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Namibia Flores Rodriguez, (Namibia), 2016

## Open to Criticism **Jack Self**

To be critical is never to simply indulge in criticism. No matter how much you critique and criticise a condition, in the endas architects—we must always make a proposal and a proposition. That is the essence of the 'project', without which there would be no architecture.

deal with design criticism.

Certainly when I was studying, and still now a good design and it takes a very long time.

Students who feel themselves overly sensitive about their work will sometimes create a defense by criticism is to always use it as a means to expand the disowning the work, as if it was somehow totally exter- horizon and scope of your self-awareness and awarenal to themselves. This is almost as bad as being overly ness of the world. Whenever you think you have underattached. Critical distance is not the same thing as sim- stood a work, ask what exists beyond the limits, or ply being distant and divorced from your process: you what invisible assumptions you have made to draw ideas, including their consequences, and truly own tioning, we tend to think we must be correct—because them. Design is a highly personal activity. It is a process we incorrectly think we have understood the big that involves introspection and personal reflection, picture and grasped the extent of knowledge. labour and then standing back from the results to judge them with fresh eyes. This means that while working it criticism. must be all consuming, and when finished it must be assessed as if it was by a stranger.

The importance of understanding how to accept criticism, and to be critical of one's own work, is vital in many fields of practice. If you work in your own

The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius once wrote that firm alone, then you have no peer or mentor to offer your beliefs are your weapons and you should be with advice. All of the job of a jury must take place in your them like the boxer, not the gladiator. This is because a own mind. And if you work with others, then collabogladiator picks up his sword only to put it down again rating to solve a design issue is not possible if one when he doesn't need to perform, while a boxer needs person is always trying to claim the idea as their own. only to close his fists. In other words, you should In a sense, this description of criticism is one that defend what you believe actively and permanently, not concerns how to form judgements and make design simply parade. Otherwise you run the risk of becoming decisions. It is the formation of a methodology that a hypocrite. But inasmuch as it is very important to be you can apply to a given problematic—for example, as vocal about your ideas and to be dedicated to your you develop your own way of understanding context practice, something Aurelius doesn't cover is how to and interpreting a site, you also develop a critical approach.

This is somewhat different from what could when I visit architecture schools, I cringe to see a be called the critical eye, which is used in fields like student take criticism personally. They might cry, get writing, editing and cinema. Here criticism means the angry, become arrogant or defensive. In every case, application of an ideological framework rather than a they become too attached to their design as a represendirect methodology. For example, the semiotics of tation and agent of their own ego. In fact, it is very photographs (as developed by Roland Barthes) is a conimportant to have some critical distance from one's ceptual device for interpreting the meaning of what we own work, and to understand that just because you experience and see. The editor or writer is mainly have produced a bad design (which is easy to do) this involved in the act of analysis and comprehension; the does not mean you are a bad person. And when a architect is mainly involved in the act of interpretation teacher tells you your work is no good, they are not and proposal. The writer improves or changes their necessarily saying you have failed. It is very hard to do vision of the world; the designer puts forward a vision of the world.

The most important aspect of all types of must always assume responsibility for your work and your conclusions. Without questioning the act of ques-

To avoid this, it is vital to be always open to