

LOU: ICON

Since that time when Lou Kahn spoke to Rice architecture students in the spring of 1968, a year before the first edition of this text, three decades have passed, essentially a generation. Those kids in the photograph, so crisp in white shirts, sitting in the Houston sun, do seem a generation away in time; but Lou remains, timeless.

Two books had appeared about a year before this encounter, and were the timely texts of thirty years ago: Reyner Banham's *New Brutalism* and Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. While they both confronted the architectural assumptions of the mainstream architects of that generation, and were divergent in terms of their positions in architectural theory, the one commonality was the significant inclusion of Lou Kahn, as if his presence bridged the broad ideologies and legitimized aspects of what were then provocative points of view.

Lou Kahn was the only American to attend CIAM X in Otterlo, and the values embodied in the work of his admirers, Team 10, were very much the things to look at in 1968, when I was just graduated and the youngest assistant professor in the Rice School of Architecture. They spoke of an attitude

more inclusive of history, local character, and a responsiveness to the basic culture of society. Kahn's younger colleague, Robert Venturi, my thesis professor at Yale in 1968, brought these ideas to suggest that the American popular landscape could be embraced as it was re-formed, even as he enlarged upon Kahn by seeing relevance for both Rome and Las Vegas.

Parenthetically, it is perhaps ironic that Lou Kahn's architecture itself stands apart from the Houston landscape of those days: he never built a commercial office building, and envisioned defined spaces extending the connection between buildings and context, prophetically speaking of "civic needs" and how "we may have cities without architecture, which is no city."

Lou Kahn left the idea that Architecture must be a proactive force, both at the scale of the environment and the scale of human interaction; as he speaks of "The Institutions of Man," or how "buildings must be true to their nature" and "architects must learn that they have other rights . . . their own rights." So, buildings must have a will, but it is architects who give it to them: a terrible responsibility and an indisputable challenge.

It was this transcendental aspect of Kahn's view which remains the central aspect to his progress of making the

designed environment. "Function" had given way to ideas of purpose and intention, and uses of history, issues of formal representation, which were the core of the post-modernist debate in the 1970s and 1980s, were transcended in Kahn's work. As he speaks on these pages, one can sense the living past not as an issue of style, but as a reborn and integral part of the process of making.

Lou Kahn speaks across three decades again, and his sensibilities are ever relevant to a new generation of white-shirt students and architects; his values and ideals remain as normative postulations.

When I did the first edition of this book in 1969, my idea for the text was a response to the poetic nature of Kahn's lecture, to take his unedited recorded words and reconstruct their physical presence in the form of "blank verse," or at least somewhat of its appearance, to visually represent the rhythm of Kahn's way of expressing his ideas. I thank Dung Ngo for retaining this format; I thank Lars Lerup and Kevin Lippert for republishing this text in its updated form, as Princeton Architectural Press in many ways is to this generation of architects what our special publisher of the first edition, the late George Wittenborn, was to us in 1969.

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