

Patkau lecture

'Circumstantial Imagination'

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Over the years when presenting the work of our office my partner, Patricia, and I have made an argument for architecture as *form-finding*, as something shaped by circumstance. We have described how at the outset of our practice, we would often initiate a project by searching for what we called the "found potential" of the project: those aspects of site, climate, building context, program, or local culture, for example, that would facilitate the development of an architectural form which is evocative of circumstance. The result of this approach was that individual projects often took on distinct identities in response to circumstance, and consequently the formal relationship between our projects was loose at best. To us this was an appropriate expression of the diversity within which we live.

More recently we have approached our work on the basis of a somewhat more completely expressed notion that architecture arises from the synthesis of circumstantial considerations through an act of imagination. This act of imagination can take many forms; for Patricia and me, it can be personal and idiosyncratic, however, it is more commonly an expression of cultural meaning or purpose, an expression of formal analogy, and/or an expression of environmental response and of construction and technology – the more inclusive the imagination is to the diversity of circumstances which surround the project, the more complete the work of architecture.

At the same time I must say that over the last decade or so Patricia and I have become increasingly dis-satisfied with some of the limitations of our situation as professional architects in Canada.

Architecture as a discipline is extremely broad-based and inclusive. Art and science as it is often described, architecture can include almost everything the human mind can contemplate. However as constituted in Canada, as a professional practice, competence and excellence of execution are inevitably valued more than invention and emotional content. This is the divide, in Canada and much of the developed world – especially the English-speaking world – which separates architecture from the other visual arts. I find this separation deeply troubling.

I would like to conclude my lecture with a group of small research projects through which we have begun to directly address this concern.