



KORYDON SMITH AND MIGUEL GUITART
Introducing Architectural Theory: Expanding the Disciplinary Debate

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Introducing Architectural Theory: Expanding the Disciplinary Debate by Korydon Smith and Miguel Guitart, published by Routledge in 2024, is an astonishing continuation of Korydon Smith’s 2013 work, *Introducing Architectural Theory: Debating a Discipline* (Routledge, 2013). It is a textbook again, perhaps even more so than the first, if one understands teaching as both imparting knowledge and engaging with the origin and context of one’s own discipline.

However, a crucial difference becomes apparent on first reading: in the earlier edition, Korydon Smith provided a comprehensive, extensive introduction to the respective subject area, before subsequently placing selected text passages from writings on architectural theory and history, usually in chronological order, in a dialectical relationship of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Equipped with a list of questions, it was left to the kind-hearted readers of the work to analyze and interpret the texts themselves, an open-ended approach that handed over the epistemological value of the reading to the readers themselves.

In this new work, the two authors opt for a significantly different strategy: they now discuss relevant text sequences themselves in dialectical form. Introduction, thesis, antithesis and synthesis of a contrasting pair of terms are presented in essay form with extensive quotations. The authors broaden their focus from a single text per position to the analysis of a collection of texts, from which the individual parts often refer to each other. In addition to a comprehensive analysis, they establish their own connections between the centrally cited writings, interpreting, evaluating and assessing them. The fascinating creativity in the authors’ own theses opens up a wide world of ideas, into which not only writings but also built works find their way into the argumentation, such as the Blur Building (Diller + Scofidio, Yverdon-les-Bains/CH 2002) in chapter six “Material and Immaterial.” As in the previous edition, introductory questions guide the reader through the chapter, enabling them to reflect on the two terms before reading. This is highly recommended, as it at least prompts readers to think about the topic themselves, and to consider whether their thoughts align with the authors’ positions. The subsequent questions, which in the earlier 2013 edition provided a framework and thus a kind of space for a written and discursive examination of the texts and also of the author’s perspective with regard to dialectical understanding, now seem more like exam questions after reading the chapter. Nevertheless, independence of thought is required, especially in the sections on self-reflection and lookout.

This second book is also an excellent basis for a substantial and at the same time very broadbased teaching of architectural theory, both in the area of written text work and in the discourse format. However, the difference between “Expanding the Disciplinary Debate” and the previous book “Debating a Discipline” quickly becomes apparent: the essay format encourages readers to follow the authors’ lines of thought, to acquire knowledge of interrelationships and to reproduce what they have read and learned in the discussion, directly and with comments. “Debating a Discipline” has motivated students to engage with the original texts in a much more independent way, including a higher error rate as well as greater creativity in dealing with the respective pair of terms.

In return, the new work places the thematic pairs in a larger context and, in addition to a reading of the referenced texts, also conveys a methodology for approaching this text work. The authors’ extensive notes on reading methods, on text work itself and on writing in architecture are also of great value.

And so, through the selection of topics, the way they express their own attitudes, and the methodological framework they provide for readers, the authors not only create a unique approach to the broad field of architectural theory, which represents an essential foundation for creative activity in the architectural process. They themselves

become a role model with this book. Architectural theory is the development of the objective principles and subjective values that guide individual and collective decisions about and evaluations of one’s own and others’ architectural works. Architectural theory is thus partly science, partly history, sometimes ideology, often sociology and cultural studies, and mostly aesthetic judgment. The examination of the built or imaginary project, the engagement with the positions behind a work, is significantly enriched by the fact that architecture itself is full of dialectics, which can also occur between individual pairs and influence others. This comes to life in discussions as an essential form of communication, because, as Heinrich von Kleist wrote in 1805 in his essay “On the Gradual Production of Thoughts when Speaking” about the connection between the discussion of thoughts and the development of ideas or the solution of tasks:

“The French say: *l’appétit vient en mangeant*” [appetite comes with eating], and this empirical rule remains true even when parodied to say: *l’idée vient en parlant*. [thought comes with talking].“¹

In his “Reflections on Poetic Imagination” (1966), Günther Lehmann draws the conclusion: “Only the artist who paints, composes and writes is struck by inspiration; searching, inventing and improvising are what drive them forward.”²

And no less a figure than Lina Bo Bardi, in her work “Contribuição Propedêutica ao Ensino da Teoria da Arquitetura”³ – the thesis for her application to become Chair of Architectural Theory at the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo – makes clear the relationship between architectural theory and architecture: it is constructed, in the same way that an architect constructs a building.⁴

In architecture, theoretical discourse is an intrinsic part of the creative process. The new book by Korydon Smith and Miguel Guitart also makes a substantial and highly welcome contribution to this.

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1 In: Kleist, Heinrich von: *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*. 2 Bde. Hrsg. Helmut Sembdner. München, Carl Hanser 1977, Bd. 2, S. 319-324.
2 Lehmann, Günther K., *Phantasie und künstlerische Arbeit. Betrachtungen zur poetischen Phantasie*. Berlin und Weimar, Aufbau-Verlag 1966, S. 222
3 Lina Bo Bardi: *Contribuição Propedêutica ao Ensino da Teoria da Arquitetura*. São Paulo, Habitat Editora Ltda. 1957.
4 Catherine Veikos: *Lina Bo Bardi. The Theory of Architectural Practice*. London, Routledge 2013.