Some Remembrances of the August 1996 Meeting of Building Technology Educators in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Gil Snyder
July, 1996

The conference took place in the three-year old Architecture and Urban Planning Building located on the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus at the beginning of August 1996. Milwaukee’s signature building, the Art Museum by Calatrava, was still three years away from being built. UWM was known as an “ink-on-Mylar” school and the computer was still a fairly novel addition to our curriculum, especially given the budgetary constraints of state institutions. The conference was organized primarily by fax, since E-mail existed, but wasn’t widely available.

The cover of the August 1996 Architecture magazine (PA had recently met its demise) featured Eisenman’s Arnoff Center at the University of Cincinnati. In that same issue was an interesting debate pitting Robert Gutman advocating for “Redesigning Architecture Schools” against Reed Kroloff noting “How the Profession is Failing the Schools.” The central point of contention in that discussion was indeed over “technical proficiency.”

Gutman wrote “that the building process often goes more smoothly by circumventing the architect and dealing directly with contractors and construction managers….Architecture schools have contributed astonishingly little to the relief of this divided fate.” To which Kroloff essentially responded, “The profession, it seems, has long been confused about the difference between education and training.”

While not exactly the impetus for the conference, that series of thought pieces in Architecture magazine accurately summarize the background against which the conference was set. The convening of the conference itself was actually the brainchild of Ed Allen, Linda Sanders (at the time Dean of Cal Poly Pomona), and Richard Kellogg (emeritus professor from the U of Arkansas), with some help from Gil Snyder who was then Chair of the UWM architecture department.

The idea was to bring together educators in architecture schools to discuss strategies for integrating design and technology in the curriculum of their schools. To accomplish this task, the conference was divided into workshops and presentations. The workshops were purposefully hands-on, while the presentations were selected to showcase teaching pedagogies and examples of design and technology integration. Everyone showed slides, if they didn’t use overheads.

There were three demonstration workshops. Ed Allen gave a spectacular workshop on Graphic Statics that had everyone in the room convinced they were Gaudi by the end. Mike Utzinger from UWM helped Ed out with that presentation that involved “hands-on” plotting and drawing.

Fuller Moore’s presentation centered on the use of physical models used to elucidate structural principles. The most memorable
moment was his use of a “shake table” to
simulate earthquake loading.

We had to make special arrangements for
the third workshop presenter, who came
fully loaded with computer models of struc-
tural behavior, a decided rarity at the time. I
remember having to contact the central
Audiovisual Department of the University to
obtain the “special” equipment Chris Lub-
ckemann required.

Interspersed among these three workshops
were a series of presentations dealing with
methods for effectively integrating design
and technology into architectural curricula.
These presentations were excellent, and
focused generally on the teaching of struc-
tures.

By way of example, Gary Black’s presenta-
tion on structural behavior in bridge design
took everyone’s breath away. He showed us
a digital model of one of Maillart’s bridges,
demonstrating how stiffness in the deck on
the top of the assembly took away bending
even with pin connections. His presentation
was a harbinger of things to come in many
ways.

Dick Kellogg spoke about the efficacy and
economy of demonstrating structural behav-
ior with simple models made using polysty-
rene foam (PSF). I still have my copy of
“Demonstrating Structural Behavior” that
Dick made available at the conference. Mike
Utzinger’s integration of structural design
with architectural design in a series of prob-
lem sets he developed for teaching ad-
anced structures at UWM were a big hit.

Some discussion related to building con-
struction was held, but generally within the
context of its relationship to the teaching of
structures. There were also two presenta-
tions on design/build studios.

A general exhibition was mounted in the
main floor hallway of the architecture
school. Both presenters and participants
displayed teaching materials here for the
assembly. We set up a small photographic
copy stand in a corner of one of the pres-
tation rooms for general use over the
course of the conference in sharing slides
by copying them. That was a popular activ-
ity.

Discussion was lively and everyone was
very excited by the meeting. I can’t be sure,
but I think we took everyone for bowling and
beer at Landmark Lanes towards the end of
our time together. After some invigorating
days sharing teaching techniques and
speculating on future directions, we had all
earned a “tall cool one.” It’d be hard to leave
Milwaukee without doing that.

(As remembered by Gil Snyder, with some
help from Mike Utzinger and Jim Dicker.
Apologies all around for omissions and de-
clining memory.)