

Confirmation Bias

Architects and their
relationship to tilt-wall
construction

Jeffrey Blaine Brown, FAIA



Tilt-Up Concrete Association

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The following text is a series of letters written by Jeffrey Brown, FAIA during his presidency of the Tilt-Up Concrete Association as a follow up to his talk at the International Tilt-Up Convention and Expo in 2015 titled, "Observations on the Quotidian." The letters explore a peculiar relationship between the practicing architectural community, the architectural elite and academia, the construction industry and commercial development realities.

“In psychology and cognitive science, confirmation bias (or confirmatory bias) is a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one’s preconceptions, leading to statistical errors.”

Science Daily

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Mitch- Thank you for the prompt. I will be pleased to write a short series of president's letters for the magazine, and I agree with you that, as we cycle leadership through the various trades and that as I represent the architects turn as it were, I indeed should write the letters from the point of view of architects. More precisely, I should address architects and their relationship to tilt wall. Sure, I see why you might, perhaps guided by your own ulterior motive, make this suggestion. While architects are per capita the lowest numbers in membership with the TCA, they are a "growth market" for the organization, although of course you only suggested it as a courtesy to me I am quite sure.

I am also pleased you liked the idea that I start with some excerpts from the talk I gave in New Jersey. It was perhaps an over-complicated talk, but I did get a great deal of positive feedback from the 20 or so architects in the room. That was encouraging.

The talk, as you recall, dealt with a protracted exploration of just why architects can't seem to get out of their own way when it comes to construction technology, such as tilt wall, as a contributor to making meaningful form. So in keeping with your multiple requests outlined above, I include here a highly edited short sample of the thesis from that lecture that may be something you could edit a good deal and print.

Before you reply inquiring about the context of these excerpts, I will give you the set up: I structure the basic talk by comparing how developers and contractors run their businesses and

operate their professions. They have much in common but nothing more so than a profit motivation that drives the entire enterprise for either of them. Somewhere I observe something along the lines that, more often than not, aesthetics are a risky proposition to developers and contractors, as aesthetics are widely known to cost more money and profit is the ultimate measure of a successful project.

The reason I argue this way is to illustrate that developers and contractors have understood that they evolve with the market or become irrelevant. Architecture on the other hand works on an outmoded platform that would seem charming if it weren't so insidious in its own way- a platform that doesn't allow it to easily follow suit with its colleagues. It's a thing called the avant-garde that in many ways holds us back. Architecture as a profession operates on an outdated model with an **avant-garde** led discourse, where very few speak to so many about so little. Unpacked, what this means is that a critic/academic class utilizes relatively closely curated magazines and other restricted venues to theorize and discourse about an amazingly small bandwidth of building types, starchitects, and problem sets to an audience of professional practitioners who are relegated through exclusion to the role of audience. This arrangement has slowly evolved into what optimists deem a transformation of the profession and a realist recognizes as a moment of near existential crises - a dying marginalized profession. It is this split within architecture that makes us unwilling or incapable partners in a new market of turnkey projects offered by developers and contractors.

So you see that my basic thesis is that the **marketplace** is forcing architects to follow developers and contractors into turnkey delivery (a delivery method architects do not like as a whole), and we need to adapt to that. Our resistance, I feel, is always articulated along the lines of our dislike of anything but form-driven building. The preferred architectural process (we design form and all else falls in line behind it, contractors figure out how to build it, and developers figure out how to pay for it) is superseded. Thus, turnkey can't ever really be "architectural."

Unlike contractors and developers in whose professions there is a very close alignment of the business and the professional sides of their industry, architecture is literally coming apart at the seam between the professional side that attempts to lead the discourse of what architecture is and does without any real interest in the everyday ongoing practice of architecture as a business.

