Architecture as instauration

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Those who aim to build for eternity in a world of economy of consumption, find themselves in a certain sense beyond the contingencies of time; and it is from this that their personalities are consolidated. Enzo Fratelli, 1961

The built environment that surrounds us is the physical representation of its history, and the way in which it has accumulated different levels of meaning to form the specific quality of the site, not just for what it appears to be, in perceptual terms, but for what it is in structural terms. [It is] the essence of architectural production. Vittorio Gregotti, 1984

Architects in the United States design a relatively nominal percentage of the buildings. Moreover, little of what is built will be remembered, or extant, two or three generations later. The work of the Philadelphia-based firm Kieran Timberlake Architects (KTA) is paradoxical in this context as they ask how architecture can resist the vicissitudes of time while sustaining a culture in which change is fast-paced and relentless. They are less interested in ‘sustainability’, however, than they are in architecture’s role as a sustaining presence in the constructed world. The antilogy of stasis and change in contemporary American architectural production provokes Stephen Kieran and James Timberlake to innovate continuously with site responses and construction techniques — producing work that is, at its best, ‘beyond the contingencies of time’ (Fratelli, 1961). Their work is, none the less, part of a long-held architectural tradition that recognizes what Vittorio Gregotti calls the ‘perceptual’ and ‘structural’ qualities of a site (Gregotti, 1984). The core of this tradition is the credo that all architectural production is inherently an act of instauration.

Instauration, intervention, and amelioration

The difference between ‘instauration’ and the more commonly used ‘intervention’ helps explain a fundamental aspect of KTA’s work. The once polemically charged ‘intervention’ is a by-product of the American Contextualist Movement of the 1960s that took shape in the urban design studios of Cornell University under the tutelage of Colin Rowe. For three decades, much of the urban and architectural design discourse both in Europe and the US has been profoundly influenced by Contextualism. The reasons for Contextualism’s dissipation are beyond the scope of this essay. Its effects, however, are registered in its valorization of form over construction and the use of figure/ground readings of a site rebuilt to ameliorate the difference between the intervention and the intervened.

European pre-Enlightenment notions of architecture and urbanism inform Contextualism’s larger urban design strategy in which old and new are woven into a coherent sequence of poché and volume. The plans, sections, and elevations of its discrete buildings, on
the other hand, are tactical conjunctions of Le Corbusier’s *Oeuvres Complètes*, pre-twentieth-century architectural exemplars, and the formal and stylistic vocabulary of the constructed context. In *Collage City*, Rowe and Koetter (1978) use such terms as ‘set-pieces’, *bricolage*, ‘collage’, ‘Collision City’, and ‘the crisis of the object’, juxtaposing the models of acropolis and agora. Yet, it is not collision but *amelioration* that concerns them. Comparing a figure-ground plan of Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin with the Piazza Navona, Koetter and Rowe equivocate:  

*On the one side of the equation building becomes prime and insulated, on the other the isolation as identifiable space reduces (or elevates) the status of building to infill. But building as infill! The idea can seem to be deplorably passive and empirical – though such need not be the case. However, though speculation may thus be incited by the fluctuations of the figure-ground phenomenon … the possibilities of any such activity – especially at an urban scale – would seem very largely to depend upon the presence of what used to be called poché.* (Rowe, Koetter, 1978, p.78)

It is in the ‘architecting’ of the poché, of course, that the urbanist- or architect-as- *bricoleur* is ultimately effaced. Rowe and Koetter conclude *Collage City*, not with the image of Picasso’s *Still Life with Chair Caning* (the ostensible centrepiece of their polemic) but with two landscapes by Poussin. Their final text illuminates the politics of their pictorial choices and the subtext of amelioration implicit in their lexicon of ‘context’, ‘adjacency’, ‘contingency’, ‘Gestalt’, and ‘ambivalence’.

Utopia as metaphor and *Collage City* as prescription: these opposites … should surely constitute the dialectic of the future, rather than any total surrender either to scientific ‘certainties’ or the simple vagaries of the ad hoc. The disintegration of modern architecture seems to call for such a strategy; an enlightened pluralism seems to invite; and, possibly, even common sense concurs. (Ibid., p.181)

Contextualism, therefore, is based not on collision or collage, but on the idea of a continuous fabric – a weaving together that is a ‘resolution of conflict’.  

In *The Architecture of the City*, Aldo Rossi (1982) argued that this manner of ‘enlightened pluralism’ retards rather than propels the positive and incessant instauration of a site. Rossi, writing in the early 1960s, was responding less to Rowe’s polemic than to the increasingly regressive preservation statutes enacted in Italy after the Second World War. He argues:

*[C]ontext itself can be seen either as the persistence of a function over time or as something isolated from the urban structure, that is, as something which stands outside of technological and social evolution … [S]o-called contextual preservation is related to the city in time like the embalmed corpse of a saint is to the image of his historical personality.* (Rossi, 1982)

Carlo Scarpa – not typically associated with Rossi – similarly criticized the building statutes of Venice. For Scarpa, the strictures of ‘dove era, come era’ made it virtually impossible for him to build ‘modern architecture’, lamenting that ‘we should build
architecture that expresses our own time, not that of others' (Scarpa, 1978). Rossi and Scarpa agreed that through the construction of the illusion of time, contextualist interventions inadvertently obfuscated the time and future history of the site they intended to preserve.3

These limitations notwithstanding, for generations of architects Contextualism signified an important critical reappraisal of the then received view of Modernism and the International Style – specifically in regards to CIAM-based urban design strategies. Yet like the movement against which it was positioned, the banality of Contextualism in general and the term ‘intervention’ in particular increased in direct proportion to the distance in time and space between Contextualism’s originators and its latter-day followers. Today intervention and context tend to be associated, perhaps unfairly, with narrow formal and figural issues. Instauration, on the other hand, prompts associations with culture and construction.

