

# The Call for an Educational MUT in Architecture: Aspects of a School of the Eye

Through musicians we know that rests between notes are as essential for a composition as the notes themselves. Floor tilers teach us that for a back-splash joints are as relevant as the tiles. Urban planners show us that for a functioning city life squares and plazas are as important as buildings. Similarly, architects have to look at the spaces next to the building projects they are commissioned for, at the blanks in the briefings, at the layers beyond the built environment. All too often, architects solely focus on what Karl Popper would call *World 1*, the physical world 'that is made of stones and of stars'.<sup>[1]</sup> There are two more worlds: *World 2* is 'the world of our feelings of pain and of pleasure, of our thoughts, of our decisions, of our perceptions and our observations', while *World 3* is 'the world of the products of the human mind such as languages; tales and stories and religious myths; scientific conjectures or theories, and mathematical constructions; songs and symphonies; paintings and sculptures. But also, aeroplanes and airports and other feats of engineering'.<sup>[2]</sup> The objects of *World 3* are waiting to be discovered by the human mind rather than being created by it.<sup>[3]</sup> All three worlds interact with each other. Obviously, the built environment as the product of all architecture activity, belongs to the physical world (*World 1*). However, it has a strong relationship with our perception of it (*World 2*) and ultimately derives from the ideas and theories of *World 3*. Architecture education should enable future architects to smoothly move in between the three worlds – the built world (as found or anticipated), the experienced world and the attributed world. Instead of focusing more and more on technical and management skills, an architecture curriculum should be about inbetweenness, about movement and fluctuation, the ability to create alliances and diffusions between aspects of all three worlds. With this approach, architecture is a discipline that eases our understanding of the world(s) we live in. This new curriculum is a synthesis of Popper's trinity.

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Dr. Pablo von Frankenberg (born 1984, sociologist, cultural scientist, and museum planner based in Berlin) and Sophia Walk (born 1984, architect, teacher and researcher at Institute of Architectural Theory, Art History and Cultural Studies at TU Graz) met in German hinterland, at the crossroads of architecture and science and ever since they can't stop talking about the inevitability of a school of the eye in architecture education.

## ELEVEN GUIDELINES FOR A NEW ARCHITECTURE CURRICULUM

ARCHITECTURE IS A WAY OF THINKING.  
Learning to experience it is the first step on the path.

ARCHITECTURE IS A CRAFT.  
Mastering the tools of the trade is self-evident.

ARCHITECTURE IS ART.  
Being open to deviation and dissent is quintessential for creativity.

ARCHITECTURE IS UNIVERSAL.  
Architects should be able to work within different cultural, social, and disciplinary contexts.

DESIGN IS RESEARCH.  
Explore, test, fail, know, fail again, breathe, repeat.

FOLLOW THE MONEY.  
It has an effect on architectural design.

DIGITALIZATION IS NOT THE SOLUTION.  
Hand-drawings are neither. Means and ends should not be confused.

IMAGES . WORDS. IMAGES AND WORDS.  
No matter how brilliant, architects have to know how to communicate what they do.

ARCHITECTURE FRAMES HUMAN INTERACTION.  
Choose wisely which social impacts your work will unfold.

ARCHITECTURE IS A WITNESS.  
Preserving it means respecting the way people perceive it and use it.

OPEN YOUR EYES.  
Feel. Smell. Listen. Taste. Architecture surrounds you .

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## The starting point of the curriculum is a School of the Eye. ←

*This School of the Eye* starts with visual perception only to put the seen into question, to draw conclusions and integrate the seen into the architecture one designs. *The School of the Eye* is about the importance to behold and the ability to assess which decisions have which impact on the built space. *The School of the Eye* aims to foster a deep comprehension of the repercussions of buildings on our disposition and vice versa. *The School of the Eye* enables students to transfer unconscious experiences into conscious experiences regarding (built) space. As we only see what we have learned to see, *the School of the Eye* encourages to look at the surroundings in a different manner than with our day-to-day perception.

