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# Researching Architectural Research

October 5, 2015

Avigail Sachs, UT Knoxville professor and CED alumna, in conversation  
with RM1000 editor Jennifer Gaugler

Speaker 1: Jennifer Gaugler  
Speaker 2: Avigail Sachs

JG:

Can you start by talking a little bit about how you became interested in the topic of architectural research? How was your graduate school experience and your dissertation writing process?

AS:

What happened is that when I got into architecture school, I was just in shock. I was prepared for one kind of education—just sitting and learning and reading and writing—and instead I was asked to have opinions from day one. It took me two years just to get out of the shock. I had just come from being a teacher [in Israel] for three years and from thinking a lot about pedagogy. So the question of how you teach architecture and why the studio is the way it is became really an obsession, not just an interest. So I went and did a master's [at MIT] right after my undergraduate in which I looked at the studio and how it works. And then for lots of personal reasons, I went back and worked as an architect and taught architecture at the Technion which is where I did my undergraduate degree. So, I was teaching architecture and I was trying to explain to students what the studio is without trying to be super critical on their first week of class [chuckles]. There was this problem of how do you give information, and what I ended up doing was giving them historical overviews. So talking about the Beaux Arts and the Bauhaus and trying through that to convey to them, "Listen, the studio is not this simple, straight forward thing, it has many layers to it." And working on that lecture, especially the first time I gave it — because I taught for five years or so, I did it more than once — but, the first time, I just started looking for stuff about what happened after World War II. [I found] nothing [laughter].

I had this idea that in the United States, after World War II, the Beaux Arts and the Bauhaus mixed, and that must be the explanation for everything that's good and bad about the studio. And in our methods course [in the PhD program at UC Berkeley] we were asked to do a little archival research, and I thought to myself, "Well, the Journal of Architecture Education starts in 1947, just the period that I'm interested in, it's in the library, I can do this little exercise over the week that I have to do anyway, it's right there." I was expecting long discussions on Beaux Arts and Bauhaus [laughter]. I think that Bauhaus is mentioned twice in ten years. And instead: "research, research, research, research...." And so that's how the research thing came up. In other words, quite by chance.

But I had some things focused; I knew the period I wanted to look at, I knew that the topic was architecture education, and then how to frame it was very much a matter of just following things. And in many ways it continued that way; once I had 'research' as a term, I just started following it, starting with the archives on campus, then friends of mine at MIT were still living in Cambridge, Massachusetts, so I went and visited them and went to the archive there. It was gradual, slowly working my way and doing more archival work, and finally coming to the conclusion that there really is a lot to talk about and it's worth talking about — and I'm interested in talking about it. So that was the dissertation.

JG:

Would you say pedagogically that your interest has been in how to combine the architecture studio with architecture history, because those are often very separate in most American schools?

AS:

No, it began very specifically with the studio to try and understand why the studio was the way it was. In other words, to go back to that initial shock that I had as an incoming architecture student, to explain it to myself...so it was a very personal thing. What Berkeley gave me which was really fantastic was the realization that you can't talk about the pedagogy of the studio without understanding the studio in relation to the curriculum, the curriculum in relation to the university, the university to the discipline, the discipline to the profession. All my advisers were in different directions. J.P. Protzen was my chair, and he was really helpful that way, Greig Crysler probably gave me more terms to think about than I could imagine in the beginning, Andrew Shanken was new. He came in a year after I arrived there. He was invaluable. He just helped me see so many things. Kathleen James-Chakraborty, by being really from within the discipline and being able to talk about it. Paul Groth was great. Just having everybody else around. Having Nezar [AlSayyad] around, having other people around who were doing other things, just made me realize that I can't talk about the studio without everything else. I'm very interested in the studio, but I'm interested in it as the focal point of architectural education, rather than how it fits with other things. And as you've seen [in my work] it's turned into much more a history of modern architecture in the United States, through the perspective of education, but that's not where it started from.

