

Sacred Pedagogy: The Sacred in Architectural and Design Education

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Sacred Pedagogy: The Sacred in Architectural and Design Education

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Spanning a period of approximately two and a half centuries (1720- 1967) and over 240 editions, the renowned design competition Prix de Rome considered sacred architecture as the focus of the competition twenty-nine times. The cathedral was the most frequent typology addressed, with about ten recurrences, followed by churches, chapels, and sanctuaries. Sometimes, the competition call included themes related to secular or national sacredness, such as the Temples of Peace and the Pantheon.

Design awards of this type supported a common practice in schools of architecture, design, and decorative arts where themes related to sacred and religious architecture were totally merged and used as training tools for students. On the one hand, they guaranteed a sufficiently broad typological spectrum to experiment new formal balances combining factors of aesthetics and materials, and on the other, they were sufficiently precise in their cultural and semantic profile to secure design proposals that communicated specific, historically stratified, and socially shared content.

Today, only the Frate Sole Foundation regularly promotes an award that recognizes the design of sacred architecture and that is open to students. Meanwhile, the weight and role of the sacred in university design studios and in today's architectural education is hardly addressed and therefore there are almost no opportunities for discussion of this important topic.

This call for papers intends to remedy this situation by promoting a special issue of our journal entirely assigned to the role and usefulness of the sacred in architectural and design education.

The question is whether (and under which conditions) such pedagogies can still be effective tools to test design abilities, and the expressiveness of forms and materials. In the past, the sacred has always been an extraordinary opportunity for architecture: the most daring solutions and the most refined apparatuses were destined for worship. A similar situation applied to artifacts and other furnishings: all ancient civilizations reserved their best-handcrafted products for the divine.

This cultural and anthropological phenomenon extends this call for papers to all areas of design creativity, including interior and object design, as well as handicrafts and all processes of production of objects.

At all scales, the sacred has stimulated the reflection and production of beauty, and, vice versa, exceptional aesthetic quality was reserved for the sacred (sacrificed) and often called divine. It is thus necessary to verify whether (and which) sacredness may still feed this creative tension, considering the extensions of our socio-cultural horizon, the processes of secularization (and post-secularization), and the changes in the aesthetic production and reception of the sacred, in part related to those involved in aesthetics and in architectural pedagogy.

To what extent, under which conditions and in relation to what aspects can the sacred continue to be a training subject for contemporary designers? This theme is meta-scalar and concerns architecture as well as objects of worship.

Any design pedagogy implies the reconsideration of the relationship between the sacred and the religious. Today, spaces of rituals risk becoming themes of specialized design – as stadiums for example, where architecture cannot ignore the rules and the form of the games that take place in them. Also, divisive religious beliefs highlight the fragility and fragmentation of contemporary society. The expansion of the sacred beyond religions underscores the theme of architecture for spirituality, such as Eero Saarinen's chapel at MIT (1955). Furthermore, the sacred was an element of unity even before the emergence of religions. It identifies a primordial and common psycho-perceptive substrate, as taught by Carl Gustav Jung, or a universal category of the intellect, as Rudolf Otto wrote.

As a critical theme in changing societies, the sacred is also an inevitable theme of Gestalt psychology. Thus the original question of this call may also admit its inversion: if the sacred is an anthropologically (and spatially) unavoidable theme, where and how do curricula in architectural education deal with it? Where and how do they teach how to manage it? What thematic pretexts and operating methods are adopted to approach it? And also, what relationship is there today between religious and anthropological sacredness? Which themes of architecture and design lie at their intersection?

Is it from architecture to the sacred or from the sacred to architecture? In other words, is architecture that shapes the sacred, or the sacred that generates architecture? There is a contemporary paradox that appears to emerge at the very center of these questions: if architecture and its teaching cannot in any way avoid the sacred, there seems to be some sort of embarrassment in facing it, almost as if it were an inconvenient subject to which only some assertion of principle or some commonplace can guarantee an escape.

Precisely because it seems to be one of the last of the taboos standing in design and architectural education, it is necessary to engage in this discussion.

This call for papers is open to architects, scholars, designers, pedagogues, anthropologists, philosophers, researchers, and intellectuals. Contributions of particular interest are those that deepen the topics covered in this call along with these perspectives:

- historical and historical-critical: studies and research on the historical development of the teaching of architecture and design and the theme of the sacred;
- theoretical: regarding the triangulation between the sacred, pedagogies and architecture/design, through original contributions or critical and comparative studies of documented experiences about the premises for teaching activities, their cultural conditions and conditioning, and their

anthropological meaning and role;

material-constructive: referring to the role that the design of sacred space plays in the experimentation and aesthetic appropriation of technological advances, new building materials and techniques especially over the last two centuries;

- practical-operational, dealing with experiences conducted in teaching or design (both of new and existing artifacts) or in construction laboratories, design or prototyping of objects.

Authors are invited to send an abstract in Italian or English (3000– 4000 characters including spaces) via email to in_bo@unibo.it by 13th September 2021. The abstracts must be drafted following the guidelines of the journal, which can be found on the website in_bo.unibo.it. A short bio (max 350 characters including spaces) and the affiliations of the authors must be included in the same email in a separate .doc file. If the abstract is accepted, the final essay must be uploaded to the in_bo online platform at in_bo.unibo.it, in Italian or English and with an overall length between 20,000 and 50,000 characters including spaces. The essays will undergo a double-blind peer-review process.

Deadlines

September 13th, 2021 | Deadline of the call for abstracts

October 25th, 2021 | Notification for acceptance

April 15th, 2022 | Deadline for the submission of the full paper

June 2022 | Notification of acceptance of full papers

October 2022 | Publication

Reference:

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