## The School of the Eye connects the immaterial with the material. ←



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Architecture students should learn how to inquire different surroundings and ambiances, how to draw conclusions from these inquiries and how to convert them into architecture. Knowing how to give buildings significance requires developing a mindset about the seen and to then connect the physical with the other two worlds. *The School of the Eye* is about seeing the built and the anticipated world as mutually dependent.

Experiencing, manoeuvring between the three worlds, getting an understanding of space and time, asking the right questions, seeing the knowledge of the built environment, all this adds up to an educational fundament that passes on: "hey, you are studying 'architecture', not 'architect.'" The aim of every teacher should be an architecture education that allows students to perceive themselves as the forthcoming generation of architects and not as an appendix or as the stooges of beaten tracks. An architecture education has to provide students with the means to change the whole discipline – in practice as well as in theory – even if none of the students ever will change the whole discipline by her- or himself.

Studying architecture means also developing a feeling for the responsibility of shaping society – in all its forms, from social housing to villas, from public swimming pools to office towers, from designing a square



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in the middle of the city to village savings banks. This responsibility of shaping society includes not only the built work, but also leadership within the own architectural practice and, last but not least, teaching architecture and research. Architectural thinking often starts with concepts of space as the means, the condition, and the result of architecture. Whether space exists and if so, whether with a distinct essence or just as a relation, is a discussion nearly as old as occidental philosophy. Architects do not have to become philosophers, but before putting pen to paper, they have to be aware that space is not a given fact, but rather something to be carefully considered both a physical and conceptual prerequisite of architectural production.<sup>[4]</sup> *A School of the Eye*, as outlined above, iteratively needs and raises this awareness, as it examines the interactions between Popper's three worlds – the spaces in which space emerges. Architecture education in this respect solely has to initiate a process of understanding of space, as once started, this process is ongoing also outside architecture classes.

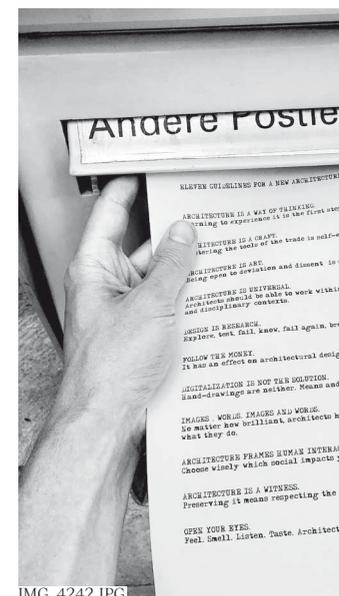
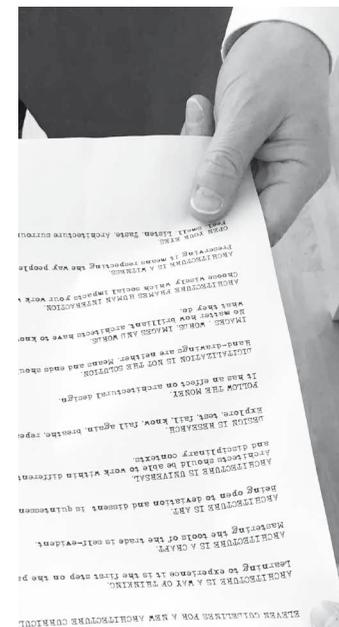
The understanding of space is a starting point to analyse what kind of questions the built heritage poses – and what kind of questions contemporary architectural production asks. ←

For architecture students it is essential to know the different ideological and analytical frames of reference different architects and architecture schools work with. That is, next to the questions posed by architecture there are the questions posed by architects. When analysing the latter, students can put their own education into perspective. Focusing on just a few historic and contemporary 'stars' easily blinds students to the manifold questions architecture has to deal with. Only after taking a closer look at the questions architecture and architects ask, it is possible to think about the answers both need – and about the questions still missing.<sup>[5]</sup> This implies that there is knowledge incorporated within the built environment.<sup>[6]</sup> In retrospect this knowledge can be analysed. In foresight, i.e. when designing, the question is which kind of knowledge a building needs to be built and which kind of knowledge it needs to convey over time in order to be relevant for the people using and seeing it. Moving in between time – then, now, later

