Abstract Title:
Architectural Technique and the Deformation of Dialogue/Discourse

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Name:
Marc J Neveu, PhD

Position:
Assistant Professor

Affiliation:
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

Phone:
805.756.5207

e-mail:
marcjneveu@gmail.com

Correspondence Address:
Department of Architecture
College of Architecture and Environmental Design
California State Polytechnic University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407-0282
United States
Beauty is back. Technique is in. Fabrication is fashionable. In the rush to stock our departments with the latest prototyping gear, can anyone remember why we are doing this?

In recent years there has been an unquestionable rise of technique-based production in architectural education and practice. The recent Matters of Sensation show at the Artist’s Space in New York celebrated the work of a new wave of architects intent on exploring the potential of fabrication techniques. A quote from the curator of the show, however, explains the participants’ relative disinterestedness in any form of theoretical position:

“Unaligned in their interests and bored by old debates, the group of young architects featured in Matters of Sensation produce work that attempts to answer no questions, solve no problems, and broach no oppositions. It is, rather, about a fascination with architectural forms that induce sensation—about fantasy, intimacy, and sci-fi, and, above all, about experiencing pleasure.”

This certainly seems like a good bit of fun, solipsistic perhaps, but still fun. Such a position (or, as they may want you to believe, lack of a position) is, however, problematic on a number of levels; doesn’t all architecture produce sensation? How does one (architect or other) decide between relative sensations? How does one know if the work does indeed produce pleasure or induce fantasy? The work presented in the show is certainly based on novel techniques, is surface oriented, often repetitive, rarely about enclosure, and very much whimsical. By removing any recourse to discourse, however, the architects in the show also remove the question of judgment. Lest we succumb to the barbarism of technicians as described by Ortega y Gasset, can we not ask, why and not only how?

If one looks a bit deeper into the (often incestuous) roots of those in the show, there are indeed connections. Beyond the graduate school and academic relationships, many of the participants fall back to Delueze’s reading of Bacon to find theoretical support for the work. This paper will first demonstrate the connection of the work presented in the Matters of Sensation show back to Deleuze and then compare that work to Merleau-Ponty’s characterization of Cezanne’s doubt. The intention of the paper is to critique such a position (implicit or stated) presented by those represented in the Matters of Sensation show as not only shortsighted, but indeed unethical.