One of my motivations was just to put research and disciplinary thinking out there so people within the profession can understand just how

important it is. And the other thing is that it still seems to me, even more than when I was writing the dissertation, that the term 'research' the way it's used in the United States is a very American term. This is not rationality, this is not wissenschaft, it is not the German idea of science; it's a very different idea. And the book that I'm just finishing right now tries to lay it out in connection to progressive politics. I think that the story of modern architecture in the United States is way too focused on what came from Europe and not enough on what happened in the United States. Research is just a way for me to say, "Look, there's an American story." And that's still probably the main thing I want to talk about, that there were all kinds of things people were talking about and they were really important but we don't know about them because we focus on Gropius and Mies. And I respect them and they did important things, but were not the only ones [laughter]. We're just doing things different.

JG:

How has your research affected your teaching at the University of Tennessee? Has it impacted your work and the way that you then teach students?

AS:

Very much. My favorite thing to do is to teach theory to professional students, rather than to teach them professional stuff, or to teach theory to theory students. I think that my role as an historian and theory professor in a college of design (and I also teach in landscape and interior design), I think that my role, the best thing I can do for them, is to give them an overview of where the discipline and the profession are. So, I think the fact that I think about this a lot, that I think about the profession and its trajectories and I can say, "You guys are talking about sustainability but that's actually a pretty old idea," and so on, I think it just allows me to be much freer about what I'm teaching them, then if I was really focused one type of architecture and said, "This is what I want you to know about." Instead I can tell them: "I want you to know about who you might be as professionals in the future." And by the way, that's what I spend 90% of my time thinking about [chuckles].

JG:

In your article "The Postwar Legacy of Architectural Research," you make an argument that academic funding and the priorities of academic life have separated architecture as an academic discipline from architecture as a profession. Do you feel that there's a disconnect

between the kind of expertise developed in architecture schools and that which you develop in the profession?

AS:

Yes. I'm referencing other people who've written about this quite a lot. I like to especially reference Stanford Anderson who wrote about it in a book called *The Discipline of Architecture*, many of the ideas come from there. But yes, very much so. And I don't think it's a bad thing. How I like to think about it is that each part of the field - the profession and the discipline - has a lot to contribute, has a lot to give. It's good that they're under different constraints, and each of them needs constraints. I'm not a big fan of just total fantasy. I don't think that advances us very much, though I admire the artwork in it, and I find it interesting. But I think that as a profession and discipline, we need to be really grappling with real problems and thinking ahead, and it can't just be fantasy. We have to also grapple with how [solutions] might come into being, and there are different ways for things to come into being. There's the doing, and there's also throwing ideas out there. The discipline and the profession each do different things, and whenever the conversation comes up "Should our curriculum just prepare students for being in the firm?", I don't care if they're ready. I care that they are ready to learn in the firm what they need to learn, but I don't want them coming in knowing everything that the firm needs them to know. That's not what we're for. But on the other hand I think it is important that the discipline remember that is connected to a profession, that it can't just go off wandering into Derrida and all sort of other things and lose track of where it comes from. You asked me about writing and what's important for me and that's been where I've tried to put myself, writing things that I hope are good work in terms of scholarship but they could also be read by professionals and understood. That's always one of the ways I treat what I'm writing, which means writing differently than if you're just writing for an academic audience.

JG:

In the typical academic studio model, the professor serves as the master of design, overseeing the students, who primarily work on their individual projects with no real clients or users. How do you think this contributes to the cultural stereotype of the lone, heroic architect as the master designer and the 'expert'?