– is a quality to be mastered by an architect, as she or he in most cases has to analyse a culturally and historically grown surrounding, be aware of the needs of the now, and plan for an immediate and a more distant future, as any design has to anticipate the date of construction as well as the years the designed object is being used. Also, when specializing in architecture history or theory and not primarily designing and building, architects have to juggle with time and have to anticipate e.g. what kind of historic understanding of architecture is crucial for the generations to come. To enhance and enable creativity, architectural design should be taught detached from schemes of economic exploitation. Nevertheless, students should also learn how finances affect design. Cost control, if handled in a good way, can be a source of creativity – as any boundary can be. Nevertheless, architecture students should be prepared that working conditions in architecture offices can be rough and clients can

be shady. On the other hand, bosses as well as clients can ruin a design. Architects should be ready to work in this contradictory setting – and be able to change it. After graduating, they should have the ability to analyse power and money relations. Being aware of the financial and political backgrounds of a client can spare oneself a lot of trouble. Part of the toolbox every architect should be equipped with when leaving university is an alertness.

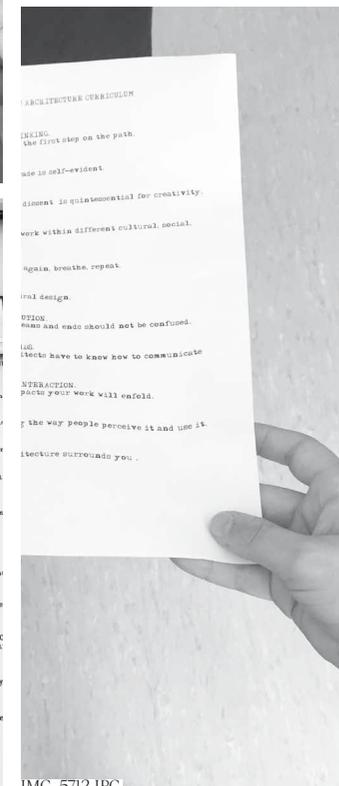
Being alert in the first encounter with a potential client, being alert regarding working conditions within the own office, being alert to social needs beyond what is written in the brief – all this is something that can be taught at university. ←