Within the architectural operative of instauration, a site is a place of continuous habitation that includes continuity and discontinuity – the latter of which is not a source of ‘conflict’ requiring ‘resolution’. Consequently, amelioration is irrelevant. Kurt Forster explains: Cities in the modern age have come to be identified by familiar emblems; prominent examples, such as the Eiffel Tower or Rockefeller Center, come to mind at once. These emblematic buildings represent instances of what the ancient Romans and the Italians of the Renaissance called the instauratio ... of the city: the periodic and partial remaking of a section of the city. Through the acts of instauratio, [a site] acquires something of its continuously dissipating essence and a truer image of its own potential. The instauratio makes new ‘sites’, marks an area, connects low and high, and, above all, provides a new point of view ... If detachment is its condition, then the reward it offers is a more penetrating understanding and a more encompassing perception of [a site’s] character than could be provided by ordinary experience. (Forster, 1984)
Some KTA works reveal the influence of former mentors Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

a Martin Jewelry Shop project

b Lehigh University Goodman Tennis Center
When KTA makes what Forster calls ‘emblematic buildings’, their expanded idea of site is not limited to the pre-existing formal, material, and stylistic characteristics of a given building or parcel of land. Consistent with the model of instauratio, they embrace the temporal and cultural realities ‘within the technological and social evolution of a site’ (Gregotti, 1984). Kieran and Timberlake are not interested in atomizing the distinction between new and old. Nor do their instaurations devalue or overwhelm an existing site. Rather than conceiving of architecture as a fetishized and overly complex formal figure on a secondary ground, Kieran and Timberlake view their work as an inseparable part of a ground that is culturally constructed and reconstructed over time. Their instaurations, whether they are new free-standing buildings or additions to existing buildings, are subtle commentaries on the fullness of a site – creating a colloquy between current and future occupation.

**Architecture, building, and the grounds of invention**

Kieran and Timberlake earned their professional degrees from the University of Pennsylvania. They apprenticed together in the office of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown (VRSB) in Philadelphia from the late-1970s until they established their practice in 1984. Both are Fellows of the American Academy in Rome (1980-81 and 1982-83 respectively), have taught extensively, and are currently Studio Masters in the Department of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania.

The experience of Rome, the academy, and academia continues to affect their work. The paintings of Al Held, an artist-in-residence at the academy while Kieran was a fellow there, were a defining influence on their first institutional commission at Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia. Kieran and Timberlake used Held’s paintings as a visual and conceptual model for a three-dimensional and diaphanous ceiling that hangs above, and is the visual focus of, the Student Center. The new ceiling, a complex arrangement of rectilinear and curved wood elements, screens the existing exposed rough concrete underside of the floor above and the ad hoc plumbing passing through the space (Figs. 2a and b). Other built works in which artists played important roles are Fingerspan [Fig. 2c], with sculptor Judy Pinto, and The Pavilion in the Trees [Fig. 2d], with sculptor Martin Puryear – both in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia. Rather than simply ‘facilitating’ the sculptor’s ideas, KTA worked in tandem, affecting both the formal and tectonic aspects of the project. Moreover, within the strictures of a 40-person office with multiple large-scale projects and tight budgets, Kieran and Timberlake maintain a studio-like atmosphere. The office pedagogy includes pin-ups and site visits. On the building site the entire office studies a project under construction, learning how contractors translate (or at times mistranslate) their drawings into buildings.

Their experience with VRSB, combined with the intellectual geography of the city of Philadelphia, their experiences in Rome, and their continued work as teachers, situate their architectural production historically and discursively. The ‘Philadelphia School’ of Frank Furness, Paul Philippe Cret, Louis I. Kahn, Mitchell and Giurgola, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, embraces the medieval and the classical, the modern and the post-modern. Several of KTA’s works – the Chestnut Hill Student Center, the project for the Martin Jewelry Shop [Fig. 3a], and the Lehigh University Goodman Tennis Center [Fig. 3b], for example – demonstrate the stylistic influence of their former mentors Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

The work of Kahn, Eero Saarinen – and to a lesser extent Carlo Scarpa – is among the critical influences on their architectural production. In the case of Kahn and Saarinen, this influence is manifold and diffuse. One sign of this legacy is Kieran and Timberlake’s focus on the role of the institution in a culture that changes with far more rapidity than did the one Kahn and Saarinen knew. They learned from Kahn and Scarpa that the spiritual dimension of architecture resides in the complex relation of culture, form, materials, and the character of a given site – that architecture is an instauration, not ‘infill’ or a ‘set-piece’. Other signs of this particular primogeniture are evinced in KTA’s preference for institutional projects, self-finishing materials, and ambivalence about designing ‘facades’.

Eero Saarinen believed like Kahn that institutions such as colleges and universities offered perhaps the only opportunity to build ‘permanent architecture’. Kahn seemed more optimistic about the future; Saarinen saw civilization speedily declining. While Kahn believed that institutional projects – academic or governmental buildings – were the sign of the best of culture, for Saarinen the institution was the last refuge, an escape from an irrevocable dissolution.

Universities are to our time what the monasteries were to the Middle Ages. They are oases in our desert-like civilization. They also have about the only beautiful pedestrian spaces that are left to us. And it may turn out that they have our only permanent architecture. (Saarinen, 1962, p. 12)

Saarinen’s sentiment helps explain his design of the fortress-like brick and steel dormitory at the University of Pennsylvania. The building stands only a few hundred feet from Penn’s Graduate School of Fine Arts where Kahn taught and Kieran and Timberlake studied. With its moat-like fenced-in perimeter, battered base of rough brickwork, and deeply set slotted windows, the dormitory deliberately evokes a homely medieval castle keep, confirming Saarinen’s lack of enthusiasm for the surrounding culture and urban fabric. Its object-like and defensive character notwithstanding, the dormitory none the less demonstrates, at least in relation to campus design, that Saarinen thought of an architect’s job as one of integrating the new with the existing while distinguishing between the two.

He explained:

An architect must be conscientiously responsible toward the master plan and he must be conscientiously responsible toward all the buildings around. There is
always a way – not necessarily within the current enthusiasms – or a way must be invented so that the old which is good does not become obsolete because of its new neighbor. (Ibid.)

