

Architecture perceived through JOURNALISM

Dans le cadre des activités de l'Archifête qui se sont déroulées en mai dernier, l'école d'architecture de l'Université McGill organisait un séminaire sur *L'Architecture Perçue au Sein du Journalisme*. Ce séminaire fut inauguré par une conférence de Joseph Giovannini, critique d'architecture au *New York Times*. Le jour suivant M. Giovannini participait à une table ronde aux côtés de Esmail Baniassad, Doyen de l'école d'architecture du Technical University of Nova Scotia; Trevor Boddy, architecte et critique à Edmonton; Susan Doubilet, rédactrice de *Progressive Architecture*; Odile Hénault, architecte, critique, et rédactrice de *Section A* à Montréal; Mark London, architecte et critique à Montréal; Pierre du Prey, Directeur du programme d'étude du CCA à Montréal et professeur d'histoire de l'architecture à l'Université Queens; Frank Renevier, architecte, critique, et collaborateur au *Nouvel Observateur* et *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* à Paris; Larry Richards, Directeur de l'école d'architecture de l'Université de Waterloo; Jean-Louis Robillard, Directeur de l'Archifête et rédacteur de *ARQ* à Montréal; Norbert Schoenaeur et Radoslav Zuk, professeurs à l'école d'architecture de l'Université McGill ainsi que Ricardo Castro, assistant professeur à l'école d'architecture de l'Université McGill et animateur de la discussion.

As part of the Archifête activities which took place in Montreal last May, the McGill School of Architecture organized a seminar on the subject *Architecture Perceived Through Journalism*. The seminar was opened by a lecture on the title subject by Joseph Giovannini, critic and architectural journalist of the *New York Times*. The seminar continued the following day in a round table discussion between Mr. Giovannini and the other invited participants, including the following: Esmail Baniassad, Dean, School of Architecture, Technical University of Nova Scotia; Trevor Boddy, architect and critic, Edmonton; Susan Doubilet, Senior News Editor, *Progressive Architecture*; Odile Hénault, architect and critic, Editor of *Section A*, Montreal; Pierre du Prey, Director of Study Programmes, CCA, Montreal; Frank Rénevier, architect and critic, contributor to *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Paris; Larry Richards, Director, School of Architecture, Waterloo University; Jean-Louis Robillard, architect and critic, Editor of *ARQ*, Montreal; Norbert Schoenaeur, Professor, School of Architecture, McGill University; Radoslav Zuk, Professor, School of Architecture, McGill University. The moderator for the round table was Ricardo Castro, assistant professor, School of Architecture, McGill University.

Trevor Boddy : To begin with, I do have a question, a line or topic that we all want to comment on that was implicit in Joseph Giovannini's talk last night. That is the whole issue of the political engagement, the political involvement, and the political pose of the architectural critic. I was really quite thrilled by your description, the latitude you were allowed at the *Herald Examiner*, and the commitment you made on issues such as the library demolition and others. I am very much impressed by that. I know my own brief, unhappy relationship with daily newspaper architectural writing is that I was told that I could be the critic of a journal as long as I never said anything negative, that I said something very nice about large development companies, that I took a very soft pose. These were the conditions laid out by the editor for my engagement. I said no, I cannot be a critic under those terms. Were you in a special situation? Surely most daily newspaper architectural writers do not have the latitude you were allowed?

Joseph Giovannini : I think it was a special situation for three reasons. Firstly, they had no firm expectations of what an architecture critic should do, not having had one before. Secondly, the *Herald*, which is a Hearst newspaper, is not based in Los Angeles and does not have any particular ties to L.A., to the L.A. power establishment. Had I been writing on the *L.A. Times* there probably would have been more implied problems and certain delicacies. The *L.A. Times* has a large amount of real estate downtown and so there is a certain responsibility coming with that. On the one hand, they did not know what to expect. On the other hand, as a result of my writing, I was able to give Los Angeles something that the *L.A. Times* was not, something one could appreciate from a journalistic point of view. What I wanted to imply last night was that each writing situation is different and that in a real

life situation you have to realize what your limitations are and push it to the maximum. At the *N.Y. Times*, I am not a critic. The subjects that I can push are more topical in nature such as sexism in design, the American dream and nationalism. From my point of view as a writer what I want to do is address issues which are serious and deal with them intellectually so that the whole subject is not an issue of fashion but of meaning.

Suzanne Doubilet : I've heard rumours that at the *N.Y. Times* there is the problem that the architecture critic, Paul Goldberger, is expected not to attack developers too heavily. That's one of the reasons that they were happy with Paul Goldberger. He goes along with that. Now, it's probably inflammatory to ask such a question, but do you feel that there are limitations at the *Times* of that sort?

Giovannini : I think that one of the problems and one of the virtues of newspapers is that, unlike television they are local institutions and they are integrally tied into the city. Many newspapers support the local industry. It is my understanding that the theatre critic a couple of years ago was fired because he took a very strong, frequently negative stance against what was a local industry and also a Times Square industry. I think the editors of the *Times* are concerned with the content and make their views known. In terms of development, Ada Louise Huxtable took a very strong stance on these things. I don't know if these parameters have changed. She had become an institution.

Doubilet : And that was why she was rumoured to be able to do it. They were not all that happy about it at the end and were relieved to have Paul Goldberger.

Giovannini : I honestly don't know about it and even if I did, I don't know if I could comment on it.



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Ricardo Castro : You are raising an issue now. I would like to ask you, being in a very special position in *Progressive Architecture*, a different kind of publication with a different kind of approach, how does it compare?

