awards
given to two at
integrated design/
integrated development
conference

Winners of the second Excellence in Sustainable Design and Development Awards program were announced recently at the Integrated Design/Integrated Development (IDID) Conference held at the AMC Highland Center in Crawford Notch, NH. Awards were given for outstanding architecture, landscape architecture, planning, or historic preservation projects that demonstrate excellence in design, a substantive engagement of sustainable design principles, and highlight the beneficial synthesis of an integrated design process. Projects of all scopes were solicited and winners were based on the project s beneficial impact to the physical environment and its positive affect on the cultural landscape.
Winners were the NRG Systems offices and manufacturing facility in Hinesburg, VT, designed by William Maclay Architects and Planners of Waitsfield, VT, and the National Outdoor Leadership School Headquarters in Lander, WY, designed by Centerbrook Architects and Planners of Centerbrook, CT.

The NRG Systems building began with ambitious environmental and social goals related to site, energy, water, materials, indoor air quality, and the workplace.

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This suspicion resonates with the Freudian concept of the unconscious. As the psychoanalyst seeks to uncover the repressed desires and guilt endemic in the Oedipus complex, the critic uncovers the oppression beneath apparently innocuous social practices.11 Neo-Marxist critique dominates architectural criticism in certain quarters — for example, in the writing of Tafuri,12 and in Hillier's review of Oscar Newman's Defensible Space13 and the work of Culot14 and his followers — and there are modes of architectural practice that depend on it, notably in certain aspects of the community architecture movement. [85]

In turn critical theory has its critics. It can be argued that the attempt of critical theory to rehabilitate "libertarian" aspects of Marxism is flawed. In any case social philosophers of the anarchist persuasion such as Woodcock,15 Illich,16 Chomsky17 andBookchin18 have shown that libertarian ideas can be explored without appealing to Marx. Long before the term "critical theory" was coined, libertarians rejected positivism.

Critical theory has undergone various transformations under the researches of Habermas and others, and it has responded to these criticisms.19 It is fair to say that now critical theory is not so much a particular school of thought as a discursive field,

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An integrated design approach was used throughout, and the site planning preserves and maintains native vegetation, agriculture, forestry, recreation, and wildlife habitat uses, while providing a serene and healthy setting for NRG and a pastoral landscape for neighbors. The site is within walking distance to the town center to maximize access to local services. Active and passive environmental design strategies were incorporated into the core of the building and site design to accomplish NRG's ambitious human and environmental goals to build a model workplace and to achieve a Gold LEED rating. Energy consumption in the facility has been monitored for one year indicating 70% renewable energy use and total energy costs less than $12,000 for all energy. Jurors commented on the excellent integration of systems, the use of the pond as a heat sink, and the good daylighting. They also noted the good response to context in its siting and the interesting and innovative solar tracking devices. The project was given extra praise for its positive social environment. Accepting the award at the IDID Conference was Jerry Bridges, Assoc. AIA, LEED, of Maclay Architects.

The National Outdoor Leadership School Headquarters is in Lander, WY, a community of 6,200 situated on the eastern front range of the Wind River Mountains. As NOLS grew to become an international leader in outdoor education, they considered relocating to a rural location. However, they decided they had a social and environmental responsibility to not impact the natural landscape and to help revitalize the town of Lander. The decision was made to stay in Lander and to reuse existing buildings and underused parking lots for their future growth. The headquarters building is comprised of three brick blocks, reminiscent of hay bales, stacked together. Unfinished steel was used throughout the building to reflect the iron oxide ore found nearby. Key sustainable design elements include: using a vacant lot in an urban setting; exterior sun shades and interior light shelves to limit heat gain and maximize natural light; 90% of the materials manufactured within a 500-mile radius; daylight harvesting light fixtures and occupancy sensors installed; recycled, sustainable, low VOC interior materials used exclusively; natural

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that engages with a wide range of intellectual debates and positions, but commonly invoking a language of suspicion and emancipation.