The relation of KTA’s work to Saarinen is not limited to broad questions of campus planning; rather, it centres more on the role of programme, the range of site responses, and the techniques of building. Saarinen explained that he based all of his work on three common principles:

*The principle of respecting function … structural honesty … [and] the awareness of the thinking and technology of our time … I want always to search out the new possibilities in new materials of our time and to give them their proper place in architectural design.* (Ibid., p. 6)

Like Saarinen, the exterior form and technology of KTA’s work varies from site to site, programme to programme. Even when KTA is simultaneously designing two buildings as part of an overall campus plan as was the case at Rider College, the character of each of the two buildings is distinct as if each had a particular site and programme. Saarinen’s explanation about his own work helps illuminate this aspect of KTA’s work:

*The conviction that a building cannot be placed on a site, but that a building grows from its site, is another principle in which I believe. I see architecture not as the building alone, but the building in relation to its surroundings, whether nature or man-made surroundings. I believe very strongly that the single building must be carefully related to the whole in the outdoor space it creates. In its mass and scale and material it must become an enhancing element in the total environment.* (Ibid.)

KTA embraces Saarinen’s inclusive vision of the role of the architect while avoiding Rowe’s insipid ‘pluralism’. Consequently, the range of formal and material choices in KTA’s work is, like that of Saarinen, relatively heterogeneous. Saarinen’s apologia for what may have seemed to others a lack of consistency holds equally true for the work of Kieran and Timberlake:

*The external form of my work varies greatly. But inside the solution of every problem there are underlying principles that hold it together and join each building I have done to every other one.* (Ibid.)

It is perhaps owing largely to the influence of Kahn and Saarinen that KTA’s work is more instauration than intervention – creating new points of view. They embed their buildings in the contemporaneous time and place of the site rather than in the vision of an invented history, seen through the Claude Glass of amelioration.

**Tactics of Instauration**

Architects are often commissioned to alter landscapes and buildings made by others. The range of responses to this challenge varies as much as the architects who made them. KTA does not limit their instaurations to the simple physical alteration and addition of a building or site. Typically their alterations are as much programmatic as they are physical. Among the tactics available to architects within the strategy of instauration are: replication, extension through transformation, insertion, negation, parasite/host, completion, subtraction, and adding a ‘third element’. Architects often use these tactics in tandem, reflecting the complexity of a project’s utilitarian and conceptual programmes, with a ‘third element’, often ‘neutral’ in character.
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Kieran and Timberlake have adopted several tactics of instauration throughout more than six hundred projects. I will briefly examine three of these: the Kegler Pool House Addition in Philadelphia, the Technology Building for Rider College in New Jersey, and the Sykes Union for West Chester College in Pennsylvania. I will then study in greater depth the Berkeley College Project for Yale University and the Melvin and Claire Levine Hall for the University of Pennsylvania. I will conclude with a more extended analysis of the Welles Activity Center for the Tatnall School, Delaware, and the West Middle School for the Shipley School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania.

KTA used the tactic of the ‘third element’ when adding on to the Kegler house in Philadelphia [Figs. 4a-e]. The new owners had converted a former chicken coop with a small cupola and weathervane into a house. KTA’s pool-pavilion addition substantially changed the character of both the house and the site. The Kegler house is a wood-frame structure, rustic, agrarian, and because of its former use, quite small in scale. The pavilion is a rectilinear prism (more glass than wood), sharing little in character and expression with the existing building, save its wood frame [Figs. 4a and b]. Although its size is concordant with the house it adjoins, the pavilion’s scale is not. A wood exoskeleton envelopes the pavilion, acting as a kind of ‘giant order’ – purposely out-of-scale with both the addition and the house. Kieran and Timberlake underscore the difference between the two architectures by unceremoniously grafting the beams of the new pavilion on to the roof of the existing house. The exoskeleton operates, not at the scale of the house, but at the scale of the existing grass-covered courtyard space and rural compound [Fig. 4c]. This small hybrid instauration signals a reoccupation of the site, with its own distinct character. Yet, the pavilion does not negate, nor is it parasitical to, the aggregate of buildings in the compound. The owner’s conversion of the chicken coop retains its original character, while KTA’s pavilion is emblematic of something new happening here – providing a new point of view of the larger collection of buildings and open space.

The Rider Science and Technology Building is an insertion into and an addition on to an existing building [Figs. 5a-d]. The addition slices through the original 1960s building, creating a shared public space along a new spine [Figs. 5b-d]. The new interior spaces and the added massing and facades contrast with, yet engage the existing building and the larger campus. While the Rider Science and Technology Building succeeds formally and materially in the continued building-up of a culturally constructed site, the project would not have been possible without a careful reprogramming of the entire interior. Successful instaurations such as this require a holistic understanding of both existing and new patterns of use and the architectural reinvention of these patterns. Consequently, KTA spent more time on redesigning how the revised building would be used and the manner in which it would be built, than on its particular image or form – a value system and working method evident in the best of their built works.

In the addition to West Chester College’s Sykes Union [Figs. 6a-d], KTA used the tactics of insertion, transformation, and parasite/host to reinvent the existing building – a humourless and undistinguished box built in the 1960s. Square in plan and rotated 45° to the existing campus grid, the existing student union was all sides and backs with no front. KTA’s tactic of instauration was twofold: they wrapped as much of the existing building as
they could while adding the primary addition to the corner of the building that faced the campus and street [Fig. 6a]. The latter stratagem created a public and civic face to a building that had neither, while strengthening the somewhat impoverished architectural and urban character of this part of the campus [Figs. 6b-c]. The relation of new to existing in the Sykes Union is one part Frank O. Gehry’s Air and Space Museum in Los Angeles and one part Adolf Loos’s Villa Karma. Gehry’s formally complex metal-clad Air and Space Museum stands in stark contrast to the simple masonry box it adjoins – creating an exterior ‘street’ between the two masses. Loos wrapped most of the Villa Karma with new programme, while completely reorganizing the interior. The similarities to Loos’s work do not end there. As in Loos’s alteration to the Villa Karma, the critical junctures in the West Chester project occur where the two architectures overlap and intersect – programme to programme, building to building, and building to setting. Moreover, while Gehry created an exterior street between new and existing, Kieran and Timberlake created a public building facing the existing street, with a generous exterior and interior public realm [Fig. 6d] supporting the civic and cultural dimensions of the complex programme.

