Architecture Depends (MIT Press)

Synopsis

Architecture depends -- on what? On people, time, politics, ethics, mess: the real world. Architecture, Jeremy Till argues with conviction in this engaging, sometimes pugnacious book, cannot help itself; it is dependent for its very existence on things outside itself. Despite the claims of autonomy, purity, and control that architects like to make about their practice, architecture is buffeted by uncertainty and contingency. Circumstances invariably intervene to upset the architect's best-laid plans -- at every stage in the process, from design through construction to occupancy. Architects, however, tend to deny this, fearing contingency and preferring to pursue perfection. With Architecture Depends, architect and critic Jeremy Till offers a proposal for rescuing architects from themselves: a way to bridge the gap between what architecture actually is and what architects want it to be. Mixing anecdote, design, social theory, and personal experience, Till's writing is always accessible, moving freely between high and low registers, much like his suggestions for architecture itself.

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Customer Reviews

Frankly, I found the book tedious - Richard Weston's review summed it up in a better way than I could :"His title may sound slightly obtuse, but Jeremy Till's argument is readily summarised. Architecture depends on all kinds of circumstances outside the architect's control, yet most of us resist or deny this contingency by retreating from the everyday world where "mess is the law". This

begins in the tribal longhouse of the educational studio, where students learn an "alien vocabulary" and develop the arrogance that Till believes pervades the profession. The consequences are manifest on every hand, from declarations of architectural autonomy to reliance on "necessarily reductive" sketches; from the poverty of Vitruvian and Corbusian theory to the rigidities of the RIBA's Plan of Work; from Mies's "opportunist entanglement with the Nazis" to the vacuities of computer-generated forms.Rather than attempting to impose order on an increasingly unruly world, Till argues that architects need to embrace contingency and re-engage with everyday experience. In marshalling his arguments for this practice of architecture as transformative agency, he draws on an impressive range of recent literature. Quotations and names, many unfamiliar to me, come thick and fast -- Agnes Heller, Alberto Melucci, Johannes Fabian, Niklas Luhmann, Carol Gilligan, Roberto Mangabeira Unger and the all-pervasive Zygmunt Bauman -- but the basic argument has a familiar sixties-retro ring. Ivan Illich's critique of professionalism; Venturi's advocacy of messy vitality and Main Street; Cedric Price's emphasis on the brief and flexibility; Habraken and Hertzberger's open-ended engagement with users -- in these and other ways we have, as Till acknowledges, drunk much of his new wine from old bottles.

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