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Crisis! What Crisis?
Suburbia After the Crash
Let's face it, except as a survival mechanism in some parts of academia and in the profession, contextualism is finally dead. Maybe this is for the best. Its early promise never really materialized and it only made architecture invisible and bland, a pawn for the status quo used to extinguish the imaginations of young designers. In more recent decades, the turn to sleek neo-modernism has contributed to the death of context; this has created a welcome historical 'break'. Modernism comes to the rescue again! But is it enough?

There once was a presumption that contextualism - code-word in the US for 'history' - required *eo ipso* a foundation of knowledge and thus a sense of intelligence. Sadly, that equation was too ambitious and perhaps, in fact, flawed. History turned out to be too complicated to integrate into design studio education. Design sustained reading on modernity (e.g., Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida) difficult and balked.

For a while 'theory' became a viable host for the discipline's intellectual energies and ambitions, but now there is a battle for design's life and soul. It is facing the same problem as did 'history', dying slowly before us - in studios, in halls, and in our universities! It has become a style, a way for students to get a job.

Given its important role in the interrogation of architectural purpose, theory needs to be saved before it goes down with the ship - before its emptiness is revealed to itself, and before our heroes are made hollow. We write words like flow, diagram, and critical large on a page, but without sub-text, without sub-sub-text - texts without erudition - without even a modicum of psychoanalytic reflection - an episteme without epistemology. Soon even S.O.M. will be doing 'folds'.

I predict a new fascination with carelessness, a new tolerance for 'whatever' in a 'whatever generation' - an architecture that prides itself on neither history nor theory, to put it bluntly. This generation will take over the mantel of the 'avant-garde' and demand that it vacate itself of purpose and thought.

Although not the cause of this crisis, computation will float through it unscathed. It has already proven that it survives best in arid landscapes, squeezing an infinite variety of possibilities out of nothing, so it seems. There are some efforts to guide the ship according to 'parametric reasoning', but will it work? Is it not all 'too difficult'? Will computation ever meet abjection?

The challenge of the immediate future will be to get past the inevitable disillusionment. Academia needs to free repressed pedagogic values. There was a moment when this seemed possible with postmodernism and the attention given in architecture schools some 10 years ago to so-called marginal spaces, fuelled by the desire to make architecture - and architectural explanations - difficult.

When will we reclaim the unmar-