Radical Criticism
There is a further mode of criticism that emerges from liberalism, characterised by hermeneutical theorists as "radical."20 It draws attention to the primacy of the flux of endless change, rather than the dialectical forward movement of the Hegelians and Marxists, which critical theory attempted to rescue. Radical criticism argues for a world in which history loses its rigidity in the inter flow of forces. It argues that contradictions are positive, and sees equilibrium as a dynamic condition in a world that changes indeterminately, and never reaches the stillness of perfection, because imperfection is the cause and consequence of everlasting movement. Such concepts resonate with the libertarianism of Woodcock and others,21 and systematic exponents of a radical school of thought include Lacan22 and Derrida,23 both of whom have been influential in architectural criticism. We will visit the theoretical position of radical hermeneutics in

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ventilation through mechanical system; indirect evaporative cooling system for precooling; dedicated trash and recycling management and storage; bike storage; a rooftop garden; and low impact planting with no irrigation. Jurors were impressed by the downtown location and revitalization goals of this project. They noted that the brick and iron related well with context as well as the interior. In general this design was a very appropriate response to the design aims and challenges. Jurors also noted the cost-effectiveness of the building, the planning for expansion, and the good daylighting. Accepting the award for Centerbrook Architects was Leslie Henebry.

The Integrated Design/Integrated Development conference is for architects, landscape architects, planners, developers, builders, owners and others interested in sustainable design. It focuses on the opportunities, benefits, and current challenges in adopting an integrated approach to site planning, site and building design, construction, and operation/maintenance needs. The conference is presented by the New Hampshire American Institute of Architects' Environmental Guild, The Jordan Institute, and the Granite State Landscape Architects. For more information, please see the AIANH web site, www.aianh.org, and click on the green IDID logo.

relation to language subsequently, but in summary, the radical position problematises the issue of authority,24 advancing on certain ideas in critical theory.

For radical criticism, the subject of critique, the works chosen for scrutiny, may extend and challenge the conservative canons of criticism. As in deconstructive literary criticism,25 the objective is not to preserve a corpus of works deemed worthy of criticism, but to subvert it's authority by attending to the marginal aspects of the accepted works, or attending to works outside the canon. So Derrida's reflections on a footnote in Heidegger, or of a comment in the margins of one of Nietzsche's papers,26 or an exposition on a postcard of Plato and Socrates from the Bodlian library,27 can serve as the starting point for literary and philosophical critique. Similarly Foucault28 analyses prisons, schools and clinics, that are usually at the periphery of historical analysis. In architecture, Venturi, Brown and Izenour's Learning from Las Vegas29 takes neon billboards and extravagantly decorated highway architecture as the basis of a critique of contemporary architecture. As an [86] exponent of deconstructive critical practice, Colomina30 pays attention to the in-between of the urban fabric, and argues that the discontinuous geography of cites is suffused with bodily significance and connotations of sexuality. Such attentions to the margins reflect on the whole edifice of authority in the institution of architecture.

Radical criticism does not take authority for granted. It is reflexive on the role of critics and their appeal to authority. For Derrida this is a form of writing "under erasure": recognising that the appeal to authority is unavoidable, though provisional. It can be dealt with reflexively and sometimes with irony.31

A further way that radical criticism deals with authority is to operate with an inversion of conventional categories of judgement. So the categories of the sublime, the beautiful, the grotesque, the efficient, the useful, the emancipatory, come under scrutiny,32 as does the nature of authorship, the creator, the supposed genius. Radical criticism does not necessarily see its end in an evaluation of the work or of its putative

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author, and the criticism of the work exceeds questions of the critic's estimation of the work.

The authority of a particular work of criticism rests in its function as a narrative. In so far as a criticism seeks to "prove" the worth or otherwise of a work of architecture, or settle the matter through "reason," it does so only as a style of narrative that appeals to a particular authoritative structure. A criticism presents itself as a narrative, within a field of narratives. Of course the critical narrative inherits the claims to contingency of the poststructuralist views of narrative. Narrative structures are multi-faceted, layered, and themselves open to interpretation and critique. A criticism may therefore take the form of a formal exposition, a detailed description, a story, a poem, or any other work. In architecture there is the common use of the hypothetical design project, as in the critical work of Archigram, Woods, Tshumi and less radically in one or two works by McCormac.33

