

**Robert Geddes**

**The 70's:**

**The Formation of Contemporary Architectural Discourse**

**Architecture: The Humanities Model**

Harvard Graduate School of Design / Cornell University  
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## **Architecture: The Humanities Model**

Robert Geddes  
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### **Constructing New Pedagogies**

Is it possible to construct new pedagogies?

Yes. To cite an example well known to all of us: a new pedagogy was constructed when Joseph Hudnut organized the Harvard Graduate School of Design in the 1930's, bringing together architecture, landscape architecture, city and regional planning. The new pedagogy was the *e professional* model of architectural discourse. "Design" was seen in two settings: as a group of "professions" in *society*, and as one of the "professional schools" in the *university*.

For those who experienced the GSD inter-professional collaborative studio as students, it had lasting impact. For me, it was manifest in a collaborative thesis, designing downtown Providence; and it was embodied for decades in a group professional practice, Geddes Brecher Qualls Cunningham, in Philadelphia and Princeton. We were deeply engaged in the society of our time. We were driven by the social value of modern architecture.

Our goal was set forth by Joseph Hudnut in *Architecture and the Spirit of Man*. He wrote: "That architect is modern who, forgetful of self expression and self advertisement, develops his constructive forms out of the work to be done, the techniques to be employed, the idea to be expressed. That architecture is modern which, addressed to serviceability in a modern world,

penetrates through to that pageantry, health, wealth and grandeur which lie beneath its outward confusions and dissonances.”(1)

If architecture is to be “addressed to serviceability in a modern world,” many questions come to mind - what values, what problems, what ideals? These are essential questions for the setting of architecture *within a society*.

How about the setting of architecture *within a university*? How should it fit, intellectually and structurally? How should it connect with other disciplines? How should it connect with its own history and culture? How should it be both a “design profession” and a “learned profession?” These are essential questions for the construction of pedagogy, within a *university*.

### **The Princeton Report**

The construction of pedagogy – in the society and in the university –was the focus of “The Princeton Report,” a study of design education prepared in 1960s for the American Institute of Architects.

In 1970, *P/A (Progressive Architecture) Magazine* reported that “The new schools of architecture that are developing, as well as some of the established ones, are being heavily influenced by ‘The Princeton Report’..... A process for planning and evaluating the unprecedented diversity of new programs that are needed if we are to be able to develop the teams of well-educated individuals who can work together wisely and effectively to design a more humane environment.”

The *AIA Journal* commented that “Architectural education needs controversy periodically. ‘The Princeton Report’ furnished just that, and the profession will benefit. After architectural education broke out of the Beaux Arts tradition, it became complacent. In the 50’s and early 60’s, students hung deans in effigy regularly, but little changed. Budding architects generally received a competent education .....In spite of it all, a competent crop of American

architects was born, but their educational background and training left them with blind spots in meeting challenges and threats... 'The Princeton Report' stirred the educational pot, and hopefully that stirring will result in flexible educational programs that will meet the needs of individual students, the architectural practices, and society."

"The Princeton Report" had two parts. First, it developed a rigorous method for the construction and evaluation of a curriculum. The method – in retrospect, perhaps too mechanistic – is now used in accrediting procedures. Second, in contrast with the traditional rigid structure of architectural education, it imaginatively explored the possibilities for diverse and complex, modular and jointed, frameworks for design education. This idea immediately took hold.

### **Constructing Pedagogy**

Throughout the 70's, the School repeatedly stated that it sought to achieve *three* objectives. In spirit, they grew out of the complexity that was encouraged by The Princeton Report.

1. Education for the development of competence to work effectively as a designer and planner of the built-environment.
2. Education for continuing intellectual growth and adaptability to change.
3. Education for the development of images and models of a better society, and their manifestations in the built-environment.

## Internal Core and External Connections

Needless to say, Princeton felt the impact of “The Princeton Report.” Taking into account our setting - within a University - we developed a dynamic, not static, strategy. We created a strong internal *core* within the School and many external *connections* with other parts of the University. We sought both implosion and explosion, simultaneously.

