

Preston Scott Cohen

Preston Scott Cohen, Inc.

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Editors

In “The Hidden Core of Architecture” [*Harvard Design Magazine* 35, 2012], you discuss architecture as an art medium. Why is it important to define it as such, and what are its specific characteristics or technical supports?

Preston Scott Cohen

Recently I’ve become wary of the idea, because I’m witnessing a division in architectural cultural production. The museum has become a venue for the production of a kind of architecture that has separated from the production of architecture in the city. Architectural exhibitions did not used to be primarily about how architecture was situated in the museum as an installation or as an experience. The museum was a place where architecture was displayed directly and rather uninterestingly. Criticism of the traditional exhibition mode has mandated that the museum, in collaboration with architects, generate new forms of display. As far as the museum is concerned, architecture has become a form of installation art. Meanwhile, architecture continues to produce the city, regardless of the museum. There has been a very strange severance. If you go all the way back, for instance, to an exhibition like *The International Style* [MoMA, 1932] or later to *The Un-Private House* [MoMA, 1999], it’s just models and drawings of buildings, the conventional means of representation that architects use to produce the city, the context in which architecture is placed. Curators and architects were not preoccupied with producing something for the museum. The preponderance of exhibitions that were important were straightforward displays of buildings in model and drawing form. Of course, there were also exceptions.

Editors

Strada Novissima [at the 1980 Venice Biennale of Architecture] is one that jumps to mind.

Preston Scott Cohen

But even with that, the ambition that it be a street, the exhibition doesn’t strike me as being exemplary of the culture that we have in the museum today, where research about things is displayed in ways that don’t resemble the conventions by which architecture is represented by plans or models or in the city. *Strada Novissima* was a case of the old tradition of Renaissance large-scale modeling. I’m not being absolutely objective about this, but I think today there is a more evident split between the theoretical legitimization of architecture in the museum and the academy on the one hand, and the production of buildings in the city on the other. This goes to this question of the temporality of architecture, its persistence as a cultural produc-

tion. Museums and publicity preserve architecture indefinitely, or sempiternally, and thus imbue it with greater significance. Since it is the museum that lends value and legitimation to works of art, architecture too must be treated as an art medium in the museum, which is different than the way it appears in the city. The city does not legitimize architecture anymore; architecture is just left alone in the city, vulnerable to time.

Editors

So is it then necessary to produce architecture that physically and culturally persists in the city in a different way than it does currently, such that the city once again becomes the site of its legitimization?

Preston Scott Cohen

Well, I don’t know if architecture needs any legitimization. I just think it is legitimate. I would argue that architecture, manifest in a few lonely buildings adrift in a turbulent sea of urbanization, continues to build upon a lineage. Of course, it would be amazing to have a city that also behaves like a museum or a cabinet of curiosities in which is held so many remarkable pieces of architecture. Until then, the only thing that matters to me is the building itself and its persistence in this city, the city that we have. But, I recognize that it’s like the tree falling in the forest. That is, if there isn’t a reception for it, architecture doesn’t exist as culture. So we have a serious problem. The problem today is that despite all the attention being given to architecture in the media, it’s not really being considered according to the inherent structural characteristics of the medium. By medium, I mean the technical supports you asked about, such as the non-hierarchical stacking of space that is at once non-sequential and sequential, the paradoxical status of the ground floor that at once belongs to the first of architecture’s vertical stack and to the horizontally arrayed spaces of the city, and the insoluble tension between the inside and the outside. These supports have nothing to do with display and publicity. In my view, most of today’s cultural venues neglect to pay attention to what architecture really is.

Editors

Is this reflected in your work? You make buildings. You don’t make installations or furniture or temporary things. Is that a position you take?

