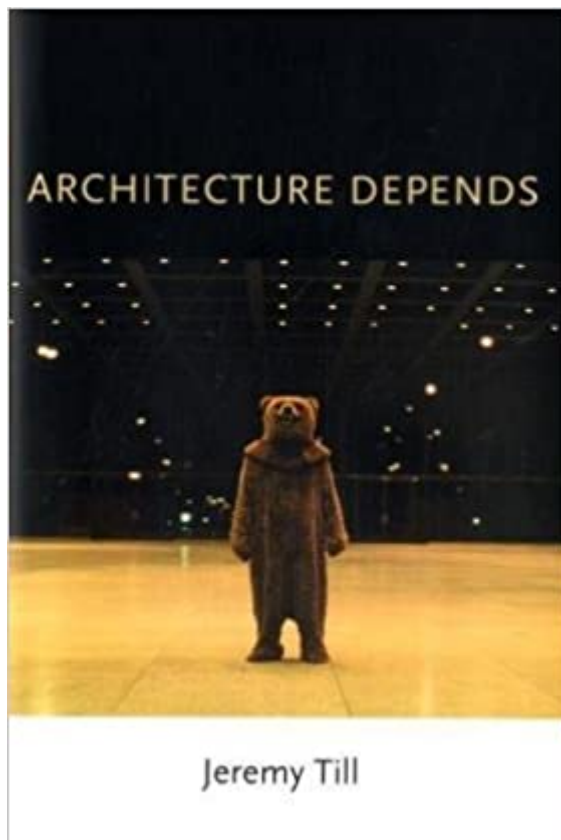


The book was found

Architecture Depends (MIT Press)



Synopsis

Architecture depends -- on what? On people, time, politics, ethics, mess: the real world.

Architecture, Jeremy Till argues with conviction in this engaging, sometimes pugnacious book, cannot help itself; it is dependent for its very existence on things outside itself. Despite the claims of autonomy, purity, and control that architects like to make about their practice, architecture is buffeted by uncertainty and contingency. Circumstances invariably intervene to upset the architect's best-laid plans -- at every stage in the process, from design through construction to occupancy. Architects, however, tend to deny this, fearing contingency and preferring to pursue perfection. With *Architecture Depends*, architect and critic Jeremy Till offers a proposal for rescuing architects from themselves: a way to bridge the gap between what architecture actually is and what architects want it to be. Mixing anecdote, design, social theory, and personal experience, Till's writing is always accessible, moving freely between high and low registers, much like his suggestions for architecture itself.

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Customer Reviews

A provocative declaration of war on utopia, powered by a fuel rich in social justice and sharp humor. Architects, hide it from your clients and your students -- it is an unusual and explosive mixture that produces difficult questions like spores. With this book Jeremy Till raises the starting price on all our discussions of architecture. (Paul Shephard, author of *What is Architecture?* and *Artificial*)

Love) Boldly and elegantly, *Architecture Depends* asserts that architecture is absolutely dependent upon the 'contingent', difficult and perverse factors that architects have long tried to ignore in an effort to be pure, self-important and professional... What Till's book achieves is to set out with great clarity the territory in which the debate around future action must take place. (Robert Mull Architects' Journal) *Architecture Depends* is an attempt to save the profession from itself and a manifesto for an architecture that acknowledges its relationship with the world and its duty to others... This is a brave, enjoyable, affirming and important book and I actually felt sad to have finished it. (Flora Samuel Times Higher Education (Book of the Week)) The book performs a wonderful contextualizing function, making architectural intervention, from idea to event, depend on the wide range of human habits and spheres of influence that we normally sum up as 'the world'. (Lucas Freeman Scapegoat) Thought-provoking and important... *Architecture Depends* raises the question of the relationship of architecture and life to a new level. (Anni Vartola Arkkitehti (Finland)) Till's book is about the world he knows and how one conveys ideas behind architecture. It is a superbly written, frequently fascinating set of arguments that will support architects who wish to use the messy stuff of life for their own advantage. (Tim Abrahams Blueprint)

Jeremy Till is Dean of Architecture and Built Environment at the University of Westminster and a partner at Sarah Wigglesworth Architects. Their projects include the pioneering 9 Stock Orchard Street (The Strawbale House and Quilted Office), winner of multiple awards. He represented Britain at the 2006 Venice Architecture Biennale.

The insights in this book are inspiring and the writing is refreshingly clear and honest. It's especially useful for reminding you that being a student never ends, whether you're working in the "real world" and have left school far behind or whether you're teaching in one. The resistance to its critical arguments on the part of certain reviewers here evidently proves their potential to challenge. Since this book avoids many of the most common pitfalls in architectural discourse, from wayward theoretical abstraction and confused jargon to compulsive obsession with practical or historical detail, those who like getting stuck in these traps may have an especially hard time working through it. Critics with impossible standards or cynical dispositions may also have trouble appreciating its humbling realism and progressive idealism (and might be better served mining its bibliography, which represents thoughtful engagement with Karatani, Bauman, Latour, and others). But for those who are willing to work with the contingencies of life and recognize the dependencies of design, this book can help open up a world of possibility.

very competent, both painful and encouraging, description and analysis of the interdependence of architecture.