Doubilet : Well it's quite different. First of all, we don't have political affiliations or expectations of any sort. On the other hand, we are national and we cannot respond as immediately to a local situation. We have to treat the whole country, and to a degree, international subjects. We can't be as effective on preservation items as a city newspaper can. We have other obligations and people often ask us about these. We have advertisers. Do we publish buildings that for example, such and such an elevator company that advertises in *Progressive Architecture* is featured in prominently? The answer is that we don't, but the pressure is there. There is no question that Dover Elevator would love us to feature a building where their elevators have been used. It's something that we always have to resist.

We have another pressure and that is from the architects themselves. Architects would love to be seen in our magazine. We have a competitor, mainly *Architectural Record*. We don't want to necessarily publish every building Michael Graves has done, but on the other hand, if we slight Michael Graves, will he give us the next building? We have to not worry about that. We have to say what we honestly believe; either criticize it or not publish something that Michael Graves has done because we don't like it. These are our pressures - advertisers and architects.

Giovannini : One thing that has not been mentioned in national publications is the competition for material. A single house which may be of national interest is fought over by *House and Garden*, *Architectural Digest*, *Architectural Record* and *Progressive Architecture*.

Doubilet : It's a very strange pressure because it's almost anti-journalistic in a way. Journalism, the rules of journalism, say publish what you want as soon as you can. Yet we are at the mercy of an architect who gives us the plans and let's us into the house. There have to be agreements - unwritten agreements. This is very strange and not particularly journalistic in nature.

Boddy : Would you not say that the present situation in the architectural press comes perilously close to violating principles of freedom of speech. I am thinking of exclusive rights for the publication of projects done between two glossies. If you publish in one you don't in the other. As a critic and a consumer of architecture, I object to that. There is something dreadfully wrong in architectural critical circles if we cannot have the major publications taking on the same project, and maybe writing with different opinions. Could you explain how that policy came to be and how it is applied?

Doubilet : It's not a matter of exclusives actually, it's first rights. In terms of a private residence, the architect or the client is the one that has to let us in to see the house. On the other hand, in the case of a museum which is in the public domain, we are not at the mercy of the architect. We can go and have the photographer take photographs and that's fine. We sometimes do. For example, *Record* published Michael

Graves' *Portland Building*. He gave them first rights. The only reason we wouldn't want to publish it is that we normally don't publish something that has already been given exposure. We might comment on it in the news section, for example, but we don't feel that it's necessary to use our glossy pages to show more photographs...I agree that we all should get out there and say something about it. That's why we did the *Portland Building*, for example. We thought it was important. Even though they already used eight of their glossy pages, we used another eight of ours to talk about it. I will agree that there is something un-journalistic about waiting, about ignoring.

Odile Hénault : But then I think we are really talking about consumer magazines in a case like this. We are really putting the issue on the consumer aspect of an architect's office. Will that office subscribe to *Record* or *Progressive Architecture*? I think we are excluding the kind of magazine like *Archithese*, for example, in Switzerland, which was trying to achieve a different kind of discourse which would enhance the profession, bring some thinking into it. How much thinking are the articles in the *N.Y. Times* or the articles in *Progressive Architecture*, forcing the profession to do? We are talking about two publics. One is the general public and the other one is the professional public. I think the professional public generally still has a lot to learn: Once they leave school, the education should be part of their practise. How can we achieve this through magazines? Is this being achieved through a magazine such as *Progressive Architecture*?

Doubilet : Well, you can answer that. I think that *Progressive Architecture*, our type of, as you call it, consumer magazine, I think is more of a professional magazine, has infinite latitude to instruct and cause debate. We also have the possibility of expressing graphically, which the *Times* practically doesn't. But that doesn't mean that we don't have the opportunity to...

Hénault : But do you do it? I respect *Progressive Architecture* for many reasons. But do they take the opportunity, such as it is, and if they did, would they not publish buildings that have been published elsewhere? One of the problems here is that architects relinquish their rights. For example, to put ourselves in the Canadian scene, I tried to publish the *Museum of Man* and *National Gallery* projects. We finally came down to the fact that the architects had signed away their rights to let anyone publish them. If they gave their brochure on the National Gallery or the Museum of Man or if anyone published it, they would be penalized.

Doubilet : Joe would know the rules in the States. You did an article on patenting drawings, did you not?

Giovannini : Well, that really is an unfortunate situation. If I understand the Canadian situation properly, the condition for entering the competition was that you had to relinquish the rights. As soon as the architect legally relinquishes the rights, there is no recourse for him whatsoever. That is done for reasons of control on the part of the client.

Hénault : Well, then what about the question of freedom of the architectural press? How would the *Times* react to a situation like this?

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Giovannini : There is no recourse in the sense that it is a legal issue and a moral issue. I don't know what the political maneuvering was behind...

Doubilet : It struck me, observing from New York, that that competition was run in a strange way - kept under wraps. I don't know what the legalities would be in the States, but I think that the public pressures would be too overwhelming to let something like that occur...

Giovannini : The real story, from a journalistic point of view, is not to analyze the buildings themselves but to analyze the premises of the competition and the controls that the government had over it, to discuss it and to raise it as an issue. Perhaps by pressure of embarrassment the government would have to see to publication. That is how the press is probably capable of...