AS:

A colleague and I, when I was teaching studio, were very bothered by this. It was his idea, but then we wrote it up together, and we did it together. He said, "Why don't we force them to have clients?" So the project - this was a second semester project - it was just a row house in a part of town that wasn't developed yet, so it was a bit abstract but not really. So we came in the first day of class and we said, "Okay, all of you please take a piece of paper and write out a family that has at least two generations, at least this many members, and describe the people, what they do, what the relationship is between them," and so on. And that's it. We didn't give them any other information. So some of course described a pretty generic family but most of them - you know these are architecture students, they want to impress their professors - they wrote up some pretty crazy things. Not like totally out there but just families with interesting dynamics, or I think it was a couple and his son from a previous marriage and the son's gay partner. One family didn't talk to each other they only watched TV together [laughter]. So we had these families, and then we just handed them off to other students completely randomly. And what that meant is that the students had clients. And each student was somebody's client, and we gave them a lot of leeway to make up their story. You could continue being whatever kind of client you wanted. From our perspective, it was super fantastic because sometimes they'd come to us, and we'd have a crit, and they'd say, "But what about this?" And I'd be like, "I don't know. What does your client say? Go talk to your clients."

Then, when we got to the end of that project - it wasn't a whole semester - what happened at the Technion is that you came together and you reviewed at least two groups together, sometimes more. And we'd been very strict about the square meters, we'd been very strict about the requirements. You couldn't do something that was totally over budget because you've got a client [laughter]. And the other studio, they doubled the size of the house and they did all these sculptural things. I mean really beautiful stuff, but completely like, "I'm the architect, I get to do what I want." And our students, bless them, I was so - this was my proudest moment as a teacher - they challenged us. They said, "Wait a minute. Why aren't we doing that? That is so cool, that's so beautiful. Why were we caught up with doing these things?" And we spent I think an hour of the review just talking to them about our ideas, and why we think it's important, and why we think collaboration is important. And you know, I don't know what happened with those students later on. I

left a year or two later - maybe even a year later - so I don't know how they're — but at least they had the opportunity to see part one.

That's a long way of answering that I think the studio is very much about that [the architect as 'expert']. I think that it's played up. I think that one of the best explanations for how that happens is in something called The Architecture Education Study. This is a study that was done at MIT and Harvard in the '70s and early '80s. These are the case studies. Then they had a group of people just read the case studies and comment on them. I think it's Chris Argyris, who was a psychologist or something like that, who actually came up with this mystery-mastery thing going on here.

But the person to read who came out of this is Donald Schön. So Donald Schön is the one who went on writing about it and I was lucky enough to have two great conversations with him at MIT when I was there. So the argument there is that, [with the academic studio] there's not that much knowledge [to be transferred]. It's about, "You practice doing something and I'm going to be here to help you." [In contrast,] when I come into history lectures, there's a lot of knowledge that I have, and I need to give it to you. It's very clear what I'm an expert at. But when you're in the studio, it's very, very diffused what it is that you know. One way is just to be honest about it and say, "Look, I don't know everything, but I know how to think." Another way is, "I don't know everything, but I know how to support you." Another way is, "I don't know everything, but I'm willing to let you into my way of thinking, so if I give you a piece of advice, I will then explain it to you why I think that I think this."

I think that most professionals don't have the time or the personality to do all that thinking, so it's much easier for them to fall back onto, "Well, I know. How do I know? I know. I'm an architect," which is what Argyris calls the mystery master. It's like, "I'm going to be mysterious," and then you're going to think I have a mastery of something, instead of admitting that my only mastery is that I actually know how to get a project finished. I think that that is something that doesn't get enough credit—the difficulty of just taking a project and seeing it from idea to the end, is such hard creative work and is rarely talked about in the same conversation with the great idea or the great form. And so seeing those things as complementary, as also creative work, is something that I think is really important, and again something that I try to write about.

We should be asking more than what the next big style should be.



Questions that they were asking at Berkeley and in other places - but Berkeley is just the easy go-to - are not usually questions of form. They're questions of process. They're questions of collaboration. These were important questions. And my experience has been that once I write it, people just come to me, "Oh yeah, of course. Of course [chuckles]." But if you just look at what is written in the discipline, it's about who invented the last big form. I think that we dumb things down in the discipline to just the form. And if we don't have an explanation for why this form was different than that form, then we're not interested. So that's my hobbyhorse. Let's widen the conversation. It's very, very, very hard to force people to widen the conversation. It's much easier to just put up a picture and say, "You see that building? It's different than that one [laughter]."