Preston Scott Cohen

It’s not a position. I just have no desire to do those things. When I’ve been asked to do installations, I can’t do them; I am constitutionally incapable of doing them. [Laughs] Actually, I did do one. I did an exhibit about the *Lightfall* at the GSD [Graduate School of Design at Harvard University]. I rebuilt the wall of the GSD so that it would appear that the *Lightfall* was lodged in and disturbing the wall. It was an architectural intervention; it wasn’t an installation.

Editors

Because you permanently altered the wall?



Lightfall Exhibition, Harvard Graduate School of Design, Cambridge, MA, 2012. Photo by Justin Knight.

Preston Scott Cohen

It appeared as though the room's wall was permanently altered, yes. It was just a normal drywall wall, but it was built in a particular plan configuration. I wanted to recess the *Lightfall* into the wall and have it be seen through a peep-hole, but the school wouldn't let me, so I had to build the wall out in a particular way so that I could then embed something in it, and the way I built it out made the wall look displaced. It's the constraining condition of the space that generated this new wall. In my view it was just another architectural project. So if I ever do an installation it has to be architecture.

Editors

But architecture with a short lifespan.

Preston Scott Cohen

It had a short lifespan, but it didn't have the appearance of an installation; it's not a unique material, it's not trying to be ephemeral or evidently exceptional. It was indistinguishable from the space.

Editors

So, by the argument in the "Hidden Core" article, would you say that the problem with installations is that they don't have multiple temporalities embedded in them in the sense that buildings do, where parts of the building exist for what you call sempiternity and others are more fleeting?

Preston Scott Cohen

Yes, that is correct. An aspect of architecture is the ambition of greater permanence; architecture is attached to the idea of permanence. A timeless dimension is inherent even to short-lived projects. The Larkin Building, which lived so shortly, suggested something that would last much longer. The Barcelona Pavilion would be another case, though it was known that it would be dismantled, it still had this idea of sempiternity built into it, owing to its significance as a paradigm of the plan and of architectural space.

Editors

As a related question, you argue for the continuing importance of the author, the architect as author.

Preston Scott Cohen

The displacement of the author.

Editors

But in your argument for the persistence of architecture and the greater impact of architecture on what you call the core, you are arguing, it seems, for more authorship, or greater extension of the architect's control and influence over the project.



Lightfall Exhibition, Harvard Graduate School of Design, Cambridge, MA, 2012. Photo by Justin Knight.

Preston Scott Cohen

Actually, I'm quite wary of calls for extending the power of the architect, the agency of the architect. I think when you look at my assessment of Koolhaas, it's clear that I'm relishing his relinquishment of authorship to the city, the idea that architecture is produced according to technology and urbanization, that the forces of technology and urbanization—I do love this idea of his—are more inventive than architects.

Editors

But you argue that this is a feint, because Koolhaas picks the exception in the city as his example of the generic, and then produces his own exception. And your work also seems exceptional, or not reducible to these forces.

Preston Scott Cohen

Yes, I'm also interested in exceptions, though not exactly the same kinds of exceptions that Koolhaas produces. But I like the argument so much, it's so addictively exciting, so thrilling, the game Koolhaas has played. Right now I'm trying to begin the outlines of a new course that's going to be required at the GSD about techniques of producing pedagogical briefs for architecture; it's going to be a new required course for the M.Arch. II program. I've had to break the course down into its absolute categories, and I've come to three areas of work that I want to focus on. One is what I'm calling constraint based design, another is typology and its distortions and transformations, and then the other is just geometry. That's it. Everything is in those. All of contemporary architecture. I believe that. [Laughs] One of the things I'm interested in about the temporal dimension of architecture, which is connected to the social dimension of architecture, is the idea that there is a great degree of inevitability or causality in architecture. What makes a work of architecture have to be the way that it is something attributable to so many things: so many parties, so many constituencies, the mobilization of so many resources and so many coalitions to make it happen; so many people have to come to terms with it, and agree on some general level about how it should perform, aesthetically and functionally; environmental factors, economy, everything. So I'm very interested in the degree to which architecture is produced according to a multiplicity of causes and in how the architect is inserted into that equation. The architect is trying to manipulate these things to make something happen that is not completely banal and typical. Why do architects want to do that, by the way? Why do I want it to be peculiar, why do I want buildings to be other than what they would normally be? That's a really interesting question. I don't have the answer for it, but the idea of disappearing is interesting, it's one of the things the architect could try to do. Another is to make evident all of the causality, or make it as evident as one can. Or one could make buildings that are completely inscrutable and peculiar, things that we can't discern the cause of.