Jean Louis Robillard : I'd like to come back to what you said about how a periodical enhances thinking in a profession. Within the experience of *ARQ*, the response that I have is that architects are an extremely bad clientele. The practising architect doesn't or almost doesn't read. He has developed an attitude of visual stops. The only clientele of a periodical is the academic, the student, the teacher...the intellectuals who also publish, who reread their published stuff, and who in fact have developed a medium of exchange. Most periodicals, I think *Section A* is the same, are in fact just an exchange between a very small elite. More practicing architects are reading Joe's articles in the *N.Y. Times*, than are reading anything that accompanies the description of a building or any editorial in *Progressive Architecture* or other magazines. If we would really treat them as such or understand them as non readers, then most of our periodicals should start switching towards general public reading; architecture magazines like decoration magazines, which with all respect to the quality that we would like to maintain, be very informative to the practising architect...

Castro : Doesn't that level of different publications exist already?

Doubilet : Are you saying that all periodicals should be oriented to the lay public?

Robillard : No, I think *Oppositions* should remain *Oppositions*.

Doubilet : But *Progressive Architecture* should become *House and Garden*.

Robillard : It's a touchy subject.

Doubilet : I would be in favour of having *Progressive Architecture* on more newstands. I dearly would love it. That way, my aunt wouldn't say, "Oh, you work for an architectural magazine. *Digest*?" Instead she'll say, "*Digest or Progressive Architecture*?" But I would love it for other reasons. Last night, listening to Joe's talk, the ability to wax philosophical on a broader plane appealed to me very much. Of course, we can do that in *Progressive Architecture* as well. I think that *Progressive Architecture* would appeal... some of its issues would appeal to a lay public. Certainly the lay public has become more informed and interested in Architecture. However, it would enhance the problem of the consumers' orientation of it. We would have to choose to feature building projects that are very attractive

to the average person. That would force us even more into the consumer situation, which I don't think would be a good one. After all, it's very expensive to distribute and we would have to gear our advertising somewhat differently. The elevator advertisers are not interested in having the suburban housewife read their ads.

Hénault : I think if this happens, if we keep *Oppositions* and make *Progressive Architecture* into *House and Garden*, we will then have to create another type of magazine - one that appeals to the public but isn't as stiff as *Oppositions*. Somehow we have to feed the architects that belong to the public, that will read this type of writing and maybe will try to enhance their own practice.

Robillard : The examples are in extremely fixed categories. The experience of those who produce magazines (and the writers) involves a lot of idealism. Here in Quebec the magazines are based on idealism and a lot of fun; there is a lot of gratification for us to be able to take a theme and get good collaborators. We want to do it in a very serious manner. This is the community we want to awaken and it's not happening. After three years I question myself profoundly on that subject. I don't know how I will tackle the next three years. I'm amazed by the extreme apathy that is found in the architectural community.

Doubilet : I'd like to address something that you mentioned before, that architects and the reading public flip through and look at pictures. We assume that it doesn't smell that good. We should be more intellectual. They should read words more. How do we get them to read the words and think? However, it is not such a dirty side of it. After all, architecture is appreciated mainly through the visual sense. Architects are attuned to that and it is not a bad thing, though we tend to say 'the glossies' as if they were a little nasty. What we should try to do is make more points, intellectual points through the visuals, not just make them pretty pictures - I think that is the problem. I don't think we should stop writing intelligent words because nobody reads them. But I don't think we should be ashamed that we depend highly on glossies. We should, however, put forth another or more interesting message than 'Pretty, Pretty'.

Hénault : In fact, we all wish that we had the money to pay for the glossy pictures. I think a magazine that tries to do it is *Casa Bella*, where it's not glossy but it's in colour. I'm sure it's more expensive than *Progressive Architecture*.

Doubilet : Yes

Hénault : And the projects are complete. There is an attempt to give a slightly different edge.

Frank Renevier : The situation in France is very different. First, I would like to explain that, in France, the average man has no interest in architecture. As far as I know, in America you have quite a lot of people reading architectural criticism. For instance, in very small daily newspapers you can have an architectural critic. It's very different in France because you have only the magazines. The mistake of the magazines is that they are too architectural when they are talking about architecture. The problem for the critic in the daily newspaper is that they are too casual; they do not have the knowledge to



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have a professional approach to technical matters, to design. I must say that I understand deeply why the average man has no interest in the architectural information. It is probably because there is no relationship, there is no link between the space he is used to living in and the pictures, the stories that we are providing in this information.

We are, on one hand, going to ask some architects to deliver some information - pictures and words about some projects already constructed. On the other hand, we are going to send a journalist on the site, to try to describe what's going on. Then, without comment, we are going to bring the two together. We have already done one. It's incredible. It's two worlds. It doesn't fit. I think that the architecture critic must represent not the common picture that the people have in their head, because they have no knowledge, but their needs.

Robillard : A real image of life.

Hénault : Where did you publish this comparison?

Renevier : We are going to do an exhibition in Paris.

Doubilet : I don't quite understand the comparison, or how you set up the comparison. One is the architect's intent and the other is the reality?

Renevier : Sometimes they do fit.

Doubilet : But how are you doing it? The photographs that the architect supplied and the photographs that you take are compared, is that right?

Renevier : Exactly. But they are not from the same angles and they are not searching for the same effects. Normally, most architects are trying to show off their design, not always showing the concrete situation. Before I would say what I think of a building, I must ask what it is built of. What is the technology? Is there any improvement or innovation in that field? Then I accept the aesthetic consideration that we are used to putting on a level of priority.