Radical criticism problematises the relationship between the work and its criticism. The criticism presents itself as an intervention that forms a relationship with the work. Radical criticism recognises that the criticism and the work may operate in tandem, or that the criticism may exceed the work in its significance. The criticism may also provide the conditions for the work to thrive, or promote similar works, recognising what is at play in Gideon's promotion of the work of Le Corbusier, and Scully as apologist for the work of Rossi. Some works are produced to provoke particular kinds of criticism. The relationship between the work and its criticism may not be harmonious, but they may feed off or provoke one another. There is the recent example of the Leeds fine art students who announced they had spent their project funds on a holiday to Spain, showing their sponsors an empty room, and declaring the event ("Going Places") a work of art. After the critics had expressed [86] and broadcast their outrage, the students declared that the work was a hoax. The money was safe and earning interest. The criticism was implicated in the work. The work and its criticism reputedly invited critical reflection on the nature of education and art.

Radical criticism recognises that a work can appear as a means of criticising something else. So Foucault's use of Bentham's Panopticon34 is not merely a commentary on a particular building type, but an engagement with the issue of power as presented in a particular era through its architecture.

Radical criticism also allows that the work under criticism is in process, that it may change in response to the criticism. So the art object or building does not need to stand alone, but can be part of a process, in the company of other works, in a trajectory of artistic development or successive interventions.

Radical criticism also allows space for a work to be recognised as a criticism. This function is irrespective of what people say or write about the work. For example, a work can offer a criticism of conventional types, say the school type, by presenting a form more concomitant with the house, as in the Montessori schools. In turn, Eisenman's house series acts as a critique of the house type, by "subverting," that is transforming, the "language" of the house.35 This mode of criticism operates irrespective of what the architect says about the work, though clearly, as with much contemporary design, it implicates the mass media. Here the legacy of surrealism holds sway. The function of a work as a criticism operates by virtue of its relationship to context, particularly a jarring of contexts.36 The work as an object of criticism exists as a provocation, by virtue of its incongruity in certain contexts, the canon, the typology, the site, the discursive setting. For the radical, as for criticism, design involves the play of incongruous forces, the mixing of metaphors and the imaginative tension between the "is" and the "is not."37

CRITICISM AND INTERPRETATION
Radical criticism gains its potency from the "radical" theories of language, meaning and interpretation conceptualised by structuralism and poststructuralism, as also evident in literary criticism. We begin our investigation of criticism and language by considering a conservative position on language.

green design is a real treat for dogs

tracy ostroff

A "green" doghouse that features a vegetated roof, a photovoltaic solar panel, daylighting, and recycled building materials, fetched $525 during "Animal House 2005," a fundraiser for the Triangle Beagle Rescue of North Carolina, held in September in Durham, N.C. The pooch palace, dubbed the "Dog Box" by its creators at Frank Harmon Architect, Raleigh, demonstrates that the principles of green, or sustainable, architecture can be applied to any built structure—even if the inhabitant is of the four-footed variety.

Excerpted from AIArchitect, 11/2005 issue.

For the rest of this article, please visit:
http://www.aia.org/aiarchitect/thisweek05/tw1104/tw1104doghouse.cfm

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The conservation of meaning

A conservative view of meaning holds that there are meanings to be conserved by a text or a work. One of the tasks of the interpreter/critic is to ascertain original [87] authorial intent.38 So a common form of criticism is to ascertain what was the architect's intention, and how well that intention was realised. So Mies van der Rohe intended that his buildings be pure expressions of function, but Broadbent39 and other critics have pointed out that the original intention was not realised.40 Mies' buildings employ various ruses to create only an impression of functionality. So the purpose of language is to preserve and elucidate meanings — the meanings of the author and the correspondence of those meanings to facts about the world. The conservative view of language is well expressed in Sokal and Bricmont's41 supposed exposé of postmodernism, where certain French scholars are accused of changing the accepted meanings of words, writing paragraphs "devoid of meaning," and where facts as expressed in language are to be distinguished from "real facts" that exist independently of language.

