



Architecture: The Story of Practice

Dana Cuff

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Although architecture is the fastest-growing profession in America, its private context remains shrouded in myth. As Dana Cuff shrewdly observes, it is filled with contradictions, particularly in the realm of practice. She delves into the architect's everyday work world to uncover an intricate social art of design. The result is a new portrait of the profession that reveals what it means to become an architect, how design problems are construed and resolved, how clients and architects negotiate, and how design excellence is achieved. Cuff concludes by discussing how the design profession, particularly the schools, can take advantage of these observations to strengthen the profession and lay claim to the whole design process. Cuff shows how architects fashion a meaningful place in society by working in collaborative settings, although attributing singular importance to the creative individual. She addresses the discrepancy between the many competencies required by practitioners in complex settings and the narrow teachings of architecture schools. Throughout, she questions whether architecture is essentially the domain of specialists or of qualified generalists. The different components of Cuff's cultural model of architectural practice are described in full. These include history and demographics; the differences between design problems in practice, in the academy, and as construed by the professional organization; the metamorphosis of layperson into architect; the culture of the office and its influence on interactions with the client. Dana Cuff has taught as a social scientist among architects and as an architect among social scientists. Her participant/observer studies for this book, carried out over the past decade, involved nearly 200 individuals representing 80 different firms. She is Associate Professor of Architecture and Planning at the University of Southern California.

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