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## Aspects in Architectural Design Review

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### ABSTRACT

Architecture is a public phenomenon, and for a work of architecture to be successfully implemented there must be a collaboration between the architect and the patron. Relying on a review of literature this paper comes to the conclusion that the success or failure of the architect-client relationship influences the quality of the architectural outcome; and the architectural critic must assess all work beyond the scenario of this collaboration. It is found that Architectural design review is important to the profession and the society, facilitating a deeper understanding of the past and present works and also guiding future works. The critic must have a sympathetic appreciation of social needs and the obligations of functionality, aesthetics and safety.

**Key words:** Architectural critic, design review, value judgement, functional aspect, safety, delight

### 1. Introduction

There is a widespread sense of apathy and hopelessness in the architectural profession. In the arts and applied sciences there is a conspicuous absence of defined idioms and ideologies in both aesthetic and philosophical directions. This status quo compounded with the state of the national economy makes the time most appropriate for proffering a framework for architectural design review, and to make a reasonable assessment for the future. Can the architectural critic deal with the issues associated with critical examination or study of built or unbuilt works of architecture given the present state of things in both the arts and applied sciences? Design review requires a sympathetic understanding of the needs of society. Reviewers must have the right attitude of mind recognizing architecture as a total developmental process. This is the theme this paper espouses through a review of earlier works.

#### *Architecture As A Public Phenomenon*

Architecture is a process of articulation and communication that draws upon every facet of human endeavour. It has outgrown the definitions imposed on it. For the purposes of this paper, a work of architecture may be an event created or selected for its propensity to satisfy the basic elements of utility, safety and delight. The Royal Spanish Academy sees Architecture as "the art of projecting and constructing buildings (MCH, 2019). This appears quite incomprehensive of the garment of activities and philosophy captured in modern architecture. Many architects have done better in their description of what Architecture is. Charles - Edward Jeanneret-Gris or Le Corbusier described it as 'the starting point for anyone who wants to take humanity towards a better future (MCH 2019); Rem Koolhaas described it as 'a dangerous mixture of omnipotence and impotence', Louis Kahn defined it as the "ponderous creation of spaces"; Raul Monterroso defined it as 'a discipline that allows us to transform reality according to the need of society within a determined environment with the available resources. Carlos Scarpa described it as a language that is very difficult to understand...Mysterious unlike other arts such as music, which is more directly understandable. Mathias Goerity held that in general terms, art and also architecture are a reflection of the spiritual state of human being in his/her time; Paul Rudolph described it as the art of "the possible". Louise Bourgeois described it as "the object of our memory". In all these, it can be seen that beyond materialism and concrete art form, architecture is deeply spiritual and of a high non-material cultural essence.

The historical role of architecture has always been to intercede in the interest of mankind. Architecture is one of the ways a culture has of telling itself where it is in space and time. Architecture does not exist in a vacuum. Public policy and economic development are its atmosphere. Are today's solutions responsive to current policies? As a discipline, architecture attempts to identify the totality of a problem, and proposes alternative solutions to the problems. Architectural solutions are translations of the inner order of metaphysical events into the physical form. Architecture has patrons/clients. Historically, the profession has always been associated with the movers and shakers of the society be it the Medici families, the Rockefellers, the Czars or the Pharaohs. In fact center for the study; The built Environment (CSBE 2021) in the words, Mohammad al-Asad described the situation in Architecture for the Rich, Mere shelter for the poor: The impact classism and elitism have made on Architecture is further shown in Rethinking the Future (nd). Architecture is to a large extent an imposition of elite values on a society that has to play catch-up. The architect has to mediate between Architecture and the client and to guide him through this elite influence.

The relationship between the architect and the patron may not be as simple or direct as the case may be. However, a collaboration must take place for a work of architecture to be implemented. Thus, through proper collaboration, the parties benefit. It is the user that sits as the ultimate judge of the product of the collaboration between the architect and the patron. A conflict arises when architects feel that they must compromise their architecture to meet budget restrictions or time goals. Likewise, the patron finds the architect impractical and unresponsive to financial and practical concerns. It is

possible that the two main participant in the backstage workings of the collaboration may find themselves at odds with one another. There is a complex relationship - one that changes with the individuals involved. Several unappealing structures result from these negative interactions. The challenge to the architectural critic is to assess architecture beyond the scenario herein presented.

### ***Architectural Design Review; Raison d'etre***

With the aforesaid background, the *raison d'etre* for architectural design review in an ever changing world cannot be farfetched. Architectural design review in a tropical developing country would enable the public and the architect appreciate and assess issues and challenges to the profession and to contribute meaningfully towards their resolution.