JG:

I want to go back again to the article we talked about before. Throughout your work on architectural research, I noticed a recurring theme of competition. In "The Postwar Legacy of Architectural Research," you point to competition between private practitioners as one of the reasons that the architecture profession has not developed a culture of collaborative research, like information-sharing on a large scale. So I'm just wondering: if architecture in a market-based society is inherently a competitive enterprise, do you think it can ever be possible to achieve some kind of a group-based expertise or shared knowledge?

AS:

Let me preface my answer by saying I think there's a big difference between "can we achieve something" or "should we be trying?" You know for seven years in Berkeley I was constantly exposed to lots of different cultures and so on, and one of my last semesters, I was teaching ED1 over the summer. And I was trying to explain something to students and then I went home and I said, "Actually, what I want to say is something from a Jewish tradition, which is, 'It is not up to you—' (I am paraphrasing here from the Hebrew), 'It is not up to you to repair the world, but neither can you desist from trying.'" I was like, "That's what I've been trying to say for seven years." And I was just amused that I found it in my own culture, in my own language. So yes, I will answer that we will never get over the competition. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't be making steps to do it.

If you don't know it, I highly recommend the book *Behind the Postmodern*

Facade. It is not an easy book to read, but I think there are really, really important ideas in here. So this is the sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson whose work I was building on. So I'd say that together with Donald Schön on the studio, Sarfatti Larson has been my most important theorist, for lack of a better word. But she has a theory of professions, which has been really helpful to me. So I think I wrote there about how competition prohibits collaboration specifically because that was very much what the people, [like] Caudill Rowlett Scott, and a lot of other people that I was reading at the time, that was their main argument, that the problem has been that we have been competitive, and if we just band together we will resolve this knowledge problem, we will have the knowledge we need, and we will all get better. And of course I was writing it in the 2000s, when I know very well that it didn't happen [laughter]. That's what was worrying me the whole time. Here I had these people doing things in late '40s and '50s which I really believed in, which I think are really great, and which I wish I could see in the profession more of. And yet it didn't have the impact.

I think the idea of environmental design as a complement to architecture — with its many sides to it, and I think it has many sides — it's a wonderful, wonderful concept. But it's been completely lost. Unless you're at Berkeley, no one knows what you're talking about [chuckles]. And even there it took me a year or two to figure out what exactly this 'environmental design' business was. So my question was constantly, okay, there were these great ideas, several universities set themselves up for this. Why doesn't it happen? And "competition" was the answer.

I'd say that today, ten years later, my answer's more complex. It's just evolved with time and also has more to do with form and the problem with form, and the fact that form is easier to talk about than all these other things. I think that the discipline has its own competition, but it can work in a more collaborative fashion, and that the profession has to work in a competitive situation. It's just a given. So these people I was interested in the '50s - Wurster and Bauer and others - were trying to, from my perspective, reframe the profession. Say, "We're actually something else," and they couldn't because [architecture] still has to exist as a profession. People have to make money [chuckles].

But to finish the answer to your question, I think we're seeing a resurgence now. I started the project on research before it became a big word in architecture. As I was writing the dissertation, suddenly

everybody was talking about research again. And I was like, "What luck is this? It's amazing!" So, I think there's a recognition again that there's a lot of knowledge out there that we will not have as a profession or a discipline if we don't do it together, and more talk about sharing and about collaboration. A lot of the lecturers who've come here [to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville] talk about their collaborations. I think it's partly matter of fads, that it went up for a while and then it fell through in the '80s and '90s, and now it's coming back again. But I think that like any human thing, it never is going to reach the peak. It's going to get better, and then it's going to get worse, and then it's going to get better. And never are we going to get to the point that people can put their ego aside and be like, "You know, what really matters is that a good solution was found, it doesn't matter who knows what [chuckles]."