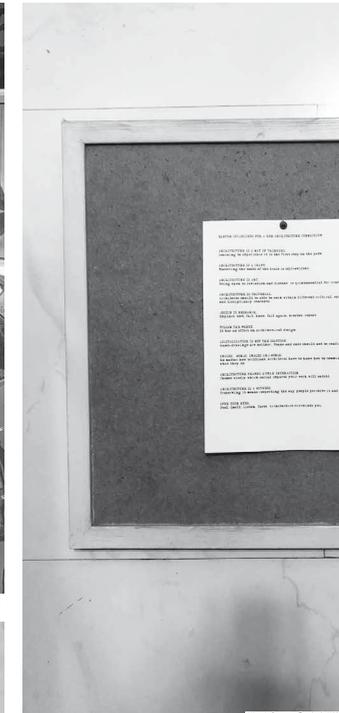
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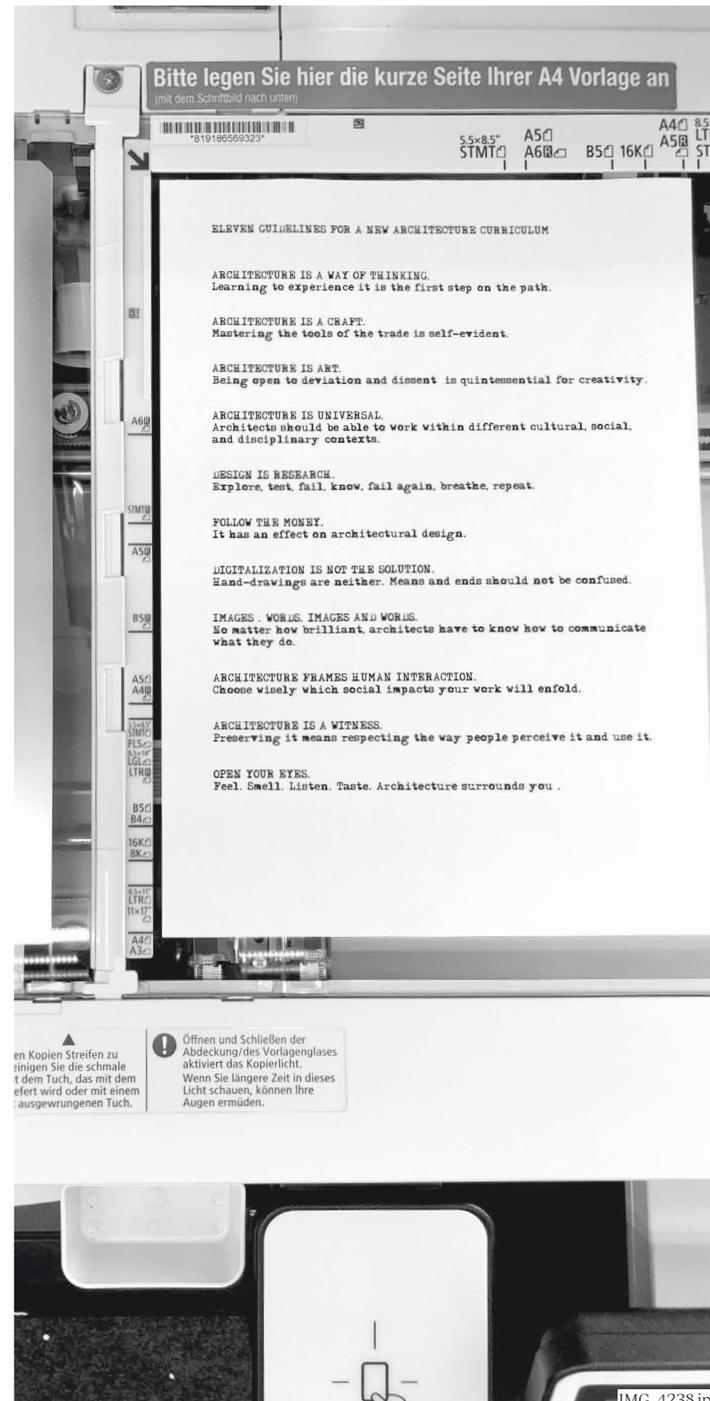
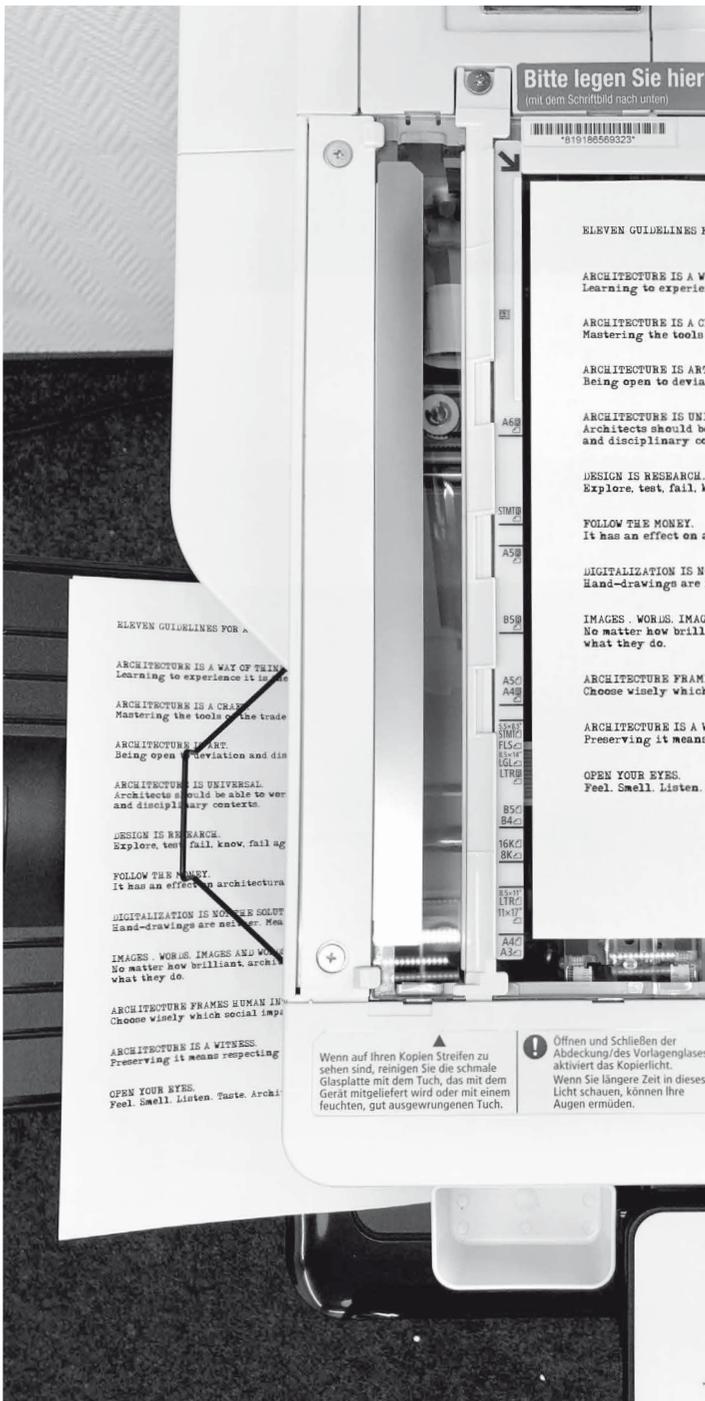


