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Digital Practice

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Technical competence in computer technology has become a *conditio sine qua non* of landing a job at a respectable architectural practice. By itself, though, this does not imply that all architectural practices are now doing their work in a revolutionary way. In their overwhelming majority they have been forced into the digital domain by the ubiquity of technology itself. The digital file has replaced the drawing as the information backbone in building profession. However, the common convertible currency of this information down the construction process is still lines on paper, albeit physically produced by incredibly sophisticated devices.

A few practices are looking beyond the drafting and visualization solutions offered by digital technology and finding themselves reshaped in the course of this interaction. The problems that those practices solve today are less related to design than to organization and project management. This reflects the uniqueness of practice among the other architecturally related endeavors, such as theory or education.

Technology has a revolutionary potential in architectural practice, but an ingrained psychological stigma needs to be abolished first. A torrent of energy will be unleashed when the legal framework of the industry stretches to accommodate the digital model as a legitimate appendix to or replacement of the traditional bid documents. Until the profession finds a non-mediated route between digital design and digital fabrication, the changes in the practice will be more cosmetic than internal.

John Marx, AIA is a design principal and partner at, San Francisco based, Form4 Architecture. He has designed over 150 buildings in 11 different countries. Mr. Marx has lectured around the world on “digital practice”, including Kyonggi University, Seoul; the Technion; Israel, UC Berkeley, and the University of Sydney.

Raffi Tomassian, UBA, is an architectural designer at Cincinnati based Glaserworks. He has won awards at two international competitions. His work on the Cincinnati Zoo Kids’ shop received the Cincinnati AIA chapter honor design award and has been featured in several publications. He is a frequently invited critic of academic assignments.