Editors

That sounds the most like your work. Your work doesn't disappear.

Preston Scott Cohen

I like very much the idea that the architect is making it happen a certain way, but that it's not discernible that the architect is the primary author of this peculiarity. I want buildings to participate in the whole set of causes. So you can see why I don't find installations very interesting, by the way. They are purely testaments to authorial intentionality. They're not cultural, they're myopic, self-indulgent, formal. They're not connected to anything really, except in the eyes of theorists and academics and the culture producers that legitimize architecture for their own sake. The self-legitimizing culture that we call critical.

Editors

Beyond Koolhaas, are there other architects that you are putting yourself in dialogue with through your writing? When you're looking at the world, are there certain architects that make you say, "Oh, I see something now that I need to deal with"?

Preston Scott Cohen

No, but I have these moments of feeling camaraderie or parallels. I feel a very strong affinity for a lot of the ideas Valerio Olgiati is committed to, about structure as a protagonist. I think the argument in "Hidden Core" is exaggerated. I don't think it's nearly as convincing as the "Successive Architecture" argument [*Log* 32, Fall 2014]. But I think it's important to make the argument, to identify a set of questions. I don't know if it makes so much sense to think that manipulating the inner guts of the building is the primary thing to be doing. Although again and again in our own projects we're doing it; in fact almost all of our projects have very peculiar digressive fire cores and elevators that open on opposite sides to resolve sectional displacements. Occasionally, the fact that something occurs on one side or the other in a building becomes highly determinative. For instance, in Tel Aviv the pinwheel of the original building is symmetrical in plan, but the auditorium is in the left rear quadrant and it is lower in section than the rest of the building for certain reasons, and it turns out to cause a lot of problems on the site that were very important for our project. Had the original architect put it on the other corner, the fate of the project would be so completely different. I call it natural selection. I like this idea, that fateful and purely contingent accidents affect architecture in this way. It's not about intentionality, it's not about concepts. These conditions give evidence to the sensibility that knows how to deal with what others might just call irrelevant accidents.

Editors

It speaks to the idea of constraints.

Preston Scott Cohen

Other arts don't have that problem. Other arts start somewhere arbitrarily; a narrative is just an anecdotal origin. Architecture has that, but there's also something else, which is that something is already there. A painting could begin with a blank canvas, you could say



Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel, 2011. Photo by Amit Geron.

there's always something already there, the frame, the flatness of the canvas, all these things. Architecture has that. It has gravity, it has horizontality, but then there are other kinds of actual already there-nesses that are not the kinds the other arts have, which is really interesting. I do like the fact that it's different than the other mediums. But, as I said, I'm skeptical of this idea of talking about architecture as a medium now, because if architecture is an art medium, then it's subscribing to the idea that it has to speak the language of those who legitimize it in the institutional realm, rather than just doing what it does as building. I'm being very critical of the magazine and museum world, I know. Because I see two tendencies: in one, architecture becomes a super esoteric, discursive, elaborate and interesting intellectual inquiry, but the audience is small, for all of the claims of criticality; in the other, this discourse of architecture is dumbed down so that it can be consumed by the general public. But none of that changes what's going on. None of it matters to the ongoing production of buildings. It doesn't change the fact that in some unusual buildings we are forced to enter and exit from opposite sides of the elevator.

