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## **General Comments to Diploma Projects Review, 16 and 17 June, 2010**

Dear Maria, Students and Faculty at Fakultät für Architektur, Innsbruck,

First of all, congratulations to all the Diploma candidates who successfully have completed their studies during the last two days. We have had the pleasure of seeing a broad range of work that - as one can expect, varies in quality from the very best to the not-so-good. In total, though, the work holds a good standard and, not the least, represents in kind a clear potential for being further developed to give your institution at large a strong profile in a national and international context.

To this end, it would be worthwhile for the faculty to consider how to disseminate the best work to a larger national and international audience. This implies publishing that would also help to crystallise a stronger and more refined profile for your institution.

To sum up some of my impressions and thoughts, I would like to offer a few more specific comments, addressed to students, graduates and - not the least, the faculty. The comments follow in list form with no particular order below: I apologise for putting this to you in English, but it would take me forever to formulate this even only in a rudimentary German.

### **ANALYSES**

The new as much as future graduates should make a note of the fact that data collection is not the same as analysis. This should be noted since very many projects rely on what is presented as 'analysis' - some even being solely comprised of this type of work. However, for architectural design, analysis implies that the data that is collected is carefully sorted and submitted one or another form of an interpretative and/or transformational process. The latter is typically concomitant to the beginning of the modelling process. In some projects seen here, this is altogether missing or of a low quality.

### **USE OF COMPUTERS**

Today, it is altogether unacceptable that any student of architecture does not learn a solid command of computerised 3D modelling. Hand-in-hand with this, the faculty must secure that it positions itself on a national and international level with respect to select advanced uses of the computer for analytical, processual and modelling processes. While I, on one hand, have surely not seen the entire scope of work that is undertaken in this realm, and, on the other hand, have seen projects for which the use of the 3D modelling appears fully acceptable, it is still necessary to stress and remind you of this. In some projects there are hints at an acceptable standard not being fully implemented, and nowhere is there sign of interesting, exploratory work in this realm being done.

### ROLE OF DIPLOMA ADVISOR

The best work that I have seen is, without exception, the projects that have been undertaken with close consultancy from the thesis advisor. A strong, productive relation between diploma candidates and consulting teachers is the last instance of a privileged educational situation that should not be forsaken. The role of professors in this relation should be promoted and secured.

### PROJECTS WITH 'REAL' CLIENTS

It seems that projects that are undertaken with a close relation to a 'real' client may be handicapped and less interesting compared to those that are undertaken more freely. The symptom of this is a strong pragmatic character in the projects with lacking exploratory or investigative qualities. One must note that a university diploma and an academic setting ought to pose different or - at least, additional criteria to those that are met in a professional setting. Were these situations to have the same criteria, the status of the university would be undermined and its role in exploring the limits and possibilities of the discipline void. This reflects that the education of an architect is more than merely a vocational obligation.

### THE DISCOURSE IN THE HOUSE AND THE DIPLOMA REVIEWS

The status of the discipline and the university's duty to cater to this are also affected by how these diploma reviews seem to be treated in-house. Aware of the fact that this faculty must host 4 such events per year, it is nevertheless the singular, most important annual event in the life of the faculty. It is, simply put, unacceptable that professors and other members of the teaching faculty are absent. This day is the most important event for cultivating the in-house discourse. For this same reason, one could also consider the possibility of organising the individual reviews differently. As it is, the panel of three reviewers per project changes from one project to the next. Thus, no discourse is allowed to emerge between individual during the day. An alternative model, which I will not attempt to suggest, could give more flair to the atmosphere of the reviews and secure a vivid disciplinary exchange between participating reviewers.

### PROJECTS WITHOUT A CLEAR DISCIPLINARY CONTEXT AND/OR RELATION

A few projects can only with the greatest difficulty be related to the discipline of architecture. This is true for projects which per chance end up not having a clear architectural thesis and for projects that are willingly accepted although the project proposal situates the work in a discipline other than architecture. This faculty is not alone in facing this problem as many schools over the last few years have explored cross- and trans-disciplinary strategies in the production of architecture as well as softened their idea of what is architectural by embracing aspects of the arts. In principle this is highly problematic and should be addressed in internal discussions about future strategies. It is difficult for some very simple reasons: What shall be the criteria for reviewing such a project? Who shall do it? And how does faculty imagine its own future if it practices an 'anything goes' type of strategy? The latter may follow if every student shall have the right to propose a project in another disciplines based on a loose or approximate relation to architecture. Note, this thoughts say absolutely nothing about the possible quality of such work; nor are there limits to how architecture can be explored, tested and addressed. Neither are these observations concomitant to reducing architecture to building. However, it is a call on all parties involved to make provisions for the future of architecture and cultivate the disciplinary specific since that is all there is.

With these comments I thank you for two exciting days and wish you, especially the new stock of graduates, all the best for the future!

Yours sincerely, Johan Bettum.