JG:

Why do you think we're seeing that resurgence in collaboration now though?

AS:

I think it comes together with a whole package of things. I think that in the '50s and into the '60s, there were several conditions that led people to be really interested in these things. The important one being - or I don't know if this is the right order - but the first one would be that the World War II experience for Americans was a real game changer and showed them that not being in competition, not being in free market; that there was something to be gained. So beginning with the New Deal and the TVA and then during the war, there was a real ethos of "if we work together we could make more," which went away by the '70s and '80s. People just got tired of it. A second thing is that there was a lot of legislation that mandated it, so housing was a legislation that starts in '37 and then continues throughout that period, and especially in the '60s, it's very specific, if you want to design housing, you need to collaborate, you need participation, you need all of these things. So there was a market for collaborative processes. And the third thing is that people were really enthralled by the idea of science, by the idea of advancing knowledge - that goes back to what I said before. The American idea of advancing knowledge is a very collaborative, or at least a discourse based one — bringing in progressive ideas, and democratic ideas versus socialist ideas that were being discussed in Europe. All of this led together to this big discussion, and what I hope [my upcoming] book describes.

Then things get... towards the late '60s, students especially, get super excited about the idea that architecture can change the world. So they adopt all of these things, which people like Rittel and Wurster, and other Berkeley people, were talking about very even-mindedly. Not like "we're going out and save the world," but rather "we need to collaborate." The students took it and ran with it. And they all stopped studying and they started striking, and then went out to work in the cities. There are all sorts of description from that time that they are rapping better than they are doing architecture. And the reaction to this flare of interest, the wider flare of interest, was, "well it doesn't work." It's an all or nothing argument which I think is very typical of the profession: "Well, if we didn't change inner cities and they're still rioting, then obviously architecture shouldn't be doing that." And the answer is no [chuckles], you can't expect it to happen in three months. You can't expect it to happen that quickly, you have to sustain things. So, the reactions set in of "you know what, never mind. Never mind that. It's all about form. It's all about our ideas." There was a group of very powerful people, especially Peter Eisenman, directing that. As someone pointed out to me the other day, it's enough that he'd make a phone call and someone would get a faculty job. It's probably an exaggeration, but he was putting his people in places, and funding for housing went [down] and instead of funding for museums and cultural things [went up].

No one really got the picture of what collaboration and science and progressive knowledge and social thinking can do. It was never really given a chance to perform. But I think that by the time the '90s and 2000s came round, there were questions about it again. And what I'm seeing - and of course this is in my interest to see it this way - is people reinventing the wheel. Because there's been no writing about it, no writing or very little, certainly not in the discipline discourse and the stuff that's presented in SAH and so on. People think that this was never done and it's time to start doing it. And so what I see is that they're just resurrecting ideas all over again. In other words the pendulum's swung.

JG:

It's rare in today's society, for research to be considered financially viable at an architecture firm, especially in times of recession as we've seen recently, but I think research could be marketed as another form of expertise-based service to offer to clients. Why do you think that this rarely happens?

AS:

I think, first of all, it's happening more and more. A lot of the lecturers who come in, do come in and talk about it. Talk about what they're doing [with research]. I think there is a lot more sharing of information and a lot more people just doing things, just for the sake of thinking about them and for sharing them. So, I think the ethos has been growing.

I think the main thing, though, is that the very idea of research is about finding generalizations, and the very thing about design is about bringing that generalization down to the specifics. And so they're never going to meet. They are not going to meet, and again, I think that's a good tension. I think that good architects say, "Okay, I'm not going to go to that book and get the answers specifically, but reading that book is going to give me ideas that are going to help me in the next five projects." They recognize that knowing more stuff is not one to one, it goes in-between but it does have an effect. [But] I think too much of our conversation in the United States today is about efficiency and economics. So if I can't show you 'this' was helpful for 'that', then the response is then, it's not worth it. I can't show that connection between research and design because I don't think that connection exists; but I do think they live in the same world.

