

Architectural Theory Review, re-Asia: Architecture as tactic, 23.1

Architectural Theory Review

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re-Asia: Architecture as tactic

A special issue of Architectural Theory Review, edited by Peter Scriver, Amit Srivastava and Duanfang Lu.

For the nineteenth-century architectural theorist James Fergusson, the methodical study of “Eastern” architecture was a critical foil for his attempt to renovate a theory of rationalism in the architecture of early-modern Europe. A century later, it was the need to deconstruct such “Orientalist” formulations and their problematical epistemic legacies that attracted the critical labour of many Asia-focused contributors to cultural studies, including critical historians and theorists of architecture. Early in the twenty-first century, however, the complexion of the increasingly Asia-centric world system today is shifting so dynamically, in both substance and imagination, that the essentialist assumptions of the past are simply no longer tenable. Nor, perhaps, are their critiques. Whilst the spatial politics of nation and region remains fraught within the physical and conceptual boundaries by which “Asia” may be defined, the lived geographies of place are increasingly delaminated from their corresponding physical geographies. In this context, regionalist framings of spatial and cultural differences are increasingly problematic issues. A prerogative for critical Asia-focused architectural scholarship may, therefore, be to re-think and re-frame its approach.

Embracing this challenge, this special issue of ATR proposes a two-ended strategy that seeks to complicate both of the problematical terms in question (“Asia” and “architecture”) in a critically productive manner, whilst simultaneously attempting to re-focus the theoretical scope and precision of inquiry. The aim is, therefore, to expand, shift, and question the various frames through which “Asia” may be claimed (defined, delimited, regarded, re-framed, re-thought) as a distinctive domain for theoretical inquiry into or within architecture. At the same time, it gently challenges the reliance of many of the most sophisticated Asia-focused architectural scholars on extra-disciplinary theoretical frameworks and concepts (spatial, cultural, socio-political, etc.) as their primary thinking tools. The proposed strategic counterpoint is, therefore, to activate and rigorously apply the discipline-specific purview of architecture itself as the theoretical framework and lens of inquiry.

Papers are invited that will vigorously explore what “architecture” can reveal about the evolving phenomenon of Asia and/or its myriad local or sub-cultural manifestations. How can we re-frame/re-think/re-claim our understanding of Asia by actuating architecture, not as a mirror, but as a “tactic”? On the one hand authors could consider how, by looking through the lens of

architecture, specific cultural theories or readings may be addressed. On the other hand, architecture might also be considered, beyond a mere representation or product of social processes and cultural practices, as a producer in its own right. Here the very production of architecture – local construction knowledges, for instance, or the linguistic peculiarities of building terminology – can provide critical insight into the increasingly mobile building cultures of Asia today. What, moreover, might such a methodologically conscious and focused exercise offer to architectural theory?

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Full papers may be submitted to the ATR Manuscript Central site by February 1, 2018.

Instructions for authors may also be found there.

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Reference:

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