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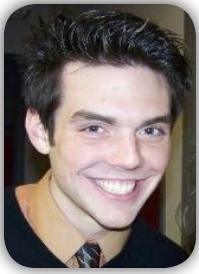
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Marc Gannon

Process of Writing, Process of Design

The subject of architecture is often analyzed and compared to disciplines such as art, engineering, and construction. What it is not compared to often, is writing. During the fall of 2009, I enrolled in an Honors Seminar class titled *Modern Tales of Humanity: The International Short Story*. I am an architecture major and I hoped this class would offer relief from the stresses of my studio classes, etc. In this class, our professor chose to present us with intriguing stories from across the world. We would read 2-3 stories before each class, and come ready to discuss the topics presented in each. He encouraged us to look deeply into each writing and analyze common themes that were associated with stories that spanned many generations and many continents.

At the end of the semester, we were challenged to write a term paper that dealt with some of the stories that we studied. I chose the topic of “approach” and compared the approach to writing a short story with the approach to designing architecture. I found through my studies that the two were very similar. Should an architect approach a project with an end result already in mind, or should he work out problems one by one and create a structure that evolves out of certain rules he creates for himself along the way? Similar to this is the question of whether a writer should determine the outcome of a story before starting or start writing and let ideas and the outcome evolve as the story progresses.

I found that there were many opinions about how an end result should come about in architecture and writing and that this was a frequent topic of discussion in both the architecture and writing worlds. The process of “designing” a short story is brought into a person’s life at a very young age. “The writing process” is a concept that we adhere to until we are well into high school. Then, of course, we start to question the legitimacy of the process: Why can’t we just make it up as we go along? Do we really have to begin with an end in mind? In the discipline of architecture, students are faced with a similar problem. Throughout history, architects have individually found ways to create architecture and each have their own arguments that can support their particular way. Students must go through the process of learning their own way of designing by conforming to professors each semester who have very different ideas about how architecture should be accomplished: “Form Follows Function,” Design Models, evolution of architecture from the past, etc.

I chose three architects and three short story writers on whom to focus as I began my study. Writers such as Bobbie Ann Mason, Edgar Allen Poe, and Chris Holbrook each

has his or her own, distinctive writing process which comes through in the style of their writing. The idea of comparing the writing process to an aspect of life has intrigued many people and authors throughout the years. The design process has been the topic of many discussions among various architects for centuries. LeCorbusier, Mies Van Der Rohe, and Louis Sullivan have all commented on and written manifestos on the design process and its importance. These six people provided perfect examples for me to showcase the similarities of each discipline’s process of obtaining an end result.

In my essay, “Processing your Project, Designing a Story,” I detailed each person and pointed out their stances on various issues in the design and short story worlds. Architects Le Corbusier and Mies van Der Rohe show a very opposite approach to designing architecture. Mies looks at the process of design and sets the goal of “form,” meaning in his designs, he will not worry about the resulting form of the building until he has accomplished all the necessities in designing it, then his outcome will be the final form. Le Corbusier, however, says that the resulting form of architecture is important, and worked throughout his life to further his points on architecture. Both of these architects were influenced by Louis Sullivan, who coined the phrase “form (ever) follows function”, but over time, Le Corbusier began finding attributes of his work that he deemed more pleasing than others (such as the piloti, rooftop garden/terrace, free façade, open plan, and strip windows). These five attributes were held up by him in his book *Vers une architecture* (The Five Points on Architecture). This led him away from the ‘form follows function’ idea and into the realm of a resulting form.

Should an architect approach a project with an end result already in mind, or should he work out problems one by one and create a structure that evolves out of certain rules he creates for himself along the way?

The three writers that I spoke of in my essay create differing opinions of how to approach telling a story. Holbrook and Mason show a similar approach in process to writing. Both are natives of Kentucky and base much of their writing on the experiences they had in their younger days in the state. In Mason’s memoir “Clear Springs”, she talks hauntingly of her younger days growing up in the rural area of Western Kentucky. This has unintentionally affected their writing styles. Mason has stated that many of her stories “just come to her” as she writes. During our class, I had the opportunity

to meet Mason when she came to a discussion on her work. She seemed timid and very kind-hearted about her approach to writing. When asked by our professor if she was in some way creating a story based on the “hauntings of her past,” she seemed a bit puzzled and replied with a kind, “No, it just comes to me.” Later, when I was deciding on my topic for this research, my professor told me that many writers don’t often comment on their approach and I remembered how I could see that attribute in Mrs. Mason. In an interview, Chris Holbrook said of his approach to writing, “It usually doesn’t come until I’ve gone through a tortuous process of writing and realizing that a lot of what I’ve written is not something that I’m going to keep. The process of writing itself is the process of me finding the story.” Edgar Allen Poe described writing much as Holbrook does: a “methodical” process (much like architecture). However, this attribute that Poe claims as his method of writing has been debated by many critics of his work. The fact that few drafts of his stories and poems have been found makes critics doubt whether he really did work through his ideas over and again in a methodical way. Some claim he had a charrette style of approach to writing. The three authors, I speculate, would probably approach the architecture process in a way similar to Corbusier: they would discover and invent the process as they move through design.

From this point, I began shifting my focus to how an architect would react to a story. I am currently looking at stories such as *Cathedral* by William Carver, *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins, and *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner. These stories all have a relevance to space and place and contain a revelation or “final release” that takes place after the protagonist becomes enlightened.