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Those who Change the World

Daniel Libeskind

Schools are not here just to produce the kind of people needed by a society. They are meant to educate people to be responsible for the work of architecture and planning which is material, ethical, political and out of this work. There is nothing more important, in my view, than the education of an architect. The simple reality is that nine out of ten people will soon be living in cities; the world will be one big building. The question is whether the life in these cities, (and their environs) will be determined by a dead and bureaucratic mechanism or whether the process of architecture will lead to a free, democratic and inspired place-to-be.

To be or not to be has never been more critical than in the arena of education where students stand at the juncture of either the closure or rebirth of architecture. Schools develop factions which would like to impose ideals of homogeneity, control or silence; factions which follow an idea of eternity in architecture. But eternity begins and ends in bed. Despite the very good students at the ETH and the high level of skill demonstrated by their work which I have seen in the past, it seems to me that the ETH is somehow out of touch with the architectural development at the end of the century. The debate about ecology, density, virtuality, technology, communication and 'otherness' – a debate which has swept over most schools in the world. Students graduating from the ETH have a very good reputation and I see them around the world in different offices. But it is a pity that they are too often sitting in the back rooms designing details and relegated to technical tasks. They are too good for that! They should be at the forefront of the architectural discourse with ideas, forms and new concepts of making. The students at the ETH should be given the opportunity to question radically in order to respond in contemporary ways to rapid changes in society. The school should challenge the global transformations of technology and the market economy by providing an international forum for creativity and thought in order to make the world a better place-to-be in for all.

It is important for students to radically question the fundamental issue: the very existence of architecture in the 21st century; to awaken from sleep of „reason“ into which the world of architecture seems to have fallen some 2000 years ago. Students have tremendous role to play in altering the inertia and resignation of the „inevitable“ and the „real“. They are not only the respondents but the creators of awareness and its spaces. Students have always challenged the prevailing „opinions“ and have constituted the catalytic and dynamic factor in transforming knowledge and the world in history. It is time that students remembered that schools were set up for them (and not for their professors) in order to challenge the world's ever-present corruption and weariness rather than to reinforce it. As George Bernard Shaw said „There are those who change the world, and those who are changed by it.“