Architectural Design review provides one way of appraising a visible past against which to measure and place the present, but also make a prediction of the future. Architectural design review could make people more aware of the physical world that they live in and to help them and architects develop values that will prove useful in shaping the built environment. Architectural design review could help build bridges of understanding between the general culture and the sub-culture of architecture. It offers an opportunity for the architect to make changes to his design (Royal Institute of British Architects (2017).

The manner of seeking solutions pertaining to architectural problems dwells on the intention of improving upon the best alternative. Architectural design review could help in the dissemination and advancement of knowledge. Architectural design review albeit criticism is an integral element of the architectural design process. Most projects begin with the visual review and criticism of precedents from the architectural past. Educators of design may be referred to as "Critics". Tutoring in architectural design is called a "desk crit". Final solutions may be evaluated through criticism by a jury of architects. Through architectural design review ways in which future schemes could be improved on may be recommended. (R-IBA, 2017)

### ***Constraints in the process of Design Review***

A major issue in design review, be it in architecture or in any form of applied sciences, is that of value judgement. Value judgement is that ingredient of formal analysis which generates varied judgements because the individual's sensitivity to the functional, visual and tactile elements depends partly on experience and partly on his sensory perceptions. In addition, reviewers must have a sympathetic understanding of the needs of society, appreciating that uniform architectural ideas applied in a similar fashion globally may not necessarily intercede in the interest of mankind in every region. Reviewers as well as architects are therefore expected to have an open mind through value management (designing buildings.co.uk, 2020). The architectural critic from the foregoing should possess a high sense of responsibility

## **2.Theoretical Framework for Architectural Design Review**

The entire practice of Architectural Design Review can leverage the concept of theory of change espoused by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG, 2020). It is a method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, is expected to lead to specific development change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence. The whole idea is that change can make a design obsolete necessitating a review. Does an architectural scheme have a rich heritage for passive solar energy conscious design (natural light) decisions or does it depend heavily on artificial means to manoeuvre the environment to achieve conducive physiological goals for mankind? There may be an overwhelming discrepancy between how the critic understands an architectural work and what actually obtains in the real world of built architecture. Not all architecture can or should address all of the social, economic or even physiological concerns. Uniform architectural ideas evolved in Lagos, London or Los Angeles have varying impact on these subcultures. Indeed, similar design decision that intercede in the interest of mankind in one region may constitute an environmental anathema in the others. For this reason architectural design decisions must be regionalized and tailored to meet specific cultural and climatic demands in an innovative fashion. In discussing some framework for architectural design review the underlying idea is to re-affirm the necessity of architecture in society. The idea is that received paradigm can be interrogated through the review process as an optimization process of fitting into the new environment.

This premise could be applied in assessing a work of architecture given the normal constraint of problems of value judgement. The framework for architectural design review would thus be apparent if the critic examine whether the work has been able to satisfy the following obligations:

- i. Functional/Organizational
- ii Safety
- iii. Delight
- iv. Environmental
- v. Contextual
- vi. Symbolic
- vii. Materials/Construction Technologies
- viii. Contractual

### ***Functional/Organizational Aspect:***

In discussing this obligation the critic should prod if the architecture sought solutions to operational questions or not. Did the solution properly identify the architectural problem?

In fashioning out design decisions there is a need to cope with the inherent paradox of the architectural dilemma beyond their cryptographic solution. The critic could assess the level of purity of inspiration in the design decision against the level of infusing originality with historically tested concepts.

In other words, are there missing links in the utilitarian element of the work? Has the issue of circulation been resolved? On a macro scale is the intended utility compatible with existing use types in the area?

**Safety Aspect:** Any evaluation of architecture must take this issue into account. Is the project structurally stable, and is it environmentally sound. In abstracting the structural paradox, the architect could be innovative or he might adopt a composite method of original inspiration and traditionally accepted structural systems.

**Delight:** Delight is synonymous with ordering in architecture. Ordering in architecture includes not just the visual, but also the tactile experience as manifested by the manipulation of such fundamental factors as line, mass, value, texture, and colour.

**Line:** The critic should consider the rhythm, balance, repetition contrast, gradation, vignette of the lines in a work of architecture. By manipulating these qualities the architect could use lines to emphasize verticality, horizontality, multiplicity, simplicity, depth, flexibility or rigidity.

**Mass:** What is the architectural massing concept? Does it have practical and functional possibilities? What are the degrees of projection and recession of shapes in the architecture mass? Gradation and contrast could be employed to emphasize openness or closeness. Balancing of mass could indicate innovation, mood or even draw attention to a component in a work.

**Value:** Contrasts could produce varying degrees of projection and recession resulting in all types of spatial effects.

**Texture:** This is the quality of a surface smooth, rough, slick, grainy, soft or hard. Texture could be employed to generate varying spatial effects. It could become directional and control devices in a work.

**Colour:** Colour in architecture could be from chemical treatment or may be borne naturally by the material. colour could be applied to stress aspects of the project, to create effects in emotion or physiology.