The theory of meaning invoked, by Broadbent (in his early work) and others, is commonly the semiology of Ogden and Richards,42 that relies on notions of correspondence between a symbol and an object or idea (or between a reference and referent, response and stimulus, or signifier and signified) of which structuralism is suspicious. Also, as a theory, it relies on concepts of validity, truth and falsity. One can ascertain authorial intent, and compare stated facts with actual facts. The critic is to marshal all the resources of "clear thinking," uncovering prejudice, discerning content from mere appearance, and questioning appeals to authority that are not grounded in sound argument.

Whereas aspects of Modernism sought to produce a technological architecture free of reference, analogous to "plain language," literal language and prose, there have clearly been modernist attempts to rehabilitate the concept of meaning, and to create buildings rich with meaning, which is to say a "metaphoric" and "expressive" architecture, as in futurism, expressionism and more recently "postmodernism."43 It is commonly held that Modernism pursued sterile functionalism, its products were prosaic, devoid of any "spirit" and therefore did not express anything other than inert notions of function, structure, circulation, services and economy.

So language as an enterprise for conserving and transmitting meanings works in concert with conservative modes of interpretation and criticism. To appeal to authorial intent, objective interpretation, the author/creator as originator, and the distinction between the prosaic and the metaphoric, sustains the objectivism and subjectivism of conservative critique, with its language of the functional opposed to the expressive, the material against the spiritual, and evaluation opposed to appreciation.

A further tradition dependent on concepts of conservation calls on ancient, Platonic concepts of the symbol. Symbols conserve the presence of the immutable in the temporal, the links between the everyday, temporal world and the world of ideas. According to Coomaraswami we participate in symbols, whether or not we [89] recognise them as such.44 They often represent concepts that we cannot or choose not to deal with directly. They are frequently used to signify life, cosmos and God. Architectural history reveals a variety of symbols. Erect stones of the Megalithic period symbolised the procreative forces; massive walls in many periods symbolised power and strength; the Christian Church adopted the Roman symbolism. The Paleo-Christian basilica was seen as a representation of the Heavenly Jerusalem; the gothic cathedral was a representation of heaven. The Vitruvian man defining the circle and square represented the reconciliation of divine perfection and earthly existence. This symbolisation was halted by the nineteenth century tendency to devalue symbolic elements of the past through appropriation, as in the use of domes and pediments once reserved for religious buildings to give banks, museums and other institutions the appearance of dignity. As Peter Fingesten argues in Eclipse of Symbolism,45 in an age of intense scientific enquiry, symbols representing one's fears, respect and devotion become less useful. Since symbols stand for something beyond themselves, they seem out of harmony with the empirical temper of our times. But

symbols representing fear, devotion and respect are only one set of symbols. So develops a theory of significance or iconography, apart from a theory of meaning. From this point of view theories of meaning are instrumental and atomistic, whereas appeals to the significance of a work are appeals to concepts of authenticity, the immutable referent of symbols, and the conservation of values that transcend the contingencies of taste and fashion. Such notions are captured in Aalto's comments on Mantegna's fresco Christ in the Vineyard. He sees the painting as a fantastic analysis of the terrain and calls it an "architectonic landscape," the appreciation of which for him has become a religion.46 To the Enlightenment sensibility, the symbol speaks of essence, perfection, authenticity and authority, and as such is prone to the challenges and re-definitions of critical and radical hermeneutics.47

Critical theory and structuralism

The structuralism of Saussure, and the tradition of language theory that followed from it, is at variance with concepts of language as conserving meaning. Structuralism has been highly influential in critical theory. Saussure showed that the link between the signifier and signified is "arbitrary," which is to say tenuous, agreed by social convention.48 As outlined by Jameson, this "decoupling" of the signifier from the signified developed into a theory of language that problematised the issue of a real world to which words might correspond.49 What constitutes the real is prone to social forces, and hence to hegemony, entrenched power relations. In architecture the hegemony of presumptions about the "real state of affairs" is clearly shown by the debate on high-rise living. Le Corbusier's Unité at Firminy-Vert [90] accommodating a predominantly under class population reveals all the problems conservative criticism says are typical of high-rise living, while the Unité at Marseilles inhabited by professional classes and indeed some architects has no such problems. Conservative critics identify how high rise blocks force the sharing of open spaces, deck access, cross-over apartments and unsupervised play areas. (Coleman provides an example of conservative criticism in this area.50) But these problems apparently evaporate when these same blocks are turned over to private developers, and Mies van der Rohe's lake shore apartments in Chicago are rarely discussed in terms of these problems. What constitute the signified, the referent, the "reality," of these debates is open to interpretation and critique in political and economic terms.

