37° 58' N, 23° 41' E
The Parthenon, Athens

This past May the official unemployment rate in Greece hit a record high of 27.6 percent. In the Peloponnese, the impact of the government's economic austerity program is starkly visible in abandoned building sites and unfinished highways and bridges. Yet in Athens work continues at the Acropolis, where the most recent reconstruction of the Parthenon is now in its 30th year. The long-discussed program, needed to repair damage caused by a restoration completed in 1904, finally began three years after the Parthenon was structurally compromised in an earthquake. The southeast corner was addressed first, where the 5½-ton corner column required repositioning and stabilization, one millimeter at a time. Over the years of painstaking labor, stoneworkers have gone without regular paychecks, but work on the symbolic monument and tourist attraction has continued. The current projected completion date? Maybe seven years from now. But given the recursive modern project of restoration, the team of archaeologists, architects, and craftsmen piecing together new and old bits and blocks of marble are making sure their work will be easy to undo.
When Mies van der Rohe famously quipped, “I don’t want to be interesting. I want to be good,” Robert Venturi, who proceeded to be interesting instead of good, called Mies a bore. We now know that the only thing they had in common was that neither Mies nor Venturi could have imagined the kind of buildings they would come to build—certainly far more if considered individually than if considered in tandem.

The field of architecture is a whole built 15 years ago, the profession is also full of people who prefer Mies to Venturi, and not a single AIA chapter lacks a significant membership. The net result, however, is a kind of “goodness” that neither Mies, nor Venturi, could have imagined. Therefore, I am not only a digital tool; I am also a visual aid.
Architecture's digital reflections reconfigured drawing, brought drawing closer to construction and thus modified long-extant forms of alienation in architecture's modes of production, and radically expanded the type of information that could be considered architectural. Whether an architect used CAD, CATIA, or clay, every aspect of architectural teaching, theory, and practice was implicated in this turn in some way. Furthermore, architecture's subsumption into the logic of the digital and its unique capacity to make this diffusion explicit and visible once again made architectural issues significant outside the field. The inescapability and breadth of the questions at hand made architecture—as a field—of interest once more.

In different ways, the critical and digital turns radically changed the terms through which architecture was defined—that is, how it was made and how it was received in the world at large. The importance of these turn today, in addition to the obvious persistence of both the theoretical and digital impulses they introjected into the field, is the way both shifts were associated with relatively small numbers of architects but immediately ensnared architecture as a whole into their logic. Even though historians will argue about who was responsible for taking the first steps in these recent turns, their significance derives from their structural quality rather than their origins in authorial intention. In other words, these changes are of less consequence for what they indicate about individuals, unique genius or talent, or even personal perspicacity, than they are for the way in which they reveal what George Kubler called the shape of time, which he considered a fundamentally collective enterprise.¹

Today, there are no new stakes that rise to the structural order of either of these previous turns, so time is more or less at a flatline. There is important work of the kind that Thomas Kuhn called mopping up to do, but the paradigm is settling in rather than shifting. There are architects working and individual projects being constructed of tremendous quality, but the field itself is in stasis; there are no clear stakes to argue for or against, and even less urgency. This is not to forget that powerfully important issues surround the field, from global warming to the foreclosure crisis, but like small children and puppies, no one argues against these crucial issues. Some believe such factors must pass through a process of abstraction and discipline for architects to have much to offer outside their individual citizenship in the global common, but even so, everyone happily agrees that environmental causes and

reconfigured drawing, function and thus modified in architecture's modes of carried the type of information cultural. Whether an architecture's very aspect of architectural is implicated in this turn in nature's subsumption into the capacity to make this diffused in made architectural issues inescapability and breadth architecture -- as a field -- of and digital turns radically 1 architecture was defined with it was received in the theses today, in addition the theoretical and digital field, is the way both shifts and numbers of architects structure as a whole into their I argue about who was in these recent turns, their structural quality rather than 1. In other words, these what they indicate about it, or even personal perspect 1, which they reveal what time, which he considered rise. 1 that rise to the structural turns, so time is more or less as of the kind that Thomas it the paradigm is settling architects working and led of tremendous quality, are no clear stakes to argu cy. This is not to forget that under the field, from global but like small children these crucial issues. Some though a process of abstrac- 1 have much to offer outside global common, but even environmental causes and other forces for social good ought to become more architecture than they are. As a result, once radically divergent models of the architect, the avaricious corporate architect with a practice and the isolated avant-garde architect with a project, are joining forces in the quest for goodness. At times they are nearly indistinguishable, as both groups more often than not willfully exploit each other's traditionally opposed postures. Professional architects profess design intelligence just as advanced practices tout their professional acumen. Schools that once stood in opposition to NCARB and other regulatory agencies are now happy to advertise how many FAIA are on their faculty. When Peter Zumthor's proposed building for LACMA, Jürgen Mayer's Metropol Parasol, SANAA's Serpentine Pavilion, and virtually every first-year design student project have exactly the same parti, discrimination seems futile and repetition and replication are revealed as the rule. It may well be a good thing overall that one effect of replication is to reinforce social cohesion, but it does not produce interest, and architecture without interest cannot rise to the occasion of being a paradigm for systems of thought internally or for other fields. That is why today, architecture, as such and as a whole, despite and maybe even because of the interest of particular individual buildings and the goodness of everybody's intentions, is, well, boring.

