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Charbonnet and Markus Peter

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SUBJECT:
RE: BRUCH CONTRIBUTION

A conversation between
François Charbonnet and
Markus Peter

Francesco Battaini
Yann Salzmann

It is certainly an interesting time to study at ETH. Since we arrived here in 2017, we have witnessed the departure of many «monuments» that built the reputation and character of this school. They were replaced by architects with a younger career and a fresher look on architecture.

From: Yann Salzmänn
Sent: Wednesday, April 8, 2019 12:08 PM
To: trans Magazin
Subject: Re: CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS—trans 35

«One of the strengths of our school is that architects, design architects, have to have an «œuvre» [in order to teach at ETH]. [...] Maybe I'm kind of a dinosaur, and maybe this will change in the future, I hope not, but this is like a test an architect professor should go through to make a building come true.»

«This is where I disagree, I think this is a myth that we are stuck with. We still haven't understood that star-architecture is a thing of the past, we still haven't understood that we cannot continue to replay this canon game. I think it is further and further away from reality where collectives for instance, bring about change.»

Annette Gigon in conversation with Philipp Ursprung at the Parity Talks in March 2019

A rupture occurred...

It is certainly an interesting time to study at ETH. Since we arrived here in 2017, we have witnessed the departure of many «monuments» that built the reputation and character of this school. They were replaced by architects with a younger career and a fresher look on architecture. Looking at the Chairs of Architecture at our department, the stereotype of the technical architecture student with well refined taste shatters. In its place a much fuzzier definition of architecture emerges. Graduating as an architect today is certainly quite different from what it was like in the 80's. Interestingly enough, we're witnessing a drift in the continuum of the department's trajectory. What does this mean for the ETH, and ultimately for the Swiss architectural panorama? We propose to respond to this topic by confronting two interviews from either end of this generational spectrum.

Yann Salzmänn + Francesco Battaini

From: trans Magazin
Sent: Wednesday, April 24, 2019 1:12 PM
To: Salzmänn Yann
Subject: Re: Contribution

Dear Francesco and Yann

Many thanks for your contribution. As for the choice of your interviewees, I wonder whether it makes a difference that some teachers on the traditional side are already retired. For the disruptive side, Alex Lehnerer could be interesting. To this day, it is more or less clear that one must be a practicing architect and have building experience to become Entwurfsprofessor. Lehnerer doesn't meet these traditional criteria so well.

Do you already have any ideas for the questions you want to ask?

Best
Jan

From: Yann Salzmänn
Sent: Friday, April 26, 2019 3:45 PM
To: trans Magazin
Subject: Re: Contribution

Dear Jan,

Thank you very much for your positive answer, we are very excited to develop that article with you! We think that the strongest contrast between a more traditional ETH school and a new wave of professors might be found within the «Entwurf» teachers. After thinking it over for some time, we believe that the most fruitful combination of interviewees would be François Charbonnet and Markus Peter.

In the introduction of the last Oase magazine, (schools and teachers) there was a quote of Peter Eisenmann, commenting on the school of Venice: «[Students] were not all going to be architects, but they were using architecture, as previous generations used the law, as a way of understanding society». Starting with this quote, we would ask them to discuss issues

with regard to teaching in the actual context of the ETH. We believe this would give an interesting frame to the topic we want to discuss.

Best
Yann Salzmann + Francesco Battaini

From: Yann Salzmann
Sent: Monday, May 20, 2019 5:14 PM
To: Markus Peter
Subject: Bruch Contribution

Dear Prof. Peter,

We are currently master students at the ETH. As contributors for the upcoming trans issue, on the topic Bruch, we are dealing with what we consider a change in the department's academic direction. This change is not only perceived among the students but also emphasized by the numerous new chairs that have been recently implemented in the department. Therefore, we want to interview two teachers, one who has been part of the institution for a long time, and a comparatively new teacher to get an insider's view of this «Bruch». The format we envisage, would be to publish an email exchange.

Best regards
Francesco Battaini + Yann Salzmann

From: Markus Peter
Sent: Wednesday, May 22, 2019 5:40 PM
To: Salzmann Yann
Subject: Re: Bruch Contribution

Sehr geehrte Herren Battaini und Salzmann

Der Term «Bruch» ist sicherlich äusserst interessant und in der deutschen Sprache äusserst vielschichtig in seiner Bedeutung. In der Wissenschaftsgeschichte hat Gaston Bachelard den Begriff des epistemologischen Bruchs und des epistemologischen Hindernisses ausgearbeitet und «Bruch» hat sich, neben den Materialwissenschaften über seine Verwendung im Jargon der Einbrecher auch in unsere Alltagssprache als Fehltritt und Versäumnis eingenistet.

