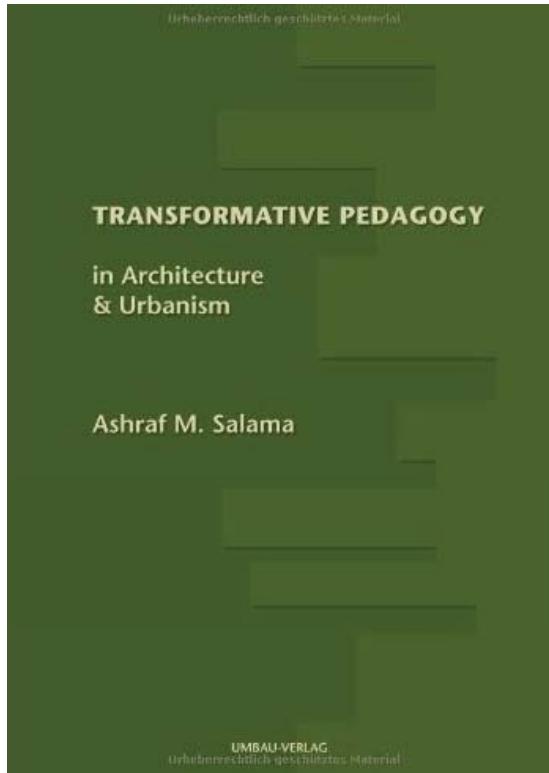


REVIEW OF ASHRAF SALAMA'S BOOK: TRANSFORMATIVE PEDAGOGY IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM

Publisher: UMBAU VERLAG, Paperback: 208 pages including illustrations,
Solingen, Germany 2009 ISBN 978-3937954-042

Amira Elnokaly



This is rather an interesting book on pedagogy in architectural and urban education by Ashraf M. Salama. *Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism* represents a new cycle of pedagogical debate on architecture and urbanism, setting the stage for debating future visions of transformative pedagogy and its impact on design education.

The ritualistic aspects of design education criticized in this book is culled from a wide spectrum of issues Salama has explored in his teaching and writing over a period of two decades. In the preface of the book, Professor Henry Sanoff, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Architecture, North Carolina State University, NC, USA, describes Salama's book as "...an important book because it probes into the motivations of design educators by placing a mirror before them and allows for a critical examination of the design studio. Dr. Salama paves the way for design educators to openly discuss and debate the delivery system of architectural education and its impact on the future role of the architect...".

Salama's Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism discusses balancing the creative act required for creating responsive environments and the social and environmental responsibilities that should be embedded in this act. This engaging book reviews the understanding of knowledge and the way in which it is produced and utilized, what the components of such knowledge are, and what are the learning processes and social practices that can be used to transmit it.

Being an architecture design educator myself I totally agree with Prof. Nikos A. Salingaros who presented the foreword for Dr. Salama's book stating that Salama's insights and experience is valuable for world architecture. Reading through the book, I can retain how extremely useful this book can be for architectural educators, students, as well as administrators worldwide. They can use this book to review and hopefully adapt and rethink today's architecture, which is defined by the fashion of the moment and start to seriously consider constraints imposed by culture, climate and materials. The work presented in this book can be used to optimistically adapt the present educational systems towards satisfying those requirements. When I first read Prof. Salingaros's preface, I noted that this is a must read book especially where he states, "...Contemporary architectural academia, however, is worried that the authority of science could impose absolute restraints on form, thus ending design creativity as we know it. That is a misconception. Science has much to teach architecture, and gives the average designer the ability to invent forms beyond the limits of current knowledge... these new technologies have never been applied in a way so as to break out of the confining boundaries of the institution, class, or teacher's limitations."

The book boldly reviews the typical tutor's subjective hidden agendas within architectural education and more precisely the design studio teaching. It challenges some of today's architecture studios that are dominated by subjective, elitist, ideological, and master-apprentice models that aggrandize invention over innovation and radical individualism over collaborative processes and societal needs.

Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism is divided into five chapters, presenting a wide range of innovative and practical methodologies for teaching architectural and urban design. It tracks the roots of architectural education and offers several contrasting ideas and strategies of design teaching practices. These chapters feature •A New Theory for Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism; •The Architect, the Profession, and Society; •The Conventional Approach to Studio Teaching Practice; •Against the Conventional Studio Pedagogy; •Empowering Transformative Pedagogy: A Knowledge-Based Architectural and Urban Design Studio.

Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism by Ashraf M. Salama is a requisite working resource for studio tutors and lecturers and all those concerned with design education. It is also an excellent resource for policy makers or students of those disciplines.

Having read both editions of this book, I can conclude that it is a classical piece. In this latest contribution, Salama has successfully managed to keep it up to date, which is not easy in today's fast changing world. Presenting different models, cases, and experiments, the book calls for expanding the knowledge base in the architectural design studio. It proposes a spectrum of supporting techniques that can be

regarded as a new paradigm in teaching design while delineating the shift and the transition of design pedagogy that is needed toward responsive architectural and urban education.