On the exterior, the addition both negates and transforms the pre-existing building, creating a parasite/host relationship. Although approximately the same size as the existing building, the addition seems larger due to its siting, massing, and articulation. Moreover, the addition reorients the building, presenting a front orthogonally oriented to the other campus buildings. If not for the use of

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Successful instaurations require a holistic understanding of existing and new patterns of use as here, at Rider College. The Science and Technology Center (1) and the Admissions and Financial Aid Building (2) are connected by a circulation spine that runs through the existing building and eventually emerges from the other end of the circulation spine (d). The end elevation (e) shows the laboratories on either side of the circulation spine. The other end of the spine (c) emerges from the existing building and becomes the corner exterior (f).
Tactics of insertion, transformation and parasite/host were used to reinvent a humourless 1960s box for West Chester College’s Student Union.

- Plans showing existing building at 45° to campus grid
- Library and KTA’s new addition facing the campus and street
- The street side provides a civic face and ...
- ... a public space
- The critical spaces occur at the intersection of old and new
indigenous materials and the orthogonal orientation of the instauration, the addition would have seemed a simple negation of both the campus and the existing building. Yet, owing to its siting and materials, the addition seems both a transformation and extension of the existing campus. The exterior of the amalgamated building often makes it unclear which is parasite and which is host. This difference would have been further obscured if the College had implemented KTA’s landscape plan, which called for masking with a dense bosc of trees the remainder of the original building still visible on the rear. The college’s failure to complete the landscaping creates the happy accident of juxtaposing new and existing fabric, enriching the viewer’s apprehension of the instauration.

Yale University gave KTA little room to explore the complex material, constructional, and conceptual agenda that is a hallmark of the firm’s practice. Ironically, this did little to insulate the firm and the Berkeley College project [Figs. 7a-f] from public controversy. Similar to Scarpa’s dilemma in Venice, KTA had far more latitude on the interior than on the exterior. It is perhaps because of this parallel that there is a Scarpa-like quality to KTA’s key insertions into the existing fabric [Figs. 7c-e]. Berkeley College, completed in 1934 by the architect James Gamble Rogers, consists of two collegiate Gothic buildings – one L-shaped and the other U-shaped in plan – that bracket a generous garden courtyard. The programme for renovations was complex and tedious. This included the thermal updating of more than one hundred distinctly configured leaded-glass windows, upgrading antiquated building systems, and altering the courtyard with a ramp to conform with US disability codes. KTA renovated and reorganized the entire college including all of its dormitory rooms. Their most significant and controversial modifications occurred in the basement and main floor of the South Building – the most public areas of the building [Fig. 7a].

The complexities and nuances of the alterations are difficult to grasp without visiting the buildings and Yale’s campus. KTA inserted new elements at both ends of the interior of the South Building, accommodating new uses and the patterns of living of the current generation of Yale students. These insertions are distinct in character and material from the existing architecture. KTA transformed an unused basement into ‘found space’, re-programmed with lounges, a weight room, and a large multi-purpose room occasionally used as a black-box theatre [Figs. 7f, and 8a and b]. The architecture and the fittings of the multi-purpose room are informed by KTA’s earlier project for the interior renovation and alteration to Rock Hall, The School of Music for Temple University in Philadelphia.8

The alterations to the main dining hall (formerly The Great Hall) and the addition of two new stairs prompted a lively debate – seemingly disproportionate to the scale, size, and character of the changes. Robert Irving and Vincent Scully Jr. spearheaded much of this dispute, reported in The Wall Street Journal and Architectural Record. The central argument was the degree to which the appearance of the historic fabric of a building ought to remain unaltered in perpetuity, regardless of programmatic and cultural change. Irving and Scully argued that
A highly controversial project. Berkeley College renovation for Yale University. The new insertions accommodate new uses and introduce new character and materials.

a Axonometric. The main dining hall at the upper level was altered and new stairs provided at each end. A multi-purpose space and other facilities were provided in the unused basement.

b Criticism focused on the new mezzanine at the end of the dining hall.

c There is a Scarpa-like quality to the new insertions as in this window detail...

d ... and this one ...

e ... and on this stair!

f The multi-purpose room, also used as a black-box theatre, is informed by an earlier KTA project.
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8. Berkeley College’s unused basement was transformed into ‘found space’
   a. Other parts of the basement reveal the original structure
   b. ... adapt it for use, as in the bays to the right

9. Another example of the ‘third element’ approach to instauration: Levine Hall for the University of Pennsylvania
   a. Site plan, KTA’s primary achievement was to recognize a site for the building (shaded)
   b. The existing buildings are linked by the distinct ‘third element’ which responds to the university’s desire for a building that demonstrated the innovative nature of its work.
   c. ... from Walnut Street

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**Site Plan**

- **Emergency Vehicle Access**
- **Walnut Street**
- **Chancellor Walk**
- **Smith Walk**

[Diagram showing layout and sections of the site]
KTA had egregiously altered a valued monument. The nature of this complaint is not new; it is eerily similar, albeit smaller in scale, to the criticism against Frank Lloyd Wright’s project for the Masieri Memorial in Venice (which Carlo Scarpa ultimately designed). Scarpa’s alteration to Venice’s Fondazione Querini Stampalia prompted similar debates. His design of a new bridge for the Fondazione Querini Stampalia – what seems today a small matter to a non-Venetian – was strongly opposed by the building authorities who wanted Scarpa to replicate the standard Venetian bridge. Similar to the Venetian preservationists’ attack on Scarpa, Irving, an architectural historian, characterized the Berkeley College alteration and addition as ‘irrelevant’. Scully, whose essay on the relation of Kahn and Scarpa is one of the highlights of the Scarpa Opera Completa, now seemed on the other side of the argument. He asked whether an architect ought to be granted such wide latitude to ‘butcher really beautiful buildings’. Yale School of Architecture Dean, Robert A. M. Stern, damning with faint praise, conceded that KTA’s alterations were, ‘not all that bad’ (Russell, 2000).

