# bfo-Journal - 2016 issue

Deadline: Feb 29, 2016

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bfo-Journal
Call for Abstracts for 2016 issue
Deadline: 28 February 2016

“A partial synthesis”: Debates on architectural Realism

For the second issue of the bfo-Journal, a multilingual, peer-reviewed and open access journal, issued once a year and hosted on bauforschungonline.ch, we invite proposals examining the theme of Realism and its manifestations in architecture. We seek new and valid definitions, clarifications, qualifications and possible expansions of this commonly-used yet ambivalent term, in relation to the architecture of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries.
In philosophy, Realism is seen as a counterpart to the abstract realm of ideas and perceptions; in art it denotes the depiction of life as truthfully and precisely as possible, without deliberate recourse to stylisation or artistic licence. In its opposition to idealisation, Realism has largely been identified with the depiction of ugly, humble or ordinary situations, persons or environments. Anchored in literature and painting, the historical art movement of Realism that dominated art production in France between 1840s and the 1870s was defined by Linda Nochlin as the “truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on the meticulous observation of contemporary life” (Linda Nochlin 1971: 13). Bruno Reichlin presented Neo-Realism in 1950s Italian cinema and literature as “a surgical examination of matters of society, an almost documentary attention to the everyday, an adherence in thought and language to the social origins and personalities of the characters, a more-or-less direct criticism of current society and morals” (Bruno Reichlin 2001: 80). The subtle shift between these definitions indicates how, during the twentieth century, Realism took a stronger political colouring, becoming the vehicle for varied, even conflicting ideologies.
A question that has preoccupied many but still remains unanswered is the degree to which Realism as an artistic category is applicable to architecture. For Aldo Rossi, “it is idiotic to make an architectural category of Realism. If one does, then it will have the same fate as rationalism, as symmetry, and so many other things that are only useful insofar as they express ideas.” (Aldo Rossi 1976: 25-26). Realism applies to architecture inasmuch as architecture is representational; by definition it pertains to representational arts – literature, painting, film – whereas architecture is ultimately anchored in reality. Rossi’s observation alerts us to a paradox inherent to Realism: in its attempt to conceptualise reality, it becomes excessively intellectualized, focused on itself and all the more isolated from it. As K. Michael Hays noted, Realism is subject to “two contradictory claims, one aesthetic and one epistemological”, the former setting the work apart in “a realm of heightened aesthetic intensity”, the latter connecting it to a particular historical and cultural situa-

tion and deriving its value from its response to this context (K. Michael Hays 1968: 254). Alan Colquhoun placed Realism at the charged boundary between architecture as “self-referential system”, with its own traditions and value systems, and as a “social product” shaped by wider social and economic circumstances. Realism could only be understood in architecture as a “dialectical process, in which aesthetic norms are modified by external forces to achieve a partial synthesis” (Alan Colquhoun 1981: 67, 74).
The editorial board seeks contributions to this debate that highlight or that challenge the understanding of architectural Realism as a “partial synthesis” of aesthetics and epistemology, autonomy and participation. These might reflect on the historiographical debate and the vehicles of its popularisations (publications, exhibitions, events). Alternatively, they might comprise the analysis of relevant, architectural case studies in their particular historical situations.

We seek proposals in English, German, French and Italian of up to 500 words. Upon their acceptance, the final papers should be no longer than 30’000 characters (including spaces and footnotes). They must be accompanied by maximum 10 illustrations, an abstract of 800 characters (including spaces), and a short biography of no more than 500 signs (including spaces).

Proposals may be sent to the editors by February 28, 2016 to journal@bauforschungonline.ch. For more information about bfo-Journal and further submission guidelines, please visit http://bauforschungonline.ch/bfo-journal.html

Dates:
28 February: deadline for the reception of the abstracts
15 March: notice of acceptance
1 June: deadline for finished papers for peer review
15 July: notice of peer reviewer comments
1 September: final deadline for revised papers

Reference:

CFP: bfo-Journal - 2016 issue. In: ArtHist.net, Jan 28, 2016 (accessed Nov 22, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/12098>.