By way of illustrating how integrated and interdependent the echo chamber of the starchitect class is, I want to point out along the way that the entire avant-garde industry in architecture has sponsored and established its counter position to "**everyday problems**" of architecture. Its focus on the exotic is cyclically kept in place by an elaborate scaffold of academic preference that feeds deeply embedded media narratives to an ever shrinking public audience. (You should probably edit this so that I am not accused of using too many 50-cent words?) I go on with the argument thus:

- The Academy- Academics has its own internal star class of critical theorists and pundits, almost none of whom actually practice architecture at any kind of commercial scale. They often utilize their classrooms as labs for the projects they do but also the students as under-market labor. They publish in journals not easily available outside of academics and exercise outsized influence on the contents of the two non-academic journals that are available to the general population through their heavily curated selection of who and what is important.
- Combined- these two components - Starchitects and Academics - make up a small minority numerically of the entire architectural community. Yet, they exercise outsized control over the discourse as to what constitutes architecture, what is excluded from consideration, and who has access to the discourse.
- So we as a profession seem to be left with a dwindling set of problems and building types that are deemed to be relevant as evidenced by the curated press of the avant-garde and the building types its minority practitioners undertake: museums, certain cultural institutions, and high-end houses. These are all repeated cyclically in the AG press by the same architects over and over, it seems.
- The very few talking to the very many about very little indeed. If you want to understand the museum as an institution for the manufacture of cultural prestige, you may do so. If you want to explore the nature of the effects of the office warehouse building type on worker retention, you are on your own.
- The actual everyday business of architecture aligns much

more closely with the business side of construction and development. It also, in fact, has an almost constant interface with them on the many everyday projects that occur at rates far superior to the building types influenced by or in the scope of the avant-garde. Think office buildings, warehouses, retail of any kind etc.

- Day to day practice encounters buildings types, client types and general profit structures including that of the practice of architecture itself that seem to be excluded from the avant-garde model's consideration. Even in this late stage of architecture as **research**, certain topics seem to repeat and most of what is done by most architects runs as an independent by passing profession. The work done in these mainstream practices is systematically ignored, but in some of this work lay virtues and value.
- The MARKET is changing architects' business, and showing the weakness of how architecture is organized as the avant-garde is by nature opposed to the market.
- Turnkey is the leveler. Developers and contractors engaged with the market overwrite or exclude the speculations of the avant-garde. Tilt wall is a turnkey method with architectural potential - it balances cost and form.
- Thus architecture is out of line with the bottom line of our industry partners. This condition has been developing and mutating for a long time. New business structures like turnkey are transforming the aesthetic component of architectural practice in new unanticipated and unstudied ways. The professional model maintained mostly by the AG eschews this state of affairs. More and more, the mainstream architect can find nothing relevant in the

musings on museums and budgetless theories.

- So on the whole, architecture as a profession is a splitting cell or a version of the divided self. At the very least we now seem to be keeping two sets of books: what most of us DO and what some very small minority of us SAY. It is not that the avant-gardes don't do as much as it is that the everyday don't seem to have a say. Set against one another, both struggle to claim the meaning of what we do, all the while evolving our profession out of its current form of existence and into smaller realms of relevance.
- So, the question becomes just what values are being made manifest by what architecture? Could it not be the case that turnkey – which is a dominant market delivery method of our capitalist democracy -would communicate something important about our current cultural condition?
- In the end I am suggesting that tilt wall has design potential, on which I have elaborated in my book extensively. Form will follow construction methods and not dictate it. This situation gives the mainstream architect a way out of the need to emulate the goings on in the AG. It gives them a way to become a participant rather than an observer in the making of new forms, meaningful forms in the new context, the new normal. The evolution of the profession of architecture is underway. There won't be a revolution - the AG will continue to exist in its own way. I can only say the mainstream doesn't have to exist in its shadow.

I notice in my summary that turnkey, while elaborated on the actual talk, may not be a clear term at this point. Next letter, expect me to fix that.

So those are my abridged notes. Perhaps we will need to link interested folks to the entire transcript at www.tilt-up.org?

Finally, you asked me to think about the next letter-perhaps I could talk a little about the market and mainstream practice and its engagement with tilt wall? Think about it. In the meantime, I look forward to your editing of the above.

Best regards,

Jb

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Well, Mitch, while I apologize for the lateness of getting my letter to you for last issue's edits I had no idea you would publish it "as is where is," per the used car sales world term. And please do remember: my ramblings as an architect are meant to give the non-architectural audience some insight as to why the architecture profession is perhaps the largest, but almost most complicated, pool of new potential TCA members. Think of my letters as things I would say on the couch to my therapist. Best kept between us.