**Environmental Aspect:** This is a very important ingredient in architectural design review. Several environmental concern must be considered as follows:

**Scale:** What is the scale of the project? Does it provide its own expression while being compatible with various elements of the old?

**Tactile Experience:** What is the desired tactile condition in the locality?

**Human Conditions:** Does the architecture fulfill the desired human conditions in the locality?

**Kinetic Experience:** This concern includes the feelings experienced in moving from one part of the project to the other.

**Ecological And Climatic Factors:** What design decisions encourage drainage along natural lines and discourage flooding? What design decisions satisfy the physiological objectives in the region? what design features discourage pollution? What is the impact of the project on wildlife and the total habitat?

**Contextual Aspect:** Architectural design review needs to consider the context of a project. Has the architecture complimented or challenged its contextual obligations to the society? The concerns here might include, but are not limited to the following:

Contextual character: What is the intended character of development in the locality?

**Regional Theme:** Does the architecture substantiate the regional theme in the compatible use of local or traditional elements?

**Focus:** What is the relationship of the architecture to natural features? Does the scheme have a consistent setting with some nearby projects?

**Symbolic Aspect:** Symbolism in architecture could vary from culture to culture. Certain objects, shapes and colours acquire special meaning for a particular culture. There are two underlying concerns in the symbolic aspect of a project imageability and physiognomy.

**Imageability:** The architect may consciously or unconsciously employ a private symbolism based on an association of certain objects, events or some past experience. Sometimes social and intellectual fashions combine to determine the aesthetic form, and often times architects shed personal vision and inspiration in order to work *a la monde*.

**Physiognomy:** This component of symbolism dwells on the form of architecture as a reflection of the inner functions of the project. Architectural design review should assess its appropriateness or otherwise and the level of imagination/creativity of the architect.

### **Materials/Construction Technologies**

The need for new architectural concepts in functionality and aesthetics parallels the need for the application of more recent and traditional building materials, construction technologies and building services in an innovative fashion. The critic must evaluate construction materials and technologies on the basis of their use in a particular project. It is not enough to evaluate construction materials and technologies on their merit alone. They should be compatible with adjacent products and structural systems. The reviewer must also assess whether the materials and technologies conform to standards and building regulations governing construction in the particular area where they are applied.

The reviewer should assess the level of success of intervening technologies for conservation and restoration such as pointing and sandblasting. It is also relevant to consider installation techniques for cladding, decoration and surface treatment. A review of a work of architecture is essentially incomplete without due evaluation of the building services albeit environmental control systems. These are those elements that enhance the livability and functionality of a building. Building services may have both visible and invisible impact in a work of architecture. A critic must assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the service in a work of architecture.

**Contractual Aspect:** Architects are by nature and by contract accountable for their actions and inactions. An architect vested with the obligation of designing a project and possibly guiding its execution has to contend with the patron's budget in terms of economy and time. The economy goals of a project are those that enable the scheme be realized within the financial framework mapped out by the patron. The time goals of a project are those that make it possible for the architecture to be realized within the stipulated time by the client. A review of a work of architecture may be incomplete without due consideration of these elements within the appropriate context.

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### **3. Conclusion**

What is in contention in architectural criticism which features strongly in Design Reviews is values. That of the client; that of the architect; that of the

reviewers. Values have no existence except as the result of a consensus reached by a culture through trial and error about what seems to work for that culture's survival and happiness. "No knowledge can be complete, no metaphor entire" (Toffler, 1980).

This paper traced the essence of architecture as a public phenomenon and states that for a work of architecture to be implemented there must be a collaboration between the architect and a patron. The success or failure of the relationship influences the quality of architecture which results, and the architectural critic must assess all work beyond the scenario of this collaboration.

Architectural design review is important to the architectural profession and the society. It facilitates an understanding of past and present works of architecture and guides future works since architecture dwells on precedence. The architectural critic must contend with the challenges of value judgement since the individual's sensitivity to the functional, visual and tactile element vary according to experience and sensory perceptions. The architectural critic must have a sympathetic understanding of social needs because not all architecture can or should address all of the social, economic or physiological concerns elucidated in the suggested framework for architectural design review.

In assessing architecture, the critic should consider the degree to which the following obligations were satisfied: Functional/ Organizational, Safety, Delight, Environmental, Contextual, Symbolic, Materials/Construction technologies, contract. Some generations are born to create, others to maintain a civilization (Toffler 1980). Architecture is a profession that is destined to create. The responsibility for change and creativity lies with architects. They should learn not to close their minds too quickly to the seemingly radical. They must fight off the concept - assassins who destroy new suggestions on the basis of impracticality. Architectural design review must continue to maintain the architectural civilization. It could historicize, discuss the state of the arts, and above all, help direct the architectural culture of the society in the interest of humanity.

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