Creativity in architectural education

Ceren Hamiloglu [a]*****, Department of Architecture Design, Faculty of Architecture, Maltepe University, 34200, Istanbul, Turkey.

Abstract

The existing paradigms of architectural education can sometimes negate creativity. This paper aims to assert and substantiate that architectural education should be about questioning the existing paradigms as well as introducing, creating and testing new ones. The paper will be based on observations as a research assistant in architecture as well as on personal undergraduate experiences to question the ways in which creativity could be stimulated in the architecture studio environment. It adopts philosophical concepts used by Deleuze to dissect the relationship between creation/creativity and the architect. Some of the nuanced examples in Turkey's architectural practice who have managed to integrate or perhaps distort the input of their architectural education into modes of interventions reciprocating the socioeconomic or cultural needs of that place are pointed out. Parallel to their production, the positive effects of young tutors to the studio environment are discussed. The paper tries to establish that confusion could be a stimulant for creative thinking.

Keywords: Architectural education, creativity, studio, young tutor.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Ceren Hamiloglu**, Department of Architecture Design, Faculty of Architecture, Maltepe University, 34200, Istanbul, Turkey.
 E-mail address: cerenhamiloglu@maltepe.edu.tr / Tel.: + 90 216 626 10 50

1. The Effects of Architectural Education

As a young research assistant, I have been constantly reflecting on myself about the ways in which I can apply my own undergraduate education to my current status. Although I am not actively teaching but mostly assisting, observing and occasionally commenting on the students' projects, this process has at times become a mode of catharsis for my own identity as the person on 'the other side' of the educational process at the architectural design studio. The design studio is perhaps the most vibrant, dynamic and destructive part of architectural education. This is a process in which a student may be fundamentally shaken and regains consciousness about issues of space and the relationships around it. However, to precede an academic career brings about another break with itself, that is, the transition from being a student to a tutor, if such a distinction exists. The tutor-student relationship is another debate that is slightly touched upon in this paper; however the more critical issue in this transition process is the contributions it could have on creativity. Through the observation of student projects, I started to realize the many nodes and sections that were present in my undergraduate education and most importantly, started to question it.

The architectural education model of many universities in Turkey is fundamentally or partially based on the Bauhaus mode of teaching. Bauhaus was founded by Walter Gropius as an art and crafts school in 1919 and was open until 1933. Although the school did not offer any architecture classes until 1927, together with the Beaux-Arts school, it became one of the most influential ecoles of the architecture education dichotomy. As opposed to the fine arts approach of the Beaux-Arts school, Bauhaus argued that the main purpose of design is functionality (Gropius, 1965). It was determined that the three main disciplines in Bauhaus's body, i.e. art, architecture and crafts, could be based on a universal, functional and shared aesthetic. The main objective of the school concluded that with a basic knowledge on the intersection between technology, aesthetics and function, the individual could design anything from an object to an entire institution (O'Connor, 2013). As a result of this, Bauhaus was committed to a new style of design, and thus, of living (Artun & Alicavusoglu, 2009).

This totalistic view on what design is, and the ways in which it needs to be conducted is one of the main debates regarding the Bauhaus style education. Such a totalitarian view framed the mode of architectural education as an incredibly static and ponderous piece of knowledge that could only be transferred through a hierarchical model of master and apprentice. Especially for a young tutor, the master-apprentice model may provide a safe harbor to establish a distance from the student and gain a dominant position, but dangerously so. Adoption of this kind of approach does not only interrupt a continuous and mutually productive relationship for the architecture student and the tutor but presupposes an invariable quality about architecture and prevents it from changing shape over the course of the studio. Furthermore, it positions architecture as a transcendent ground for all those who have not received such an education.

On the other hand, despite its transcendent quality, the Bauhaus education becomes immanent once transferred to the student and within this inner accumulation, becomes instantly normative. As a result, it defines a common ground and a shared language for the members of the studio in the micro level and for the designers that are a part of the architecture discipline in the macro level. This is perhaps why issues of space have been solely discussed among architects for such a long time even though there are many actors –more than the number of the architects actually- who interact with architecture. Nevertheless, today architecture has become a more widely discussed subject with different members of the society.