Perhaps I will start by trying to answer some questions that came about from readers' confusion (surely it was not my writing that was confusing...). I should say, let me answer those questions in the context of my suggestion in the last letter that I elaborate on "The Market" and "Mainstream Practice" and just what it is I mean by those terms. To say nothing of the term "turnkey," which itself was the subject of many questions from readers. Yes, turnkey is just as good a spot to start as any.

By turnkey I mean to say, at least in the argument I outlined in the last letter, that, in general, developers and contractors are assigning to the architect the construction method by which a project should be approached; and that method often being tilt-up is not the choice of the architect. This whole process can only be EFFECTED by turnkey or design build; or, simplified, someone OTHER than the architect holding the contract with the client—this is what turnkey is.; it's a kind of portmanteau word. So I am saying that somewhere along the way, during the transformation of the process of the life of a project from a client-based world to a market-based world,

the architect has lost her place of prominence. The developer acts as client even when there is an end user who would have hired the architect in the old pre-Great Recession world but now cannot get financing, or has been directed by “corporate” not to own the facility. And to make things more complex, the developer assigns—somewhere along the way—the architect’s contract to the contractor and et voila, the architect wakes up with a creative hangover in which no one wants to hear why it should be formed like such and such (you know, this is “really beautiful” and it “works compositionally” or “I asked the material what it wanted to be and it was this;” you know that kind of shit architects pull), but rather “the client,” newly formed as “contractodeveloperasaurus” (official architect term, btw), begins the assessment of any design proposition with a little proposition of his own that goes like this: “How much does it cost?” It is as if architecture, through construction form and building techniques (yep—tilt-up), has become a... commodity.

Now I didn’t talk about commodification at all last letter; but in a nutshell, as they say, architects find it revolting, appalling, and a sellout. So on and so forth they will bitch when confronted by the proposition. I mean, honestly, in the twenty-first century architects may be the only professionals left willing to defend and practice eighteenth-century prejudices. About commodities and architecture I have written a good bit elsewhere but can say briefly in letterform the following:

Reduced to almost fundamental simplicity, within the discipline of architectural theory, a great deal of debate was

held regarding the notion of architecture as a commodity. Particularly in the mid-eighties, journals such as *The New Left Review* explored postmodern cultural transformation, particularly in art and the social structure of the public realm, and the relationship between the relationships of representational systems to power, which overlapped with architecture. More recently, this theme has been revisited in “Commodification And Spectacle In Architecture,” edited by William Saunders. It is a compilation of recent articles from the not so mainstream *Harvard Design Magazine*. So it is now a kind of back alley whispering match ending in slapped faces rather than a brawl. Much of the debate, simplified, is structured around reconciling the modern movements’ imputed inspiration by Marxist principles with its capitalist aspirations and manifestations. The complexity of this exploration of what was proposed as the commodification tendencies in modernism was rent by the simultaneous rejection of those same capitalist urges. This is some complicated stuff, basically. However, what it means is architecture is a commodity whether or not it is intended to be. From my book:

Post Great Recession, no business, profession or trade is planning to take up where it left off before this historic economic event. They all get the new normal. Architects however give every indication that they just need to wait until the market comes back. When it does, it will not come back to them.

They seem to miss the meaning in the new normal. Architects will have to “go to” the new market with a

product rather than waiting for the market to come back requesting our services. The value proposition of architecture has changed. There are no more clients, only markets now. Innovation in mainstream, everyday practice requires that we understand markets don't behave like clients...it is open 24/7/365 and unlike clients, markets can be created where none existed before.

To build a market you have to have a product. Or the notion that you can commoditize something- even if it appears to be ubiquitous; it may NOT be commodity...yet... AND- Architects don't really like hearing the buildings they pour themselves into, have responsibility for 10 years + and often get sued over as Commodities. Get over it. All it really means is realizing the commercial potential for what is currently being perceived as a REQUIREMENT.

You don't have to compromise on integrity, purpose or the poetry of your soul. Tilt-wall construction's capacity to instigate and sustain investigation of transformative modalities marks its difference in potential from competing value oriented building technologies. Balancing high design and technical innovation with form driven construction is unique to tilt-wall.

