Delivered as a lecture at Columbia University in the spring of 1998, what follows is a revised and extended version of the introduction to Practice: Architecture, Representation and Technique, a book of essays to be published by G+J Arts. Standing as it does in front of a collection of essays written in the odd intervals between teaching and practice, my introduction sets out to define the place that writing and speculative thought play in the work of a practicing architect.

There can be no difference which doesn’t make a difference—no difference in abstract truth which does not express itself in a difference of concrete fact, and of conduct consequent upon the fact, imposed on somebody, somehow, somewhere, and some-when.

William James

Michael Speaks, who was kind enough to read a draft of the text, pointed out that there is a potential confusion in my argument. The critique is directed simultaneously at two positions nominally at odds with one another. On the one hand, I am skeptical of the current prestige granted to critical theory in architectural practice. (It would of course be disingenuous for me to protest too strongly. I am entirely aware of the paradox of an argument against theory conducted entirely in the language of academic theory.) What I do object to is what Speaks has referred to as dumb theory—the mechanical application of theory, a way of working that sees building as the simple resultant of abstract concepts produced elsewhere. Aside from aesthetic objections (to the obscurity of language and the visual poverty of the results) the problem here is that this work tends to close ranks, forming a protective phalanx against the contingencies of the real. Freighted with the baggage of big ideas, the rote application of theory produces work that tends to be ponderous and slow moving.

My critique should not, however, be read as an endorsement of conventional professional practice. What we could call, for the sake of symmetry, dumb practice (which dismisses theory) in fact operates entirely on the basis of unstated theoretical assumptions that unwittingly replicate the very structure of the academic practices supposedly repudiated. The normative assumptions of professional practice also weigh down the practice of architecture. They form a different kind of protective enclosure, in the form of codes, conventions and standards, which are today deformed to a breaking point as they attempt to accommodate the multiple and contradictory demands of the real.
In contrast to both of these positions, I propose a pragmatic realism that would embrace the complexity and unpredictability of the real. Architecture's inside and its outside, I would suggest, might be productively imagined as two open sets that intersect to form an indeterminate figure. As the landscape of the real shifts, so too the definition of architectural practice would have to shift, continually re-configuring the territory where the two overlap. Theory is defined here as an agent of doubt and uncertainty, and practice as the exercise of pragmatic imagination.

Finally, in an effort to come clean, I would have to confess that at one level what follows is nothing more than the description of a sensibility a desire for freshness, realism and straight-forwardness, a way of employing theory loosely, and at times improperly. This is a sensibility perhaps easier to identify today in other art forms. As fiction writer Frederick Barthelme has put it:

"I don't know where the presupposition that fiction traffics in big ideas comes from, but I take it as axiomatic that people who say they're carrying the big ideas of the day probably aren't. That's just good sense. If a fellow comes up to you at the gas station (or the library) and tells you he's the best-looking guy in the country, about the last thing you're going to think is, "you know, he's right." So here are my rules about big ideas: they're often big by reason of inflation, product of the airs of some poor soul with an ordinary idea and an enterprising imagination; even if they are genuinely big, they don't always look that way when you're right on top of them; a lot of times big ideas are after-the-fact things people make up to make sense of experience, that sense being a kind of statement of personal limitations; and in art, ideas are often inherent rather than attached." 1


In part what follows, then, is simply an attempt to take seriously Barthelme's proposition that in art, ideas are "inherent rather than attached."

The stakes, of course, are different for an architect. Architecture is necessarily marked by circumstance and situation. The practice of architecture is subject not only to material constraints (limits of form and medium that change only incrementally over time) but also to functional imperatives.
that differ radically from building to building. These variables are governed by complex political, social, and historical dynamics, and are open to continual revision. Almost unique among creative disciplines, architecture’s objective is given from the outside. Even in the most ideal of careers, the building program will be determined by agencies beyond the control of the individual architect. Moreover, architects today practice far from home, and each new site presents unfamiliar conditions. As creative subjects, architects react to these demands, inventing in response to occasion of the commission, specifying and particularizing a given set of abstract variables. The practice of architecture tends to be messy and inconsistent precisely because it has to negotiate a reality that is itself messy and inconsistent.

This lack of consistency is only partially offset by the tendency of conventional practice to repeat known solutions. Too often, contemporary practice oscillates between mechanical repetition and shallow novelty. Against this landscape of contingency, architectural theory has consistently been called upon to serve a unifying function. Without a larger ideological framework, it is argued, the architect runs the risk of reacting passively to the multiple and often contradictory demands of context, clients, regulating agencies, the media or economics. Architecture apparently needs a grand narrative in order not to be entirely consumed by these small narratives of opportunity and constraint.