2. The Aims of Architectural Education

As much as architecture and architectural education is universal, it forms its many localities within different social conditions and geographies. Turkey, for instance, is entirely different than, say, Norway. With the difference in geography, weather conditions, cultural practices and everyday routines, they do not only require different typologies of architecture but also different approaches to

architecture education. This is not to say that a grand narrative is required to create specific identities but it is necessary to generate multiplicity within specific geographies. As pointed out by Boyer (1996), the integration of history and locality is absolutely integral to interpret today, but they should not be aestheticized to form a unified code. That is to say, the integration of the knowledge of history, geography, anthropology and philosophy becomes important in the architecture education to create a wider consciousness about architecture's existence in relation to different disciplines.

In fact, this integration has been increasingly visible in the education and representation of architecture. With postmodernism, architecture would not be represented as a sculpture-like object with no context as it had been until modernism; on the contrary, it would be treated as an adhesive element of any area regarding the society (Tan, 2013). This aspect eroded the position of the architect's position as the single authority both in the discipline and the studio. Following this shift in the representation of architecture, the architecture education also transformed.

Following Grassi, Yurekli's (2007) identification of the student and the tutor as being on the same level with the only difference being a slight unevenness in experience is a supporting approach for a more democratic and approachable environment of the architecture studio. Yurekli (2007) continues to say that with this approach, the students are not discouraged in their education life and can gain skills about dealing with architectural issues by establishing self-confidence. Although one of the main disappointments of architecture as a discipline is the great operational gap between education and practice, through self-assurance acquired in the undergraduate years, students could have a better comprehension of the design problems they encounter post-school.

I suggest that the more theoretically complex problems they encounter during school, the more self-confident they could get via the process of solving them. This is not only necessary for their individual progress but for the development of creative thinking and production. In order to achieve this, the students could be exposed to problems that would dismantle the norms that have been located in their minds. According to Thomas Kuhn (1970), the possibility of progress in scientific thought is through the constant destruction of existing paradigms. Thus, the main purpose of architectural education should be to disrupt what has been taken as 'the truth' by the students to convert static thinking into dynamic creative energy.

3. Resistance as Creative Production

Especially in the current political and economic conditions of the world, as architecture has increasingly become a tool for the neo-liberalist policies and the materialization of nationalist and capitalist agenda, the education for architecture cannot remain the same. The paradigm shift in the architecture education can start with the instructors. The integration of young research assistants into education can become particularly important to crack the traditionalist approaches to architecture. As individuals who have recently completed their education, they could have a better sense of intervention within the conditions of the *zeitgeist*. In addition, as they do not yet have calcified opinions and are open towards fluidity in thinking, they could become co-thinkers on a student's project rather than a director.

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) describe an umbrella of *doxa* in which the basic opinions are floating and it is only the true artist, philosopher or creative person who can slit slots in this umbrella. Architects could become a part of this group when they manage to produce outside the general norms (opinions or 'commonsense') established through the exercise of power, that is the dominant ruling groups, the state and the bourgeoisie. Following these opinions, perhaps a form of education that organizes resistance to the current system and its norms could draw near this situation. This resistance would not necessarily be addressing politics per se, but it could adopt the tools for political activism for unorthodox creative production. The tutor's position then is to constantly stimulate the student to create such an environment in the studio.

This kind of shift in the educational paradigm has been epitomized by student initiatives, non-profit organizations or other examples of guerilla architecture. These are not directly attacking the political system but adopting ways of using or producing space through interventions, attachments, by-passes, hijacking or occupying that, in return, form a discourse against the established norms of the society. An example for such an approach could be the works of the student initiative Plankton Project. As an alternative local authority in Turkey, Ovacik's mayor Fatih Mehmet Macoglu introduces free public transport in the town and with the increased use; a need for new bus stop emerges in Ovacik. To provide for this demand, Plankton Project offers Durak Ovacik (Bus-stop Ovacik) and incorporates local production actors and materials into their design: the team actually goes on site to build the bus-stop to establish a relationship with the builders and users that is not based on consumerism (Itez, 2016).

Other examples include but are not limited to: Baska Bir Atolye [Another Kind of Workshop] which was established by the Kocaeli University instructors and students to organize workshops based on inter-disciplinary co-learning, Paradox Studio or Whatabout that organize and offer instructorless autonomous workshops and Herkes Icin Mimarlik [Architecture For All] that aims to offer transparent participatory processes of architectural production (Duman & Kom, 2016). These examples not only propose alternatives to creative architectural production and discussion, but they also form alternative discourses on how the architecture education could change. The increasing tendency to seek for informal ways of architecture education and production in Turkey since the 2000s proves that the education falls short of teaching alternative ways to organize against the normative system (Duman & Kom, 2016). The practices of the above groups are examples of creativity in dealing with site-specific needs, economy of materials and integration of the users to the design process.

