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OASE #82 on Architecture and (Analytical) Philosophy

Hans Teerds - BK

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS
Oase 82 Architecture and Philosophy
Editorial board: Véronique Patteeuw, Lara Schrijver, Hans Teerds
Advisory board: Bernard Colenbrander, Christian Illies, Jacob Voorthuis.

Although philosophy has contributed a great deal to the architecture discourse in the second half of the twentieth century, this has been primarily centered on continental philosophy (with prominent roles for Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida). The analytic tradition of philosophy, figuring philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Quine, Putnam and Searle, has been relatively insignificant to architecture. Despite works of contemporary thinkers that address issues of architecture directly and are situated within this tradition such as Scruton, or share some affinities with it, such as Harries, , the issues and methods put forward by analytic philosophy have found little resonance with the mainstream of architectural debate.
In recent years, as some questions have proven difficult to address within the realm of continental philosophy, the idea has begun to grow that architecture and philosophy may not have much to offer one another. In this OASE, we propose instead that the architecture debate may benefit from the less central tradition of analytic philosophy, as it offers the means to address complicated times with real and tangible issues in architecture.

In particular, some of the approaches of analytic philosophy may help rethink the discourse on the issues of ethics and aesthetics. The balance between these two notions is one of the fundamental elements of twentieth-century architectural history. Within the line of thought of the philosopher Immanuel Kant – and especially the continuation of his work within critical theory and phenomenology, both issues (ethics and aesthetics) were seen within each other's extension. Although perhaps the most 'natural' equilibrium between ethics and aesthetics is to be found within the history of architecture in Classical Antiquity and the Renaissance (where 'beauty' was seen to imply 'virtuosity', and 'virtue' was deemed to be necessarily pleasing to the eye), the modern history of this relation should not be dismissed. This can be seen in light of such examples as the modernist assumption that architecture with a functional and mechanical approach of the assignment would lead to a logical aesthetic and the most ethical choice, to the use of the method of

"dérive" by the Situationists in the sixties, leading not only to the liberation of architecture but to the liberation of the human being itself.

What can be said when we submit the relation between ethics and aesthetics within the architectural discipline to the logical analysis and specificity of analytical philosophy? This encompasses an approach that focuses on language, logic and significance, but in an empirically oriented fashion. This avoids the desire to return to a metaphysical system, but focuses instead on the concrete and specific manifestations, while paying attention as well to meaning and families of relation and to orders of things. What can be said about the notions of ethics and aesthetics? Can we describe these notions within the architectural discourse without using metaphysical concepts, or can we be more precise in addressing both how they are used and which abstract concepts they refer to? How can analytical philosophy contribute to a more specific understanding of their relationship?

A number of topics have been selected that seem particularly interesting in the sense that they sit at the junction of architectural and philosophical questions.

[ethics]
- Ideology
Ideology has had a prominent role in architectural discourse. Analytic philosophy, as a form of 'thinking without abstractions', may help to untangle the complexity of ideology becoming built form. This poses the question of whether architecture may embody ideals without resorting to the total system of an ideology.
- Morality
Equally, the discourse has utilized a sense of morality within its aesthetic propositions. Whether appealing to Ruskin's 'Lamp of Truth,' Loos' disavowal of ornament, or Le Corbusier's 'architecture or revolution', architects have often appealed to a moral standard embedded within their particular aesthetic. What might this imply in contemporary reality? How is this related to the object itself? Can we discern a moral standard to be unequivocally expressed through the object of architecture?
- Consumerism
The consumerist tendencies of the late twentieth century give rise to questions of permanence and ephemerality. Is architecture a fashion, a lifestyle, or a bastion of permanence? Is it a form of individuation for the sophisticated consumer, or should it be seen as a community gesture of cultural signification? In the recently increasing calls for sustainability and moderation, is there a role to be seen for architecture?

[aesthetics]
- Style
The mechanisms of style in defining architecture and its relevance to society

have received little attention in past years. Might the 'vocabulary' of architecture be due for exploration within the larger syntax of globalization and heterogeneity? What do stylistic interventions tell us about the standards they operate within? How do they work in relation to cultural convention?

- Perception

Is it possible to derive information from perception without taking recourse to an idealist (and by definition unknowable) reference? Strictly speaking, without an a priori understanding of 'design intentions', these cannot be understood unambiguously. Might a syntactical relation of perception and families of meaning offer a new insight into architecture and its significance?

OASE invites both architects and philosophers to send in abstracts that deal with issues or aspects of the ethical or aesthetic discourse in architecture, with special attention for the methods and strategies of the analytical tradition. We are particularly interested in papers addressing the notions mentioned above, but are equally open to other suggestions. Abstracts of 500 words max. can be sent by email to p.j.teerds@tudelft.nl no later than 22 May, 2009.