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Developing an instinct for these situations cannot. Power and money relations are but a smaller part of what can be called the social scale of architecture. This social scale reaches from the togetherness of a shared flat to the conundrum of a city, from the negotiations with a family to build a house to the policies of a binational bridge building project, from the people's differing perceptions of historic and contemporary housing blocks to the decay of downtown Detroit and its inching rise. Working with different times – incorporating the old, being conscious of the now, projecting the future – is a quality inherent to architecture. Working with different scales, from the technical details of a hinge to an urban masterplan, is so, too. The scalability of architecture thinking is also applicable to its social dimensions. Working within social structures can be seen as a burden. It can be seen as a responsibility. But first and foremost, it is an absolute condition precedent of every architectural production. After studying architecture, students should not only be able to build, but to build with the social impact of all architectural activity in mind.<sup>[7]</sup> Architecture education needs to go both back to its historic roots as a universal discipline and go on ahead to the technical, social, cultural, and political potentials of the now and push them further into something new.



Endnotes

- [1] Karl Popper, 'Three Worlds' (delivered at The University of Michigan, April 7, 1978), in: Sterling McMurrin (Ed.): The Tanner Lecture on Human Values. (Cambridge: 1980), 141–167, p. 143
- [2] Ibid., p. 144
- [3] See Jürgen Habermas, Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns. Band I: Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung. (Frankfurt: 2016 [1981]), p. 117–118
- [4] 'When we attribute a certain size, position, and distance to things in space, we are not thereby expressing a simple datum of sensation but are situating the sensory data in a relationship of pure judgement. Every articulation in space presupposes an articulation in judgement: differences in position, size, and distance can only be grasped and assigned because the separate sensory impressions are differently regarded by the judgment, because a different significance is imputed to them.' Ernst Cassirer, Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume Two: Mythical Thought. (New Haven/London: 1955), p. 30
- [5] 'To speak with Thomas Pynchon: 'If they can get you asking the wrong questions, they don't have to worry about answers.' Thomas Pynchon, Gravity's Rainbow, (London: 1973), p. 255
- [6] See Georg Vrachliotis, Architekturforschung, in: Hochschule Luzern (Hg.), Architekturopädagogiken. Ein Glossar. (Zürich: 2019), p. 24
- [7] 'An attitude that can be called love: 'L'architettura è un atto pubblico, è un'espressione della nostra civiltà, è un gesto d'amore verso la società nella quale viviamo.' Ludovica Molo, 'Amore', in: Hochschule Luzern (Hg.), Architekturopädagogiken. Ein Glossar. (Zürich: 2019), p. 18