And so what often happens is that in order to legitimize its repetitive procedures, practice appeals to a project: an overarching theoretical construct, defined from somewhere else and expressed in a language other than practice’s everyday discourse. Situated at a distance from the operational sites of technique, theory staked a claim on a world of concepts uncontaminated by real-world contingencies. The appearance of the architectural treatise in the Renaissance, for example, where normative codes were for the first time in the postclassical era set down in written form, marked a shift from the “ambulant science” of the medieval builder to the regulated culture of the “royal sciences.” A place for abstract thought about architecture, governed by the codes and conventions of discourse, was delineated apart from the building site. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have written: “In the nomad sciences, as in the royal sciences, we find the existence of a ‘plane,’ but not at all in the same way. The ground level plane of the Gothic journeyman is opposed to the metric plane of the architect which is off site and on paper.” More recently, theories of typology, tectonics, or historical precedent have been proposed as a means to regulate architecture’s prolific heterogeneity. Theory’s promise is to make up for what practice lacks: to confer unity on the disparate procedures of design and construction.

2. This distinction from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Chapter 12, 1227; ‘Treatise on Nomadology,’ *The War Machine*: ‘A distinction must be made between two types of science, of scientific procedures: one consists in reproducing, the other in following. The first involves reproduction, iteration and restituation, the other, involving iteration, is the sum of the itinerant, ambulant sciences... Reproduction implies the permanence of a fixed point of view that is external to what is reproduced: watching the flow from the bank.’ But following is different from the ideal of reproduction... ‘There are invariant, ambulant sciences that consist in following a flow in a circuitous field across which singularities are scattered like so many accidents/problems,’ p. 372.

The invention of theory and the codification of architecture as a discipline went hand in hand. For a Renaissance theorist like L. B. Alberti, the production of theory had a concrete political end: to incorporate architecture into the circumscribed body of the liberal arts. This could only be accomplished by differentiating architecture from journeyman craft, extending the domain of the royal sciences to architecture. For this codification to be effective, it was necessary to institute an opposition between the “speculative” and “practical” aspects of the arts. As Michel de Certeau has remarked, “Art is thus a kind of knowledge that operates outside the enlightened discourse it lacks.” The need for something called theory arises from the desire to think of the discipline in more abstract terms. A separate space for theory is defined in order to reflect on the nature of the discipline at a distance, while the possibility of cumulative or incremental change from within is held in check. Theory and practice are, under this formulation, equally rule bound: theory devoted to the production of rules, practice relegated to the implementation of those same rules. What the “royal sciences” provide to the arts, de Certeau concludes, are “constructed, regulated and thus ‘wrappable’ systems” organized from without on the basis of that which they themselves lack. The enlightened discourse of theory (scientific and generalizable) is contrasted to the mechanical techniques of practice. Today, this view persists in the form of a mandate for critical practices that would hold the individual instances of practice accountable to ideological criteria.
The conventional view (prevalent today in schools of architecture) understands theory as an abstraction: a set of ideas and “concepts” independent of any particular material instance or example. Practice, in turn, is understood as the object of theory. In this view, theory tends to envelop and protect practice, while practice excuses theory from the obligation to engage reality. Design is reduced to the implementation of rules set down elsewhere. Ironically, the separation that results is not dissimilar from the very structure of conventional practice supposedly challenged by theory. Conventional practice renounces theory, but, in so doing, simply reiterates unstated theoretical assumptions—assumptions that are perhaps all the more rigid for being unexamined. It works according to a series of enabling codes, which have been defined without reference to individual practices. These codes are modified in response to circumstance, but never challenged in practice. Theory imposes regulated ideological criteria over the undisciplined heterogeneity of the real, while the unstated assumptions of conventional practice enforce known solutions and safe repetitions. In both cases, small differences accumulate, but they never add up to make a difference.

4. Ibid.

However, the abstraction of theory from practice is a fiction that can never be sustained. Neither practice nor theory can be reduced to an object. Theories and practices are both produced in definable spaces, by active, conscious subjects. Theory itself is a practice, that is to say, a set of activities and procedures with a specific language and a known set of protocols. Its terms of discourse are defined by its own history and in relation to other practices through intertextual exchange. Theory’s medium is language, its primary activity is writing, and its preferred site is the academy.