The criticism focused on a new mezzanine level KTA inserted at one end of the dining hall [Figs. 7a and b]. Echoing Rossi’s earlier criticism of naïve Contextualism, Kieran responded to these and other criticisms during an open debate at Yale. ‘A generation ago, the world was far too ready to demolish and dramatically alter our past … Today, the pendulum has swung too far the other way. We place all too many buildings and landscapes beyond time, where no change is acceptable.’ Kieran concludes that the idea of leaving ‘no fingerprints’ tends to lead to a ‘dogma of total retention’ (ibid.). KTA’s architecture-as-instauration – where the fingerprints of the new are visible alongside the fabric of the existing – aligns more with the complex concept of ‘site’, than the more facile idea of ‘context’.

The University of Pennsylvania gave KTA far more latitude in their design for Levine Hall [Fig. 9a–c and 10a–c] than did Yale. The programme requires a new building with classrooms, laboratories, offices and public space connecting two existing buildings: the Graduate Research Wing (GRW) built in the 1960s and the much older Towne Building. The two differ in scale, age, floor-to-floor dimensions, and architectural expression. Interior circulation, therefore, was almost as important to the addition as was external form, character, materials, and techniques of assembly.

The primary task for Kieran and Timberlake’s instauration lay largely in the ability to recognize a site where no one else did. The site [Fig. 9a] – formerly used for parking and other tertiary activities – was an amorphous part of the campus with no distinguishing character. Just as they had done in the basement of Yale’s Berkeley College, KTA reclaimed ‘dross space’ – this time as a siting strategy. Having recognized the site, the firm had to choose the appropriate tactic of instauration. The footprint of Levine Hall creates a clearly defined forecourt and an enclosed courtyard garden space. The three other

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10 Levine Hall. KTA’s glass and steel ‘third element’

a The proportions and dimensions of the mullions and panels are based on the Golden Section

b Detail of the double-glazed wall which eases the heating and cooling loads by controlling the temperature in the void

c External wall sections. Left, the abstracted large-scale ‘coining’ where the new building abuts another. Right, the glazed curtain wall used elsewhere
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walls of the courtyard are pre-existing engineering buildings. The front wall of KTA's addition (facing the Graduate School of Fine Arts) is a subtly complex glass-and-steel, double curtain-wall system.

The buildings that comprise Penn's large urban campus are predominantly stone and brick; many designed by important figures in the century-old 'Philadelphia School'. These include Cope & Lippencott; Frank Furness; Louis I. Kahn; Mitchell Giurgola; Geddes, Brecher, Qualls, and Cunningham; and Venturi and Scott Brown. The School of Engineering and Applied Sciences has an equally rich history. The school, with many technical and scientific 'firsts' including the first computer ENIAC, continues to produce highly innovative and experimental work, particularly in computing and robotics. Kieran and Timberlake decided to connect these differing architectures and cultures, not by blending the two, but by adding a 'third element'. Their decision was, in part, prompted by the College's desire that the new building demonstrate, internally and externally, the innovative nature of their work. KTA's glass and steel 'third element' is formally and materially distinct from the GRW and Towne Building [Figs. 9b and c]. KTA's only accommodation to the existing fabric is at the point of connection between Levine Hall and the Towne Building. KTA creates an abstracted large scale 'coining' where the two meet, consisting of brick matching the Towne Building and the glass of the new curtain wall. This exterior transformation creates a hybrid expression that is neither a replication of the existing, nor a stark contrast with the new. KTA used the Golden Section to establish the proportions and dimensions of the mullions and panels [Fig. 10a], the latter of which are composed of two different kinds of glass. By assembling a wall combining one of the oldest proportional systems with a much newer construction technology, KTA signifies the nature of the applied science done behind the wall and the history of that science and the university at large.

The best-designed glass curtain-walls face challenges of heat loss and heat gain, a balanced HVAC system, and longevity. In response to this, KTA designed the curtain wall for Levine Hall to have two parallel wall systems reminiscent of William Lescaze's double-glazed wall for the Alfred Loomis House in Tuxedo Park New York (1936-37). KTA's wall eases rather than increases the heating and cooling loads on the building by controlling the temperature of the void space in the double wall [Fig. 10b and c].

While the upper floors link the two previously unconnected engineering buildings, on the ground floor the building works as a transverse 'pass-through' building. Its largely transparent walls visually and physically connect two public outdoor spaces, both of which exist by merit of the site strategy of the architects. Levine Hall enhances an existing series of discrete yet poorly defined exterior urban spaces by adding a distinctly new building that, 'marks an area, connects low and high, and, above all, provides a new point of view'.

Between theory and technique

Vitruvius, during the age of Augustus, used the term *ratiocinatio*, variously translated as 'theory' and 'technology', to describe a core principle of architectural production. Kieran and Timberlake probe the depths of architectural production in the gap between these two translations – between Claude Perrault's 'art and science of building', and Etienne Boullée's *Architecture, an essay on art*. KTA's work is, at once, a desire to be rational and an attempt to rationalize desire.13 This apparent paradox between 'constructive logic' and desire, gives such projects such as the Welles Activity Center for the Tatnall School and Shipley West Middle School an intangible quality that is at the heart of KTA's work. The former is an addition and partial interior renovation/re-programming of an existing school building; the latter a free-standing addition to a primary school campus lacking in structure and character.