Doubilet : Then you have to remember, and this is a very big limitation in a magazine that depends on photographs like ours, you have to remember that there is architecture and there are photographs of architecture. Neither the architect's photographs nor your photographer's photographs tell the whole story and sometimes they are both very misleading.

Castro : Larry Richards spoke some time ago about the whole notion of a secondary reality that is produced by the media. We are talking a little bit about that whole phenomenon - the electronic media is the magazine. It is *House and Garden*. It is *Progressive Architecture*. It is probably less so the academic periodicals. They are starting to produce the secondary reality in which we are all living. I would like to throw that question to Larry Richards.

Larry Richards : Naturally it's been on my mind while listening to these responses. I don't know how one gets around that. I don't think that there is any way to get around it. I think that what one has to do is to find ways to expose it and understand it, to draw it in to the whole process. This example of people looking at the same thing in two different ways is quite interesting. Of course, it becomes absorbed itself again. In a way there is no escape from it. In this case, you said that it is going to be an exhibition and not put in a jour-

nal, so that makes it a bit different. I don't have any answer at the moment about how one deals with that. I think it is interesting to try to deal with it a lot more. Some journalists have, but I don't know much that is discussed. I would like to ask Susan how much it is discussed and I think that there are some examples in *Progressive Architecture*. The one thing that I remember a few years ago is an *exposé* on how the various journals approached architecture. It was a kind of humorous thing, a very small example. But do you talk very often about doing that kind of thing, about exposing your own process? Or is that just a kind of no-no?

Doubilet : Well obviously it's not a no-no since we've done it.

Richards : How far would you go with that? Has anyone ever done an article where you are taking photographs of the people taking photographs of the room and what architectural photographers go through and how much money is spent to get the one fabulous picture? I'm not sure what that would accomplish.

Doubilet : It's certainly not against our principles. In fact, I mentioned the subject as being one that has to be remembered. There is a difference between photography and architecture. It might be an idea to discuss that. I think it comes down to a question of responsibility. To decide what we are going to publish, we look at slides and we also go and see the building. After all, you can make wonderful slides. We are conscientious and responsible and would not publish it. You can do a wonderful photographic essay on a terrible building. Our intent is to document the building as well. Even when we choose a building that we think is quite good we don't only show the *arty* photos. It is very difficult to show really becoming photos too and yet perhaps we should. We do at times. When you show the real facts, when you compare the architect's photos and the *real* photos, are those real also? It really comes down to responsibility. It's wonderful journalism, I mean wonderful sensationalist journalism, to show the extremes. One could really push the extremes in photographs. It could be fabulous. Everybody would buy it up. Wonderful. But that's not being more responsible than only showing beautiful photos.

Boddy : I've got an anecdote and then a question, following along the lines of Larry's question. The anecdote goes like this. In 1980, I was talking to Philip Johnson in the Palace, in the *Seagram Building*. Philip Johnson is quite interested in the work of Douglas Cardinal. He stumbled onto his work in the late seventies and was quite impressed. In the course of my conversation with Johnson, he said, "You know, that man has never been published in any of the glossies and I think that is a bloody outrage". This is the way Johnson works. He looked at me and said, "Young man, you write, don't you?" Instantly, his secretary had Suzanne Stephens, then editor of *Progressive Architecture*, on the line. Johnson gets on the phone and says, "I think it is a bloody outrage that you and the jokers over at *Progressive Architecture* never published this incredible young architect from Canada." That was the gist of the conversation. The outcome of it was that Suzanne said, "Send me a package of photos and we'll take it to the *Progressive Architecture* Editorial Meeting". One of

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the most important architectural institutions in the world, certainly on the continent, is the *Progressive Architecture* Editorial Meeting. Careers have been created and destroyed in those meetings. Despite Suzanne's wanting to do the article and despite the personal endorsement of Philip Johnson, the idea didn't make it through the *Progressive Architecture* Editorial Meeting.

Doubilet : Our judgement was different than Johnson's.

Boddy : Could you describe the dynamic of that meeting? I am fascinated by the whole notion. By David Morton's description, they are often three day, dragged out, knock-down fights. People enter with favourite architects or projects and beat each other up until a victor emerges. Do you want to describe one of them?

Doubilet : Thank goodness it never lasts more than four hours. It just seems like three days.

Esmail Baniassad : I would like to ask what the purpose of this discussion is? If the purpose is to recollect some memories, that's fantastic. But is there in fact a critical edge to this discussion, as to the identity of journalism, of its place in architecture?

Castro : We are talking basically about the whole notion of how architecture is perceived, specifically through the media, in this case, through journalism - the written word or image. In that sense, the panel is contributing some of their experiences and probably providing a certain feel for the discussion of these things which I think are not usually put on the table.

Baniassad : I would be interested in somebody or the panel saying outright, what is the limit of depth to which they can take architectural discussion and at the same time, make a living?. It seems to me, by and large, that architectural literature, for whatever reason - the low level of intellectual activity of the professional or otherwise - lacks in critical judgement, certainly in critical content. It may be that it's suicidal for architectural journals to become overly critical, whether because they owe a debt to a developer or to some successful architect or whatever. I think it would be interesting for a panel to at least address that sort of an issue head on. Are there any limits of depth, for any reason, that journals or journalists have to observe? In fact, what we may be talking about are newscasters, and we are glorifying them too much by trying to make it appear that newscasters and illustrators are spanning the whole range of publications on architecture. Certainly in comparison to other subjects, we seem to be totally putting aside the critical side of publications.

Boddy : My response to your comment is that from my own experience I think the architectural critic is caught in a bit of a double bind. There is an urge towards *populism* - taking elements of architectural discourse, architectural principles, popularizing them or else taking them to a broader audience. In fact, talking to the public in a real sense, writing for the very popular magazines, often at, admittedly, quite a low level. Very simple issues; vast, complex things reduced to clichés, *etc.*... there is an urge towards that. At the same time, there is an urge towards a very rarified academic level, which is really just elites talking to elites. I could write an article for the five or six people in Canada interested in certain theories

and we could get together and talk about it. It seems to me that the rich area of architectural criticism lies between those two poles, between a rarified *Oppositions* level of discourse and the house sections of most newspapers. Somewhere between there lies a true architectural discourse. Now, the question is that, institutionally and economically, there don't lie many options, especially for those of us in Canada, for those of us who want to pursue it.

Baniassad : The practise of architecture is going to be served by some sort of occupation, those who are willing to do the critical analysis, making statements about buildings and the practise of architecture that the practising architect and the student of architecture finds important to go to. The question really isn't whether architects read or write. It takes a lot of time and energy and knowledge, beyond personal opinions, to bring out that sort of criticism. I really wonder if, in any editorial office or establishment, the investment that is required of a magazine to put out critical statements, to study standards, to study the range of information that is being made available, look at issues, take particular instances and universalize them, is being undertaken. The work is tremendously important. It really takes a research dimension to bring what we usually call journalism to the level that the practising architect and that student of architecture can begin to pick up and learn from.

Robillard : This is very true, except that, for architectural criticism to have any effect, it has to reach a population that will then join and either condemn or praise whatever building has been analysed. Even if you do this, if it's not read, not even by the architect who has done that building, then you're going nowhere. I think criticism must reach at least a certain number of people to be effective. I think it starts much more with the newspaper than with the specialized magazine. It doesn't have a sufficient circulation to make it efficient.

Norbert Schoenauer : I think the most important point is that the public at large is not familiar with architecture. If they are not familiar with architecture, why would they be interested in criticism of architecture? It seems to me that one of the biggest problems is that the public at large is not fed through the common media the problems about architecture. Most of you that know me, know that I was very influenced by Scandinavian architecture. What impressed me in Denmark, in comparison to Canada, is the following. You could not open any magazine, whether it dealt with food, clothing or whatever, where there was not an article in that magazine about an architect. After the public at large had gotten to know what architecture was about, then you could delve into criticism. I think there is a place for *Progressive Architecture* specializing in our profession, as a medical journal is specialized. Somebody told me that the best read newspaper in the world is the *National Enquirer*. There you read about medical issues, you read about Elizabeth Taylor's latest fling. It would be interesting if, in that magazine's content, you could read something about architecture. Then, the lay person would know something about it. They don't read *Progressive Architecture* but apparently they do read the *Enquirer*...

Robillard : It ties in with what Frank just said, how to in-



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terest them in their *milieu de vie*. If they are interested in their *milieu de vie* then they can carry on.

Pierre du Prey : I think some of these comparisons we have just heard with Europe though are bound to be to some extent odious because of the tradition that exists there. Not just for the teaching of the history of architecture and the appreciation of architecture but because the material is present and people are aware of it. I've just myself recently completed a tour of most of the major schools of architecture and departments of art that teach the history of architecture. One observation, at least as far as historians are concerned, that I think I can make without doing too much injustice to any one or any number of people, is that there is no tradition for a critical analysis of buildings, whether past or present, going on in the schools. It's dates, facts, names, images, mugging up for a slide test or something like that. There is an absence of this tradition of analysis and discourse. I think you are going to be constantly talking down, in terms of the level at which the editorial and articles can be directed, until such time as the level of interpretation can be brought up. I think the problem largely resides, at the moment, in forming in the schools of architecture - and certainly it is absent in the liberal arts programmes - an appreciation and a willingness to enter into this kind of analysis and discourse on the part of the students in general. Then you develop a kind of *cadre*, and from that *cadre*, who can appreciate a rather higher level of architectural journalism, from them down, something will percolate to the general public. If you aim at the general public, we will be wallowing in a dubious kind of discussion and criticism. One has to think a little bit in elitist terms.

Giovannini : I don't think there should be any verticality implied between the journalist writing for the lay public and the journalist who is writing for a professional audience. If you think of it as a horizontal situation, if as a critic or architectural writer you don't know how the building is put together or what were the architect's concerns, then you lose that audience altogether. Your writing is then written for a lay public and it's not a dialogue between the two. On the other hand, there are fashions of subjects, as well as architectural fashions, and there are fashions of ideas. There are also everyday living patterns that a writer can assess and evaluate and relate back to buildings. I think that a good writer establishes a dialogue between the two. What distinguishes the writer who is writing for a larger public is that he is taking into account the needs of the public as users as well as or instead of the needs as defined in theory in architectural circles. I don't think that either reading public should be ignorant of the other.

Doubilet : There is another point. This is not by way of an excuse but an unfortunate explanation. I don't disagree with what you're saying, but if you look at the history of architectural criticism in North America, it is not non-existent but has been very, very sparse. Perhaps, since the onset of Modernism there has been a tradition among architectural magazines to have absolutely no criticism at all, until the last decade or so. Architectural journalism became a matter of exposing buildings, period. The extent of editorializing was to choose

what the editors felt was the best and to show it - only to describe it. This is evident in *Record*, post World War I, and early *Progressive Architecture* (*Pencil Points*). There really was no tradition, unfortunately. In music and the theatre there has been an ongoing tradition of criticism. In architecture, there hasn't. Ada Louise Huxtable broke ground with real architectural criticism.

