

Constructs

Yale

Architecture

Fall 2014

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The Institute



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1. Princeton's *Beaux Arts and Its New Academicism*, a group exhibition at the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1977.



2

2. IAUS Fellows and friends at one of Peter Eisenman's Indian dinners, c. 1974. Courtesy Suzanne Frank.



3

3. Panel discussion at Yale on January 30, 2014. From left: Alan Plattus, Peggy Deamer, Diana Agrest, Peter Eisenman, Robert A.M. Stern

The Institute: A Spring of Architecture Made of We's

The Making of an Avant-Garde: The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1967–1984, written, produced, and directed by Diana Agrest, was shown at the school on January 30, with a roundtable discussion on the following day. The hour-long documentary includes excerpts from over twenty-five hours of recorded interviews with former fellows and trustees of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS), as well as Agrest's own footage of the daily life and events (and many parties) from when she taught there beginning in 1971. The roundtable was organized and moderated by Ioanna Angelidou (PhD '18), and Tyler Collins (MArch '14), with the participation of Agrest; Dean Robert Stern; Peter Eisenman, the founding director of the IAUS; and faculty members Alan Plattus, Deborah Berke, and Peggy Deamer.

Peter Eisenman described the institute's beginnings, saying, "In 1965, when I was denied tenure at Princeton, I quickly moved to New York while organizing the institute with Arthur Drexler, a curator at the MoMA who was the motivating force. The original fellows were Bob Gutman, a professor of sociology at Princeton, and painter Bob Slutzky, who had written *Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal* with Colin Rowe. Emilio [Ambasz] designed the first poster, but he did not otherwise participate in the decisions. Burnham Kelly, who was the dean at Cornell, was on the board of trustees; he gave us the students of Colin Rowe. In spring 1968, we had our very own mini-revolution when Colin and his students wanted to take over. We had a midnight meeting with Gutman, Slutzky, Drexler, and myself and decided to have Rowe locked out. *Oppositions* started in 1973. Ken Frampton came in the spring of 1964 to the CASE [Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment] event at Princeton with Vince Scully, Colin Rowe, and all the young architects of our generation. The idea was to start a magazine, and he [Frampton] was going to be the editor. Scully and Bob Venturi left angry, but that was good—it was the beginning of something."

Dean Stern contextualized the period that foreshadowed the birth of the IAUS: "What many people don't realize is how completely broken down architectural education had become in the late 1960s. The

architecture schools were basically schools of sociology or political 'prepostery.' The discourse of architecture had completely evaporated, so the institute filled many voids. The timing was exactly right. It was a traumatic time, and out of the ashes of that moment the institute really took off. Its last moment of grandeur was, in my opinion, when Ada Louise [Huxtable] wrote about it in *The New York Times*. Once that happened, it was over—it was public territory."

Diana Agrest added, "I think, at that moment, the functionalist ideology was bankrupt. We didn't want to do architecture as form-function. That's where language came in; we wanted to look at form differently. That's why linguistics and semiotics came in. The IAUS had this impact on architectural education since it presented a different way to look at it. The institute made a difference because we were not just disseminating: we were presenting, cooking, producing, doing everything. We, ourselves! We were teaching there; we were doing our projects; we were writing; we were doing the programs—educational and public—and publishing a magazine. We were totally invested in the place, and that is what made it unique."

Peggy Deamer, one of the first interns at IAUS, described how she discovered it: "I was there between January and September 1973, before there was a formal internship program. I got there because I went to Oberlin College and the Great Lakes Collegial Association helped place students in arts internships in New York City. That's how I wrote to Peter [Eisenman] and said, 'I have a philosophy background, I know nothing about architecture, but I want my future to be in architecture. Would you take me?' I was just so delighted that there was a place to take somebody like me who knew nothing about architecture. The amazing thing was that having studied philosophy and linguistics, I arrived at a place where those were actually being studied in relationship to architecture. That, for me, was very profound."

Alan Plattus, who was at the institute from fall 1973 through the following spring, recalled, "One of the many things I did when I was there was the working drawings for House VI, which Randall [Korman] was producing for Peter. This speaks to the extent to which the institute was always a work in progress. Whatever there was to do, whoever was around was drafted to do it. I roomed with Rem Koolhaas for a whole year and lived to tell about it. He was at Cornell working with Matthias Ungers and fighting

with Colin Rowe, so he came to the institute. There was an empty office looking out onto the Empire State Building, and we moved in there when he was writing *Delirious New York*. The world of theory was already heating up in comparative literature, linguistics, and philosophy departments, and the great discovery was to find this place where the interest in architecture intersected at a high level with such disciplines that seemed to be out in front of us. Architecture, thanks to the IAUS, seemed to catch up very fast to the extent that intellectuals such as Princeton professor Carl Schorske and French literature professor Peter Brooks, then at Yale, started coming to the institute to find out what was going on in architecture. It was an exhilarating experience."