Warum ein altershalber, durchaus gehäufter Professorenwechsel als Bruch diagnostiziert wird, bedarf einer Argumentation. Die Architekturschule an der ETH hat schon lange internationale Professoren eingeladen und weist vielfältige Haltungen auf, die einen Bruch als didaktischen und kulturelle Einschnitt als schwierig erscheinen lassen. Eine solche These muss

sich am Anspruch messen, dass das Prognostizieren eines Bruches sich als prägende Verschiebung noch Jahre später abzeichnen lässt.

Markus Peter

From: Yann Salzmann
Sent: Wednesday, May 29, 2019 1:48 PM
To: Markus Peter
Subject: Re: Contribution

Sehr geehrter Prof. Peter,

Thank you for your reply, it was very stimulating.

The term «Bruch» in German is perhaps too strong in meaning to talk about this evolution, nevertheless we believe it is relevant to talk about the changes that are going on at ETH. Change is certainly a very natural process and a part of the dialectic of the evolution of any school. However, given that this evolution did not occur gradually and many new teachers arrived in fast succession—with philosophies that contrast with the traditional image of the D-ARCH—it is still interesting to discuss this evolution in that way. We are also keen to see in it a general shift in the paradigm of architecture.

We believe that architecture was more political throughout the 70s and the 80s. The 90s brought a more neoliberal paradigm to which architects reacted with a general objectification of the project. We think that the ETH embraced this trajectory and that this was strongly embedded in the image that the school produced. The world has experienced more acute political crisis during the last decade and we see architecture reacting to this. We observe this also in the new wave of teachers introducing a political stance in their teaching, be it Freek Persyn, Eyal Weizmann or Arno Brandlhuber. In that sense, we believe that the term «Bruch», even if extreme, is not irrelevant.

In any case, this is our subjective point of view, as students, having experienced the school over a shorter timespan than you. But maybe this is precisely why such a discussion from the teacher position seems interesting today.

Best regards,
Yann Salzmann + Francesco Battaini

From: Markus Peter
Sent: Tuesday, June 18, 2019 5:28 PM
To: Salzmann Yann
Subject: Re: Bruch Contribution

Sehr geehrte Herren Salzmann und Battaini

Ihre Argumentation zur Verteidigung des Terms «Bruch» erfolgte entlang von Positionen einzelner neuer Professoren:

- 1 Beim Städtebau orten Sie einen Bruch, doch erlauben Sie zu fragen, gegen wen? Christian Schmid ist eine gewichtige Stimme auch in meinem Kurs—eine Position, die sich auf Henri Lefebvres «Recht auf Stadt» beruft. Sie verbindet Urbanität, Differenz und Emanzipation, eine der wichtigsten politischen Handlungsstrategien der letzten Jahrzehnte.
- 2 Betreffend Denkmalpflege ist die Berufung unbestrittenermassen politisch—doch sie ist nicht vielmehr als eine dezidierte Politisierung der Archäologie, die auch kriegerischen Zerstörungen neue Erkenntnisse abgewinnt. Zur den Neuberufungen gehört aber auch die zweite Position, die sich fundamental weigert, sich auch nur in irgendeiner Form zum Erhalt im 20. und 21. Jh. zu äussern. Somit verbleibt auf einem äusserst strategischen Feld eine vernichtende Leere und dies nicht nur innerhalb der Hochschulwelt.
- 3 Die dritte von Ihnen erwähnte Neubesetzung erfolgt auf dem Aufgabengebiet, das wir bisher Entwurf genannt haben, doch das einer beschleunigten Auflösung unterworfen werden wird, wenn ich mich den neusten «Brüchen» aus den letzten Professorenkonferenzen erinnere. Ich hoffe Ihre Arbeit als Journalisten und Zeitdiagnostiker angeregt, aber auch nochmals gestreift zu haben, welchen gigantischen Anspruch Sie mit ihrem Wechsel der Paradigmen der Architektur an sich selber gestellt haben.

Mit freundlich Grüssen aus der Peleponesrundfahrt.
Markus Peter

From: Yann Salzmann
Sent: Friday, June 23, 2019 11:07 PM
To: Markus Peter
Subject: Re: Bruch Contribution

Dear Mr. Peter,

Regarding «Bruch», we were thinking of discussing it more in relation to Entwurf. We have the feeling that the design teachers might have a somewhat greater influence on the curricu-

lum of a student and occupy a more substantial part of the school's stage. Moreover, I believe over 10 chairs were introduced in the last 2 years, which for us make the change at the department visible and tangible. It is quite interesting that you see this as a dissolution, it certainly is one in terms of not having one strong philosophy within the department. Reading you, I have the feeling that you view this with a very critical eye. But I believe that Andrea Branzi in the 90s wrote about the dissolution in a more optimistic way, and that this point of view is shared by some. Maybe they don't see it as a dissolution. Or maybe they do. For us, trying to discuss this idea within the department is an important matter that we are very passionate about. Much more than discussing whether or not the paradigm of architecture changed, which is a somewhat subjective assumption and also a dramatization of change, as you named it. Thank you again for your insights.