According to Kuller, the perception of time depends precisely on recurrence and aesthetic routine, but history and the disruptions it permits depend on variation. It is important to emphasize that Kuller, more interested in time than in history, had no concerns about aesthetic fatigue and no apparent anxiety about being bored. As a result, he argued for shifting historical analysis toward a consideration of systems and for analyzing the slow historical drift that can be seen only by looking at minor objects, repeated again and again over long periods of time. Some critics and historians are again turning their attention to minor objects like tools, anonymous building practices, and other analogous typologies. But such repeated objects require huge expanses of time and massive numbers in order to signify. When looked at over short periods of time and with close attention, say the 10 years and the specific projects this issue of Log addresses, such objects produce neither history nor time, but rather the flatline. A short-term and near view of the architecture of routine and repetition reveals only the oxymoron of individual acts of repetition.

This is why there is a strange irony permeating the state of the architectural field today. On the one hand, the building
industries are on the front lines of some of the most urgent, perplexing, and historically challenging issues of the day. The buildings of the built environment are canaries in a mine filled with things that could lead to a massive architectural mission at a scale not seen since the housing shortage after World War II. Buildings are staring urgency in the face. And many buildings like to wear their commitment to these issues like a Boy Scout badge, symbolically gesturing toward LEED certification in every apparently organic curve of their curtain walls. In other words, buildings that are apparently seeking to effect change on the level of systems are behaving historically rather than systematically. On the other hand, that part of the architectural field concerned with culture, and that seeks to add intellect to the environmentally and fiscally accountable assemblage of components, is overwhelmed by fine-tuning its own project. For example, the ramifications of both the digital and critical turns have to be adjusted to the demands of the building trades. This adaptation is a necessary process but it’s also long and not particularly interesting and not everyone in the field has enough patience to wait and see what happens. As a result, we have a reversal in the typical relation of the interesting and singular to the boring and generalized; the kinds of logistical and pragmatic issues that are endemic to practice and that achieve cultural significance most often over time and through anonymous vernacular buildings are producing heroic demonstrations without historical importance. Meanwhile, the small but essential adjustments to building practice that “signature” buildings are introducing (to wit, the anomalies in geometry that produce misalignments in various tiny details in Preston Scott Cohen’s Tel Aviv Museum of Art addition) are often overlooked because they require more time than has passed for their systematic rather than authorial importance to emerge.

The contemporary state of the drawing is a specific example of this paradox. On the one hand, drawing has long been considered the principal activity of the architect, and the kind of drawing an architect made served to distinguish between what Henry-Russell Hitchcock would call a bureaucrat and a genius, what Reyner Banham would call the architect enslaved by convention and the builder ready to jettison architecture altogether, what Peter Eisenman would call architects with as opposed to architects without architecture. In the context of these debates, when drawings ranged from expressive to useful to conceptual, these differences
functioned as gauntlets thrown against the category of drawing as such. Hence, drawing mattered. Today, it appears that both everyone and no one is drawing – that is, the system of drawing is so vast and complex (Do renderings and 3-D prints count as drawings?), so full of developing problematics, that no single drawing can alter the category, while drawing as a collective enterprise operates as a monolithic set of shiny renderings with no internal variations. At least for now, there is no imminent critique or even evident means of evaluating the drawing. Most importantly, there is no way to determine what kind of attention should be paid to what kind of drawing. Without attention, affect turns to boredom.