So any claims to give a rational account of reality, as a conservative might, are immediately under suspicion, as is any system that claims to offer logical methods for ascertaining true meanings, or appeals to objective evaluation. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the "general concept which discursive logic has developed has its foundation in the reality of domination."51

Saussure developed the theme of language as a system of differences, where meaning resides in the subtle differences between phonemic utterances. So what distinguishes the meaning of "ledge" from that of "edge" resides in the difference in the first phoneme. For Lévi-Strauss,52 the structuralist theory of difference became the basis of cultural analysis: culture as language, grounded in the distinctions between male and female, born from one and born of many, the raw and the cooked, the inside and the outside. So the contemporary home can be subjected to structuralist analysis in systematic terms calling on distinctions such as front and back, private and public, noisy and quiet, male and female, and observing how these various distinctions are preserved or transformed across different building types, regions, periods, and so on. Aspects of Van Eyck's analyses could be construed as structuralist in so far as they appeal to concepts of large and small, outside and inside, closed and open, and many and few.53 Critical theory would take similar oppositions and show the privileging of terms inherent in each: male against female, white against black, reason against unreason, public against private. The oppositional nature of language and culture finds support from the Hegelian dialectic, and the Marxist identification of the domination of capital over labour. Barthes provides such a critique, further invoking concepts of the modernist "myth," a truth held to be self evident that serves to conceal domination.54 Critical theory therefore resonates with structuralist language theory in its suspicion of conservative claims to access the real (the signified or referent) through language, its assertion of the ubiquity of cultural forces, and hence hegemony, and its appeal to the

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dialectical play of opposites. For Marcuse: "Philosophy originates in dialectic; its universe of discourse responds to the facts of an antagonistic reality."55 [91]The restlessness of the critic already resides in the restlessness of language.

Radical theories of meaning

A radical hermeneutics extends several concepts from structuralism and critical theory. Lacan and others resurrect the ancient concept of the "the real," which moves the issue of reality into the game of language and contingency.56 As a system of signs therefore, language loses its foothold. The referent, the object referred to, is illusive. Derrida invokes various metaphors to account for the elusive nature of the referent, such as the play of signification, endless reference, and "trace." For structuralism the word "door" might refer simply to my front door, but for poststructuralism the example can never be dealt with so simply. The example is already an artefact, appealing to the role of reference within a system of explanation and pedagogy. It appeals to (signifies) Saussure's examples, which in turn make reference beyond themselves to ancient questions of correspondence, origins and transcendence (the concept of the "transcendental signifier"57). To appeal to "straight forward" language usage is no simpler. "Open the door," as a request, may refer to the door we are both facing, which is also the entrance to an apartment, which is the door to a home, which refers to coming and going, the mediation between being welcome and unwelcome, and so on. The references are multiple, chained, and without determined referent. The subsequent action may also be said to determine the utterance. It is a way of rendering the request comprehensible. In this way the word "door" is a consequence rather than a cause, a signified rather than a signifier. The meaning, the ensuing action, resides in this space of possibilities provided by the play of signification. (This just provides a hint of the "style" of deconstructive argument about language. For a further account see Culler58 and Coyne.59 The latter includes a comparison with Austin's speech act theory and its spatial implications.) If language operates in this way, then a similar play arises in radical critique.

Deconstruction, or radical hermeneutics, is perhaps most potent as a means of challenging appeals to ultimate authority, metaphysics. Deconstruction seeks to show that such appeals do not only reside with conservative agendas, but are endemic in any system of argument, not least with appeals to the ubiquity of domination and the imperative of emancipation. A radical conception of language does not assert that there is no authority, or that language has no meaning, but rather that such concepts are the residual traces of an indeterminate movement of meanings, references in search of referent, or chains of signification.

