Notes for a Non-Visual History of Architecture

Aggregate

(represented by Michael Osman and Timothy Hyde)

This paper begins by introducing the Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative through the central topic of our methodological debates: the problem of *writing in architecture*. Educated with the belief that writing is an essential part of the architectural discipline, the members of Aggregate have pursued a collaboration focused on the intersection of various forms of architectural writing with problems of historical method. Our paper will pose the question: Is there a non-visual history of architecture that dislocates how we write about buildings, contend with historical persons, and read architectural images?

We will answer this question by way of examples drawn from our work. First, with thoughts on specifications as they relate to the industrialization of construction in wood. This research exposes a set of instruments developed in American architectural practice to accommodate the processes of mass production in formalizing the balloon frame. It also considers the possibility of reading specifications as another form of architectural writing. Second, with research on the category of 'architectural persons' and its effect of the category of personhood in defining an historical event in architecture. By examining legal and other ramifications of the signature, questions are posed to the presumed temporality of architectural history. Finally, with a speculative reading of Alison and Peter Smithson's architectural specifications. The ambition of this research (still in progress) is to show that, these specifications present a form of writing that inscribes both an anonymous industrialized reader while retaining a unique brand of architectural signature. We end by reading several photographs of Smithsons' projects as inventories to further speculate on the possibility of other non-visual histories of their architectural practice.

Biographies:

Formed in 2006, the Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative is dedicated to advancing research and education in the history and theory of architecture. Aggregate generates, work-shops, presents, and publishes innovative scholarship from multidisciplinary perspectives in a variety of venues, including its

website www.we-aggregate.org. In 2012, Aggregate published the collected volume *Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (University of Pittsburgh Press).

Michael Osman is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture and Urban Design at UCLA. His research focuses on the technological, environmental, and economic aspects of architectural history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He is a founding member of the Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative.

Timothy Hyde is an architectural historian and theorist at MIT. He is the author of *Constitutional Modernism: Architecture and Civil Society in Cuba, 1933-1959* and a founding member of the Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative.