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«What does critique mean to you?»

Vincent Bianchi, Yann Salzmann

When we read about the theme of this issue at the beginning of the semester, we asked ourselves: is critique present in the architecture design courses? Studying at both ETH Zurich and EPF Lausanne, we are experiencing that students mainly understand critique as a dry commentary, highlighting the shortcomings of their design project. In this negative understanding, critique is downgraded to a simple tool to judge something as good or bad.

«Tischkritik» is followed by «Zwischenkritik» is followed by «Schlusskritik»: Even though critique is omnipresent in our pedagogical process, we sometimes forget its real potential: a generator of new ideas! We deeply believe in this proactive definition of critique, one that does not simply dismantle an idea, but can be expressed projectively to help construct new perspectives. As students, do we care enough about our own critical thinking? How do our professors try to introduce us to critical thinking? How much space is allocated for critique in the framework of studios, apart from judgemental discussions?

Throughout this issue, you will encounter different interviews with teachers from ETHZ and EPFL. In these conversations we talked about their understanding of critical thought, and the role it plays in their teaching pedagogy. The choice of the seven professors was a subjective one: we selected them because we were curious to have their opinions on the topic. We hope that our choice will represent a panorama of positions.

We initially expected that blending these opinions would form a debate on the value of critical thought within the pedagogy. However, a general attitude was prevailing, which could, simplified, be summed up as: «yes, students should be critical». Maybe our question was rhetorical?

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