In his "What is the Creative Act" lecture Deleuze (2007) talks about an urge- almost a necessity- to *create* after a specific confrontation. Although he specifically refers to cinematographers and philosophers, his description can become a reference for architectural production. The mentioned groups are actually confronted with issues that require redefined social relationships and with their specific knowledge, have instrumentalized architecture as a mode of creative production. These individuals who have become collectives to produce within their area of knowledge is something that Deleuze and Guattari (1994) point at when they are explaining the ways of slitting the doxa umbrella. An architect could design or become a mediator between the actors of space, and thus the architect would have produced something within their area of expertise. This act would not completely abolish the world of doxas, but it can still produce an alternate slit.

4. Design Studio as a Mode of Questioning

A preliminary example for utilizing architecture to produce different ways of thinking and thus creative production could be the experiment conducted in the Design Studio VI at Maltepe University. The coordinator of the studio programmed two projects for the Spring semester that consists of a courthouse on a virtual site by a river and a market complex in a historical setting. The objectives of his agenda are defined coherently but not the subject of this paper. The mention of this program is to create a discussion about the possibilities the projects could bring when combined with different functions. To put it more clearly, what would happen if these two conventionally divergent functions were congregated to form a transcendent discourse? Would these 'unlikely' spatial situations stimulate the student's creativity? As I pointed out at the beginning of this paper, is it not the purpose of architectural education to shake the norms of the existing world to cause surges of creativity in order to make a difference in the world? Is it not about asking questions and not reaching answers but rather discovering the process?

A courthouse and a bazaar combined would start to form a dialectical relationship between spaces that are conceptually placed at the anomalous ends of the societal system we currently live in. When a young architect encounters such a design problem, the issues about what a crime is or how this could be integrated to a traditional practice of consumption becomes a part of the educational process. For instance, the circulation system of a courthouse is very intricate as the paths of the

prosecutors/judges, the public and the arrested should not cross and the arrested are usually held in rooms underground. In contrast to this strict structure, the circulation pattern for an open market or bazaar is very dynamic and flexible. The difference is not the result of the architecture, but rather the architecture is the result of a societal system that separates the paths of an arrested person and a judge in a courthouse. The combination of these two projects could create a situation for the students that when confronted would necessitate a questioning of how the society views crime and people who have (possibly) committed crime.

The aim of the studio would not be to provide a perfectly working solution towards the judicial system and consumption but rather could generate ways to rethink the existing norms by clashing two different subjects. Especially for the studio tutor, such shocking confrontations could be use to trigger the minds of the students; as Peter W. Parsons (2007) states, "projects that address significant cultural issues, that challenge conventions of construction, that are augmented by empirical investigations, and that employ diverse representational media have the greatest pedagogical value" (p.39). As pointed out by Prof. Dr. Hulya Yurekli (2007) the most important job of the tutor should be to constantly disrupt the stage of equilibrium of the tutor-student interaction to stimulate dynamism.

5. Conclusion

The precarious positioning of architecture as a creative discipline often raises questions about the role of creativity in architectural education. As in other educational programs, architectural education is also led by paradigms. These paradigms, in other words, established notions on a certain kind of approach about how to 'design' or 'how to teach how to design' can sometimes get ahead of the creativity aspect in architectural education. I pointed the major elements towards stimulating creativity in architecture education: working against the norms, the integration of young tutors into the education system and with their own fluid thinking ways, constantly triggering a shift of paradigm in the system.

The educational relationship between the architect and his student had been that of the master-apprentice between the Renaissance and early 20th century. This was partially because the architect was simply a conductor of power, hired by patrons. However, this relationship was dismantled as architecture was redefined as a way of producing discourse rather than a mere representative. Today, as architecture has taken on an intricate relationship with the economical, political and social factors, architectural education becomes fundamental in helping young architects to position themselves in this realm. Many alternative architecture initiatives are examples on the changing approaches towards architecture and the relationships it produces. Certainly it is not a coincidence that young individuals form the majority of these groups: despite having less experience than their senior colleagues, they manage to transfer their unsteady ideas into creative solutions. Therefore, the young tutors in the studio could reflect the constant confusion and rediscovery they are going through in their encounters with the students to stimulate a shifting and changing creative environment or to destroy the paradigms of architectural education to create new ones.

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