Giovannini : She invented the field in North America about twenty five years ago.

Hénault : I am not sure that I would qualify that as architectural criticism, maybe architectural comment, but not architectural criticism in the sense that Esmail (Baniassad) describes it.

Boddy : I think maybe we should define architectural criticism, an extremely rare beast, admittedly. Certainly *The Canadian Architect* almost never has criticism. It is architectural reporting. In most of the glossies, it is the same case. Most of it is reporting, it is in fact journalism - what the building is without any higher level of discourse, of analysis or interpretation. We need to get to a state of true criticism as hinted at in Pierre du Prey's comment. We really need to improve the level of discourse, to create an architectural culture of which criticism would be one component. We've got to start with reporting. We have to know the basic buildings, we have to understand them, a certain level of information - from that phase, true criticism will emerge. It is almost non-existent on this continent at this point.

du Prey : It goes deeper than that. We have to know how to write also. That's one of the basic problems in the educational sphere. People just don't know how to write. How can they criticize? Writing and thinking go together in the same sense that persists, at some base level, in the European situation which has just been referred to. I think that that pertains rather more.

Baniassad : This comment reminds me of Geoffrey Scott's distinction between two types of criticism. That is, the criticism that comes from a critic who is not a designer and the criticism that comes from the designer. Totally different viewpoints; the beginning is different, the end is different and the medium is different. I would be interested to know if the panel is interested in making that distinction in their work? Are they addressing that subject? **Do they** have any ambition to address that distinction? Success speaks for itself. As far as magazines are selling, we really don't need to worry. I do think that the criticism that comes from a designer addressing the process and act of design is a different kind of activity.

Giovannini : Among the critics here, who has an architecture background and who has a literary background? All of us are trained as architects or designers, is that right?

Hénault : It is a question of experience. The building of the environment as seen by the designer or by the non-designer. I think that the main difference between the two is that the non-designer will take a stand much quicker and much firmer than the designer. If you watch a designer trying to judge a building they often wait for the oldest and most respected designer to say, "I guess it will do". Then they go, "Yes, yes. I can see a dimension here and...". But they won't take a

"I think a lot of architects don't only conceive of the building on a site in the city but on the site of the printed page."



stand immediately. That is the big problem. That is why I can't get any critical articles.

Baniassad : The difference between the two is not whether one of them has a degree in architectural design or whether they make their living designing buildings, it's the point of view they assume when they are doing a piece of thinking or writing. The kind of criticism that comes from a designer and addresses the problems of design relates to the way people design, relates to the act of designing, relates to intermediate decisions...

Giovannini : We would all like to think we do that. I know in my architectural criticism, I interview the architect, but there are a lot of other considerations - the developer, the people who design codes... There are a lot of parameters, it's not only the designer. You have to arrange a lot of opinions before you arrive at your own.

Renavier : I am between the practise and the writing about architecture. From the inside, I feel that it is very simple to explain design. But most architects want to make a mystery of it. The purpose is to find out whether the architects want to fascinate with their work or want to explain, to share something. As soon as you try to share, people will respond to you.

Doubilet : You have generalized about architectural criticism, or architectural journalism in America. Beyond that general statement, there is a varying level. One article, perhaps, does approach what you are discussing more than another. Have you read some articles in American journals, magazines or newspapers that do satisfy you at least to a degree?

Baniassad : Whether they satisfy me or not is not the question. I think there are some quite adequate pieces of architectural criticism. By and large, they come out of critical studies in the hands of people like Silveti and many other outstanding teachers. That is because they take several pieces of architecture and they relate the history of the type to the member of that type, that is the building of the moment. They do highlight various aspects of it - inside, outside. The drawings that come out of that sort of piece show the depth of analysis that's going into it. There is quite a bit of new drawing done just for the sake of that study. The piece that comes out of it is quite a piece of research. By and large, the judgemental side of it is very little. The descriptive and analytical side of it is quite a bit. After reading it one doesn't know only what the author should think but knows a lot about what one should think. They are truly informative at many levels. I think that is an acceptable method of critical study. Unfortunately, a sign of poor criticism is that it is one-dimensional; it informs the reader at only one level. We go away knowing what the writer thinks. I think one has to agree this sort of thing does not serve the cause of architecture. I don't think it's fulfilling for the author either.

Giovannini : I said in my talk last night that I would like to approach buildings as cultural artifacts. The reason that writers are read, over a long period of time and on a regular basis, is the breadth and depth of cultural reference; not only dealing with the building as a building and a form of analysis but in all its complexities. I would like to think that your de-

scription of what is desirable is what we have, as a unit, tried to do.

Another thing is this issue about pictures. When Susan Sontag wrote this book about photography, she did it without pictures altogether. She tried to re-establish an evaluation in words, re-establish the presence of words in a book. That presence had been bumped altogether by photography which is a major force in our appreciation of our environment. I heard an account of a woman who dressed herself in a mirror because she was going to be photographed later. She dressed herself to what she would be photographed like. She was not only looking at an image of herself, but she was thinking of a photographic image of that image. It was a compounded image. I've heard architects say, "I didn't pay too much attention to that building because it is not going to be submitted for publication". I think a lot of architects not only conceive of the building on a site in the city, but on the site of the printed page. The secondary reality, the printed reality is the photographic reality, the printed reality in terms of publication. I think this phenomenon of the image replacing the reality is pervasive in our culture, whether we are listening to recordings rather than going to a concert or looking at pictures rather than going to see the real artifact. I think it's a real problem with buildings in architectural journalism. You absolutely have to see the building. A lot of people write from photographs and experience it in their minds. It's very unfortunate but it's pervasive in our culture.