Did it work? In a gracious and generous assessment of what I had done, Rafael Moneo wrote: “...schools in the turbulent 70’s and 80’s needed to offer a difficult constituency an attractive curriculum where architecture acknowledges the complexity of its condition. He succeeded in that enterprise, and I do not think that I am disclosing a mystery by saying that Princeton was, at the end of the 70’s under Dean Geddes’ direction, the most interesting school of architecture in the country and perhaps the world.” (2)

### The Core

The *core* was design - the process of design, the products of design. Swirling around the core, *connections* were built to and from other disciplines, other professions, and other communities.

Design is an intellectual discipline in its own right. It is unlike art (whose goal is *expression*), and unlike science (whose goal is *knowledge*) *although* it is informed by both. What makes design *different* is a question that needs to be better understood, not only by designers, but also by the public. In this respect, a school of design in a university has a special responsibility – and opportunity – to explore the questions, “What does design do, and what do designers do?”

At some time everyday, everyone acts as a designer. The design product might be a physical object, or a social relation, or a political program. Design is so pervasive a human activity - and so important to the human condition - that it ought to be a key discipline in every University.

The School's core is the *design* of buildings, landscapes and cities. That is its domain. It shares with other disciplines the analysis, history, philosophy and literature of human habitation – but its task is to design it.

In the 70's, the *design studio* was under attack. In some schools, it was being replaced by "programming studies"; in others, by "design methodology"; in others, by "case studies" modeled on business school or law school pedagogy.

By contrast, at Princeton, the design studios maintained their traditional role in architectural education, inherited from previous pedagogies such as the Ecole des Beaux Arts and the GSD. The intention of studios was to be the meeting place of the School's courses, seminars, symposiums and research - in short, of its architectural discourse.

Here is a sampler of intentions in studios, one rooted in architecture as a *social construction*, another rooted in architecture as *cultural expression*:

#### *Architecture and Patterns of Living*

The studio investigated the role of the built-environment in patterns of living. With a focus on habitation, varying in scope and scale, students investigated how built-form can, or should, respond to and intervene in the 'life style' of people.

#### *Thematic Organization in Architecture*

The studio investigated prototypical themes that are embodied in architectural organization - cultural/historical themes coming from myth and ritual, art and literature; and formal/compositional themes such as additive and subtractive, transposition, porosity and solidity, and transparency.

The undergraduate program's design studios were organized according to their increasing scope, scale and complexity. The graduate studios were organized according to their fundamentals— architecture and landscape (directed by Michael Graves), architecture and urbanism (directed by myself), and architecture and building technology (directed by Alan Chimacoff).

## **The Connections**

We built connections of two kinds. With Engineering and Public Affairs - the two other professional schools at Princeton - we developed close but rather conventional connections. Where we really succeeded was in creating new intellectual connections with the social sciences and humanities.

The connections with social sciences were often brilliant, but full of tension – recognizing that architecture is both a *social* construction and a *cultural* expression. Robert Gutman wrote in 1977 “perhaps the most significant change in the architecture curriculum throughout the industrialized nations over the last century has been the introduction of the social sciences. Princeton, under Dean Geddes, has been a leader in this innovation. This is the explanation for my presence on the faculty, as it also accounts in part for the presence of Anthony Vidler, Carl Schorske, Suzanne Keller, and earlier, Kenneth Frampton. At Princeton, because of Geddes' cast of mind but also because of the orientations represented by people just named, the social science emphasis is manifested in a primary concern for the role of the cultural and historical sciences in architectural education.” (3)

The connections with humanities grew in all directions. The traditional close relationship, of course, was with art history (the School having originally been a section of the Department of Art and Archaeology) but art history's influence was more than matched by the emergence of social history and cultural history. Together, we created a Program in European Cultural Studies. We made joint appointments in philosophy and anthropology. Even structural

engineering was explored as a humanistic discipline. Indeed, in the 70's at Princeton, the *professional* model was at least balanced, and perhaps overtaken, by the *humanities* model.

What did we do? When did we do it?

### **The First Connection: Architecture 101**

Architecture 101, "Introduction to the Built-Environment," was created as the first connection between the School and the University. Although I organized the course and gave the lectures, a wide range of faculty and graduate students participated as Preceptors. Over the years, it became one of the largest, most popular courses in the Humanities at Princeton.