Distancing themselves from what they consider to be the current state of specious theorizing within the profession and the academy, KTA's partners describe their principle of 'constructive logic as a credo ... [for] we do not yet have a theory'. Timberlake explains, 'Our interest [is] in the expression of a constructive logic, a “reality-based” architecture that differs from the current, more decorative, stylistic exercises that are in vogue. We believe much of current architecture to be cloaked in an untruthful veil of reality, structure and technology which is ... merely a more abstract continuation of post-modern decorative principles'. Timberlake continues: 'What is common to [our projects] is a clear definition of an innovative agenda for construction within varied landscapes coupled with a formal exploration of the relationship between that agenda and project circumstance.' Although their work is as optimistic as it is realistic, Timberlake's description of the firm's credo and Kieran's comments regarding the Berkeley College alteration demonstrate that the partners are often more comfortable describing what they are against. They are against the 'decorative, stylistic exercises [currently] in vogue'. They are against an 'untruthful veil of reality, structure and technology'. They are against a 'continuation of post-modern decorative principles'. They are against a 'dogma of total retention'. The Welles Activity Center for the Tatnall School in Delaware and the Shipley West Middle School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania are particularly important because they represent, to date, perhaps the most lucid demonstration of what Kieran and Timberlake are for. Both reveal KTA's 'constructive logic' and their desire to combine 'an innovative agenda for construction within varied landscapes' – i.e., instauration.

The addition of the Wells Activity Center – a large multi-purpose room – to the existing Tatnall School creates discretely formed exterior spaces, while the interior establishes a rich ambiguity of spatial, material, and programmatic layering. The Activity Center is used for physical education, sporting events, public meetings, ad hoc student theatres, and
weekly ecclesiastical services. The four walls and roof of the open volume render the simple, complex. The east wall consists of a large ramp connecting the lower floor level of the Activity Center to the existing floor level of the school. The ramp is inserted between a series of masonry columns and a large wood and glass curtain wall. The west wall, built of concrete masonry units and brick, is largely blank save for a series of small, floor level niches that seem carved-out of the thick masonry wall [Fig. 1]. The niches, located at the base of the wall, are sized and scaled for the young children, the primary users of the space. What seem like niches on the interior are actually cantilevered box-like aedicules appended to the exterior ‘rain wall’. The niches, fully glazed on the west side facing the existing play area, have wood side walls framed and clad in teak. The contrast between the large, composite glass-and-wood south-facing end wall of the main volume and the small window walls facing the playground in the niches creates an important subtext to the architecture of the addition. This contrast makes palpable the difference between the school-as-collective and the student-as-individual.

Each of the aedicules has its own exterior stairs/stylobate, evoking an image that is, at once, sacred and profane. When the play area adjacent to the Activity Center is empty of students, the aedicules prompt associations with the tempio (dedicated to specific saints) found on the sides and corners of buildings, ubiquitous throughout the fabric of Italy’s historic city centres. During recess, the stylobates transform into stoops. Young students appropriate the concrete steps, playing or watching others play, creating a lively theatrical quality to what was previously a poorly defined play area.

The longitudinal space of the Activity Center is visually open at its transverse ends, creating an uninterrupted view that begins in the renovated existing building and ends in a thicket of trees beyond the south wall. The large windowed south wall, combined with the longitudinal parallel trusses, side-aisle niches, and a continuous Kalwall clerestory running the length of the roof, all contribute to the basilica-like quality of the space. The view to the forest beyond evokes the gentle transcendental quality similar to that of E. Fay Jones’s Thorncrown Chapel in Arkansas.

At the opposite end – the point of connection to the Activity Center is a lobby that is a critical hinge to the physical and metaphorical operations of the school. The lobby also is located at the nexus of existing and new circulation. A glass wall and doors physically isolate the space from the Activity Center, yet as a prospect the lobby has an unobstructed view into and through the Center, much like the relation of balcony to cavea in a theatre. The lobby’s proximity to the school’s primary circulation route, ample size, large-scale steps, and view into the Activity Center – all contribute to the liveliness of this locus. KTA’s addition connects high and low, new and old. It creates edges that, in turn, form a semblance of a campus where only ad hoc sprawl once existed. By creating a multiplicity of new points of view, the Welles Activity Center is an instauration that transforms a building into a place.

The Shipley School [Figs. 11a-e] is adjacent to Bryn Mawr College and a few minutes’ walk from Louis I. Kahn’s Erdman Hall dormitory. Like Kahn’s dormitory, KTA’s Shipley building is somewhat ungainly. Each is faced in slate and other ‘self-finishing’ materials intended to gain a patina with age. For KTA, as was the case with Kahn, the role of the facade [Fig. 11a] at the West Middle School is secondary to the articulation of the interior organization and choice of materials [Fig. 11b]. This is, however, where the two buildings and architects part company.

The heavy, humourless, repetitive, and quasi-medieval exterior of the Erdman dormitory shares little in character with the playful, idiosyncratic, thin-skinned ‘rain wall’ of the Shipley building. The two could not be more dissimilar in plan. The relentless geometry and static volumetric character of the Erdman dormitory tends to determine rather than respond to the programme of the building. Conversely, the plan, volumetrics, material finishes, and character of the Shipley building were developed in tandem with the programmatic, philosophical, and pedagogical desires of the school. Low where it should be high, broken where it should be whole, highly varied where it should be simple and repetitive, the Shipley building is unconventional and, at times, homely. These are just a few of its virtues – if one is willing to accept homeliness and ungainliness as virtues – which help make the Shipley Middle School a compelling work of architecture. Moreover, when the Shipley project is placed within the context of contemporary architecture culture – wherein the buildings typically published in the professional journals tend to be gratuitously complex formally – this virtuous building signifies KTA’s conceptual dexterity and design integrity.

One of the key elements that often gives the firm’s work an edge that it might otherwise lack, is that while KTA’s methods are invariably reasoned and reasonable, they are not always logical. It is reasonable, for example, to clad the external wall of the school as if it were a roof, yet there is nothing logical about it. The occasional soccer ball knocking askew or damaging one of the slate shingles, demonstrates the specious ‘logic’ of cladding walls with brittle roofing materials in close proximity to young schoolchildren at play. Yet, by cladding the building exterior with thin roofing material instead of thick slabs of slate in the manner of Kahn’s nearby Erdman dormitory, KTA heightens the building’s sense of playfulness, irony, and its material relation to the larger campus.