The second thing is that we have talked about the printed media, but there is a vast phenomenon, the electronic media and the role of our subject, architecture, in electronics. I think if you are talking about television, you are dealing with a phenomenon that is non-place specific. As critics and writers on a newspaper, for example, it's appropriate to talk about buildings because newspapers are a local phenomena. A television network is not. I don't know what the role in a national television situation is for architecture, whether it can exist or not. It's quite possible that our critics are somewhat impoverished because television, as a secondary reality, has displaced our primary realistics, our built environment. We are living in the two, to a certain extent. In New York, people walk down the streets and talk about the buildings. They are real characters in their lives. In an increasingly televised culture, I am not really sure about the importance of a building because people have alternatives. One might address the possibility of an architectural journalism occurring with a nationally televised distribution.

Robillard : I think that it's on two levels. I think there are general architectural topics that can be dealt with in the same way as newspapers, in a debate for example - a way where the architect, the designer and the journalist are present. I kept seeing a show on television on the different arts and the theatre. There were different critics coming and giving their bits. Every time they had a block, they showed a film. These were French films on castles... publicity at the same time, but however they were produced, the thematic part of showing suddenly an ensemble has a lot of possibilities for the viewer to understand one point. Instead of having a critical point of



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view, it enhances the knowledge of what there is elsewhere. It starts first at this level, but films on castles in France could become films on thematic ideas of building, could become an explanation of styles, of tendencies, of ideas, depending on which level you set it up.

Giovannini : Is it possible that we are all missing the point by writing in these microscopic publications that have very little to do with reality?

Robillard : I think that the specialized magazines are very romantic about it, and after five years of working on it, I think we are missing the boat.

Doubilet : I think architecture is, or has been, missing the boat. Theatre for instance, has been written over the centuries, as has music. Perhaps architects, and not just the public, have been completely confused about what architecture is about in this century, what there is to understand and how you understand it. Therefore, we have written less about it, and the public is not interested in it. They don't know what to be interested in, they don't know what it's all about. We have been backwards about using 20th century ways of exposing ideas and physical things to the public. There aren't very many films about architecture. Cable T.V. in the States should be quite flexible in terms of the type of things they show. Very few show anything about architecture.

Radoslav Zuk : It seems to me that our discussion oscillates between two extremes. Certainly there are two kinds of architectural discourse. One is the communication with the public. The other is the communication within the profession. I think we are confused because too often we take the stance of the layman. Music criticism is for the layman. When musicians speak amongst themselves, they are not talking the same language. They are not talking about mode of expression or the impression that is given, but they talk about how a piece of music comes out. You have to make that distinction. On one side there is an enlightenment of the public about architecture at a certain level and at another level, we have to have a discussion - where the architect begins to understand how architecture comes about and what is important in architecture. After all, it is an architect looking at the work of another architect - the visual becomes extremely important because a statement in drawing or in diagram, to another architect, means almost everything. You may need additional explanation to understand. I think the problem with magazines is that most architects look at what is published in the glossy magazines and begin to copy the superficial aspects. My appeal is for two distinct approaches, I think there is room for one and the other and let us not confuse one with the other.

Richards : On one hand, I would agree that there are two levels and that we confuse a lot of discussion unnecessarily. It is a bit of the chicken and the egg argument. My own interest right now is with the broader base, the public, the lay person. I have more confidence in more exciting things happening, things of substance happening within architecture, if there is more pressure put on the profession. I have more confidence in the public making demands at some point down the road. We will have to read more, think more, and be quick to respond. I think it would be interesting. I think there is a real

challenge in the next five years in Canada, to find a way for architects, students, educators and journalists to be involved in a broader base way, probably through the electronic media, in a kind of interactive - T.V., home video, things that I think are on the horizon. The possibility of people at home being able to interact opens up a whole new level of things.

One other example that I just wanted to mention is an extremely successful example of public education, in the area of architecture, in a show which I believe it was on PBS about two years ago, *This Old House*. It was a long series, about twenty half hour shows about the renovation of a house in Massachusetts. Along Essy Baniassad's lines, the programme was incredibly well researched. They went through, in a very general way, giving the background of the house and then, over a long period of time, they showed all the changes, all the renovations. They talked with the workmen about their experience, about what it means to put a bathtub in place. They talked to the contractor and they talked to the client. Week by week, you saw it changing and unfolding - it took twenty half hour segments to do it. It was entertaining as well. I know a lot of people who had never thought of architecture, designing, building before but were drawn to that show and watched it every week. It was very carefully done and very thorough. It did all these things at the same time as well as being popular. Last night, you were talking about articles you had done that were part of a series of eleven or twelve chapters to a story. You tend to make a newspaper article read quick, there's only so much space. But if it's one of ten articles and you get drawn into it, then you can use something as fast as newspaper to get a broader base for it. My only point is that I think there is a greater challenge to do it with a broader base and after that the profession will respond.

Renevier : I would like to mention a very interesting program on Italian T.V. which was presented on the national network two years ago. The program was made by Renzo Piano, the Italian architect. The purpose was not to show architectural objects already finished or tossing theories around but to take some very important examples of Italian architecture, some from the past, some from the present, and to show them to the people. The program was happening at seven o'clock in the evening before the news when everyone is watching the square box. They were showing the building process. They were providing people with a new means of appreciating, understanding the physical, the concrete culture of architecture. I do believe from that experiment, that the architecture at the moment is too intellectual, it's *gardé*.