The other answer I will give which isn't mine which is something that I'm borrowing from J.P. [Protzen], and from Rittel, and others, is that research really goes to "how are things?" How are people building things now? Great. I can answer that. It might take me my lifetime to answer the question, but I can do it. Design is not about what things are now, it's about what should be. Again, research is not asking the questions that the designers need the answers for. Research, by definition, is not going to ever be this way — it's only going to tell you what has been done, not what should be done. So it's two different sets of questions and they are, again, connected in this complex way, but there's no clear direction, and the minute you ask, "Show me how your history lesson plays into their precedents in studio?" — it doesn't. But I hope that when you [the studio professor] assign students a train station they'll remember what I was talking about [in history class] - the early train stations, what the problems were — and they ask good questions in their design.

JG:

In your article on "Marketing through Research: William Caudill and Caudill, Rowlett, Scott (CRS)," you quote William Caudill as saying "The

staff should practice architecture (to understand the problem), then do research (to find out how to solve some of the problems), and then teach it (pass on the students his broad experience and knowledge)". In "Innovation and Tradition: Eighty Years of Housing Construction in Southern Appalachia," we also see the Tennessee Valley Authority following a model of first designing/building, and then documenting/researching. Do you think that architects become experts primarily through the process of designing and building? In other words, do you think that architectural expertise more commonly derives from empirical investigation followed by documentation of results, rather than from theory-driven inquiry?

No, I don't. I think that they're both important. I really liked your comparison between [these two articles] because I think of them as coming from two different worlds. The first I wrote in Berkeley; the other I wrote here [laughter]. So it was really interesting for me to have a question where they come together. But both people during the New Deal, and later CRS - the issue they were confronting was that there was an idea of what research was, and that research was based on empirical findings. You identified a question, you collected empirical findings, you analyzed it, you got to a solution, and you published it. This is what the research universities were putting out there, and all around them, the social sciences, psychology, sociology, anthropology, were trying to fit into that mold. And so, [CRS and other designers during the New Deal era are] caught in this world where they want to keep on doing what they're doing, but they also want to conform to these ideas of what research should be. So the solution is that design is the empirical thing.

But that's just one answer of how to fit design into it. Later in the '60s, which I don't talk about so much with CRS because it was less relevant to them, but when we get something more 'environmental design' in the sense that EDRA uses it (the Environmental Design Research Association), [in terms of] user needs and so on, 'design' in that line moves from being the information gathering to being the implementation of a hypothesis that you then check with research. In other words, that's just one way of fitting the two things together. That's part one of the answer. Part two is that idea that that's the way research worked has been undermined since the '60s. People were writing about that even then, and especially Kuhn who publishes about paradigm shifts in 1962, and basically his main argument is, "You scientists say that you are doing this, but when I actually come and look at what you're doing, you're not

doing that.” So that opened up a whole another conversation because now design needed to fit into a different idea of what research was. And I think it’s just gotten more complicated since then.

JG:

In a world of increasingly global practice, it’s common for architects to often live and work at some distance from the site for which they’re designing. I’m just curious to know: what are your thoughts on the importance of architects spending significant periods of time (months or years) at a particular location in order to gain some degree of expertise in that place before they design something for that place?

AS:

The real answer, I think it’s crucial [laughter].

JG:

So do I.