The plan and play of the building reveals yet another curious gap in KTA’s constructive logic: the building bends (or breaks) at its centre [Fig. 11e]. The bend, seemingly gratuitous, was a point of controversy between the partners during the design. Its effect on the plan and section of the building none the less created a number of opportunities for the architects – all of which they exploited.
Conceptual dexterity and design integrity: West Middle School, the Shipley School

a. Exterior. The role of the facade is secondary to the articulation of the interior organization.
b. Detail of the playful, idiosyncratic thin-skinned ‘rain wall’
c. The main stair: a dynamically composed and assembled architectural element – and a place of repose and reorientation.
d. The light-filled resource centre adjacent to the main stair is the focus of the view from each end of the circulation spine.
e. Axonometric showing the bend at the centre of the building. The resulting wedge is filled with core functions and the main stair.
Architecture as instauration

George Dodds
The wedge of space formed by the bend is contiguous with the main space of the school – the Resource Center. Rather than interpreting the bent space as an extension of the Resource Center's open horizontal space, it is filled up with core functions: lavatories, elevator, and a stair. The backside of the bend, which is wider than the front, houses the central stair of the school [Fig. 11c]. Generously designed to accommodate impromptu gatherings, the stair is at once a dynamically composed and assembled architectural element as well as a place of repose and reorientation. The oversized landings afford both internal and external vistas, helping to connect a discontinuity of form with continuity of experience – outside and inside. Moreover, bending what is otherwise a simple double-loaded corridor building heightens the role of the Resource Center, hierarchically and visually. The focus of the view from either end of the building is the central light-filled space of the Resource Center [Fig. 11d] rather than the inevitable door to a fire stair or classroom. Moreover, the bend in the building reinforces a subtle correspondence between the major interior space – the Resource Center – and the major exterior space on to which the building fronts. KTA's architecture of instauration operates within these curious gaps between the necessary and the imaginative.

In 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', Kenneth Frampton argues:

*Ever since the beginning of the Enlightenment, civilization has been primarily concerned with instrumental reason, while culture has addressed itself to the specifics of expression ... Today civilization tends to be increasingly embroiled in a never-ending chain of 'means and ends' wherein, according to Hannah Arendt, the 'in order to' has become the content of the 'for the sake of'; utility established as meaning generates meaningless.*

(Frampton, 1983)

In Kieran and Timberlake's Shipley building and in most of their works, utility is not supplanted for a lack of meaning. Rather, KTA proffer a speculative architectural programme grounded within a culture of productive imagination wherein constructive logic and programmatic exigencies are employed and deployed. In his essay ‘Functionalism Today’, Theordo Adorno (1979) argues, ‘Only the artist who has never subjected himself to the discipline of creating a picture, who believes in the intuitive origins of painting, fears that closeness to materials and technical understanding will destroy his originality. Demonstrating both a ‘closeness to materials’ and a ‘technical understanding’, KTA has constructed, in the shape of a building, an architecture where meaning is established in the space of a discursive practice of form, materials, construction, and site.

Because of this, KTA's work is readily susceptible to and is often subjected to a reductive, materialist interpretation. Yet, as Semper (1989) reminds us, in the hands of the architect and in the service of architecture, the materials of construction have the capacity to stand for, ‘something still higher, namely, the task or the theme for artistic exploitation’. The theme of materiality in the Shipley building is also its task – that is the substitution of walls for roofs, sides for fronts, foreground for background, open for closed. Through the processes of translation, transformation, and substitution, Kieran and Timberlake establish a balance neither through sameness, nor through dialectical oppositions, but rather through a careful management of differences. These differences occur in the form of materials and in the material of form, in the activity of construction and the construction of activity. In this project, Kieran and Timberlake charge their work with a particular kind of character, a particular kind of architectural speech.

In *De Re Aedificatoria*, Leon Battista Alberti (1988) argued that the *lineamenta* (lineaments) of architectural production are both independent of the materials from which they are made and, more importantly, precede and order those materials. Alberti explained, ‘[L]et lineaments be the precise and correct outline, conceived in the mind ... and perfected in the learned intellect of imagination'. In *Vers une Architecture*, Le Corbusier (1968) reformulated Alberti's dualism of *lineamenta* and *materia* arguing that following the composition: *comes the moment when [the architect] must carve the lineaments of the outward aspects ... It is in his contours that we can trace the plastic artist; the engineer is effaced and the sculptor comes to life. Contours are the touchstone of the architect. Architecture [and lineaments] is the skilful, accurate and magnificent play of masses seen in light ... He concludes, somewhat disparagingly, that lineaments ... go beyond the scope of the practical man.* (Le Corbusier, 1968)

Le Corbusier further laments that through confusing architecture and building, ‘... [A]rchitecture is lowered to the level of its utilitarian purposes: boudoirs, WCs, radiators, ferro-concrete, vaults or pointed arches, etc., etc. This is construction, this is not architecture'. The work of KTA oscillates between these two extremes, reflecting both the inherent conservatism of their largely institutional client-base and the often unconventional interests of its two partners. While they approach each project as a distinct world unto itself, as with Kahn and Saarinen, there is still a common sensibility to siting, materials, structure, assembly, and construction.

Kieran and Timberlake propose through their buildings and projects a pedagogical architecture-as- instauration. While their work does not demand one's attention, it rewards the assiduous observer none the less with a sense of both its constructive logic and its productive imagination. Kieran and Timberlake follow a difficult trajectory between the gaps of logic and imagination, between the lineaments of architecture on the one hand wherein ‘the engineer is effaced’, and the ‘constructive logic’ of assemblage on the other. Like many young firms, they began to find their unique voice by declaring that which they were against in the work of others. At times, this includes their mentors. As their practice matures, its programmatic scope widens,
and as they focus more on that which they are for, their architecture-as-instauration is becoming subtler as their means of construction becomes more imaginative. Having done so, they are finding opportunities to explore more fully the art of architecture wherein ‘the engineer is effaced’ and the lineament precede and direct the materia of building.