Editors

Today there's a prevalent idea of architecture as a form of research, in which it emerges from the analysis of these urban or environmental or technological forces that you are talking about. There's also a renewed idea of architectural autonomy that you see in various theoretical discourses. It seems as though you wouldn't align yourself with either of those camps. You also sound as though you wouldn't argue for an extension of architecture into new markets and forms of expertise, such that it finds new forms of legitimacy, in the way that Koolhaas might through branding and media, or Frank Gehry through Gehry Technologies. Are you arguing that there is something that is, simply,

architecture, something that doesn't need to be legitimized through research or theory or new models of practice?

Preston Scott Cohen

Well, I have some pretty clear parameters for what I think architecture is. It is a mental construct. It's not just the walls and the floors and the windows and the rooms and the functional intersection with form and structure and all of that, though that's there, and that has to be there, and these are the things that we're thinking about in some way. But these elements are all being rearranged in our heads—this, for me, is architecture. It's a constantly mutating, beautiful, unstable interrelationship between these things. In any given building there are many possible reconfigurations and possible associations and interrelationships and ways to track how these things came about, and how they might have come about in a different way. Why this element had to be positioned there or there or there or be that big or that small or that narrow or that wide.

Proportionality is elastic, for example, everything is always implicitly stretching or compressing, in one axis or another. There are whole sets of related axes and series and patterns that are progressive and full of equivalences and equilibriums or disequilibriums. All of these elements are shifting and can re-stabilize in other configurations. This is architecture as a mindset, though. This is purely imagined, it's a construction by the architect who is thinking about the building. But, in my opinion, all buildings are open to this form of interpretation. And if you can think this way about buildings, I think you make buildings in remarkably interesting ways. I'm committed to that. The architect who is most dexterous and most able to imagine all of these permutations mentally and to manifest them, and who uses the elements of architecture—the walls, the windows and everything else—is the one who is manipulating the substrate, the material that's full of causality. They're in the stuff that's complexly embed-



Taiyuan Museum of Art, Taiyuan, China, 2014. Photo by Shu He.

ded in society. To be able to do anything with reality you have to have a mindset to work on reality. You have to work with the material of reality. I don't like the idea of rarefying reality, turning it into something that it doesn't normally make. The conspicuous reshaping of the normal stuff of the built world doesn't interest me. I can't figure out what the cause for doing it is.

Editors

You are talking about an informed viewer or subject—an architect looking at architecture.

Preston Scott Cohen

Yes, but on the other hand I don't really mind if nobody knows about this at all. If you manipulate a building the way I'm talking about, it will behave exceptionally and a person will unconsciously experience things that will give them pleasure. I don't want to burden people with the kind of knowledge required to make this happen. The question of audience is so reductive today. We are so interested in communicating ideas, but I'm not preoccupied with communication. I think architecture can be there and be enormously effective, whether anyone recognizes it or not. The fact that it is most often in the background, not being consciously scrutinized, is one of the most compelling things about architecture.

Editors

But you subscribe to the idea that architecture is a kind of text. You could go back, for instance, to Colin Rowe and Peter Eisenman to locate the importance of being able to read buildings in these ways.

Preston Scott Cohen

I like the idea of making the kind of buildings that Eisenman or Rowe found and tried to interpret. I'm not so interested in the propagation of the interpretation, the publicity of the interpretation, its influence or its display. I just want to produce the artifacts that would avail themselves to those kinds of extraordinary interpretations. The theoretical interpretation may never come. I'm aware that it could never come. In fact, I have been criticized for not publishing enough. But I still think the artifact is doing these things. One of the more influential figures in these ways of interpreting is Douglas Graf. Another would be Leo Steinberg and his interpretation of Picasso, as well as his interpretation of Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane. But the thing that I love doing is making the buildings that will be the ones that will generate interpretation. And yet, as I have said, I recognize that without these interpretations, we wouldn't have the thrill, or the ability, to engage architecture as a discursive phenomenon.

Editors

Would you disengage some of your own work as a critic or as a theorist from your work as an architect? The articles that you've been writing recently aren't necessarily the argument for your work.