Against this prevailing current, the revision proposed here is double. Practice needs to become more structured and at the same time more tractable. If conventional practice and theoretically driven critical practices are similarly structured, it cannot be a question of going beyond theory or of leaving theory behind. What is intended here is instead a notion of practice flexible enough to engage the complexity of the real, yet sufficiently secure in its own technical and theoretical bases to go beyond the simple reflection of the real as a given. Not a static reflection of concepts defined elsewhere (either the codes of professional practice or the dictates of ideologically driven theory) but a rigorous forward movement, capable of producing new concepts out of the hard logsics of architecture’s working procedures. Practice needs to find a realistic conceptual basis from which to cultivate meaningful differences. Ironically, practice (usually assumed to be unproblematically identified with reality) will discover new uses for theory only as it moves closer to the complex and problematic character of the real itself.

Hence, it is of little use to see theory and practice as competing abstractions and to argue for one over the other. Intelligent, creative practices—the writing of theory included—are always more than the habitual exercise of rules defined elsewhere. More significantly, practice is not a static construct, but is defined precisely by its movements and trajectories. There is no theory, there is no practice. There are only practices, which consist in action and agency. Practices unfold in time, and their repetitions are never identical. It is for this reason that the “know-how” of practice (whether of writing or design) is a continual source of innovation and change. Tactical improvisations accumulate over time to produce new models for operation. Nevertheless, these new patterns of operation produced in practice are always conditional. In as much as they derive from experience, they are always open to revision on the basis of new experiences or new data. Deliberately executed, architecture’s procedures are capable of producing systematic thought—serial, precise and clinical—something that resembles theory but that will always be marked by the constructive/creative criteria of practice.

Rather than the conventional theory/practice distinction, it might be more useful to distinguish broadly between practices that are primarily hermeneutic—that is, devoted to interpretation and the analysis of representations (law, history, criticism, psychoanalysis, etc.), and material practices—activities that transform reality by producing new objects or organizations of matter (engineering, urbanism, ecology, fashion, gardening or architecture). The vector of analysis in hermeneutic practices always points toward the past, whereas material practices analyze the present in order to
project transformations into the future. Writing is the primary medium of hermeneutic practices. Material practices, on the other hand, often involve operations of the translation, transposition or transcoding of multiple media. Although they work to transform matter, material practices necessarily work through the intermediary of abstract codes such as notation or calculation. Constantly mixing media in this way, material practices produce new concepts out of the materials and procedures of work itself, and not as a regulating code grafted onto the work from outside. Conceived as a material practice, architecture achieves a practica (and therefore provisional) unity inferred on the basis of its ensemble of procedures, rather than a theoretical unity conferred from without by ideology or discourse.

This program is more uncertain, but also more optimistic. The accumulate catalog of architecture’s rules and procedures suggests that a partial unity is given at the level of the discipline itself. Yet, unlike the conservative project that would see the structure of the discipline as a historically defined limit, the pragmatic know-how of technique does not necessarily respect precedent.5 The criterion of productivity simply bypasses outmoded working strategies, leaving the discipline open to new techniques that may in turn be incorporated into the catalog of architecture’s procedures.

5: There would appear to be two dominant positions today, with regard to this question of architecture’s limits, and the regulating power of the discipline. On the one hand, a conservative position says that architecture’s fundamental questions of space, structure, materials, and the rituals of inhabitation change little over time. Issues that cannot be resolved by reference to a known repository of techniques or forms are understood to be outside of, or beyond, architecture. The most thoughtful of these conservative positions would appear to be Giorgio Grassi’s. See his L’Architettura come Metanoia, Milan, 1980. Or the article “Vantaggio Continuato,” Oppositions 21, New York, 1981. On the other hand, a neoclassical position sees the structure of the discipline as a limit to be interrogated. Working on the basis of ideological criteria, or in response to technological change, neoclassical practices set out to transgress or reform disciplinary limits. The opposition of these two positions, as expressed in the issue of JAY that documented the confrontation of Peter Eisenman representing the neoclassical and Bruce/Herzog/DeMeuron/Thom representing the neonomicstic. New Urbanist. JAY: Sense and the Real World, New York, 1993. But both of these positions share a similar notion of the limits of architecture’s limits: they simply situate themselves on opposite sides of its boundaries. By contrast, a radically pragmatic position would maintain an indifference with regard to the perceived limits of architecture. It feels itself under no obligation either to affirm limits from within or to transgress them from without. Instead it would propose to work opportunistically, operating within the catalog of known solutions if productive techniques could be found, and outside it as necessary. The dilemma of architecture’s limit is faced by not choosing not to choose.