People go to great lengths to avoid being bored. Architecture began to bore Hitchcock when he argued that the logic of modernity had taken architecture as far as it could go and hence not only used standards of repetition and mechanical precision in its design and construction process but had itself become a standard to be mechanically repeated. He called this kind of industrialized work, which he considered appropriate to everyday buildings, bureaucratic. But he also called it boring, which is why he contrasted it to the work of geniuses, individuals producing single buildings rather than processes that resist repetition and emulation. When a few years later Banham also decided it was time to take stock, he divided architecture into segments allied to either tradition or technology, the tradition side filled with words like lore and amnesia while the technology side contained risk and TV. For Banham architecture seemed boring, while the landscape of gizmos and gadgets was full of interest. The fascinating two-column structure of his “Stocktaking” essay, its very eye-grabbing novelty, seems like a compensating distraction from the general boredom he felt with the field, which he really wanted to leave behind altogether.

Hitchcock and Banham were bored by different and even opposite things, but both responded to being bored by stocktaking. There is no small irony in the tendency to try to assess the lay of the land at precisely the moment there is the least to see. When it is flat, it is apparently easier to see the landscape. A cynical view would explain this by suggesting that since there is nothing to see, it foregrounds the act of seeing, an effort on the part of critics to usurp attention. This is less a matter of if you can’t do, write, than a matter of when doing is boring maybe writing can stir things up. A more optimistic assessment, on the other hand, would be that the ground is not merely flat but lying fallow and that the

tools available to us for understanding this as potential have not yet been developed.

The field is boring. It is time for it to be boring. The historical circumstances are producing boredom. In fact, the most interesting thing about the field may be that it is boring. If we look at the work of a firm like BIG, which presents itself as akin to Hitchcock's bureaucracy, we see something that has little importance on its own, but rather must be seen along with the thousands of similar projects from equivalent firms, like the massive offices of Gensler or HOK or Chinese rendering farms or... Once their products accumulate in very large and sustained numbers, they will be interesting because they will take on the shape of time itself. The same is true of the work and ideas produced in many schools of architecture today: modeled on the marketplace and the convention center, big schools where more or less anything goes if students will pay for it (a typology quite distinct from the more narrowly targeted strategies of 15 years ago) will alter the world through their long, slow, and incremental effects. But if looked at individually and in the present, these works and pedagogies do not sustain interest. On the other hand, at least for now, it is in the working through of boring things, in minor forms of resolution, that interesting architects are operating: several recently or about to be completed buildings with astonishing concrete exoskeletons constitute refinements, small acts that are transformative in their contexts but, theoretically speaking, belong to large conceptual problems already stated. These buildings are realizing historical change rather than initiating it and hence cannot currently be axiomatic. They are thus of interest within the field rather than able to force the field itself to become of inescapable interest.

If the most interesting thing about the field today is that it finds itself in historical circumstances that produce boredom, perhaps the best response is to manage the anxiety that boredom often generates and tolerate being bored. Stocktaking under those circumstances risks being demoralizing and disheartening, so it is more productive to recall that boredom has its virtues: not just the one ascribed to it by Martin Heidegger, who argued that boredom revealed being itself, but rather the virtue of shifting frames and duration of attention, as did the deadeningly boring quality of Andy Warhol's seemingly endless and uneventful films. Boredom can permit new forms of perception to emerge that will make it necessary to move away from the overly general
categories of genius and bureaucrat or boring and interesting or close and distracted. If boredom, like frustration, is the key to invention, more boredom now will lead to more invention in the future. The urgent problems of today, from ecological disaster to the disruptions of war, take time to confront in architectural terms and it is unseemly and most often counterproductive when architecture jumps in too fast. Disaster-chasing does not make the field interesting or even really good. Boredom does its work on attention in small steps, slowly and steadfastly. Architects should keep doing the largely boring or minorly interesting things they are doing. They should keep their noses down and get to work and tolerate the ennui. They should even take some solace in the fact that the world is losing interest in the field because it suggests there will be less meddling and more room for invention that will leave potential lying around, untapped but available to those who are ready to seize it. Architecture must quietly recast itself as lying in wait. Even though architecture often bemoans the slowness of its practice, its hard-earned expertise in patience in this case might be a virtue, since more time will allow the flatline to emerge not as a plane of boredom but as a plane of possibilities. Carpe Taedium!

Sylvia Latin is director of the Critical Studies and MA/PhD programs at UCLA's Department of Architecture and Urban Design. She is the author of several books, most recently Kissing Architecture.