Mark London : People are interested in what they can use to help themselves. The purpose of architectural magazines, the glossies, is to a large extent, for architectural offices designing and churning out buildings to look at them and say, "Oh, I can copy this window here and that there". That seems largely what they are used for. Those magazines and architectural criticism in newspapers are somewhat broader, but both of them focus to a very large extent on the design of a very small number of new buildings and very often deal with very philosophical aspects of some detail, should it be treated

"I think that the sole means of improving the state of architecture is by appealing to the public."



quite this way or quite that way, should it be grey or should it be white, should we be copying this person and treating a column in that way? Things that really touch one tenth of one percent of the built environment we live in every day. There is only a relatively limited number of people that care whether a window is symmetrical or not symmetrical or some detail... Whereas everybody lives in the city everyday, they live in ordinary buildings that were not designed by great architects, that were never published in glossy magazines. Ninety five percent of the new construction in this city is unfortunately very ordinary. Nobody ever talks about those. Nobody ever talks about what's making our cities, changing our cities, what's already there, the dynamics of a city. Usually, when you get a critique of a building, there may be a mention of the neighbourhood. I guess there is more of a discussion of context in recent years. But it will focus in on the building as an object of art and it will be an artistic, philosophical discussion of the design. Very rarely, will it focus in on why that kind of building was built there, was it the right kind of building..., what was the effect on the people and the community - the things that really matter to people. When the plans finally come out of the federal proposal for the redevelopment of the Montreal waterfront, what is going to be relevant there is not an architectural critique of the design of the building, well I guess we won't be at that stage, but when we get to that stage, but fundamental questions. In the City of Montreal, when new buildings get built, it is not the detail design of the entranceway that is important but should a big office building be built on Sherbrooke or can it be built in another part of the city? What about suburban shopping centres and housing, the effects of changing of neighbourhoods? It's the *why* aspect of the built environment. I think by that you can reach a large part of the population because that's what really affects people.

Hénault : That raises the problem of convincing the editor of a newspaper. Let's take Montreal. If you want to sell a series to *Le Devoir* you have to crawl on your knees for two days and accept all kinds of humiliation, and get drunk at the end of both days in order to get your self respect back again. It takes you two and a half days to write and to do a proper job and you get paid fifty dollars. After two years, it has had a dampening effect. I very much agree that that's one thing to be tackled. I agree that pressure from the public will put pressure on the profession. That's the most important thing. When you go to Vienna, the people talk about the public of Vienna having a very good ear. I am sure that they are not born with any special talent. It's just that they have been hearing good music and they don't get up for a standing ovation, as we do in Montreal for every presentation at *Place des Arts*. They boo sometimes. In terms of architecture, to me, the problem is that we don't take a stand. In school, we don't have *critique* courses mainly because we have very strong professional practice courses that say that any one of you that attacks a colleague will be banned from the order of architects. It happens here and that's why some of us who making a living as critics, don't have a practise. The television media is very difficult for us because it is very present, very

actuel and we don't take a stand. We deal with history. We organize symposiums. I can think of the *colloque* on 'The Orders'. We deal with history because it is safe. The best lectures in the symposium we had were the history lectures. When we come to the present, the discourse breaks down, we are looking over our shoulders to see who will give the stamp of approval before we make a stand. I don't think that architecture is too intellectual. I think it hides behind quotations and a sort of gossip club in order to make statements that look like they are intellectual but they are really not thought out.

Giovannini : About your comment about essentially elitist buildings that deal with symmetries of windows or whatever. I think that they are interesting not only *per se*, because an exceptional building, or an exceptional person, is not only so in his own terms, but as models for the medium ground building. I think the quality of the language that they establish is extremely important for the image of the other ninety five percent of buildings. That's the reason why we look very closely at those buildings.

Boddy : I think the sole chance for the discussion of architecture and the enhancement of architecture lies with the public now. The profession itself is usurped by intellectual ambition and lost social responsibility. I think that the sole means of improving the state of architecture is by appealing to the public.

Hénault : Jane Jacobs did that. She really changed a lot of attitudes in North America. Beginning with a few articles and a book of statements and suddenly pressure, incredible pressure was put on the profession and they had to react to it.

Robillard : We have to remember that communication with the public does not happen in one day. Not only do you have to be professional about it, but at the same time you have to count on time. I think that a newspaper that goes out everyday, even if it's not always full, has something. It can take two years, three years but this is where it happens.

Doubilet : For example, your series of articles on the library in Los Angeles helped save the library, so it can be effective.

Giovannini : I think it would have been even more effective, in Los Angeles, and anywhere else, if on a professional level you had professional publications, if you have newspapers, if you have electronic media coverage, if you have Jane Jacobs' books, if you have this energy going on, so that you have reinforcing points of view that make the subject much bigger than the sum total of individual efforts. It is extremely difficult unless you have a monumental book by Jacobs or someone like Ada Louise Huxtable who had a powerful position. You really need reinforcing points of view on a repeated basis over a long period of time. In a Molière play, I think there is a line, 'I have been speaking prose all my life'. I have a feeling that people don't know that the buildings that they occupy are architecture. People don't know how to spell the word, if there is an 'h' in it somewhere. You were talking about creating a popular basis and I really do believe in the base of a pyramid. I believe the pressure is on the profession from the public.