And so there you have it—turnkey means the loss of relationship and thus control, via commodification, by the architect to the client. The interceding entity, not satisfied with the humiliation of the architect, also tells him how it will be built BEFORE the architect has, well, cogitated on the form as it were.

Yes, I can almost hear your thinking: I am at or over my word count and haven't touched upon "The Market" and "Mainstream Practice" as promised only 800 words ago, but I think you can only expect our readers to digest so much... stuff...in one go. Shall we leave those for next time? I don't want them to become overwhelmed and, honestly, I know they are worried about this commodity approach and its effects on us poor architects, and I want to leave space for sympathy. Let them whirl away in the market while we sit pouting on the sidelines hoping they glance our way for a second or two.

BTW—Have those idiots in New Jersey actually torn down our gift to their community yet? You just can't make this stuff up. I await your reply.

Best regards,

Jb

3

Mitch- in your last e-mail you remind me that I have, in my last two letters, promised to flesh out two key components of my case for why architects simultaneously resist and are driven to tilt wall construction. Those are “Mainstream / Everyday” practice and the “Market.” That is really, to the extent structural engineers, concrete sub-contractors and vendors may have really any interest in these dialogues as it is, you tell me. They simply want to know how to...market to us, get us to join an organization like the TCA. But we are more complex than that, we like to think, us architects. We want to conduct our therapy sessions in the public sphere so everyone can see just how tortured we are about why our profession is dying and transforming without our input. I mean, can you imagine this kind of existential shit going on in the contractor community? Seriously? They seem to find a way to ride the drift better than we do somehow.

But I think you have confused the middle ground argument we have been discussing which is not so much why architects are driven towards construction technology (like TW) but why they resist this impulse. This resistance is what gets us in trouble when it comes to understanding our own conditions—our own CONTEXT as mostly mainstream practitioners. Clever followers of these private communications you have made public will refer back to letter one in which we had reviewed the talk I gave in New Jersey. There, you recall, is where I outlined the strange condition of bifurcation within architecture between the Avant-Garde / Academic class and the everyday architects. The mechanism of that split—the scaffold of it, perhaps better said—is commodification. I

covered it just a bit there and even more in my book. While I made those observations in regards to *The Mainstream / Everyday Practice*, I think I will need to come back to it, to commodification, here when I talk about *The Market*.

So, I think I will start with *Mainstream / Everyday Practice* first. Just a bit easier. I am surprised that I feel like I have to yet again describe what in many ways most people understand intuitively, but I feel like it is this visceral acceptance of a very subtle boundary between types of practice that obscure the starkness of the actual condition of living with the split in architecture when you sit down at the office each morning. There is a great anecdote told by Rem Koolhaas (I hope your readers look him up—he is the paradigm of the avant-garde class in some ways). He describes architects as King Midas’s in reverse—and let’s be clear, he means the starchitects and is critiquing from within his class level. When architects look at something that is authentically from everyday life, the moment they look at it (here he means the minute they work up the required slightly different version of it) it loses integrity (this from an interview with him). What he means, invoking the “everyday,” is that it is the job of his class of architects, for better or worse, to transform the everyday into the special occasion as it were. One has to change things from the way they are to something compulsively different, and thus somehow he laments from his position, the dilution of authenticity and integrity. Given our short format here, in some ways the effect of the real architects he is describing invokes the old saw that if you see a building with slightly larger or smaller windows than seem necessary, then there was an architect involved. If the windows are just right, probably built by a contractor.

But the bulk of us in The Mainstream / Everyday Practice—we don't travel in these kinds of "outside in" transformations. No "I don't do budget" museums, which either raise the money to build our subsidized self-expressions for us or no building. Budget is not an option for us, the masses of service provider types. No, indeed we accept the premise of the industrial building just the way the market delivers it, the office building just the way brokers think they can lease it, the IHOP site adapt prototype in its recognizable format. And we outnumber the Avant-Garde guys 95% to 5%. And we are finding "inside out" transformations that DO produce important works. And we have them scared I think. But listen, this is all sounding.... revolutionary or schismatic. Frankly we are, our two classes in architecture, simply starting to ignore each other to death. One half screaming into the void, the other slowly transforming into role players in the turn key world. BTW, nothing new here. Let me end this point by going all the way back to Marshall McLuhan. Most of the mature readers of this stuff I have been arguing will remember him from the pot-fogged memories of the sixties—the cultural interpreter of the boomers.