Such a notion of practice maintains a deep respect for history and for architecture’s past. Material practices unfold in time, confident in the logical structure of the discipline as a starting point, but never satisfied simply to repeat, or to execute, a system of rules defined elsewhere. Architecture’s limits are understood pragmatically— as a resource and an opportunity, and not as a defining boundary. The practitioner looks for performative multiplicities in the interplay between an open catalog of procedures and a stubbornly indifferent reality. On the other hand, material practices cannot be arbitrary or capricious. They are governed by the hard logic of matter and forces, which behave according to verifiable rules, but without regard for consistency or the conventions of rational expression.6 Under the pragmatics of practice, the fixed structure of the discipline is neither rejected nor affirmed. It is subject instead to a form of radical doubt.7 Refusing the safety of theory’s disembodied distance, practice is not defined by reference to the secure perimeter of a fixed discipline, but instead marked by the uncertainty of an ever shifting reference in the world itself. This is not a Cartesian doubt that works by process of elimination to arrive at a core of unshakable propositions. Rather, it is
tactic for dealing with an imperfect reality with a catalog of tools that is itself imperfect, or inadequate. 7

6. What I mean here could also be explained by another reference. Robin Evans, in discussing the supposed "rationality" of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion, gets it, as usual, exactly right. Evans contrasts the ad hoc structure of the Barcelona Pavilion in Antoni Gaudi's Sagrada Familia Chapel. There are two reasons why we must think the Barcelona Pavilion is a rational structure: Mies and it was, and it looks as if it is. It looks rational because we know what rationality looks like: precise, flat, regular, abstract, light and above all, correct. The image of rationality is unreliable, however. The Sagrada Familia Chapel has none of these attributes, yet it is consistent and logical in its structure. The entire chapel was to have been built up from an inert “circular” model made of wire and modeling clay. The model was wholly in tension. Turned upside down, it would produce a structure wholly in compression, thus avoiding persistent tension against which masonry has little resistance. This is a rational structure. By contrast, the structure and construction of the Barcelona Pavilion is procedural and innovative. In Mies, unlike in Wright and Le Corbusier, there is a "proper" of rational construction, which is given visual expression by means that do not always coincide with its performative realities. Robin Evans, Transitions from Drawing to Building, pp. 243-244.

7. "The space of doubt differs from the space of certainty in that it widens the distance between theory and the world. If theoretical reflection entails being at a certain remove from the world, doubt returns thought to openness before the world; it involves a loss of mastery and control which places thought in a more vulnerable relation to the world than before." Norman Bryson, The Ethics of Doubt in Art: Recent Observations, 71. The Ethics of Doubt, edited by Penelope Gilbert, Hollee and John Johnston. New York, 1996, p. 11.

These arguments can be clarified with a few brief examples that refer specifically to technical problems of construction. When speaking of techniques of construction, it is important to remember that the architect is not a builder, but a specifier of construction technique. The architect works with a knowledge of the methods and materials of construction in both design and implementation, but the impact of this knowledge is indirect. What is more significant is the way in which the variables of construction are factored into the calculus of architecture's procedures. This leads away from a theory of "truth to materials" toward an examination of their consequences and experiential effects.

The design history of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, is significant in this regard, and was crucial for me in defining the notion of practice outlined here. In 1991, I wrote that Frank Lloyd Wright could

deploy multiple structural principles with effective operational freedom precisely because he was committed to structural rationality as practice not as project."

What I meant was something like this: early models showed the spiral ramp of the museum propped up on thin columns (closely related to the International Style idea of structure as the punctuation of space). The solution was clearly at odds with the organic continuity Wright desired. In time, Wright devised an integrated structural solution based on the continuity of the structural members with the spatial membrane, achieved using the fold as a structural principle. As William Jordy has perceptively written

"It is at least theoretically possible that the curved and folded cross section of the ramp would stiffen the building structure in an important way. All the more since both curvature and folding are doubled. The ramp curves in plan, as a circle, while its floor plane simultaneously curves up into a parapet at its inside edge. On the outside, the floor plane of the ramp folds once at an oblique angle so as to separate one turn from the next above, and provide a notch for the ribbon window of the one below. It folds again more sharply to make the gently out canted wall which, in turn encloses the building."8