Deconstruction argues that the original meaning of a work is unobtainable and therefore interpretation is about stretching the limits of language. Thus the history of a particular phenomenon covered by major events such as wars may be deconstructed an then reconstructed using more minor events as points of [92] departure to produce provocative insights. So the history of world war two in Singapore written from the point of view of its ethnic minorities rather than from the point of view of the conflict between Japan and the Allies would no doubt challenge the authority of the conventional account, and provide new insights. Tschumi's Parc de la Villette uses an analogous reading to derive a new sort of urbanism based not on major architectural events but on minor ones. So the "Hamburger Joint" is given the same importance as an art gallery in order to problematise the conventional hierarchy embraced by the traditional urbanism.

If such is the nature of language then there is no ultimate end to criticism. The referent (the work, the building) of criticism is in play. So too is the authority to which a criticism might appeal: standards, good taste, emancipatory power. The referent of a word (reference) is in play. It too constitutes a reference to other referents. Every criticism is itself prone to criticism. The work and its criticism are in play, and elude fixed definition. Such a view of the nature of language, interpretation and meaning clearly supports the tenets of radical criticism outlined above.

Pragmatic hermeneutics

Critics of radical hermeneutics are cautious of its language of the flux of signification. The appeal to the signifier is an appeal to the instrument, the surface, the word, and its endless play. For Giddens60 and others committed to Wittgenstein's view of language, structuralism and poststructuralism, in concentrating on the sign, have lost contact with concepts of agency, which is to say contexts of action or praxis. For Wittgenstein meaning resides in use,61 which is not to re-affirm or conserve concepts of the immutability of referent or "reality," but to replace issues of the play of signs with issues of context, community and practice. This praxical theme is present in the various strands of hermeneutical endeavour we have described so far, but finds eloquent expression in the work of Gadamer on the subject of hermeneutics.

As illuminated by Snodgrass62 and others, Gadamer63 presents his hermeneutics as an argument against method.64 If Descartes and the conservative tradition denigrated prejudice, then Gadamer argues for the recognition that all interpretation, and criticism, is from a position of prejudice. Tradition, authority and community are primary in the position we take in making judgements. The Cartesian method requires that understanding, or the advance of knowledge, arises from a process of analysis, or breaking a problem of understanding into parts, and then reassembling or synthesizing the parts into a whole. For Descartes understanding requires evaluation and iteration to progress. Following Heidegger,65 Gadamer constructs a counter-theory of understanding as emerging from the [93] cyclical play between the whole and the parts. It is not possible to gain an understanding of the whole of a work without appreciating the parts, and the parts do not make sense in isolation, other than from a consideration of how they fit into the whole. Descartes' method promotes a "vicious" circle of understanding, where the two constituents (the part and the whole) rely on each other, but neither is sufficiently complete to allow the other to be grasped. For Gadamer, the process is alleviated by the intervention of prejudices, literally pre-judgement. Prejudices are the anticipations of meaning, projections derived by virtue of having a background, a historical consciousness, being part of a community. The critic already has a provisional judgement, no matter how partial. The interpretive process requires its revision, questioning and refinement. For this formulation of interpretation, context is crucial, inescapable, and cannot be pinned down to neat formulation. One can scrutinise one's prejudicial "horizon," one's background, the nature of one's interpretive community, which is always an interpretive matter, but there is no position at which one can stand to settle the matter, or produce the definitive or final interpretation. This formulation is "praxical," in that it elevates the role of context, which is to acknowledge that every interpretive act is situated. Gadamer examines the issue of application. Confidence in a proposition, or a rule in law, emerges from its application. To ask what something means is to ask what it means in a context of use, in a situation.

As every teacher knows, the test of whether, and how, someone understands something is to see how they apply it, or what difference it makes to their design practice. Of course, the understanding is never complete, and new situations of application reveal new understandings. Gadamer therefore conflates concepts of interpretation, application and understanding. Critics and designers are both engaged in forms of practice, though their conventions of legitimation, the authority to which they appeal, may be different. Pragmatic hermeneutics sees the transformation of various concepts from structuralism and poststructuralism. The supposed arbitrariness of the sign becomes a matter of interpretive community, and a recognition that it is for or against this community that language, architecture, and criticism have the capacity to provoke.66

The supposed divorce from reality (of structuralism), the breach between signifier and signified, becomes a matter of the "ontologically positive significance" of interpretation.67 The question of what constitutes the real becomes a matter of the interpretive field of practical engagement, recognising the primacy of language. According to Heidegger68 "language speaks," implying that we do not simply use it as a tool but participate in events of meaningfulness.69 Gadamer goes further and says that it is language that acquires us rather than we who acquire language.70

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cont.

