

Ignored by critics, but worth remembering

Integrating the testable with the intuitive

Boyarsky at the AA

As someone who was there for much of his time as Chairman of the Architectural Association School, I am pleased that Alvin Boyarsky's extraordinary achievements are beginning to be appreciated by a generation who have come later. One response to Igor Marjanovic's ambitious article about his tenure (*arq* 14.2, pp. 165–174) is to doubt how much the publications programme, undoubtedly an important enterprise for Boyarsky, can be separated from his larger obsession and long-term project of re-making architectural culture.

When Boyarsky became Chairman of the School in 1971 it appeared to have no future and his long-term strategy, fully realised only twelve or fifteen years later, was simultaneously to deal with the pragmatics of ensuring the School's survival and the development of a new programme for a modern architecture also in a state of near-terminal crisis. One

part of this strategy was the development of an ambitious publications list, but more urgent was the need to reanimate the School's teaching, and Bernard Tschumi, Dalibor Vesely and Michael Gold among others who predated Boyarsky's arrival, were each challenged to develop their own unfettered architectural agenda in terms of design unit teaching programmes. Early publications such as those by Tschumi emerged from this, and can be seen within the tradition of the architectural pamphlet rather than part of a larger institutional enterprise. Such possibly subversive publications continued with, for example, Martin Pawley's editing of a School journal *Ghost Dance Times*.

The Libya exhibition and book, mentioned by Marjanovic, was a political embarrassment at the time and had the unmistakable whiff of sponsorship, something anathema to Boyarsky, and one of the reasons for his liquidation of the *AA Quarterly*. I remember that

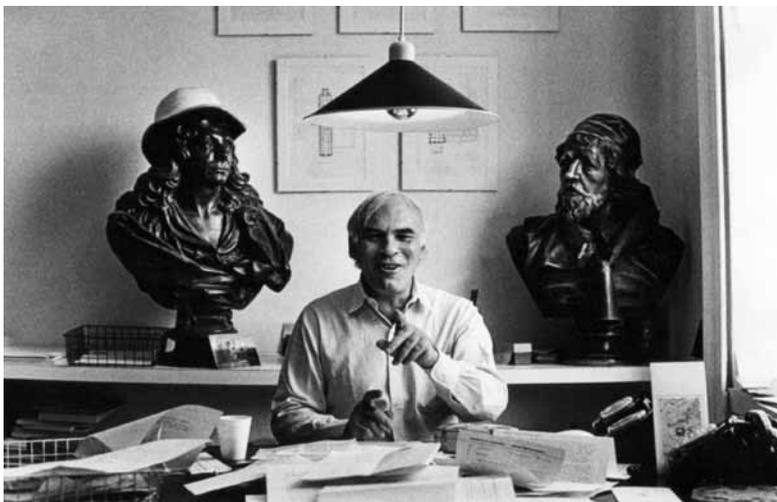
its conjunction of academic and historical texts with advertisements for lift contractors and plasterboard manufacturers appeared to cause him physical pain. The series of small format catalogues – including the historical re-evaluation of Oud and Hablik as well as the contemporary work of Libeskind and Tschumi, published in 1979 to 1980 – can rather be seen as the start of a publishing enterprise that would later take over much of Boyarsky's energies. This was to include the appearance of a long postponed serious journal reflecting the culture of the school, its lectures and exhibitions: *AA Files* (initially to be called *AA Annals*) in 1981.

But predating these were the two publications set up soon after Boyarsky arrived, both acting as public relations exercises on behalf of the AA School. James Gowan was commissioned to edit both: *A Continuing Experiment*, a series of articles and interviews about the AA's history; and *Projects 1946–71*, which set up the precedent of using student projects as this intrinsically valuable selection of the most distinctive work since the AA's conversion to Modernism in the late 1930s.

The latter publication served as a catalogue for the AA 125 exhibition, supposedly to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the AA's foundation, shown internationally and effectively acting as PR for the School which, before any other UK School, needed what became an influx of overseas students.

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1 Alvin Boyarsky in the Chairman's Office, Architectural Association, London. Courtesy of the Alvin Boyarsky Archive, London