

## For Dalibor...

My relationship with Dalibor was never of a singular nature. He was not just the teacher and I the student – and later colleague, friend. Our interactions and work together were a complex hybrid of all the qualities associated with those designations – and more. And yet I was not alone in that regard. Many people had very special and personal working relationships with Dalibor during his lifetime. That's what was unique about him.

Dalibor was a complex person with extraordinary insights and strong opinions. He could astound you one minute with his knowledge of a certain topic, whether architectural history or philosophy, and then the next surprise you with his insistence on trying to prove a point, even when he knew there was a chance he might be wrong. It was this passion, this sense of engagement that mattered. He was totally committed – emotionally, sometimes almost to the point of being irrational – to the things that moved him intellectually.

But more than anything it was his wit that helped make him an exceptional teacher and a deeply grounded human being. He managed to be both intellectually rigorous and funny at the same time, with a distinctly black sense of humor. Not that I could ever remember any of his many jokes, except, perhaps, one of his favorites about the farmer who comes to visit and brings you the gift of a chicken, which he carefully places under the dining table before asking for your wife in return. For him this joke was very poignant, a middle-European way of commenting on the nature of certain one-sided relationships and the weight of unreasonable expectations. Being seriously funny in that kind of sustained way requires a particular talent.

Dalibor loved driving, especially long-distance journeys, which he viewed as special opportunities for conversation. We once drove from England to the Swiss-Italian border, where Dalibor had an “aunt” in a small town that was also the summer retreat of the godfather of dialogical hermeneutics, Hans Georg Gadamer. Having become friendly with Gadamer on his previous visits, Dalibor was now in the habit of holding extended discussions with the holidaying philosopher. I have no idea now why I was going to Italy – I was going to be dropped off at the border in Chiasso, so that I could take the train to Milan – but what stays in my mind is the pure pleasure of the

conversation, the reference to the ideas of the great master at the end of the journey. Dalibor taught me the importance of thinking of architecture both as architecture and as philosophy.

When I first met Dalibor I was genuinely surprised by his breadth of knowledge, not just of architecture but of continental philosophy, history, and music. How could someone living in pre-68 Prague be so well read on phenomenology, or know so much about Romanesque architecture? I suppose human beings have an incredible capacity for creativity, however scarce the resources. During the 1970s England was not really part of Europe – and it seems a lot of people still think of it that way today. But Dalibor brought with him the European perspective on the study of architecture and the city – a perspective deeply influenced by surrealism and the situationists on the one hand, and by phenomenology and hermeneutics on the other.

Like Lautréamont's description of the "chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella", the urban context – in our case, London's King's Cross – was the "dissecting table" for the chance encounter of different architectural projects. The relationship of architecture to an existing urban context – the concept of architectural and urban juxtaposition/disjunction – became an interesting and productive domain of interest in our student projects.

For me, the idea of this type of architecture of juxtapositions meant placing the new directly on top of, or adjacent to, an existing part of urban infrastructure, such as a series of industrial brick arches that were originally intended to support the weight of a railway track. In a sense my "modification" of an existing condition through the insertion of a new piece of architecture led to a relational project – not just a hybrid of old and new, but an architectural grafting procedure akin to montage.

As a student I found my conversations with Dalibor not just inspiring but also a little frustrating. He clearly had some vision of a fictional city in mind when sketching out his possible recommendations to you. The sketch would begin with a very shaky hand and gradually the multiple layers of ideas and suggestions would build up, in the process making the sketch more and more dense, occluding the lines. The intensity of the movements of the hand and the resultant covering up of ideas required its own procedures of deciphering.

A few years later, as a collaborator and fellow teacher, one of the issues that gained in importance for me was the way drawings could be used more systematically, not only as intimations of a mood or an atmosphere, but also as clear architectural propositions that engage with and relate to a specific urban artifact. As distinct from Rossi and the Italian Tendenza's emphasis on type and typology, our preoccupations, together with the vital contributions of Peter Carl, focused on the concept of "typicality" as a *spatio-temporal* phenomenon, which gave us a means to deal with repeatable experiences of everyday life. While this method of work referred to architectural typology, it was not limited by the purity of its formal characteristics.

On reflection, it seems that it was this focus on drawing as a way of simultaneously articulating and revealing an architecture and its relationship with the urban that enabled us also to construct a non-generic form of urban design – a form of urban design whose architecture was at once typical and specific. This achievement could be attributed in part to the scale of the drawings and their three-dimensional character. Also important was the careful balance between atmosphere and clarity. Revisiting the site of our projects in Kentish Town now makes me wonder what could have been possible for this neglected part of London.

At some point Dalibor and I traveled together to Prague, a city I had never visited before. I saw his father's painting studio and walked around the streets, courtyards and squares. It was only then that it dawned on me that the fictional city of Dalibor's frenetic sketches was none other than the city of his childhood.