The introduction to this book, *A New Round of Pedagogical Discourse in Architecture and Urbanism*, starts with a conspicuous quote of Thomas Fisher, "To remain silent about the values represented in what we do, either out of mistaken belief that professionals must remain ethically neutral or out of romantic dismissal of all normative values, is to eliminate one of the main reasons for the profession's very existence." (Thomas Fisher, 2006: 30). This is an inspiring quote that Salama has decided to start his book with, and reflects upon the content, myths and discourses articulated, adopted, and presented in this book.

In Chapter 1, *A New Theory for Transformative Pedagogy in Architecture and Urbanism*, Salama starts by debating the reasons behind the introduction of a new theory and answers the question *Why Introduce a New Theory?* This chapter is divided into a number of sections where Salama scrutinizes the current policies on studio culture. He also presents some alarming figures on studio teaching practices later in the chapter. Extracting conclusions from these discussions, he takes us into the negative impacts of the current culture of architectural education and the shift in studio culture from the mechanistic pedagogy to the systemic. He concludes this interesting chapter that is full of challenge with strategic accommodation of the theory presented at the beginning of his book.

Chapter 2, *The Architect, the Profession, and Society*, starts with shedding the light

on the significant changes that occurred to the architectural profession during the past thirty years, in response to the change in the environmental needs of society resulting from population growth, increased urbanization, and advanced technology, the emergence of aging societies, and environmental concerns. Salama avows to present a new view of the role of the architect in society in order to be able to define the impact of this role on the needs of architectural education and design studio teaching practices. He follows this interesting debate depicting the architects' view of the profession, and how and in what ways they have changed since the 1980s. He then presents some interesting studies of mainstream and star architects. Before he ends the chapter, he offers a review of post occupancy evaluation and user participation as important paradigms that should be included in the education process of architecture and urbanism.

In Chapter 3, Salama discusses *The Conventional Approach to Studio Teaching Practice its Roots, Origin, Evolution and its Educational System*. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the conventional approach to studio teaching where he disputes the Impacts of and Challenges to the Conventional Approach. He then presents a holistic world-class survey of architectural design teaching practices, policies and admissions. He concludes by regional explorations of Africa and the Middle East sustainability issues in the curriculum and the required content of knowledge. A thorough investigation of the impact of international paradigmatic trends on Arab architectural education is also presented to highlight contextual particularities of education and pedagogy in that part of the world.

Against the Conventional Studio Pedagogy, Chapter 4 examines the variations in design teaching practices. Salama made his main objective in this chapter to identify different teaching styles that can provide insights toward the teaching methods of the conventional studios. He puts emphasis on several revolutionary models that have been developed and employed by different studio instructors worldwide, who attempt to expand the role of the architect to be more responsive to the environmental needs of contemporary societies, which emerged as a reaction to the dominance of the conventional approach to studio teaching. This chapter is structured in three sections. The first offers a systematic critical analysis of ten models of teaching architectural design described in terms of how each model views architectural and urban design as a mental, physical, and professional activity; how they employ a specific studio process, and how they adopt and adapt different modes of teaching and learning. The second section discusses these models highlighting commonalities and differences shaping studio processes and teaching and learning styles. The third section articulates and discusses Salama's personal reactions to the conventional studio teaching pedagogy by introducing a process oriented design studio teaching model.

The last chapter of this book Chapter 5, Empowering Transformative Pedagogy: A Knowledge-Based Architectural and Urban Design Studio, presents a summary of issues discussed in the book. It provides a critical synthesis of design studio pedagogy and articulates an approach for expanding design studio contents, methods, and outcomes. The approach aims at empowering transformative pedagogy in

architecture and urbanism by establishing several constituents, scenarios, and techniques that help integrate an architect's creativity and his/her social responsibility by bridging the gap between research/knowledge and design. Salama's work emphasizes that the discourse on transformative pedagogy in architecture and urbanism asserts that the mission of a school of architecture or an urban design program should foster an environment that encourages exploration and critical thinking. The discussion throughout this chapter asserts that inquiry and investigation are now viewed as activities central to studio pedagogy in architecture design and urbanism, as a consequence advocating the true integration of research into teaching and knowledge into design.

Undoubtedly this is rather a proficient book, an original and genuine effort that addresses academics, practitioners, graduate students, and professional associations that make decisions about education. As a new round of pedagogical dialogue on architecture and urbanism, it resets the stage for debating aspects, rituals, and future visions of transformative pedagogy and their impact on design professions. While capturing the body of knowledge required for seeking this new form of pedagogy, the book introduces student-centered educational processes based on actual experiences that could ultimately transform this knowledge into guiding pedagogical principles and teaching practices toward a more responsive pedagogy in architecture and urbanism. I strongly recommend this book to my educator colleagues and students worldwide.