

# **ARCHITECTURE DEPENDS**

**Jeremy Till**

**The MIT Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
London, England**

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This book was set in Scala and Scala Sans by Graphic Composition, Inc. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Till, Jeremy.

Architecture depends / Jeremy Till.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-262-01253-9 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Architecture—Philosophy. 2. Architectural practice. I. Title.

NA2540.T55 2009

720.1—dc22

2008029578

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## **Preface : Mess Is the Law**

It started to go wrong quite early.

The graffiti went up in the toilet of my School of Architecture sometime in my first year.

Less is more: Mies  
Less is a bore: Venturi  
Mess is the law: Till

Maybe I should have been flattered to be placed within such a distinguished genealogy of architectural greats, but actually I was hurt. Some wag was acting the schoolroom bully. The wag did not have a prescient sense of my later obsession with the everyday in all its glorious mess; he was mocking my complete inability to master the use of ink pens.

It started to go wrong quite early, my relationship with Architecture.

We had been issued a shopping list in our first week and this included 0.25mm and 0.35mm Rapidograph pens. These were soon put into use in a precedent study exercise, in which each of us had to trace a complete set of drawings of some piece of iconic architecture. This was boot camp pedagogy; by slavishly copying the masters the hope must have been that some of their aura would be transferred to us innocents. Others in my year quickly graduated downward to 0.18mm pens, even to the holy grail of 0.13mm, because these narrower instruments were neater, more professional, and more expert. Somehow these putative Architects managed to keep these needle-thin nibs running smoothly over the tracing paper. For

whatever reason (I now put it down to weird bodily electromagnetic forces), my pens clogged up and trailed blobs of ink across the paper. I soon gave up on the 0.25mm and tried to do the whole exercise in 0.35mm. Try tracing the precise minimal lines of Mies van de Rohe's Farnsworth house with a stuttering fat line of ink blots and you will know the meaning of architectural humiliation. In a strange way I have never forgiven Mies. That is why I put him on the front cover with Mark Wallinger gently roughing him up by walking round the precious spaces of Mies's Berlin National Gallery in a bear suit.

My drawings were, indeed, a mess. In terms of my student career this was a disaster. There was an almost precise correlation between the ability to master a 0.13mm Rapidograph and the gaining of good grades. I left the School of Architecture with my tail between my legs.

It has taken me this long to work out that maybe architecture is a mess; not an aesthetic mess but a much more complex social and institutional mess. It has taken me this long to have the confidence to shout back to the wag: "Yes, Mess Is the Law," and be proud of it. It has taken me this long to get to a point of discovering that this mess is not a threat, but an opportunity. This book sets out the case.