AS:

And I think it’s crucial because when I talk about environmental design, I am talking about architecture as something that’s shared with the people who are going to use it, and not something that’s just sort of given. And when working as an architect, a lot of my time; it’s not spent drawing, it’s spent on the phone talking to people. So I do believe architecture is a collaborative project, it’s a community project. And so the architect needs to be part of the community. I’ve practiced for five years and since then what I’ve mostly done is either volunteer work in India, or renovated a house here in Knoxville which was an amazing experience. And purposefully I had all sorts of ideas about what I wanted, but I let the contractor who knew the local things [have a say]. Like if he said, “Listen, I can build that for you, but it will be three times as expensive. People won’t know how to fix it because here this is the way things are done.” That’s what I wanted to hear and when I hired him I told him that. Having said that, I think that the strength of the good architecture theorist is to not get caught up only in their point of view. A lot of my colleagues and a lot of students here are really interested in phenomenology. I think that was a big thing here at some point. I get what they’re talking about. I purposely try to say to them, “Listen, if medicine was only phenomenological...if you look at malaria as a phenomenological thing, you’re never going to get to generalizations.” And I think the same thing is true in architecture. I think there is a lot of value in things that we do

as architects that are standardized; that you can produce more homes for more people. We have a population growth everywhere, not just in Africa and so on.

So in other words, I think the profession should have both. It should have those whose expertise is very general - is about creating systems, creating new materials, and all sorts of things like that. And in that case, I don't care if they live there or not. They don't have to ever be there. But what I'd really like to see is two things. One is that the discussion of the importance of being part of the community is given more place in architectural discourse, I don't think it has enough place. So that's just part of what I'm doing. Secondly is that if you are going to develop systems and projects, you then run them by the people who are on the ground and the other way round. If you're on the ground, run what you're doing by someone who thinks systematically and who sees things from far away, just for the different point of view. Are we ever going to get to collaboration and overcome competition? No. But I think what architects do, but don't talk enough about, is getting input from other people. And that's why Caudill is one of my heroes because he was willing to talk about it. He wrote a book called *Design By Team*, and he actually said, "This is the way architecture should be." If you go and talk to professionals, they are talking to all these different people all the time. But then when they present the project to architects...[they don't reveal that]. And I think if we just made it more acceptable to talk about the collaboration, to talk about the input of the person on the ground — then we get a lot more than if we just focus on one overview.

JG:

In your chapter "Architects, Users, and the Social Sciences in Post-War America," you talk about how architects often still play the role of experts, even in nominally participatory design processes. So, do you think a truly participatory design process negates the role of the architect in any way? And how can architects embrace this paradigm that threatens their status as experts?

AS:

It's one of those things where we'll never reach the ideal but we shouldn't desist from trying. I think participatory design is a fascinating topic, because it brings up that question of -- basically it's a question of knowledge. Do architects have special knowledge that other people don't have about the design? And as an architect and someone in the



profession, I still want to say yes, because otherwise why are we holding students for five years [chuckles]. If a layperson is just as knowledgeable as a designer, then no education is needed. And yet I do believe in education, I'm part of education, and I want to continue doing that. I think that we're giving something to students. So by definition I have to also believe that there's knowledge involved there, that is somehow different from the knowledge of the layperson.

I think that architects should just acknowledge that they're never going to be 100% participatory. They can't be. Unless it's them and their friends designing in a weekend house and they do everything together. But then they're not there as architects, they're there as a friend.

At the other end of the spectrum though, I think it's really, really important to remember that the architect doesn't have all the knowledge, and has some deep holes in the knowledge, and that that's okay. I think that that goes back also to your question about the studio and the way we train architects. We train them to think that if they have to ask a question, then something's wrong. And that would be something I would very much like to see less and less of.

So yes, I think that an absolutely participatory design process that doesn't include an architect, I think that that is an unrealistic thing. But on the other hand, I think that if we [architects] think more about [what it means to be] participatory, I think it will make us better professionals. It's just that then architects need to be very confident in what they have to bring to table in terms of the time they put in, the knowledge they put in. And they don't have to know everything.

JG:

So, what's next and where do you think your research is headed? And maybe you could talk about the book you're working on, *Environmental Design and the Expansion of Architectural Practice, 1937-1973*.