In Architecture 101, "man's built-environment was considered from many viewpoints, including the anthropologist's, the biologist's, and the social scientist's, as well as from the disciplines of the engineer, the planner, and the architect."

### **Values, Concepts and Methods**

A new core of architectural studies was introduced. "Principles of Architecture: Values, Concepts and Methods" was a series of reading courses "closely coordinated, almost integrated with the concurrent work in the design studios."

"The title of the courses indicates their educational objectives...to break new ground over the next few years, developing a systematic study of the central concepts, the fundamental values, and the working methods in the design and building of the human environment."

"These courses include study of the theory and methods of design in relation to social needs, and the analysis of significant designs of urban areas, institutional groupings, building types and components.



## **Theory**

### **Analysis and Criticism**

A new series of graduate courses was created, with the intention “to contribute to the analytical, critical skills of the architect and planner in our society.” The courses were connections between theory and practice.

The first course by Kenneth Frampton was “the analysis and criticism of architecture, through the study of the modern movement.” An example of the course content was Frampton’s paper, “The Humanist vs. the Utilitarian Ideal,” a comparative analysis of the competition designs by Le Corbusier and Hannes Mayer for the League of Nations headquarters.

The first graduate seminar by Kenneth Frampton was “Architectural Theory.” The intention was “to study the evolution of theories of architecture, and to attempt to develop an analytical method for determining the relation between such theory and the culture of the society as a whole.”

The Doctoral Program was reformulated under the direction of an interdisciplinary committee, with three concentrations:

1. History
2. Social science
3. Technology

### **Weekly Faculty Lunch Seminars**

The physical, social, economic and political realms of architecture and urbanism were explored in Friday brown-bag lunch meetings. Ten academic disciplines were regularly represented: Economics, Politics, Sociology, History, Anthropology, History and Philosophy of Science, Civil Engineering, Public Affairs and Urban Planning, and Architecture.

The faculty members included, William Baumol (Economics), Robert Gutman (Sociology), Suzanne Keller (Sociology), Thomas Kuhn (History and Philosophy of Science), and Emilio Ambasz, Lance Jay Brown, Robert Geddes, Michael Graves, and Bernard Spring (Architecture).

What were the discussions like? Sometimes contentious – for example, the economist Baumol’s qualifier, “all other things being equal,” did not fit well with the architect’s or the political scientist’s sense of complexity. Sometimes cautionary – for example, when taxonomy and typology led to the architects’ use of a matrix, the historian of science Kuhn warned, “beware of empty boxes.”

### **Symposium:**

#### **Practice, Theory and Politics in Architecture**

Periodically, symposiums captured the mind and spirit of the School. In one organized by Diana Agrest, the intention was "to review critically the state of architecture, by presenting works that serve as a critique of the traditional legacy of architecture. Such criticism implies the studies of the relationship between architectural practice, theory and politics."

Round Table 1:                      On Practice

Rem Koolhaas

Jorge Silvetti

Mario Gandelsonas

Antoine Grumbach

Round Table 2:                      On Theory

Peter Eisenman

Manfredo Tafuri

Round Table 3:                    On Politics

Kenneth Frampton

Melvin Charney

Anthony Vidler

## **The Professional Model**

### *Architecture and Urban Planning*

The boundaries between architecture and urban planning were not rigid, and Most students sought to develop their professional studies and scholarship in Some combination.

Together with the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, a Masters Degree program was created to educate architect-planners for physical planning, through an emphasis on policy-making and decision-theory, systematic analytical and historical studies, and studios in urban design and planning

Drawing upon the social sciences, public affairs, and physical planning, the Doctoral Program sought to expand the intellectual frontiers, to maintain continuity between social planning and physical planning, and to bring to bear the insights of many disciplines on the problems of urbanization and the quality of the human environment.

### *Architecture and Civil Engineering*

An interdisciplinary program was created by the School of Architecture and the School of Engineering. Students in both Architecture and Civil Engineering worked together in the same courses and design studios, until their individual Senior Thesis.

