“You should know what Architecture has done …”

Rafael Moneo, from Critical Mass, 2006

Premise

If we are asking questions about what Architecture can do, it is a reasonable assertion that we should have a hearty appetite for the examination of what it has done – an ambition for a nuanced comprehension of the building, the site, the cultural context, and maybe even the genealogy and pedigree of the ideas that Architecture emerges from. Alvar Aalto and Alvaro Siza are two architects from distinct generations whose bodies of work are critical and deliberative, embodying rich relationships with the cultures and places of their construction: Aalto in Scandinavia and Siza in the Iberian Peninsula. Through the identification and analysis of the work of Aalto and Siza the attributes of a modern and contemporary “Architecture grounded in place” can begin to be examined and related to other architecture practices. The intrigue of a North/South axis developed through the analysis of Aalto and Siza will sponsor speculations on who the assortment of “friends of Aalto and Siza” might be: they too are worth spending time with. Don’t be surprised by the prospect an East/West axis emerging as a result of this inquiry.

Objective

To develop a conversancy with the work of both Alvar Aalto and Alvaro Siza
To identify the contemporary and historical architectural discourses that the work of Aalto and Siza have been impacted by and have bearing on
To identify, analyze, and describe the unique qualities of their work that are a product of place and culture, and to examine how material, spatial, and phenomenal conditions become developed in the work to form meaningful embodied experiences
To develop a conception of what an “Architecture grounded in place” might be at this point in time in history
To expand the familiarity with architecture practices that have some productive relationship with the work of Aalto and Siza – one’s own work should grow from this

Method

This seminar class will be organized around a collection of lectures with attendant readings, a case study project of one building delivered as a presentation to the class, a final project provisionally titled “Reconsidering Critical Regionalism: Place and Architecture,” and a journal keeping expectation. The lectures will be delivered weekly and form the primary content of the course. The case study presentations will begin mid-semester to supplement the lectures and inform the final project, which will be presented in an exhibition setting.

Content

Readings by Aalto, Siza, Christian Norberg-Schultz, Juhani Pallasmaa, Kenneth Frampton, Rafael Moneo, David Leatherbarrow, Steven Holl, and Henry Plummer will inform a conversation related to the phenomenological and experiential in the built environment. These readings will form the background to become familiar with the architect’s work and frame a critical investigation of the work. In addition to the work of Aalto and Siza, over the course of the semester work by Frank Lloyd Wright, Sigurd Lewerentz, Sverre Fehn, Steven Holl, and Kengo will be examined.