

Quilting Space: Alternative Models for Architectural and Construction Practice

FRANCES BRONET
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Conventional architectural design and construction in contemporary U.S. education has little to do with the actual lives of the workers involved in designing and building. In this paper I present alternative models of building and making for pedagogy and practice. This work is based on a sequence of first year architecture design experiences where normative design and construction practice is compared to a practice based on negotiation-determined construction. It examines the possibilities for social embeddedness in the configuration of the constructed object. These exercises are examined with respect to fundamental principles of both the Arts and Crafts and the recent Appropriate Technology movements.

At Rensselaer we are quite provocative in challenging the status quo with respect to the nature of eventual inhabitation of our projects. This project demonstrates how

the actual process of building can affect the early design constructs. It also shows how students can build into their process their own level of expertise as well as a malleable condition for construction and for eventual occupation. This concept of “quilting” was one where the builders had control over the technology, integrating collaborative design into a flexible project determined by their human, material and cultural resources. The process revealed an economy that connected quality of life with meaningful work production. The outcomes raise specific questions about how students understand their role in the development of material culture.

Editor's note: The full text of this paper was not available at the time of publication.