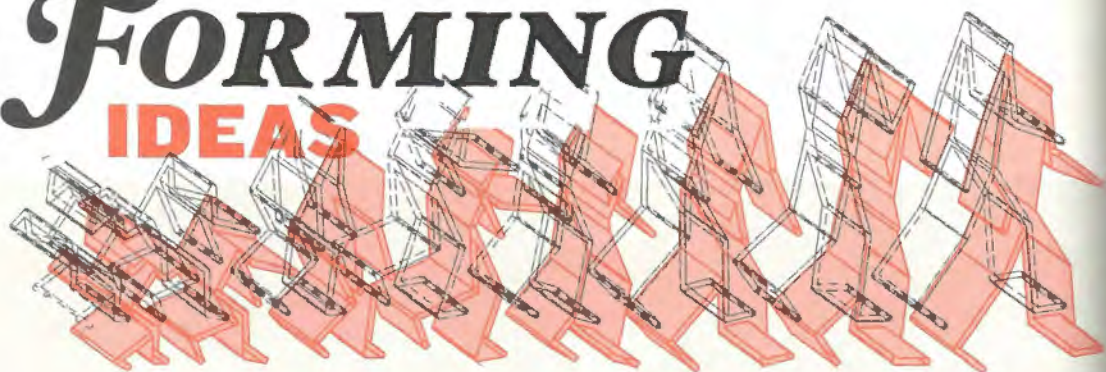


FORMING IDEAS



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Chicago, New York, Boston, Denver, Rome. These are all places we may visit as a part of the architecture curriculum. More importantly, is that they are the setting for semester-long studio projects, marathons of sketching, modeling, and critiquing. These site visits may seem like exercises made under the guise of academics to some, but they are a rare opportunity. They are the one chance we have to take in as much about the immediate site and surroundings of our projects first-hand. We each gain a unique experience that, along with gathered knowledge and research, provides the context on which we discover and ultimately form the concept for our project.

When visiting a proposed site, I am struck with a mental image that stays fresh in my mind, sometimes for months before I start experiencing it. The image is unchanging and is often grouped with a feeling, such as animosity, awe, or clarity. Whether it is conscious or not, I attempt to identify what about the idea is so significant to me. In *Form and Image*, Herbe Greene describes that images and architecture are comprised of "sense cues." The thing that triggers a stored experience is a sense that artists and architects become skilled in arranging and manipulating them to call forth a variety of layered images and memories. The image is a created idea, and the elements of a site are the cues. The cues may be anything, the sound of a nearby train, or the way light reflects off an adjacent river. I dissect the image in an attempt to identify which cues acted together to elicit the emotional response. By finding some common thread between them, I arrive at a concept.

It is assumed that the concept was something concrete and would answer any question that may arise during the course of a project. I wondered how a word or phrase could describe every aspect of a building, from its general form to the spacing of structural columns. Over time, it

became clear that the concept is something dynamic and fluid; it changes as our understanding does. As new information arises and failed attempts occur, it should evolve. There is often an attachment to our original verbalization of the concept; rather than change it to better fit a new understanding of the idea, we formally "break" the verbal description when something doesn't necessarily fit. We are told not get attached to the first forms we create at the outset of a project. However, just as we should not stick to a design because it "looks cool," we should not be afraid to abandon a verbal explanation of the concept, even if it sounds good at a review. Failing to do so leads to an ill-informed and nebulous design.

We need to take the time to look back and reflect on our current manifestation of the idea and explanation of it. Doing so reinforces our ability to convey it: graphically, through models and drawings, as well as during our verbal presentations. Reviews require that we explain ourselves and unveil our reasoning, though they occur only a handful of times during a semester they are our opportunity for the final product to be judged in relation to the concept we present. Building upon a concept that is no longer truly representative of your idea leads then to confusion and inconsistency within the project and for those who are trying to understand it. Knowing how to understand our original response would allow one then to have a more focused view when it comes to the creation of the form. We can personally reflect on this work through writing, honest dialogue with peers, or simply looking at the evolution of the work done over the course of a project. Through a better understanding of the work can more accurately express the concept that has lead us in the body of work we created and in the verbal presentation of that work. Ultimately, we are able to gain insight into our own thought and design process, and then better express ourselves.