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## Questions for Tom Fisher

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The following questions were generated in light of an interest on behalf of 49th parallel ejournal to start a new online journal speaking to shared regional values and aspirations.

Q1. It is by now a well known fact that our world has been pried open by globalization, including the way we communicate, do business, and learn. Even our empathetic meme has acquired a new dimension, feeling the plight of distant disasters in ways that weren't there just few years ago, through videos, social media and so on. Is there room anymore for regional education in light of this?

**Thinking of globalism and localism as somehow opposed to each other is a mistake. The human ecosystem is like any other ecology, which is always global and local at the same time. Every ecosystem remains a part of a global flow of energy and resources, but it thrives or not locally. One reason modern civilization has done so much damage to the world is that our knowledge of it is misaligned with the way the world is organized; we sort knowledge into terms of disciplines, while the planet and its ecosystems are sorted by place. In the future we not only need global knowledge paired with local action, but also place-based knowledge in an increasingly place-less civilization. As one of the few place-based design disciplines, architecture has much to contribute to this.**

Q2. As a tag-along to the previous question; does regional

practice mean anything anymore, especially given that a good part of the last recession was overcome on the backs of projects performed overseas? China and Dubai played no small part in helping the likes of NBBJs and the SOMs stay afloat, which in turn kept a few local firms intact as well.

**Humanity has had a couple-hundred-year Ponzi Scheme with the planet, where the one billion or so people now at the top of this pyramid scheme have done very well by exploiting the other six billion, by exhausting natural resources needed by future generations, and by extinguishing other species at record rates. As we learned from Bernard Madoff, Ponzi Schemes collapse when they run off the planet and that is exactly what has happened with humanity; it now takes 1.5 earths to meet our current needs. So the game is over. Our Ponzi scheme is poised for collapse and those at the top of the pyramid, the global rich, the wealthiest countries, and the biggest firms, all have the farthest to fall, and fall they will. A post-Ponzi-Scheme existence will look a lot like human existence before it began, with communities of people living in resilient ways, in local economies, husbanding local resources. In the near future, regional practice will be everything.**

Q3. As inland schools we have a unique opportunity to work with rural communities and open landscapes, and yet the world is on a hyper mission to urbanize, to densify, and gentrify. Might there be a unique role for the inland school to ruralize the urban, and vice versa?

**Humans are moving into cities of all sizes as a survival strategy, since cities may be the one ecosystem in which our vulnerable species can survive. But the megacities emerging around the world are not sustainable, since they depend upon too much land and too many resources in order to survive, so we will also see the re-emergence of smaller cities and revitalized towns more able to support themselves on the resources – the food, water, energy, and materials – within their immediate control. The rural/urban dichotomy will not mean much going forward. The two are interdependent and need to reinforce each other at a scale that can ensure the survival of both.**

Q4. Collaboration has become a buzzword and just like any other it embodies both the valuable and the trite; what may be a good model for teachers and students to follow to be effective consumers of the term.

**We have entered a sharing or collaborative economy in which cooperation will increasingly prevail over competition, access over ownership, and social networks over hierarchies. Properly understood, collaboration isn't a buzzword, but a fundamental shift in the way in which people will relate to each other and to the world around us. And it has to be at the center of how we educate – and relate to – students,**

**clients, and communities.**

Q5. The journal for which these questions have been devised was set up under the auspices of collaborative aspirations, is it time to break down some of the boundaries between schools, or is there still a need to uphold them?

**We have entered a time in which networks and webs have replaced the machine as the dominant metaphor for reality, as we move from mechanistic to ecological ways of seeing the world. In that light, the hierarchies within and boundaries between schools makes little sense and we would all do well to find new ways to connect institutions and link faculty and students with each other, which in the digital age, has become much easier to do.**

Q6. On a slightly different topic: what is the role of the architect today as a public intellectual, what pressing issues should he or she speak to?

**Even when doing private commissions, architects make environments that affect the public and that convey an answer to the fundamental question of all architecture, which is: How should we live? As such, every architect is already a public intellectual, a person putting ideas into the public realm that prompt a discussion and provoke a response. As to the issues we should take up, they remain much as they always have been: we build in order to create a place for ourselves in the world and to improve human, social, economic, and environmental health.**

Q7. What is the relationship between the public intellectual and the region? Is there such a thing as a regional ethic?

**Those questions, like all architectural questions, happen in particular places, and so unlike the public intellectuals who use print or digital media to convey their ideas, architects necessarily have to do so in a given location. Like politics, all architecture is local and however global it may appear, our field remains one tied to specific geographical regions and we should embrace that reality.**

Q8. Back to education; what is the role of "theory" in education today. In the past it borrowed heavily from linguistic examinations of text, diagnosing issues related to sign and signified: what might its value be for us today? Now that the world has been probed and opened through Google, superficially or otherwise, and if theory was in effect an attempt to demystify things unknown, is there really a need for theory as knowledge anymore?

**Theory puts forward propositions about the world. Every building represents a "theory" about what it means to live a good life and to be in the world, in a particular place and time. Architecture cannot exist without theory, without an idea about what it is doing and what it means, but our field goes through cycles in which we put more or less emphasis**

**on thinking or doing, on theory or practice. But should not think that we can do away with one or the other, since architecture always involves both.**

Q9. The studio has always represented the core platform on which we test ideas, teach creativity and practice design. Does it need to change, cast a greater influence on distant locales, work with the UN in rebuilding marginalized communities, corporations in improving our cities, airports etc?

**Studio offers an excellent pedagogy, one that other disciplines have wanted to emulate because of its flexible, interactive nature, ideally suited for the digital age. That said, the studio can also become too hermetic, too closed off from the challenges people face in the world, which, however avant garde the work in the studio may appear, represents a profoundly conservative point of view by refusing to deal with social, economic, and political realities. We can no longer remain a profession of the rich, designing primarily for wealthy individuals, communities, and companies, if we hope to have any credibility or viability. We need to declare human shelter as our purview, as medicine has health and law justice, and find ways to serve the shelter needs of all 7+ billion people on the planet, and studio becomes a place in which we can begin to figure out how.**

Q10. What ideas might you have for ways the schools of the 49th parallel can physically communicate and connect? For example one thought is that the 49th parallel schools agree to build/buy a shipping container that makes the rotation between the schools, setting shop at each and over the duration of say a month it serves as symbol and space for interactive/collaborative/immersive work, helping communities address pressing spatial and environmental problems, but serve as hub for social and creative production.

**In an era in which we already produce far too many greenhouse gasses and use far too much of the globe's finite supply of oil, we need to stop moving bodies and begin to move more bits instead. So, how can the 49th parallel schools communicate? Skype, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, e-mail, video conferencing, and cell phones, among many other means. We don't need to be in another place in order to be present and our schools could lead the way in this.**