For Gadamer's hermeneutics, the structuralist primacy of difference is translated into a concern with distanciation. One of the themes of hermeneutics is the notion [94] of the "remoteness" of the object under scrutiny to the interpreter. ("Distanciation" is often used to describe, in a combined way, the idea of temporal remoteness and the degree of detachment an interpreter needs in order to be effective.) There are several occasions of remoteness. First there is the strangeness of the object under consideration.71 Gallagher uses an unwrapped Christmas present received from an unknown person to show how language and its attendant tradition in us preconditions our expectation of what it could be.72 There are parallels to this in architecture. For instance early Western observers had great difficulty in seeing Ottoman architecture as anything other than a decadent mixture of Persian, Byzantine and other styles.73 Likewise the early eighteenth century observatories of Raja Jainsingh in India was interpreted through languages familiar to European observers, for example by P. Chetwode as "cubist" in 1935. Then there is the remoteness of critics and audience to the "intentions" of the author, especially when the work is separated by a long time span. Conservative hermeneutics argues that through objectivity one should get as close to the author's intentions as possible. In hermeneutics this is called "re-production,"and critical theory argues that efforts in this direction are futile, as the significance of any architectural work goes beyond what its author can envisage, and interpretation involves creativity in uncovering the "excess meaning" a significant work always contains. In hermeneutic terminology this is often called "production."74 A work of architecture always purveys an "excess of meaning," which is to say it is open to prodigious interpretation. Hence a critic's attempts to elicit the views of the author of a work are not always revealing.

Temporal distance can be regarded as an artificially induced detachment needed for effective interpretation. Radical hermeneutics argues that the search for meaning imposed by distance, language and tradition, as presented by conservative hermeneutics, as well as Gadamer, can exclude many other possible meanings possessed by a work.
For critical theory, interpretation, if it is incisive enough, has a positive effect on the interpreter. It emancipates the interpreter from the compulsions of tradition and language. For Gadamer such emancipation is not possible. Interpretation is implicitly determined and unwittingly obstructed by socially constructed knowledge, and the interpreter can never be aware of this social force.

The language we use carries with it a tradition. While Gadamer insists that all interpretation is conditioned by language and the attendant tradition, Habermas suggests that compulsions induced by them can be eliminated, or at least relaxed, by reflection, and interpretation can be free from distortion. That is to say, a critic can render the process of tradition and language transparent. The declaration of a position by a critic (where they are coming from) can illuminate their critique, but this is in turn an interpretation of a position. [95]

For pragmatic hermeneutics, knowledge, impressions, sensations, training and skill play an important part of any judgement, and indeed criticism is the social development of all these faculties to a point where they can be held as norms of judgement. Gadamer's use of the term "judgement" borrows from Aristotle's concept of "phronèsis."75 Phronèsis strictly means moral or ethical knowledge but is usually interpreted more widely. Moral or ethical judgement is tacit, rather than a matter of resolving a clearly stated problem, and involves self-knowledge in a way technical decision making does not.76 While technical decision making is about means, "phronèsis" conflates means and ends. If criticism as judgement ought to be about means and ends then, in addition to evaluation, it ought to leave the reader with an enhanced appreciation of the work it seeks to criticise: a participation in the work rather than standing apart from it.

Therefore, rather than there being a transposition of some meaning intended by the architect to the consumer of criticism, interpretation becomes a process, a movement back and forth between what is being criticised and the critic's interpretations, for the benefit of those who share the enterprise. There can be no completion of this process. As Ricoeur points out,77 discourse always refers back to its speaker (in our case the critic) and at the same time it refers to the world. Criticism is thus discourse in action, and involves a return to the world of action as the basis of meaning. The interpreter's task involves understanding the language of architecture in its many contexts. It involves coming to terms with narratives that shape space, place and the broader setting of city and territory.

