
The Community of Scholars and the Culture of Silence

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Source: *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984-), Vol. 46, No. 2 (Nov., 1992), pp. 124-125

Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1425209>

Accessed: 25/09/2008 22:23

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Course: It makes sense for Bonn to Recognize Croatia." *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1992.

8. Anthony Lewis, "Abroad at Home: The New World Order," Op-Ed Sunday, *The New York Times*, May 17, 1992.

9. "La Serbie a un comportement dictatorial." Interview with Alain Finkielkraut, *Le Point*, no. 1001, November 23, 1991.

10. For the full story of this massacre, in which the "Serbian propaganda machine, having laid waste to this town for months, added desecration to devastation," see Anna Husarska, "The Dead," *New Republic* (Dec. 16, 1991):

11. Michael Meyer, "Yugoslavia Divided: Mass Migrations." *Newsweek*, December 9, 1991, p. 38.

12. Stephen Engelberg, "Villagers in Croatia Recount Massacre by Serbian Forces." *The New York Times*, December 19, 1991.

13. "The Sacking of Croatia." Editorial, Op-Ed page, *The New York Times*, September 22, 1991.

14. Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (New York: Penguin, 1941), p. 243.

15. *ibid.* (see n. 11)

16. The *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 1991. This inexplicable statement was made two weeks after the bombing of Dubrovnik had been shown on nationwide television (November 15, 1991). CNN and McNeil-Lehrer had broadcast 11-1/2 minutes of an ITN film by Paul Davies on the systematic destruction of Dubrovnik.

17. Alexandra Tuttle, "Croatia's Art and Architecture Buried in Rubble," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 16, 1992: A-11.

18. Zagreb, *Vjesnik*, Nov. 14, 1991: 9.

19. There have been speculations. In part, our inaction might be explained by US investments in Belgrade, especially Lawrence Eagleburger's dealings with Yugo car imports; in part, it might be due to state-run Serbian television and its carefully censored news; in part, it might result from the Serbian government becoming a client of the famous British advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi. The agency upgraded the Serbian public image which had been badly tarnished by wanton violence and reborn Chetnik terrorist activity.

20. *C.A.A. News* (Newsletter of the College Art Association), vol. 17, no. 2 (March/April 1992), p.1.

21. Rose Macaulay, *The Pleasure of Ruins* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), pp. 453-55.

The Community of Scholars and the Culture of Silence

By the nature of their calling, scholars owe allegiance under two banners. The first of these is the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, and the second is *publication*, the process of making their findings available so they can become the substance of debate and dispute concerning value and relevance. Among a community of scholars, therefore, the virtue of silence is attached only to such reflective thought and practice as may be pursued in detachment. Whenever it becomes necessary to test the precepts of knowledge and wisdom, then the veil of silence must be lifted in order that the entire community may share in the public evaluation of individual explorations.

The merit of scholarship lies *both* in the private excavations of the scholar working in library, laboratory, or field *and* in that individual scholar's sharing of those discrete discoveries with the whole communion of scholars. Importantly, this communion of scholars must include immediate colleagues. Research without the trials of discourse and application represents only half of the equation: its merit is uncertain and its value thereby limited.

The communion of scholars shares at least one prerequisite with the communion of saints, and that is the necessity for a true sense of community, an active sharing in the spirit of wisdom. In a monastery a monk's private prayer may well be efficacious for personal development, but it is the monastic community's devotion to the common welfare that allows it to flourish in the spirit of wisdom. Within the monastery the rule of silence is balanced by the community's sharing of a common faith, which is acted out in the form of communal eating and spiritual exercises. Without this communion of spirit in the monastery, the very spirit of wisdom itself—*hagia sophia*—no contemplation or effort or even aspiration can achieve the

spirituality that is the essence of life in a monastic community.

Our modern community of scholars is the natural inheritor of this spirit of communion, of *hagia sophia*. The rule of silence—of private meditation and obligatory sequestration in individual cells—must be balanced by the parallel rule of communion. If the rule of silence is not complemented by the benefits of disputation, then we achieve only half of the equation in our search for knowledge and wisdom.

Knowledge and wisdom must always be fully tested in the fire of debate. Those who impose the rule of silence upon a community of scholars, at the same time denying those scholars the essential catalyst of open communion, do so because they fear the consequences that open debate of knowledge and wisdom will bring. Their response to the perceived "dangers" of continuous scrutiny and questioning by colleagues is to create an intellectual vacuum—a *culture of silence*.

