

Drawings/Objects/Buildings/Texts: The Post-Medium Parafictional Scenarios of Young & Ayata

Architecture cannot be defined through a single medium. This lack of specificity is a problem for the discipline, but is also where its strength may strangely lie. In many ways, the built environment, our cities and buildings are the most visible and real outcome of our actions as architects. It is through the reality of construction that architecture directly impacts the physical world. But, as has been often noted before, architecture is somehow more than just building. Or, more prosaic, (equally cliché) the facts of architectural labor stipulate that architects do not make buildings, they make representations that lead to buildings. These representations are thus often the battle ground upon which the discipline wages its internal war to define what is specific and singular regarding the architectural condition. There are passionate defenses made for the drawing as the locus of architectural thought, with subgroups that privilege the freedom of the hand, the rigor of geometry, or the abstraction of the line. There are equally legitimate arguments for the physical model as the medium for the exploration of space and material assembly. There are stances that the rendered image of a design proposal is how architecture most clearly speculates through a visual medium everyone can engage. There are other arguments that architecture must be centered on the resolution of programs, circulations, systems, and infrastructure. These diagrammatic notations are aided by a textual discourse that unveils the cultural project in which architecture situates its histories, theories, and ecologies. There is also the reality of economies that drive the development of architecture, both as constraints in construction and economic effects generated through exchange.

The project of Young & Ayata considers all of these conditions as the multiple mediums through which architecture operates. Architecture is a post-medium effort. Drawings, Renderings, Models, Prototypes, Computations, Simulations, Texts, and Buildings are all put forward by architects as a speculative proposal for the reality of the future. These mediums all involve levels of expertise in techniques that are necessary for their practice. They all involve conceptual dimensions that structure their disciplinary arguments. And perhaps most importantly, they each have an aesthetic relation that opens up their cultural potential for effecting political change. The building itself is seen as one of the mediums of architecture, a very important medium, but not the only medium upon which architecture acquires difference and value in society. Instead, Young & Ayata view the tensions, overlaps, and frictions that are created through multiple mediations as the most provocative zone for architectural work. These multiple mediums translate techniques, concepts and aesthetics between themselves, constructing architectural arguments. There is always an alteration that occurs in any translation. One of the most important issues that an architect deals with is exactly these transformations in the translation between mediums. Architects negotiate between drawing and building, theory and diagram, model and rendering, computation and materialization.

In contemporary art, one of the most relevant practices for architecture can be found under the loose heading of Parafiction. There are several useful suggestions in this art. First, Parafictional art never reduces an artwork to a single medium, instead it uses every medium available through which to open an aesthetic investigation of related to the construction of "the Real". Second, reality is never equated with realism. Realism is an aesthetic argument regarding the tensions between reality and representation. A successful parafictional artwork is one that begins to open questions of doubt regarding the reality of what is presented. It is often in the gaps and tensions between the multiple mediations that this estrangement of realism is found. Third, aesthetics is primary in the artwork. This is not to deny conceptual and political dimensions, most parafictional art is aggressively political, but the realization is that the conceptual/political impact of an artwork begins with an aesthetic provocation, not the other way around. Fourth, the edges, the framing, the delimitation of the artwork are dispersed. It is often hard to find where a parafictional artwork starts and stops. The effect is that it disturbs one's notion of reality both spatially and temporally. It requires that you see the reality of the world outside of the work in a different matter, often making the context into which the work is inserted acquire a strangeness. Fifth, parafictional art is not narrative driven, but scene driven. There no single arching story line establishing the parameters upon which to interpret the work. The narrative is often unstable, haphazard, or fleeting, built in multiple ways by whomever and however one chooses to engage the art. What is cohesive is the believability of each scene, each mediation. How these rub against each other and the context of "the real" builds up the provocations of the artwork.

Architecture has much in common with parafictional art practices. Architecture is multi-medium, it uses aesthetics towards conceptual/political effects, it is constantly engaged in questions of context, and it is a specific object or scenario that inserts itself into the constantly changing conditions of reality. What architecture can learn from this art is how each medium must be mastered not to rarify it towards self-critical abstraction, but in order to proactively position it in relation to the complex of mediated relations. This does not require an overarching narrative predetermining interpretation, but instead a cohesive and convincing scene that rubs against the multiple notions of reality. Lastly, aesthetics is primary. It is through shifts in aesthetics that information is made sensible and distributed through society. And it is through these redistributions that art and architecture are involved in the culture of relations, be they political, economic, or ecological.