



**“ REALITY ”
CONSTRUCT**

The most important invention of Western modernity is the scientific method, which is the systematic formulation of hypotheses that are then justified through observation, measurement and experiment.

Within this model, a reliable and justifiable vision of reality is constructed through evidence and argument, not speculation or opinion. Nonetheless, there is no such thing as a fixed truth; even so-called “laws” of science, like Newtonian physics, can be disproved at any moment, if a single verifiable test produces an error. The scientific method says, “Oh yeah, you think so? Well, prove it.” And if you can’t, your belief is unfounded and must be rejected. Even if you can prove your hypothesis, the scientific method remains sceptical – you don’t have a law, you just have a working assumption that can be potentially overturned by further work.

Without this invention, there can be no basis for a shared conception of the world. Without the scientific method we descend into myth, superstition and unfounded assertions or unprovable ideas unrelated to the natural world. The existence of God (or gods), the meaning of suffering, and the nature of Being in the universe are all basically “he said, she said” lines of argument. Abandoning the scientific method means we can no longer distinguish justifiable statements from falsehoods.

The only meaningful opinions are expert ones. This doesn’t mean you have to be a professionally-qualified “expert” – it simply means your opinions must be based on a rational consideration of relevant evidence. To eliminate bias, the sources for your opinions should be as reputable as possible, and their results repeatable or cross-comparable. We should feel free to challenge the assertions of others – particularly those in power – that don’t appear to follow reason or method, and demand they justify themselves.

The subtext to all this talk of scientific method is clearly the so-called “post-truth”, “alternative fact” reality that certain forces are currently wishing into being. As recently as a decade ago, a dogmatic insistence on the pursuit of reason might have seemed like a kind of intellectual snobbery – an attempt to deprecate the value of less educated opinions, and so to dictate which voices in society have the right to speak. That is no longer true. The struggle today is to defend the scientific method, upon which all of global and Western civilisation is based. Without it, the Decline and Fall will be accelerated considerably.

The current era in architecture is not one dominated by competing grand narratives. There are very few ideologies in operation – and even these are mostly implicit or poorly articulated by their advocates. Rather, it is an era dominated by misconceptions and confusion, muddled waters, muddled thinking and misapplication. Where academic rigour is actually applied, it is frequently to questions that are not relevant to the field of architecture or our current condition.

The immense proliferation of images in architectural culture, and the collapse of any clear chronology to the canon, has flattened the entire history and past of the discipline and profession into a vast but shallow lake. In my mind’s eye, the world of architecture

today is a desert salt flat, reflecting a crystalline mirror sky. An attempt to penetrate this membrane could be described as a pursuit of “authenticity” in architecture – but many of the efforts to do this are not working. This is because they are not pursuing an epistemological enquiry, to determine if indeed there is such a thing as architectural knowledge; and if so, where its extents might be located. We’ve seen the return of history as a pressing concern. We’ve seen the rejection of apolitical or technocrat architectures. But we’ve also seen the rise of self-contained narrative architecture, which is utterly divorced from reality and belongs to the realm of reified (and epically dull) metaphors. We’ve seen an obsession with pure geometric form and erotic materiality, which in the hands of inexperienced designers is no more interesting than the popular data set manipulations it replaced. We’ve seen faux-activists claiming the architect is a humanitarian figure. It’s all got pretty messed up.

So what is the future of architecture?

I don’t have a monolithic doctrine to profess. I’m not sufficiently deluded to believe in absolutes. Instead, I really insist on a methodology rather than an ideology. There is a way to do architecture correctly. There is no correct outcome, however. Here are just three criteria that are essential – what the Romans might call the *sine qua non architecturae*.

Firstly, all work must strive for relevance. At its best, that quality is near eternal (architecture that is both timely and timeless). To be relevant, we must try to define the contemporary condition. The more you can learn about the past, the easier it will be to see broad cycles in civilisation, as well as give you more perspective on the present. Most of all, a good understanding of what it means to live today will help you understand what is, and what is not, an architectural concern. It will help you refine what you should do with your skills and your life.

The second method essential to architecture is the project. This is a type of scientific method in itself, a model of inquiry that involves clarifying and defining a relevant question (the brief), which in turn will limit the scope of work to be carried out. In researching the field, certain lines of argument will suggest themselves to you. This always leads to a proposition. That’s what makes the project so powerful. If your work does not lead to a concrete proposal – one that can be critiqued, examined and evaluated on its own terms – then you’re not doing architecture.

Finally, architecture is the politics of space. If you are not making a spatial proposal, then it’s not architecture. Metaphorical spaces, like “the space of the page” or “mental space” do not count. Even fanciful, imaginary, fantasy, paper architectures must suggest a spatial relationship between persons or objects.

The most powerful form of architecture is that which intervenes in the everyday conditions of life, alters them for the better, and in so doing becomes invisible. ♥

IMG: In 2013 the town of Suzdal turned into a 'Potemkin Village' by covering it's derelict, crumbling facades with printed tarpaulin for the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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