

Is There (Anti)Neoliberal Architecture? (Graz, Nov 2011)

Graz University of Technology, Graz/Austria, Nov 11, 2011

Deadline: Jun 30, 2011

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Call for Papers

Is There (Anti)Neoliberal Architecture?

Conference:

November 11, 2011 - Graz University of Technology - Graz/Austria

Call for papers closes:

June 30, 2011

Graz University of Technology

Institute of Architectural Theory, History of Art and Cultural Studies

Head: Prof. Anselm Wagner

Neoliberal ideology has irreversibly changed our political and economic realities. The utopia of a global market functioning without external regulation has de facto served as a foil for extensive restructuring affecting all scales of socio-spatial organization. In the last three decades, the impact of such restructuring on urban processes has been extensively theorized. The focus on the urban system as a key site of neoliberal globalization has also affected architectural theory: theorists who dared to challenge the postmodern-poststructuralist-postcritical ban on deploying economic theories of capitalism or neoliberalism turned away from strictly architectural concerns to the more general issue of the city. As a result, the connections between neoliberalism and architecture have so far been examined mostly indirectly, in the context of neoliberal urbanization.

In truth, the question of architecture and neoliberalism is a tricky one – and there are plenty of potential objections to it. Given the capacity of late capitalism to absorb and actively (re)produce cultural difference, one might suspect that any common formal tendency in the globalized neoliberal world could only be discerned by arbitrarily privileging one niche of contemporary architectural production over the others. Furthermore, one could claim that the typically vast size of neoliberal interventions into the built environment prevents them from being adequately analysed in terms of what we usually take for the genuinely architectural scale. Another objection would refer to the changing focus of architectural practice: if contemporary designers increasingly focus on socio-spatial processes rather than formal qualities, then it is obsolete to separate architecture from other projective spatial disciplines (e.g. urbanism), as the socio-spatial processes at different scales are intrinsically interwoven and interdependent.

The validity of these objections, however, depends on how the question of architecture and neoliberalism is posed. If it is assumed that the only relationship between architecture and the global socio-economic condition resides in a formal tendency and that the concepts of architectural practice, architectural form and architectural scale are fixed, then the objections may indeed apply. However, if we accept that these very concepts are continuously transforming, and that this transformation is connected to broader socio-economic changes, then the relationship between architecture and neoliberalism becomes an intriguing and multifaceted question to be potentially approached from a broad range of perspectives. Possible questions include, but are not limited to, the following:

Form and space

Even if the search for a universal spatial form expressing neoliberal society were misguided, can particular spatial forms nonetheless express (or critique) the specific contexts of their production that reflect the general condition of neoliberalism in some way?

Architectural practice

Is there a connection between the post-Fordist production characteristic of neoliberal socio-economic configurations and the shift from “architectural hardware” to “architectural software” – that is, from the traditional design of objects to the new practices that range from mapping spatial processes to unfolding possible scenarios and coordinating agencies?

Architectural scale

If neoliberal globalization is characterised by manifold rearrangements of a previously established hierarchy of socio-spatial scales, as many geographers have postulated, how does it affect the scale of the architectural project?

Anti-neoliberal architecture

If there is an architecture of neoliberalism, are there also tendencies in contemporary architecture that take a position against it? What is the potential and what are the limits of hitherto realized projects aimed to counteract diverse socio-economic processes associated with neoliberalism?

These are just a few of a myriad of possible questions addressing the relationship between architecture and neoliberalism. The Institute of Architectural Theory, History of Art and Cultural Studies invites you to submit an abstract (max. 500 words) relating to this complex theme. Please send your proposal with a short c.v. to ana.jeinic@tugraz.at by June 30, 2011.

The papers will be published in a proceedings volume in 2012.

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