

Tammeron Jonesfrancis

PO Box 512
Fremont
Indiana, 46737
USA

011 616 540 7419

Skype: tammeron.jonesfrancis

tjonesfrancis@gmail.com

Teaching Philosophy

Within the studio I emphasize three concerns: imagination, process and relation. With imagination we construct, or more precisely, synthesize – from the world around us – a symbolic and relational perspective. Process assumes that we can cultivate an awareness of how we design. And, an emphasis on relation suggests that an architect does not bring meaning ex-nihilo but through education, develops associations.

Imagination

Imagination is the ability to make uncustomary connections between customary appearances. In the studio I have illustrated this by demonstrating that the significance of Mies's work lies not merely in his personal expression but an ability to rethink commonly available materials and methods within larger context of custom, history and ideas. The sense of stability and balance, so often associated with Mies's structures, involves an imaginary recollection of the ancient Greek temple. Likewise, the succinct order in his details expresses a modernists sense of a knowable and logical cosmos.

The work of imagination, designing – being in emphasis one of developing relationships – can, for the sake of teaching, involve three further divisions: openness, order and style. Openness involves an enthusiasm for the foreign, unfamiliar and uncustomary. An open attitude in design involves both the intellectual attitude and design process. Openness inspires the imagination but its most significant contribution is awareness of possibility. The need for 'openness' is the reason that I encourage manual drawing. The apparently infinite patterns available to the pencil and paper are not characteristic of the graphical computer interface. My emphasis on manual drawing in the studio, however, does not aim to avoid digital approaches to design and representation. On the contrary, I believe that with a good grasp of manual drawing the pursuit of new forms of digital representation, as well as other means of engaging in architecture, is better accomplished. An ability to extend beyond the customary also can be encouraged with assignments and research that take students beyond dominant perspectives. For this reason I value the insights of anthropology and inter-cultural research and assignments.

I introduce order as a historical problem and one essential to the architectural imagination. In the context of order I have lectured about the intent of the vanishing point, the evolution

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of the grid and orthographic projection. Likewise I have discussed architectural order in the ancient Greek temple, especially in terms of Vincent Scully's insights about landscape and temples, the Gothic enthusiasm for pageant, as well as ordering principals in traditional Amerindian architectures.

All aspects of imagination bear on creative work in the form of style. A student's style comes into being through insights acquired within the reach of a particular biography. Only after a certain mastery of craft, however, can a student adopt the personal stance that is manifest in style. I encourage the development of a personal style by providing resources of interest to students. Also, by providing choices within a project for a student to pursue, students are able to take a stand on issues they believe important. In the past I have let students select from a number of possible building sites or develop particular regions within an assigned project. A window seat project, that I developed, offered three sites, (a first year project at Ball State University). For senior interior design students, at the College of Creative Studies in Detroit, I asked students to develop limited areas within a museum of industry, already brought to a schematic level, for development.

Process

Second to imagination is process. An architecture school's design studio is a unique environment where designers can be asked to pause and consider how the work before them came about. Our judgment of process is grounded in craft-knowledge and extended by discussions of historical and theoretical contexts. Here, therefore, within the class critique, is the appropriate time to introduce architectural theory. In the past I have assigned readings in architectural theory that directly bear on the assignment. Past readings have included: Alberto Perez-Gomez's "The Myth of Daedalus"; contrasting essays on representation by Omer Akin and Dalibor Vesely. I have also assigned selections from *The Mexican Kickapoo*, by anthropologists Latorre and Latorre, who discuss how the Traditional Kickapoo tribe of South Texas and Mexico have developed a means of organizing dwelling and community upon a complex of mythic relations imaginatively constructed from and with local appearances.

Relation

My third emphasis in the studio is 'relation.' Relation suggests Thoreau's insight that "in the pond can be found a reflection of heaven." In the studio I have found that beginning students are frequently resistant to extend beyond the narrow matter of producing a building design. I address this problem in the desk critique and/or lecture by showing how a project's site elicits possibilities within, for example, the particular bearing of the sun on a site, predominate winds, species of plants and animals to be protected as well as custom and tradition. Sometimes, again, it is also helpful to direct students to traditional Amerindian architecture. There, developing relation between land, design and meaning is explicit, and in accord to particular regions.

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Summary

Within the imagination we let what is hopeful in our humanity to assert itself. My understanding of architectural imagination seeks a middle-road between making a fetish of technology or design as narrow personal expression. To this end I emphasize architectural design as a humanity, that is, as a practice that recognizes human needs – the need to craft something well, for example – as well as the need to consider and develop something significant. My inspiration for that perspective includes architects, philosophers and anthropologists, naturalists and geographers. I feel a special kinship for the architectural work of Louis Kahn and Carlo Scarpa, as well as the ‘folk’ architectures of the American Indian. My theoretical orientation lies with the existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and I believe that anthropology grants significant insights to architectural work. Anthropologists I find useful for architects are Mary Douglas and Lewis H. Morgan. Finally I am attracted the broad contextualizing scope of Lewis Mumford, Yi Fu Tuan, and Richard Sennett. While I will naturally be inclined to teach to this perspective I also believe it important to show contrasting orientations in a context that illustrates how to think rather than what to think.