Taiyuan Museum of Art, Taiyaun, China, 2014. Photo by Sergio Pirrone.

Preston Scott Cohen

In fact the articles I have been writing have made me very skeptical of my work. They tend to make me consider what I really think is right, what really matters. They describe the normative background against which I am working. And then I realize that for whatever reason I've gotten involved in doing the things I do. It's very interesting. This is a problem. There's a kind of schizophrenia where I end up involved in things I'm wary of. I'm not sure I'm ready to give up those things yet either, despite my wariness. The facades, the production of these complex envelopes, Carl Dworkin and I have reviewed this a hundred times with each other in the office in really distressed states of mind about why we're doing these things and why we can't stop. We are terribly skeptical of our architecture becoming rhetorical. We desperately want it to be inevitable. To that end, we have developed some new ideas and ways of working. We've learned our lesson.

Editors

This is a parallel question, but how did you learn to build? Did you work in offices before you started your practice?

Preston Scott Cohen

I came out of the academy. That's the irony in all of this. I've been criticizing the hand that fed me! For years I wasn't building, I wasn't practicing, I wasn't in a real office. I was never a producer at an office in any way that was significant. I worked for a few years in several offices in New York, but played only a very minor role in every job I had. My head was elsewhere. At the same time, I was designing houses that were doing stuff that I thought was important, architecturally.



University of Michigan Art and Architecture Building Addition, Ann Arbor, MI, 2015. Perspective.

Editors

Were you worried then about how they could be built, or did that come later?

Preston Scott Cohen

I worried about how they functioned. I never wanted to make something that was impossible. I've never been interested in that. But I didn't actually get into the question of how they would get built. I had caught the cardboard architecture disease. This was the same disease that Venturi had, the same disease that Hejduk had. Whether they were drawing or building, they weren't really interested in tectonics. Eisenman made a polemic out of the atectonic, but I want to distinguish what I was doing from that. Mine wasn't about the polemic of expressing architecture as cardboard. I just didn't care yet, I didn't know that materials could be discursive, or that structure could be. I wasn't able to see that. I was only looking at it compositionally, spatially and sequentially. I've always been interested in sequence, the Corbusian promenade and the five points. But in my beginnings, for example, I wasn't so interested in the way the five points anticipated a whole urbanism. Or how the five points were part of what I now recognize them to be, something that went against the inevitable stacking paradigm, the structural order of architecture. I didn't know about Mies' connection to the industrial production of buildings and how he wanted to classicize industry. Structure and material was absolutely the thing he was working on. I wasn't yet interested in the interpretation of Mies along those lines. I am speaking now of the remarkable text by Fritz Neumeier [*The Artless Word: Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art*, 1991] which I read later, in the nineties. Those things became intensely more interesting to me when I started doing buildings. But initially, I was just doing conceptual designs. There was even that period when I went off the rails and was just doing projection drawing. I don't know what that

was about. [Laughs] We can talk about that another time. But it was a great thing to think that way.

Editors

Does that kind of rigorously constructed drawing still play a role for you, either in your own practice or pedagogically?

Preston Scott Cohen

No.

Editors

Architecture exists in multiple states—models, drawings, renderings, buildings, etc.—and one is always translating information from one to another. Do you see important hierarchies between these states? Some people would argue that the drawing is primary, others that the experience of the building is primary.