**Postscript**

What then is learned from Kieran and Timberlake’s ‘reality based’ architecture? While they claim not to have a ‘theory’ of architecture, there is, of course, no such thing as a-theoretical architecture, whether or not the architects themselves articulate a discrete theoretical model. In *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, M. Abrams explained that the difference between theory in the sciences and in the arts is largely in how each uses theory (Abrams, 1958, pp.4-5). In the sciences, a theory is postulated, hypotheses are drawn, and experiments made. Theories are subsequently, proved or disproved – but the results are always positive as something is learned. In the arts, of which architecture is still arguably a part, the function of theory is not to make things, but rather to better understand the things we make. This has been the case since Vitruvius. It still is. Kieran and Timberlake argue that they ‘do not yet have a theory’. If this essay has helped explain that aspect of their work that is informed by *instauratio*, and related to their working *credo* of ‘constructive logic’, it should be clear that the theory of their work is found, not in abstractions or generalities, but in reflecting on the work itself. To understand the theory of their work, one must listen to the buildings they have made. In the end, something is learned.

For Kieran, Timberlake, and those who work with them, architecture is a gerund. It is an act of instauration that, beyond fulfilling ‘utilitarian purposes: boudoirs, WCs, radiators, ferro-concrete ... etc.’, also enhances the nature of a site and the quality of dwelling made possible by their modifications. This has always been the difference between building and architecture. It is the core of an unbroken architectural tradition operating outside stylistic definitions. This is why Kieran and Timberlake practise architecture. Moreover, this is why they insist that their works must succeed as instaurations at the scale of a site, and as critical insertions made at the smallest level of assembly.

**Notes**


2. While the pattern of this fabric may be complex and dynamic, its overall character is one of continuity and consistency. Grahame Shane explains: ‘By definition the [contextual] design must fit with, respond to, mediate its surroundings, perhaps completing a pattern implicit in the street layout or introducing a new one. Crucial to this appreciation of urban patterns is the Gestalt double image of the figure-ground ... The contextualist is concerned [with] a precise area that has a sharp pattern. Such an area has its centre or centres, supporting infill or tissue and a clearly defined boundary edge. A well-defined relationship between figure and field is termed a set-piece, with all its parts and their relationships known and fixed. Set-pieces should also occur between fields or at the point of overlap of fields, as a *resolution of implicit geometric conflict*. Grahame Shane, ‘Contextualism’, in *AD* 11 (1976): 677 (my italics). See also Tom Schumacher, ‘Contextualism: Urban Ideals + Deformations’, in *Casabella* (1971): 359-369, and Wayne Cooper, ‘The Figure/Grounds’, in *The Cornell Journal of Architecture* (undated copy): 42-53. For a critique of this position see Alberto Perez-Gomez, ‘The Modern City: Context, Site, or Place for Architecture’, in *Constancy and Change in Architecture*, Malcolm Quantrill and Bruce Webb, eds. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991): 77-90, and David Leatherbarrow, *The Roots of Architectural Invention: Site, Enclosure, Materials* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 21-23.


4. Kieran and Timberlake were part of one of the first generations of architects after modernism to be educated during a renewed interest in architectural history and precedents. When Kieran and Timberlake began their careers, architectural discourse was in the midst of a major shift. This movement was away from the exclusivity of first and second generation anti-historical modernist polemics to a more inclusive discourse – one that was theoretically, historically, and socially grounded. Central among the writers and rhetoricians of this period were Joseph Rykwert, Manfredo Tafuri, Kenneth Frampton, Aldo Rossi, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, Aldo van Eyck, Gio Ponti, Ernesto Rogers, and Vittorio Gregotti. Their influence on Kieran and Timberlake is manifold. These more diffuse influences notwithstanding, there are three primary pairs of shoulders on which KTA’s work stands – VRSB, Louis I. Kahn, and less obviously, Eero Saarinen.

5. That they both worked at VRSB at the time was no small help in their securing fellowships at the American Academy, Frederick Schwartz and Mark Schimmendi are among the other architects from the office of VRSB who went on to be Fellows at the American Academy in Rome.

6. Kieran and Timberlake's work with Venturi connects them with a
fundamentally important post-war lineage in American architectural practice – the Saarinen School. In addition to Venturi, the list of architects who worked in Saarinen’s office includes Minor Yamasaki, Roche and Dinkeloo, Harry Weese.


8. The wood lattice walls in the Berkeley multi-purpose room in particular are reminiscent of the woven wooden proscenium KTA installed in the converted theatre space at Rock Hall.

9. This strategy is vaguely similar to one used by James Stirling in his Tate Gallery addition in London. The first metre of the exterior wall of Stirling’s addition is a direct replication of the materials and character of the existing building. Unceremoniously slicing the replicated fabric, Stirling adjoins the distinct architecture of his addition to the replicated fabric through a simple reveal.

10. Loomis, a science aficionado, conceived of himself as a patron of the sciences. Not only did he invite scientists to come and work in a laboratory he built in conjunction with his home, but he conceived of his own design to be an experiment as well. Lescaze’s design for the Loomis project was a house within a house. Double glass walls (separated by approximately 18in) enclosed the artificial environment of the house. Loomis used a sun machine of his own design to measure the movement of the sun and potential heat gain throughout the house.


12. Unfortunately, the new administration of the school was unable to see the merits of such ‘virtues’ and rescinded KTA’s contract for another addition to the campus for which the construction documents were already complete. The new Science Building would have paralleled the rear side of the West Middle School and fully realized KTA’s campus plan for the complex.

References


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Tom Bernard 2a and b

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Kieran Timberlake Associates 3a, 4a and b, 5a and b, 6a, 7a, 9a-c, 10a-c, 11e

Catherine Tighe 4e-c, 11b-d

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Biography

George Dodds has a Ph.D. in Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation was Landscape and Garden in the Work of Carlo Scarpa. He is currently an Assistant Professor and the coordinator of history and theory for the College of Architecture and Design at the University of Tennessee.