For anyone who has read architectural theory, this book is a breath of fresh air. In contrast to the useless theory of the Peter Eisenmans of the world, this book looks at architecture not as an isolated profession but as one that must recognize its connection to society. In short, the architectural profession can only regain relevance in society by letting go of the absolute control we delude ourselves into thinking we have over the buildings we design. At the end of the day buildings are used by society in a free form, organic way that architects need to stop fighting and start embracing. The book could be more specific on how to accomplish the goals the author sets out but otherwise this is a great, thought provoking work. If you are not interested in reading architectural and social theory don't read this book.

While I consider this book ripe for a poor review, it's best to see it for the positive rewards it offers. Till's vapid close of *Architecture Depends* left me wanting to hate the time I had spent reading it. Between the covers rests the foundation of an argument that is left for personal reflection rather than explication through example. The book is practically a polemic on architecture but with a love of the practice beneath the frustrated rhetoric. Self reflection in the face of hard truth is always worth it, especially when the need to reassess ambition is dire. You don't have to like Till or his book, but you have to pay respect to the push that he gives to honestly address the driving forces of architectural practice.

Frankly, I found the book tedious - Richard Weston's review summed it up in a better way than I could: "His title may sound slightly obtuse, but Jeremy Till's argument is readily summarised. Architecture depends on all kinds of circumstances outside the architect's control, yet most of us resist or deny this contingency by retreating from the everyday world where "mess is the law". This begins in the tribal longhouse of the educational studio, where students learn an "alien vocabulary" and develop the arrogance that Till believes pervades the profession. The consequences are manifest on every hand, from declarations of architectural autonomy to reliance on "necessarily reductive" sketches; from the poverty of Vitruvian and Corbusian theory to the rigidities of the RIBA's Plan of Work; from Mies's "opportunistic entanglement with the Nazis" to the vacuities of computer-generated forms. Rather than attempting to impose order on an increasingly unruly world,

Till argues that architects need to embrace contingency and re-engage with everyday experience. In marshalling his arguments for this practice of architecture as transformative agency, he draws on an impressive range of recent literature. Quotations and names, many unfamiliar to me, come thick and fast -- Agnes Heller, Alberto Melucci, Johannes Fabian, Niklas Luhmann, Carol Gilligan, Roberto Mangabeira Unger and the all-pervasive Zygmunt Bauman -- but the basic argument has a familiar sixties-retro ring. Ivan Illich's critique of professionalism; Venturi's advocacy of messy vitality and Main Street; Cedric Price's emphasis on the brief and flexibility; Habraken and Hertzberger's open-ended engagement with users -- in these and other ways we have, as Till acknowledges, drunk much of his new wine from old bottles. The language of Till's emergent architecture of contingency is, however, freshly minted. Permeated by "slack space" and existing, in emulation of Joyce's Ulysses, in "thick time", it will be "lo-fi" like an Elvis Costello song, calculated to communicate via a transistor radio on the breakfast table. Rather than being preoccupied with form, Till believes that tomorrow's architects must be driven by a renewed sense of social and ethical responsibility, able to work with people to tease spatial structures out of situations, not stamp all over them. My problems begin with the dustwrapper, which features four encomiums that make the book sound like just about the most important contribution to architectural theory since Alberti put quill to paper. These anticipate the self-satisfied tone that permeates the content, from the author's eagerness to exhibit the range of his reading, via the anecdotal interjections that demonstrate his speed of observation and wit, to a list of acknowledgments that reads like a who's who of the metropolitan elite in which he moves. These don't negate his arguments but seem surprising in a broadside against the supposed arrogance of others. It isn't just a matter of tone, however. For all his advocacy of the messy realities of the everyday, Till is far too concerned with what architects write rather than with what they do. This ranges from his facile, relentlessly ahistorical assaults on writings by Vitruvius, Le Corbusier, Mies, Rossi and others, to the dismissal of more recent interests such as phenomenology and tectonics; even the RIBA's Code of Professional Conduct is found woefully wanting. Could it really be, as he seems to believe, that we have all been so conditioned by our education and the mores of our profession that we operate with little or no regard for others? Faced with the demands of corporate clients and big developers (remember them?), it may be difficult to address the needs of what Aalto called "the little man", but it is insulting to imply that most architects, grappling day to day with the contingencies of budgets and sites, contractors and manufacturers, don't even try. Till's dislike of most architects extends to most architecture, which he appears to see as an imposition of oppressive order by those in power. In this, presumably, his ultimate master is Karl Marx. But unlike Marx, who famously struggled to understand the aesthetic

enjoyment he found in the art of a reprehensibly class-based society like ancient Greece, Till seems immune to what Karl Popper called our "need for regularity". As to the character of his new architecture of contingency made with and for others, Till offers only one real clue: the straw bale house at Stock Orchard Street in north London that he designed with his partner, Sarah Wigglesworth. Anyone for Athens? "

Bit of a let down. The shocking 'real world' as seen by a traditional academic. Too much expectable architectural theory, more Piranesi, and not much about what I thought this book was going to touch on: construction costs, client expectations, politics, anything dealing with daily practice and its effect on the purity of architecture.

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