

“Position Statement” On Architecture Criticism

Art is parasitic on life, just as criticism is parasitic on art - Harry S Truman

No artistic expression has a meaning until it's studied and evaluated. Architecture is not just an artistic expression but an expression of human needs in a physical form. Hence architecture criticism becomes all the more important. I believe architecture criticism is not just the act of writing or speaking about a built form but also a tool for architects to learn from their work either; a masterpiece, a blunder or a mediocre design, it is a tool for the public to develop an eye for good architecture.

All good criticism should be judged the way art is. You shouldn't read it the way you read history or science- Leslie Fiedler

Criticism doesn't judge aesthetics or the philosophy in isolation but techniques, context, the objective and the subjective. The purpose of architecture criticism is served when the readers develop rationality to appreciate what's built around them and avoid personal opinions. It is the critic's task to assess how successful the architect has been in meeting the criteria he set out to achieve and the criteria that the critic feels was important.

In 1998, the British critic Martin Pawley rather dramatically announced what he called “the strange death of architectural criticism.” Pawley lamented the disappearance of an aggressive, “take-no-prisoners” approach to critical writing about architecture, which he felt was being replaced by “wall-to-wall testimonials of praise.”¹ Criticism as a field struggles with the same issues as many other fields do; fast paced technological advancements and the economic forces. For competing with the weapons of the digital age like the twitter, facebook and the iPad; critics can afford to waste no time and need to pay attention to pieces for blogs and print edition and also their promotion via social networking, TV, and radio. They have to compete with people who blog, historians, videographers and even practicing Architects. Different topics and different perspectives serve readers with different tastes and the competition to provide something new and different gives rise to the rationale that criticism as a field aspires to achieve. When people start to realize that garages and malls, streets and freeways are worthy of analysis – when they find architecture if not more than as exciting as music – that's when a critic's task shall be considered to be completed.

¹ Commentary: What Happens to Architectural Criticism When Dailies Shrivell and Bloggers Take Over?
By Christopher Hawthorne