The fold is both a practical expedient and a logical extension of the fluid geometries of the spiral ramp as a structural concept. However, although compelling from an architectural point of view, this folded structure proved impractical—not due to faulty structural design, but rather to logistics of implementation and objections from regulating agencies. Among other issues, the perfect integration of structure and space envisioned by
Wright would have required excessive and overly complex wooden formwork to support the concrete structure during construction. Additionally, the metal struts that were to connect the cantilevered exterior walls to the folded edge of the beam above would have become bulky when fire-proofed. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Wright sanctioned many compromises in order to realize the Guggenheim. He allowed conventional reinforcing rods to be substituted for the expanded steel mesh originally proposed; he made concessions to allow for the reuse of formwork (which meant that the ramp had to be poured in sections, not all at once as Wright had wanted); he sanctioned the elimination of compound curves (the formwork was too labor intensive and hence expensive); and, most significantly, he introduced into his structural design a series of radial “webs” at 30 degree intervals, which function like piers to provide vertical support in place of the continuous folded structure. But all of these changes, while they may undermine the literal continuity of the structure, in no way detract from the sensation of smoothness, continuity and the integration of space and structure in the building. Because Wright was not ideologically committed to structure as symbolic or expressive construct, he gained a pragmatic, improvisational flexibility that made the realization of this unprecedented space possible. He was more concerned with effective and realistic means to realize the building than with the expression of the intrinsic properties of concrete as a building material.
Hence: "Wright could deploy multiple structural principles with operational freedom precisely because he was committed to structural rationality as practice, not as project." What is revealing, and speaks as much to Wright's tactical flexibility as to his intimate knowledge of building technique, is that, in practice, the desired continuity is in no way compromised by this apparent structural expedient.

I would argue that the measure of Wright's 'mastery' of the terms of building is as much in his knowledge of where and when to compromise, as in any mythic appeal to integrity and the 'truth of materials.' I think this is visible in another way in Le Corbusier's treatment of reinforced concrete in the Carpenter Center. In the Carpenter Center, Le Corbusier works against the apparent 'truth' of concrete as a material to effect a complex experiential and phenomenological transformation. That is to say, he achieves a sense of mobility and lightness with a material that is not in itself intrinsically lightweight—an interesting and complex transformation that speaks to his own long history and intricate, operative knowledge of material and technique.

Kenneth Frampton has observed that an unresolved contradiction exists in Le Corbusier's early work between the machinelike precision of the forms and finishes and a crude and approximate means of realization (at the Villa Stein at Garches, for example, a rough concrete frame and block infill is rendered in stucco to appear seamless). Now this contradiction is apparently resolved in the postwar work where béton brut is employed. A weighty, plastic material is rendered as weighty and plastic. But in some of his late works, something distinct and more complex happens: there is a return to the light planarity of the early purist work, now rendered in cast concrete. The heavy is made light. Concrete construction is made to behave with the taut precision of aircraft engineering. As in parallel works by Pier Luigi Nervi or Eduardo Torroja, an astonishing effect of lightness is achieved with a material that is not intrinsically lightweight.

There is evidence that Le Corbusier himself was not completely satisfied with the conventional definition of béton brut. In a letter written to Jose Luis Sert, his collaborator and project architect on site during the course of the construction of the Carpenter Center, Le Corbusier noted that "Béton brut was born at the Unite d' Habitation at Marseilles where there were 80 contractors and such a massacre of concrete that one simply could not dream of making useful transitions by means of grouting. I decided; let us leave all that brute. I called it 'béton brut.' The English immediately jumped on the piece and treated me (Ronchamp, the monastery of La Tourette) as 'Brutal' – béton brutal – all things considered, the brute is Corbu. They called that 'the new brutality.' My friends and admirers take me for the brute of the brutal concrete."

At the Carpenter Center, on the other hand, the concrete was specified as "lisse"—"béton brut but smooth," in a "spirit of perfection." By this he intended the use of steel form-work to attain a precision finish, and curved forms to be made of plywood or wooden strips of small dimensions, as had been employed by Nervi at UNESCO: "Those forms for the concrete are extremely elegant and very clean." Concrete is a fluid material. It can function in a primitive state, as a sculptural and tactile material, as at
Marseilles. In this case, its realism is primary; it functions as a crude and immediate index of the process of construction. But concrete can also perform as a mobile, plastic material, capable of abstract transformation and formal exactitude. Le Corbusier proposes the Carpenter Center as a "new stereotomy for reinforced concrete," signaling with this language the fundamentally abstract idea of the material as it is used here. He is, at this point, simply not interested in a realistic idea of the 'nature' of the material. "Beton brut," he said, is not "béton d'une brut" but simply "the concrete coming directly from the formwork."\textsuperscript{15}