"The basic criterion for any kind of human excellence is simply how heavy a demand it makes on the intelligence. How inclusive a consciousness does it focus? By this standard there is very little fiction in a century, very little music, and very little poetry or painting which deserves attention for its own sake. One function of the critic is to keep the best work free from surrounding clutter. But, in order to free the mind from the debilitating confusion, it is not enough to claim priority for excellence without considering the bulk which is inferior. To

win more and more attention for the best work, it is necessary to demonstrate what constitutes the inevitably second rate, third rate and so on. And in the course of doing this one finds the great work of a period has much in common with the poorest work. The air of unreality which has hovered over the little-magazine coterie culture in general is due to their neglect of the close interrelations between the good and the bad work of the same period. The result of this work is, finally is failure to see the goodness of the good work itself. The great artist necessarily has his roots very deep in his own time- roots which embrace the most vulgar and commonplace fantasies and aspirations.”

In case that extended quote is not clear, I contend that what he was predicting in 1951 is that there is not that much space between what the Avant-Garde thinks they are producing and the territory in which the rest of us are working. Perhaps the Midas touch and Value Office are, at the level of creative DNA, more alike than different as containers of cultural import....

Mitch, if you don't mind, may I end it here for this exchange? I am sure you will have questions but I think it is enough to digest this dilemma of the mainstream practice. Perhaps others will weigh in? I promise to give The Market the same development space next letter—it is a fitting subject for extended treatment as well and the next letter is our last. I want to leave folks focused on the importance of the transformation from clients to the market. And I want to elaborate that it is not so much of a thing or a place as it is a condition (yes, I hope that does get you thinking). I really do think that when we are

done, our membership will have an unprecedented insight into how they, all of them, relate to us. It is going to take them to reach out for our membership as we are too caught in this internecine positioning up to seek it out.

P.S. I know you have been overwhelmed with reader comments about these letters we share. As I haven't seen any of them, I assume you keep them from me due to their critical nature? Well, I can share that a valued colleague of mine was provoked enough in reading the letters that he had his staff read them for a group discussion. Left to the evidence—we have at least one reader I can confirm.

Best regards,

Jb

4

Mitch- Very sorry for yet again bumping up against a deadline. You have both asked me questions I have not answered and reminded me that our correspondence was “due.” One wonders what became of spontaneity. And yes—indeed I have avoided the “Market” thing up to this point. No more.

Our last series of communiques has covered the mechanics by which architects interact with the balance of our colleagues—Developers and Contractors, Engineers and Clients. By default this means it has been about why they collectively seem more connected to the Market, and, in many ways, why they have been more successful at adapting to the post-Great Recession dynamics than we architects. They are transforming the delivery process with clients and, with increasing frequency, at the expense of either architects...or architecture. I write this lest anyone reading beyond this point feels as if, in their reading of our private discourse, I have strayed off course. Or lost it.

Architects seem to want to cling to our vintage Porsches (or our weird addiction to unproven, boomer romanticism Prius environmentalism), fling ourselves into any new bullshit software that gets published under the guise of being progressive (we will for some reason surrender authorship at the drop of a hat) and very carefully curate our eye wear. Otherwise we seem to keep sucking at the tit of 19th-century moralism whilst pining for a spin in the authentic zeitgeist.

So, to go back to a question you asked me about in my lecture in Jersey: You observed that my talk and my summary in my

letter to you might over complicate a simpler notion. Perhaps you are correct.

Let me try a new line of argument in aide of our finishing concept: the Market. It's so complicated, isn't it? Years of theory classes by Michael Hayes at Harvard with readings covering Adorno, Benjamin, Tafuri and Anderson—and yet? In the end, certainly in a discourse as removed as ours, one might simply say the market is the verdant intersection of just who hires architects and whom architects wish would hire them. So, in some ways, the Market is an abstraction, like a place that exists only virtually and thus is vulnerable to wide interpretation when it comes to its effect on and its interaction with something like architecture. But in other ways, as in when we look at the patterns of aggregated transactions between Patrons (threw that in for the AG folks) and architects, it is a very real, very interpretable phenomenon.