Deborah Berke gave her take on a longer tenure at the institute, saying, "I was at the institute from 1978 to 1982. I started going to Open Plan [the IAUS evening lecture series]. They already had the internship and undergraduate programs. Diana was starting the advanced design workshop at that time, and I, along with Larry Kutnicki, went to the board of fellows and told them we would like to start a program for high school students. The response was along the lines of, 'If it meets our standards and if you get your poster design to look like the rest of our posters and if we don't have to pay you anything, it's totally fine with us.' So that's what we did. There I met Mario Gandelsonas, who was running the educational program at the time. He asked me to work with him, and from there I moved into teaching a studio in the undergraduate program, along with Steven Harris. The lecture series, exhibitions, catalogs, the *October*, *Oppositions*, *Skyline*, and *Oppositions* publications, four different educational programs, constant debate—every single thing was imbued with an idea, and there was so much of it."

The evening's discussion also touched on the institute's connections with places such as Cooper Union, Columbia University, and Princeton as well as the Architectural Association and its director at the time, Alvin Boyarsky. There was talk about other figures, such as Bernard Tschumi, the relationship between the Grays and the Whites (New York Five), as well as the so-called West Coast Silvers—Craig Hodgetts (MArch '66), Coy Howard, Eugene Kupper (MArch '67), Anthony Lumsden, former Yale dean Cesar Pelli, and Tim Vreeland (BA '46, MArch '54). Stern commended Julia Bloomfield for her high-level editorial work on IAUS publications and remarked that the founding of the

institute was driven by Eisenman's nostalgia for a public forum like CIAM and Team 10.

Eisenman emphasized, "There was an immense degree of cohesion among us, a sense of pride in the mission of whatever it was we were doing. At the same time, there was an enormous anxiety and antagonism in the world out there to what the institute was doing. One always felt a little embattled. There were certain people who were very much against not so much what we were doing but how we were doing it. That antagonism permeates the architectural culture of the last fifty years in this country. The clichéd reference to the IAUS as elitist has to do with our relationship with Philip Johnson. He ran a show in New York City, a group of architects who used to hang out in the Century Club. He was the focus of anxiety."

Agrest argued that Johnson "came into the institute later, not when it was struggling and everyone was sticking their necks out." Stern contradicted this by claiming that Johnson's interest in the IAUS actually preceded its high times and added the anecdote that Johnson always referred to it as the Eisenman Institute. According to Plattus, what to some seemed like elitism and obscurantism had to do with the difficulty of some of the texts published by the IAUS, which "scared a lot of people when cigar-smoking, bearded, bomb-throwing people like Manfredo Tafuri showed up. It just confirmed the suspicion that the IAUS was smuggling dangerous ideas into the country."

The panel also discussed aspects of the IAUS that were absent from the film. Eisenman remarked that there was no mention of the fact that, besides *Oppositions*, the IAUS started the art journal *October* when its founding editors, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, were fellows there. Stern added that one of the figures who appears in the film, yet is neither interviewed nor mentioned by name, even though he was very important, is recently deceased: "brilliant graphic designer Massimo Vignelli." He created the look of *Oppositions* and many of the other publications, such as *Skyline*. Indeed, there was a strong idea of branding at the IAUS, largely the result of Vignelli's efforts.

A point not adequately clarified by Agrest's documentary is the profound historic reasons for the IAUS's end. However, the film was satisfactory in providing various answers, one of them Agrest's point of view that institutions of that kind have a certain life span. "At a very particular moment we put a lot into it, we got a lot, and then it couldn't go on. You know, the Beatles lasted fewer years, and they were the Beatles! There were many strong people; it's a miracle it lasted so long." To this, Deamer added that the institute's demise was not irrelevant to the fact that "the mission had been accomplished."

Thanking Agrest for her contribution, Plattus concluded, "Imagine if somebody had done during the CIAM meetings what Diana did for the IAUS. What an incredible resource and provocation that would be and how much more vivid all of this is because of the way it has been presented." Everyone seemed to agree. Earlier in the discussion, Stern had remarked that, although the timing of the institute was right, one could not start a similar institution today "because the need doesn't exist."

On that last point, I couldn't agree less. Comparing the debates produced by the IAUS and its journal *Oppositions* to current publications, Deamer summed up the struggle we are all faced with: "I don't think we read those in the same way we read *Oppositions*. We read these publications to get a sense of what's in the air, but not to get positions. I think we really read *Oppositions* to learn about what we should believe in because we wanted to take a stand." Isn't the idea of "taking a stand" exactly what contemporary architecture needs? The timing is really perfect.

—Gregorio Carboni Maestri
Maestri is an architect, visiting research scholar at Columbia University, and a PhD fellow at the Università degli Studi di Palermo. His dissertation is focused on *Oppositions*.