Le Corbusier paid close attention to the pragmatics of concrete construction, sending Sert detailed sketches of different kinds of joints and specifying the finishes on the plywood forms to achieve the smoothest finish. He objected to the use of cardboard Sonotubes because of the roughness of the finish and the spiral joint left on the surface.\textsuperscript{16} Le Corbusier instead spoke of the "softness" of the columns desired and enclosed a "confession" regarding the seductiveness of the smooth finish obtained from steel forms:

"Columns of reinforced concrete called 'women's thighs' poured in half forms of metal (with crossed joints) the concrete is so smooth, so seductive 'that one puts one's hand there.'" The above designation, he adds, is "not official."\textsuperscript{17}

The lightness of the Carpenter Center is not only an effect of material conditions but also of formal and technical organization. Three additional observations:

First, the upturned shear caps of the concrete structure allow the under-
side of the concrete slabs to be completely smooth, enhancing the floating effect of the flat slab construction. This in turn is made possible by the use of the "airfloor," a technical innovation consisting of a layer of lightweight concrete poured over the structural slab into which channels were cast to accommodate the air circulation and floor grilles.

Second, the intersection of the regular interval of the brise-soleils with the curved edge of the slab creates a constantly changing condition on the exterior of the building. This effect produces a sensation of movement and a corresponding lightness in the concrete structure—a lightness implying quickness and agility corresponding to the sense intended by Italo Calvino, in his memo on lightness where he quotes Paul Valery: "be light like a bird, and not like a feather."

Finally, Le Corbusier insisted that the verticals
of the *ondulation* be cast in concrete, rather than fabricated in wood as Sert and others suggested. By establishing material continuity between the two horizontal slabs, he allows the exterior to read as a heterogeneous but continuous membrane, rather than as paired concrete slabs infilled with distinct materials, which would have had the effect of strati-
ating the building horizontally.

The difference between practice and project is therefore marked by the pragmatic idea of "differences that make a
difference." It appeals to actual differences of performance and behavior and not to abstract relations between ideas
and discourses. For Wright, for Le Corbusier, and for most of the architects that interest me, buildings are always
more than the individual components of a larger project. They are not examples of principles enunciated elsewhere, cases
to be tested against the rule of theory's law. Particular instances are met with particular solutions. Consistency and ration-
nality are guaranteed by the hard logic of structure, and by the indifferent behavior of materials themselves. For these
architects, the rational behavior of structure is not an absolute fact to be given material expression, but an opportu-
nity and a resource—a point of provisional stability to be freely handled.

In this sense, it is significant that the examples chosen are absolutely mainstream. In as much as these figures are
conventionally seen in terms of a larger project, a case for practice over project made with Wright, Mies or Le Corbusier
is by definition stronger than one made with figures standing on the margins. I think that an unprejudiced examination
of these "masterworks" will tell a story equally distant from the critical project of "de-mythologizing" the canon, as
from the uncritical hagiography of its presumed masters. It will suggest instead that, for these architects, the ability
of architecture to generate perceivable experiences and sensations in the world—practical consequences and effects—was
more important than the conformance or non-conformance with some abstract set of theoretical criteria.

I want to end by restating that architecture, in my view, is not usefully understood (as is so often the case in the acad-
emic world) as built discourse, that is to say, as the expression of ideologies or theories written down elsewhere.
Instead, as a material practice, it is capable of producing ideas and effects through the volatile medium of artifacts and
images rather than exclusively through the mediation of language. It works by means of a necessarily mixed assem-
blage of procedures, and requires multiple tactics of exposition. To understand practice in this way is to recognize the
heterogeneity of architecture's procedures, and to pay close attention to architecture's promiscuous embrace of the
real. It means working from examples, and not principles, and it necessitates continual reference to specific instances
of buildings, drawings or texts. But perhaps more significantly, it also means resisting the temptation to generalize the
results in the form of a project. Theory, of course, needs a project: a static construct, a persistent template of beliefs
against which individual actions are compared and tested for conformance. In contrast, practices imply a shift to per-
formance, paying attention to consequences and effects. Not what a building, a text or a drawing means, but what it can
do: how it operates in, and on the world.†

† Stan Allen. Architect. Interior perspective of Reading Room and
Exhibit National Diet Library, Kanai Kaho. JAPAN COMPETITION 1998

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