The program had three specialized fields:

1. Structures and building technologies,
2. Transportation planning and design
3. Environmental studies.

As a complement to Architecture 101, an introductory course was created by David Billington from the perspective of engineering. "Structures in the Urban Environment" dealt with "the technology, art and social factors involved in the planning, design and construction of large scale structures that are essential to the public life of modern cities."

## **Civic Engagement**

### *The People's Workshop*

Staffed by students and volunteer architects, storefront workshops were set up in New Jersey cities - Newark, Hoboken, New Brunswick, Princeton, and Trenton. The key faculty was Lance Jay Brown and Anthony Vidler

The objective was to change the profession of architecture by changing the education of the architect – " to focus on individuals in team systems, to solve problems where they are located by actual experience, and to evaluate solutions by actual results... It acted as a catalyst for discussion between student and architectural practitioner, practitioner and practitioner, architect and government, and government and business." (4)

### *Planning and Design Workbook for Community Participation*

The State of New Jersey, Department of Community Affairs, sponsored the creation and publication of a Workbook, in order to improve the connections – the discourse - between the

design professions and local communities. The Planning and Design Workbook was used extensively in New Jersey communities, and in design studios in the School.

The review of the Planning and Design Workbook in *Architectural Forum* noted that community participation is “either required by regulation or demanded by community groups themselves in an increasing proportion of our redevelopment programs. But how do the community groups go about participation? The Workbook.....is the first serious effort to give community participants a tool for understanding planning and design... It is made clear that no solution will satisfy all demands – that priorities must be established and some objectives traded off against others – or against the factor of time....Maybe there is a lesson in this for architects....”

## **New Studies**

Because Princeton had a single University-wide faculty, the School's faculty members were able to create working relationships in many directions. Here is a sampler of the new areas of research that were supported by the School and the University:

### *Anthropology – Architecture*

Studies from the viewpoint of Anthropology of the systems of symbols and meanings embodied in the built-environment.

Martin Silverman ( Anthropology)

### *Economics – Architecture*

Studies of the economic and institutional determinants of the evolution of “prototypes in architecture”

William Baumol ( Economics) with Francis Duffy, Eduardo Lozano

### *Visual Studies – Architecture*

Studies of “form prototypes” and the development of a theory of form, from the viewpoint of aesthetics, linguistics, and the plastic arts.

Michael Graves, Peter Waldman, William La Rich

### *History – Architecture*

Studies of the development of industrial society, and its influence on the architecture of industrial buildings, streets, housing and cities.

Kenneth Frampton

### *Theory – Architecture*

Studies of the evolution of modern architectural theory and architectural education.

Anthony Vidler

### *Behavioral Assessment*

The National Science Foundation awarded a grant to the School for a multi-disciplinary team of architects and social scientists to develop means to evaluate architecture - in terms of human use.

The team headed by Robert Geddes (Architecture), Robert Gutman (Sociology) and Suzanne Keller (Sociology) worked at two scales– a *building* and a *community* .

The research was motivated by the belief that behavioral assessment “is an essential prerequisite for improving the quality of the built-environment and the design process.” It was intended to expand the discourse of architecture and the social sciences.

## Social Construction? Cultural Expression?

In the 70's, debate erupted between two contrasting views of architecture - *social construction* ? *cultural expression*?

At Princeton, the tension was evident throughout the School - for example, in the intentions of design studios; in the mix of the social and cultural in *Values, Concepts and Methods*, in Robert Gutman's assessment of the role of the social sciences; in the experiments of *Civic Engagement* ; and in the diverse areas of *New Studies*.

Historically, architects, critics and teachers had sought to balance both views of architecture. In the 70's, the balance tilted markedly. At the outset, the decade was a continuation of the 60's view of architecture as social construction, but in midstream, cultural expression began to dominate architecture. The 80's had begun.

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(1)

Joseph Hudnut, "Fundamentals," in *Architecture and the Spirit of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949).

(2)

Rafael Moneo, Chair of the Department of Architecture, Harvard Graduate School of Design, letter to the American Institute of Architects, November 1988.

(3)

Robert Gutman, catalog of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies exhibition, *Princeton's Beaux Arts and its New Academicism, from Labatut to the Program of Geddes*, New York, January 1977.