Pragmatic hermeneutics provides the basis of a potent critique of conventional semiotics, which has difficulty extrapolating from the meaning of fragments to a broader unit of significance, such as place or city. After all, as we expand our concern outwards from a house to a city (or even inwards to a fragment of a house) what we encounter is no longer a larger or a more complex house. It is a new entity. Furthermore, as Ricoeur argues,78 the distinction semiotics makes between denotation and connotation is under challenge. For pragmatic hermeneutics there is no denotative, cognitive meaning that can be subjected to semantic analysis in contrast to a connotative meaning that is "emotive."

This language of engagement is often in conflict with the language of radical hermeneutics, which speaks of flux, rupture and dislocation. For pragmatic hermeneutics, the appreciation of difference (rupture and dislocation) is always in a context of understanding. The aporia of the various hermeneutical positions has been the subject of various debates, elucidated further by Gallagher and Caputo.79 Suffice it to say the debates it engenders are productive in ways that exceed the old debates of conservative hermeneutics: "objective" versus "subjective" truth.80 [96]

CRITICISM AND PRACTICE
Pragmatic hermeneutics gives weight to the tenets of radical criticism outlined above, while changing its terminology in part. It also renews the emphasis on language in architecture. In schools of architecture educators do not wait until students have acquired the language and vocabulary of design before being expected to design. The student does not acquire this language but simply enters the linguistic environment, and this environment, to use Merleau-Ponty's words "snaps him up like a whirlwind tempts him by its inner articulation and brings him almost up to the moment when all this noise begins to mean something."81 The pragmatic language view supports the position that so-called "teaching by demonstration" has to be supplemented by critical articulation by the tutor/critic. The student in turn does not learn the design vocabulary as it were, but develops and translates it, or more acutely, as Heidegger82 puts it: "it is not we who play with words, rather the essence of language plays with us."83 From the start, students of architecture are thus immersed in a linguistic universe of design that orders their interpretation, and they take part in the authority of a socially constructed framework of knowledge and open their ears to it.84

In the professional world of criticism, this primacy of language, encourages us not to be cynical of the peculiar language of critics, as they do not invent this language but they are, as it were, dropped into it, and begin to co-habit it. Likewise, the distinction between a "lay" and a "professional" language, as in Jones' summary dismissal of Parc de la Villette,85 needs to be reconsidered. Again architects do not invent their critical language in a wilful way, and in isolation, but it is socially constructed and holds sway over them.

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Language thus powerfully brackets the students', the critics' and the architects' interpretative process, enabling them access to the diverse practices of architecture, while at the same time denying them access to the full scope of interpretation. Language conceals as well as reveals. This characteristic of language is a source of multiple, but productive disputes in hermeneutics. By the same token, the language of meaning (in architecture commonly pertaining to the form/content dichotomy) implies that there is something hidden within professional discourses — meanings to architecture that will one day be revealed to the noviciate. Following Ricoeur, we observe that there are no layers in language, only interpretations.86 In Ricoeur's critique of Freud, the psychoanalyst and the patient are primarily involved in a work — the construction of a meaningful diagnosis, which is to say a narrative that fits their practical situations. The education of the architect involves participation in various interpretive practices, not the uncovering of an occult wisdom, or the peeling back of layers of meaning. [97]
The divide between the critic and the architect is sustained by the conservative position with which we began this article. For the conservative, practitioners produce architecture, without which the critic has nothing to say. The architectural work is indisputably the referent, to which the reference, the work of criticism, is secondary. On the other hand the concerns of the critic represent appeals to theory, of which the architect is unwittingly the practitioner.

In so far as it embraces structuralist theories of language, critical theory problematises the theory/practice divide. Radical theory further introduces concepts of flux and play, the indeterminacy of the play of signification, ideas that resonate with concepts of the surrealist work, that operates through provocation, roles of both the work and its criticism. Pragmatic hermeneutics presents architecture and criticism as discursive practices, each as modes of the other. More importantly, pragmatic hermeneutics demonstrates that interpretation and application amount to the same thing. To understand an architectural proposition is to apply it, and to apply is to understand. Under this regime it makes sense to assert that a built work can function as an architectural criticism. Conversely, to engage in architectural criticism is to engage in architecture, not to stand apart from it.