Preston Scott Cohen

Well, I agree with Loos, and his resistance to consuming architecture in photographs. He didn't want to see architecture commercially consumed, but I think he probably also understood that you can't absorb the dynamic of continuous movement of the *Raumplan* in photographs. The psychic experience of spatial complexity has nothing to do with what an image presents; no animation can do it either. It's frustrating as hell to represent a building in a still image, because you know a still image is such a fleeting and contrived representation. But you have to struggle hard to get a rendering to do the work you need it to do, because what gets conveyed is so significant for mobilizing people's



University of Michigan Art and Architecture Building Addition, Ann Arbor, MI, 2015. Perspective.

support—how you construct the image is very much about an audience and about a means to an end. It's laboring to get to the building, it's laboring to move the unbuilt to be built, but it's not the building itself. I used to be consumed by the complexities of representation. I'm sure they're still operating in my mind, and I know about them, but I'm not consciously interested in asserting them as architecture anymore. You consume yourself with these problems of representation—buildings that are directly involved in trying to construct themselves as an anamorphic image or whatever else—and you start to make architecture as if it is a problem of representation. That doesn't interest me. I don't agree that that is what architecture is. All of that said, however, there is one convention of representation that I've become increasingly preoccupied with. Well, it's not really a convention of representation: it's the plan. What has emerged from all of this work is the plan. In a way, for Carl and me, everything is gone except the plan.

Editors

Because it allows you to see things that neither the building itself nor other forms of representation allow you to see?

Preston Scott Cohen

Let's go back to the stacking argument from "Successive Architecture." This only pertains to the z-axis. Spaces stack vertically, non-

hierarchically, a fact recorded by plans that are sliced one after the other, parallel to each floor. Stacking has remained endemic to architecture since the Industrial Revolution. In contrast, buildings do not develop themselves in horizontal succession according to slicing planes arrayed laterally. For the most part, it would be arbitrary to imagine them that way. There are anomalies, of course, such as pier buildings and airports that extrude laterally. There are these specific types that do it. But the section, the plane that we slice, corresponds to a horizontal extrusion, and I don't think horizontal extrusion, sliced successively in section, is endemic to the whole of the medium of architecture. Only the plan is. The plan is everything, is everywhere at all times. [Laughs]

Editors

Looking at images of the Tel Aviv project, one might imagine the *Lightfall* to be a sectional idea, but in the section drawing it's not clear what you are doing. Only the plans make it possible to understand.

Preston Scott Cohen

Kenneth Frampton read the section of the project and hated it because he saw the *Lightfall* as

a shape or something; he was disgusted by it. I should never have drawn the section, because it misguides someone like him to think I mean it as a section. It is a section through the levels and ramps but is not a section of the *Lightfall*; it's just a slice arbitrarily through it. I should never cut a section through something that's not intended to be cut in section, that doesn't extrude horizontally, and for which a section, therefore, is utterly incidental, anecdotal and tells you nothing. There are projects where the section tells the story of the building. With the Goodman House you could do a meaningful section because it's an extruded gable. On the other hand, the plan of the Goldman Sachs Canopy in New York is the meaningful drawing of that project, not the section, because it's a continuous transformation in section, from end to end. Plans have duration, which has to do with the floor, whereas most sections don't have any duration. I think it's a mistake to think the section is the generator of architecture, though the section does sometimes serve as the key device with which to navigate successive plans. But how many skyscrapers are like Johnson's AT&T Building, for instance, where the profile is extruded and therefore the section corresponds to the form of the building? Very few.

Editors

Are you working on any towers? Do you have an interest in trying to build a tower?

Preston Scott Cohen

I'm very interested in towers, but I don't know if I want to design one. I like the way the city generates the vertical extrusion. What I'm fascinated by in these new tall buildings in New York is the extreme extrusion.

Editors

Is the tower more interesting as an object of criticism than as a project for you?

Preston Scott Cohen

Maybe so. I've grown increasingly interested in designing from the inside out and I'm having more and more trouble designing from the outside in. With the tower, there's no inside to design. Towers are too intractable in what they do and have to be. They always have the lobby, they always have the core, they have too much already determined. But I love the determinism of them so much. I think this preoccupation about making our own form of the city, so conspicuously



Goodman House, Pine Plains, NY, 2004. Photo by Raimund Koch and Victoria Sambonaris.



Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel, 2011. Photo by Amit Geron.



