

The purpose of **arcCA**, as our recently revised mission statement declares, is to explore “ideas, issues, and projects relevant to the practice of architecture in California.” Not all ideas we explore are going to be agreeable to everyone. But it has been my experience that you, our readers, are quite capable of taking care of yourselves, of determining where you stand on an issue, and of expressing forcefully but in a dignified way your disagreement with positions presented in the journal. For example, some issues back (04.4, “School Daze”) we published an op-ed piece—we call them “Contentions”—by Raphael Sperry, AIACC member and national president of Architects, Designers and Planners for Social Responsibility (ADPSR). Mr. Sperry presented ADPSR’s initiative for a boycott of prison design. In a succeeding issue, we published a reader’s spirited critique of that initiative. Together, the two items captured a significant spectrum of opinion. I have not heard of any AIACC members finding themselves brainwashed or otherwise led astray by either the position paper or its critique.

Imagine my surprise, then, when I learned that Mr. Sperry, who had been invited to participate in a panel discussion on “Exploring Prisons as a Design, Ethical, and Social Policy Issue” at this year’s AIA Convention, was prohibited by the AIA from showing two images: one of the exterior of Abu Ghraib prison, the other of prefabricated holding cells being assembled at Guantánamo. The AIA avers that this prohibition is not censorship, that Mr. Sperry was “completely out of bounds” advocating a political position during a continuing education seminar.

Baloney. Mr. Sperry was invited to the discussion precisely because he leads an organization that advocates the position. To ask him to participate without stumping for that position would be like asking Billy Graham to speak at a panel on faith but (please) not to mention Jesus. Meanwhile, there were sessions offered at the Convention on “Design Leadership and Advocacy in the Public Realm,” “Leadership and Advocacy Through Design,” and “Architects as Advocates”; and, while I unfortunately missed Thom Mayne’s keynote, I gather he may have strayed somewhat into political territory.

It may be that Mr. Sperry’s choice of images was hyperbolic; perhaps, had he been allowed to show them, he would have weakened, rather than strengthened, his case. Maybe so, maybe not. Was he being silly or shrewd, compelling or naïve? Who knows? The attendees would know, if they—if you—had been given the chance.

There are two possible motivations for this act of censorship—and censorship it is. It was done either to suppress a political position with which influential people in the Institute disagree; or it was done because somebody at headquarters thinks AIA members are dupes who can’t react thoughtfully and responsibly to another person’s point of view. Either way, it’s a damned shame.

On a brighter note, as this Comment was going out the door a terrific new book arrived: *NorCalMod: Icons of Northern California Modernism* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006), by Pierluigi Serraino, Assoc. AIA and member of the **arcCA** editorial board. It would, of course, have been the perfect subject for a book review in this, the “Preserving Modernism” issue, had it left the bindery earlier. As it is, we’ll have to save the review for next time. But look for it; it’s full of *good* surprises.

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