Francesco Battaini + Yann Salzmann

From: Yann Salzmann
Sent: Thursday, July 4, 2019 9:53 AM
To: François Charbonnet, Markus Peter
Subject: Bruch

Dear Prof. Charbonnet, dear Prof. Peter.

It is an interesting time to study at ETH. Over the last 2 years, we witnessed the arrival of a dozen new «Entwurf» teachers. One could argue that they embody a new generation after the departure of the so called «monuments» that built the character and reputation of the architecture school.

To some extent, they also clash with the ethos of the «craftsman with a refined taste» that was that of the school until now. They bring forth another perspective on architecture as well as on the role of the architect.

As students, we perceive this evolution as a moment of rupture in the character of the department.

One of you has been teaching here for some time now and the other has freshly arrived. We would be interested in your opinion on this question as teachers, from a personal position. In place of the archetypal technical, student with a refined taste, we witness the emergence of a much fuzzier definition of architecture.

What does this mean for the ETH and ultimately for the Swiss architectural panorama? As-

king this question, we cannot but help thinking of Peter Eisenman, who, in a conversation with Pier Vittorio Aureli, said about the IUAV in the 80s «The idea was that architecture was taught as a way of educating—not to learn architecture, but as a way to understand society»

From: François Charbonnet
Sent: Friday, July 12, 2019 3:28 PM
To: Yann Salzmänn
Subject: Re: Bruch

Dear Yann, Dear Francesco

Thank you for your message and yes, you are somewhat right: The [D-ARCH] is currently undergoing quite a few changes, some for more obvious reasons—a whole generation is approaching retirement—than others—new orientations seem to be given to a multiplicity of studios and institutes (for instance, the newly founded LUS).

You also seem to suggest a less ambiguous stance of the department on the orientations given to design studios. As an absolvent at the turn of the century, I only share your claim to a certain extent: A strong polarization between the heralds of a certain conservatism—in the best meaning of the word—and a more speculative mode were indeed at the time coincidental, specifically—but not only—through the leading role that the gta, strikingly torn between two seemingly antagonistic considerations of history; yet, such a theoretical spread never turned into dogmatic, ideological or peremptory «postures» among studios, but rather fueled the necessary political contradiction within an institution like the ETH. I must concede—and do not mistake this for nostalgia—a very fond memory of such a time where alternative viewpoints were argumentatively confrontational, and as a result very stimulating for a young aspiring architect.

One of the origins of the ambivalence you are implying is perhaps to be found, I suppose, in dynamics which are more transversal than specific to the built environment: a tendency to address definite issues through exclusive expertise—questioning the generalist essence

of the architect and leading to the categorical atomization of competences—a radical awareness of pressing environmental concerns, the necessary multiplication of alternative stances embracing a multipolar world, the overwhelming and vain economy of attention catalyzed by various media platforms—preventing the architect to become a critical agent of its environment—the tragedy of the horizon or the inability to simultaneously consider short- and long-term requirements: all contribute to an edgeless and complex predicament.

Accordingly, Peter Eisenman's educative model of the 80s enters in a conflicting resonance with what seems at stake today; yet, I very much share his point of view as an institution like that of the ETH does not strive at instructing architecture per se, but trains architects, that is professionals with a political awareness. And any architecture being to a relevant extent an act of policy, an education which would consciously evade such a responsibility would be bound to cosmetic triviality. Is it to say that the Beaux-Arts tutelary figure and its mimetic emulation does not constitute any valid educational model anymore? Certainly not as a whole; but there is now little doubt about the necessity to engage with issues beyond design to defend the essential cultural and transgenerational value of architecture. I would even suggest that higher education should not necessarily adapt to the market—a function to be rather fulfilled by professional schools—but could benefit from undertaking a more speculative and research orientated step toward design yet without renouncing to the imperative and preliminary guidance on constructive and technologically advanced requirements.

Finally, I tend to be rather suspicious about the notion of «Bruch»: several chairs are now occupied by tutors educated by a glorious generation of overwhelming globalized figures of the discipline; a change has been initiated but the transition appears much smoother than you seem to suggest preventing the identity of the D-ARCH from vanishing into an array of equivocal orientations.

Sincerely,
François Charbonnet

Full Professor of Design and Construction at the Department of Architecture at ETH Zurich since 2002.

Full Professor of Design and Architecture at the Department of Architecture at ETH Zurich since 2018.

Both studied in EPFL and are currently graduating at the ETH Zurich.