Arcade Canopy, New York, NY, 2009.

controlled and designed, or authored, is flawed. The reason older exceptions within the city work—buildings like Grand Central Terminal and the New York Public Library—is that they work within the elements of the urban morphology. They were working with the canon that produced buildings in the city—classical order, ornamentation—and their spatial configurations were coming out of a tradition of architecture. I don't believe that this is the case with many of today's forms that are presumed to be architecture.

Editors

Do you think it's necessary that there is a language that constrains the production of architecture, such that you're able to find evidence of a larger structure within which new buildings fit?

Preston Scott Cohen

Well, there's a lot of stuff that is making it tough to do anything, for instance the fire curtains and the fire doors and panic bars. We are strangled by that stuff. All of our desires for open space or continuous sequences are becoming impossible. If you can get any kind of openness, it's a testament to a dexterous deployment of fire or water curtains, a manipulation of the code, or an ability to mobilize the resources to pay for smoke evacuation. The *Raumplan*, in the old days, was the *Raumplan*. Today, it's like, "Wow, how did they get that to happen?" Anybody who knows anything, any connoisseur of practice, walks in and thinks, "God you're lucky you don't have those doors in here. How'd you pull that off? Where are they?"

Editors

Has this regulatory framework supplanted formal language in architecture? If once there was a Beaux-Arts language or a modernist language, for instance, is there now this other kind of organizing structure that one has to work with and against? It's not visibly manifest in the same way, it doesn't give the same formal order to things, but it undergirds everything.

Preston Scott Cohen

The comparison is good. In terms of organizing space, this is the stuff that constrains you now. It's not very lovely, but you've got to be interested in it; it's what we have to work with. In our project for the University of Michigan, we were required to introduce ramps in order to resolve the difference in depth between today's thick plenums and

those of the thinner existing building. Interestingly, this led us to introduce two sets of ramps that are knotted together by a stair. The spiral-like form is made implicit by the composition of straight-edged solid railings. Even more difficult to contend with was our intention to create continuity between multi-level spaces. Spaces need to be parceled due to structural partitioning, fire divisions, despite our overwhelming desire to make spatial sequences that we inherited from the modern period. But the Corbusian sense of space is not buildable today. Buildings become full of cavities for mechanical space and fire curtains; they are so atectonic. It's fascinating how the fabric of buildings has changed. Spatial continuity and sequence, the *promenade architecturale*, the *Raumplan*, the multiplied symmetries embedded in the French *hôtel* plan: all these things, and the entanglement of spaces they generate, just don't work well within today's codes of fire curtains and doors.

Editors

Do you feel that there's a way to teach that? If you're arguing that there's a divide between architecture as a theoretical discourse that doesn't manifest itself in building, and then there are buildings, is that divide perpetuated by the fact that those pragmatic issues of building are no longer a substantial part of education, at least at the graduate level? Once there was more of a synthesis. In learning how to solve formal problems, you would also be learning how to address certain pragmatic issues: structure, for instance, or plan organization. But today no student has fire curtains in their studio projects.

Preston Scott Cohen

I like to force students to approximate this experience, to push constraints to the breaking point, and I like them to recognize how bizarre architecture can get just by virtue of the push back of constraints on their work. Maybe these things are utterly boring and we should just stay away from them, let them catch us when we get out in the field. But then they bite your tail and you are left just trying to make them look okay. I think it's better to keep pushing this stuff, to put it into crisis. It's important pedagogically, because the students recognize how much is embedded in it. These constraints embody the social conditions of architecture: the obligation to society's safety, economy, everything. I think we have misunderstood this; these constraints are not just the vocational part of architecture. The compulsion toward the open plan or the promenade is a compulsion to synthesize, to bring coherence to architecture, though in terms that are much more abstract relative to the classical means of coherence. This compulsion to give coherence remains. Yet, we can't simply have it and the struggle to attain it is perhaps what is most interesting of all. That's when the reality of building comes in. For architecture, the flight to other media in order to escape from reality is a futile and nostalgic academic exercise.