AS:

There's a whole body of knowledge about what architecture is, and what modern architecture is, that is American-based, that is university-based, that is science-based, that is less about form and more about process, that has been written out of architectural history by the people who — there was a discussion in the 1960s, it could have gone the other way, but Eisenman and his crew won the day, and they not only put forth Derrida,

they also rewrote everything else out of it, and it's time to bring it back. So that's really what my new book is about, and the way I'm framing it right now though, is, look, in the 60s, a lot of people were talking about environmental design, including in places that you don't expect them, like Princeton, they were using the term "environmental design," the way we use it in Berkeley, collaboration and different disciplines. They were using it, they were talking about it, and then it's lost, or at least it's lost from the bigger view. So let me give you a history of why it was that they were talking about it, what it was they were referring to.

So the book starts very briefly with ideas that come up during the Great Depression, and most specifically, I finally realized that my go-to person was Catherine Bauer Wurster. And I just let her lead the narrative. So that's the introduction, [about how] she went to Europe, she saw all the socialist housing and she came back. If you look at her book *Modern Housing*, she's trying very hard there to say, "We should be building like that, but we can't be socialist. We have to stay a democracy, what does that mean?" A lot of the ideas that we've been talking about, collaboration and input and public input and all of that, are her answers to this problem of "how can you be an expert, but in a democracy, and still lead in the right direction, but you don't force people, but you do make them see that they need it, but you're not avant-garde...." So she sets up the conundrum [chuckles] and basically the rest of the book is people trying to figure out the conundrum.

So looking at schools that are set up like the Berkeley College of Environmental Design, mixing architecture, landscape and art and planning together; looking at Caudill and others, talking about environmental controls and sort of the wider idea, not just like "are you hot or are you cold" but why this is important. Chapter three as I told you, is very much a history of design theories and methods as it relates to these things, and then looking at how Caudill and his gang used it in their work. Chapter four is about user needs, and the EDRA, and participation, and all of that hoopla that was happening in the '60s and into the early '70s, so another interpretation of environmental design. And then the fifth chapter looks at the idea of environmental design as design with nature, going in one direction. And then what I was telling you before about how for a brief few years there, it goes beyond the schools where it had always been, like Berkeley and Penn. It becomes this big hot thing, that at Yale they are talking about it, and at Princeton they are talking about it. Everybody's talking about it. And then [poof!].

What happens to it? And so it's sort of following that trajectory.

So the next project is going to be a history of architects and landscape architects working for the TVA. Well how exactly is it going to develop, I'm not absolutely sure yet because I didn't want to commit [chuckles] to anything ahead of time. I was really interested in the TVA and there's amazing archives found in Atlanta. It was kind of on my mind that something should be connected, and I think that this college [at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville], there's a lot of talk here about how should this college distinguish itself from other colleges. I truly believe that we're the only college sitting in the middle of a large scale project, that there are very few of them in the United States. We have to be looking at it and a lot of my colleagues agree. So, I was like, "Okay, I'll do it."

And, then another project which I did, was a profile of a woman architect. Her husband worked for the TVA. And the family really wanted a personal profile. I've never written a biography. I've always written ideas. But I got in contact with one of her sons and since then with her other children - it became a very personal story. I gave it to the family, and I just met one of her granddaughters the other day [chuckles]. You know, people want to read biography more than I thought. The project is to take the things that interest me about the profession and about how the profession changed in the '30s, and about the impact of the New Deal on architectural thinking. But, at least at the beginning, go in a more biographical direction and see what happens. Knowing myself, I'll probably get back to talking about big ideas because the people don't interest me quite as much. But at least at the beginning — I'm calling it, for now, "Atelier TVA" — I had lots of little anecdotes of people experiencing the New Deal as an atelier experience, and I want to see if that happened or not. And I hope it'll be a book eventually. It might just be an exhibit. It might be a series of papers, but I don't know. The college has been generous and has given me funding for it, so I'm committed to doing this [laughter].