I actually rounded off your exact question. You mentioned in a more detailed way that old saw of theory vs. practice in architecture. I would like to take you up on that. In the service of sponsoring an exploration in this final note to you of a notion that perplexes me, may I reformulate your query as a difference between the Theory side of architecture and the Business side of architecture? Two sides in conflict if you will? No? (You worry that Frank Lloyd Wright may be spinning in his grave?) Well, once you admit business, you invite several questions, or shall I say implications, regarding business itself—the most important being that of capitalism. From there it is not a stretch to get to cool provocations like this: Can you

have something like capitalism IN architecture since there is much observation regarding the effects of capitalism ON architecture? (Honestly, any academic wandering unsafely astray from the ivory tower and for some bizarre reason is reading this will choke; this is a well-covered and no longer debated subject in most venues...)

If you accept this idea then you could ask, “Does Capitalism affect Theory in the same way it affects the Business and Practice of architecture?” And then, you see, we will be back to the complex but important point I have been attacking from various directions in my last several missives.

We need to define some terms for the casual reader. I will start with the notion that even casual readers either understand or do not understand Business and Practice. Theory though? Easy. For architects it is either the way of interpreting the meaning of an act of architecture OR it may be a postulation about a way to generate meaning in an act of architecture. But it is never a good idea to look at a building as illustrated theory. Do folks see the shit we deal with in our business?

Capitalism? Well, there are seven kinds or types I can think of:

- Robber Baron Capitalism=Business to politics
- Corporate Capitalism=Balance of government and business
- State Capitalism=State as a corporation
- Entrepreneurial Capitalism=Creative destruction
- Worker Capitalism=Employee owned corporations

- Shareholder Capitalism=Maximum profit and minimum workers / pay
- Financial Capitalism=Buying and selling, or corporations vs. actually managing them

OK, mea culpa—this all comes from a great Washington Post article called “Identity Crises for American Capitalism.” See what happens when you click off of Fox News for a second? But it shows very compactly the complexity of what is meant when one invokes the old capitalism trope. I suspect most people simply talk past one another on this matter.

So how to gauge capitalism’s influence is a complex project, particularly on its influence on architecture. May I simplify? Back to Rem Koolhaas (did anyone look this guy up?): “I think that to speak of a ‘cultural project’ today is too limited, and that it’s partly because culture has become part of the market economy.”

May I give you yet one more sample of the reaction of the Avante-Garde to the effects of capitalism on architecture? On this subject with Sanford Kwinter one feels like a mosquito in a nudist colony—there are simply so many quotes; but let’s try this one as a sample of samples:

“The current intoxication with the magical flame of neocapitalism – expressed primarily through the exaltation of market forces and their legendary, but not proven efficacy and intelligence – has so subsumed contemporary culture, society and media that even our intellectuals, if we can still call

them that, can no longer muster the awareness that something troubling had happened.”

And to conclude my quote-athon, here is an explanation from Michael Benedikt as to just exactly what that troubling even is;

“What has changed is the national will to direct attention, labor, and resources to architecture specifically and the built environment generally, be it through markets or governments. And one reason for this change has been the relinquishment by architects of their role—indeed duty—in upholding standards and modes of discourses about design that ordinary people can understand and that produce buildings that people want to live and work in for reasons other than the fact that they are new.”

While he makes some parts of my point, the run-on compound sentences and use of oxford columns establish his avant-garde/academic bona fides.

Yes, it seems to the AG team, that capitalism has negatively affected architecture and in fact, here simplified, they simply cannot co-exist. But indeed they do, as we all know. So what gives? Read the first three letters between us for the answer to that. It goes something like this: Architects want to make beautiful and meaningful stuff which unfortunately only they understand and can create. Thus everyone else (yep—developers, contractors, clients) must get in line behind us in support of this endeavor. ANY process not organized with the architect as lead has been corrupted by market forces and cannot result in any meaningful endeavor.