This culture of silence is imposed by anti-intellectual administrators *not* through the application of genuine scholarly values *but* with the aid of carrot-and-stick techniques. By the use of such methods, these dictators of the culture of silence not only eliminate academic debate, but also suppress all questioning of their dubious ways and means. Such a culture of silence breeds *not* a love of knowledge and scholarship *but* a fear of rewards and punishment (see Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*). Anti-intellectual administrators attempt to write off the spirit of communion and collegiality by dismissing it as "mere conviviality." Because these puritans cannot comprehend the sheer joy of digging for knowledge and wisdom, they cannot tolerate the pleasures of debating this archeology.

But no proposition, argument, or motive escapes the true scholar's scrutiny. The true scholar, seeking *hagia sophia*, rejoices in this search. In contrast, an academic slave

bends at the whiplash in the oppressive culture of silence. Denied the sense of community and the spirit of communion, the academic slave is incarcerated in a solitary cell, only hoping that private prayer will merit the master's approval. If such slaves are unwilling to question their masters, how can we possibly expect them to ask those critical questions that will help unearth knowledge and wisdom?

When the rule of silence is unrelieved by communal discourse and debate, the communion of scholars is replaced by a culture of silence. This culture of silence constructs a prison in which both scholars and ideas are incarcerated and held hostage. Whenever scholars and ideas are not joined in a state of complete intellectual freedom, we cannot, by definition, have a true university. By imposing a culture of silence, academic administrators deny the very process of intellectual communion that a university exists to nurture.

In part, of course, the computer is responsible for this culture of silence. Marshall McLuhan forecasted that his "electronic village" would bring the whole world into closer contact. But to be connected to a terminal is not the same as being connected to each other, either in mind or spirit. The modern scholar, with a personal computer, bounces ideas not off colleagues but off a screen. In this sense we are in danger of being connected only as lines are linked in a diagram. It has become common practice to reduce human communication to points drawn on a network, effectively reducing scholarly exchange to the whirrings of a laser printer.

If the community of scholars is to be protected against the effects of the culture of silence in our universities, it must be through accepting that *life is not a diagram*. Neither the life of the mind, nor the social intercourse upon which that life depends, can be reduced to the abstraction of a graphic symbol.

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Tricks

I shall describe the various tricks or stratagems without regard to questions of objective truth or falsity; for that is a matter on which we have no assurance, and which cannot be determined previously. Moreover, in every disputation or argument on any subject we must agree about something; and by this, as a principle, we must be willing to judge the matter in question. We cannot argue with those who deny principles: *Contra negatum principia non est disputandum*.

—Arthur Schopenhauer

Stratagems

I

"This project makes me want to go to the bathroom!" and with that, exit the room, returning to hear the final comments in silence.

II

Comment lastly and reluctantly about the part of the project that is obviously most important to the student, ". . . and I suppose we *should* talk about the giant salt-shaker."

III

"If you spent more time on this project and less time tying that tie we might have something to talk about."

IV

Sequester the review, thereby removing external, possibly damaging attacks. By providing the students with a single view, the danger of other influences is avoided.

V

Be very interested in drawings and models of previous or future projects to indicate a lack of interest in the ongoing presentation.

VI

Stand and approach, very closely, the drawings or models of the project at hand while

the student is presenting. Remain standing and watch the student present.

VII

Stay seated, request the student to hand the model to you, lift and press it to your face. Smell the model.

VIII

Sit on the chair backward to indicate a casual attitude toward the formal critique.

IX

Always be the first to speak, setting the tone for the critique.

X

Always speak last.

XI

Relegate other jurors' criticisms as secondary to your larger criticism.

XII

Cite obscure references from other disciplines to avoid direct attacks on ill-defined criticism while confounding the audience.

XIII

Attack poor craftsmanship and lack of completion. "It is difficult to respond to this project in its present state of incompleteness."

XIV

Attack fine craftsmanship and obsessive completion as an unwillingness to allow possible development of the project as an investigation.

XV

Attack the misalignment between what is spoken and what is presented. Question the etymology or the definitions of terms. "That looks more like a gutter than an aqueduct!"

XVI

Nickname the projects as they are reviewed, and refer back to them as the critique continues as a way of coding and delimiting. "What is this? The Garden of Death?"