However, the market itself, as a cultural institution—or at least as the result of cultural operations—is EXCLUDED from being a source of meaningful operations or the carrier of meaning! Et voilà—we are back at the dilemma we started with.

Let me finish with a more sophisticated and synthetic riff on the interface of capitalism and theory and markets. This is an extended paraphrasing of an argument put forth by the great cultural anthropologist and raving hippie David Hickey. Said otherwise: for brevity I am ripping him off in shorthand to the best of my limited ability.

Hickey, making a case for beauty, could be transposed thus (I have substituted Architecture for Art and taken other liberties).

If you broached the issue of the everyday in the American Architecture world of 1988, you could not incite a conversation about rhetoric—or efficacy or practicality. You would instead ignite a conversation about the marketplace. That is the “signified” of the everyday. If I said Everyday architecture, they said, “The corruption of the Market.” And I would say, “The corruption of the market?!” After thirty years of frenetic empowerment during which the venues for contemporary architecture in the U.S. evolved from institutions of the Avant Garde in New York into the vast transcontinental sprawl of privately and public funded postmodern ice boxes; when the ranks of Avant Garde “critics” swelled from a handful of dilettantes into this massive civil service of PhD’s and lifetime non-practicing faculty administering a monolithic system of interlocking patronage (which, in its constituents, resembles

nothing so much as that of France in the early nineteenth century); when powerful corporate, governmental, cultural and academic constituencies vied ruthlessly for power, each with its own self-perpetuating agenda and none with any vested interest in the subversive potential of warehouse or retail buildings—under these cultural conditions, architects across this nation are obsessing about the Market. Fretting about a handful of Avant Garde critics nibbling canapés in business class; blaming them for any work of architecture that doesn't incorporate raw plywood.

Under these cultural conditions saying that the market is corrupt is like saying a cancer patient has a hangnail. Indeed.

I have used a number of quotes, which is uncommon for a letter. But these quotes help condense a difficult and well-documented, if not prosaic, academic study of market forces and architecture into two basic acts, as it were.

So in the end I think what I am saying is the Market, if you map this back onto the several previous letters, is the outcome of the interactions between these forces. And for better or worse the Market, in its many forms, has become a much bigger influence on architecture than Culture is. In fact, it appears to me that as perverse as it may seem, Market and Culture have merged into a kind of toll road that architects want to argue should still be free.

Since your organization wants to market to us, it may well be good to enter the problem as we see it. There is a tent off in

the distance, and we seem to be trying to get to it through a persistent, heavy downpour of yellow rain. Help a guy out?

Best regards,

Jb

P.S. At our dinner in Las Vegas a few weeks ago, you were down about the destruction of Tod and Bille's very beautiful beach pavilion. But I mentioned to you I would write about this. I would write about the power of architecture and it being dangerous—enough so that some would attack it as ideology out of ignorance. And you were, enthused. At least less down. I promise I will take this up soon.

About Jeffrey Brown, FAIA

Jeffrey Brown, FAIA, is Principal-in-Charge of Design for Powers Brown Architecture which he co-founded. Practicing architecture for more than 20 years, Brown has an array of experience working on multiple building types for both public and private entities; he is an accomplished designer with unique graphic communication and strategic planning skills. His ability to design utilizing an interactive process of project definition and interpretation has resulted in distinguished design awards and published works.

Brown has been instrumental in leading the firm to numerous awards including a Citation in the 2012 Annual Design Review from Architect magazine and recognition from the Tilt-Up Concrete Association as the 2008 and 2014 recipient of the Irving Gill Distinguished Architect Award for the firm's and his own contribution to the design and advancement of tilt wall construction. Additional accolades have come from the Texas Society of Architects, American Institute of Architects Houston, AIA DC|Washington, Design Excellence Awards and the Urban Land Institute. The firm's work has been widely covered in magazines and books including his latest, "Tiltwallism: A Treatise on the Architectural Potential of Tilt Wall Construction," available through book sellers nationwide.

Brown has taught as an assistant at his alma mater, Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, and as an adjunct professor at both The University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture and Prairie View A&M. Brown is also active in numerous professional organizations including NAIOP; and the Tilt-Up Concrete Association, where he serves as President on the board of directors.

