Dialectic IV: Architecture at Service?

Salt Lake City, UT, USA
Deadline: Jun 1, 2015

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Call for Papers and Projects
Dialectic, a refereed journal of the School of Architecture, CA+P, University of Utah

Dialectic IV: Architecture at Service?
- A Profession between Luxury Provision, Public Agency and Counter-Culture

Deadline:
June 1st, 2015

Requirements:
Abstract (350 words)
Short CV

When defining architecture, the debate codified in mid-nineteenth century as "Architecture: Art or Profession" is far from dead. The face-off between arts and crafts architects and neo-classicists at Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) persists on partly similar and partly modified terms. The emphasis on the primacy of the program, function, and technological problem solving is still robust; though there is no consensus among its champions about the addressee of architectural design. There is little agreement if architecture should be serving the interests of the client, the users, or the vision of the architect. Should its primary duty be to the profession, the debates in the media, or the symbolic client, namely the public at large? The opponents of this faction, in turn, insist on artistic freedom from such constraints and call for the autonomy of the discipline. Art-architects as well as practitioners of architectural history, aesthetic philosophy, and semiotics dominate this faction. These questions are highly charged with political and ideological leaning, full of consequences for teaching, practice, and society, and therefore in need of dialectical interrogation.

A materialist reading of history frames architecture both as part of the superstructure (intellectual culture) and the productive base of the society. Architects are involved in matter-of-fact processes of production and organization of labor. They have a say in the distribution of goods, products, and services, and they are complicit in the reproduction of labor forces. A neo-liberal society could only create a neo-liberal architecture. There is no room for artistic agency in this position.

Critical theorists of a slightly different persuasion, however, argue for a more dialectical relationship between culture and base. They allow vanguard architecture a degree of agency or semi-autonomy, if you will. They point to the 'soft critique' of Mies van der Rohe or John Hejduk, erect

the worth of the 'esoteric musings' of Kenzo Tange or Jeffrey Bawa, and most recently, hold sacred the 'gorilla tactics' of rebel architects in Israel, the occupied West Bank, Pakistan, Spain, Nigeria, and elsewhere. These concrete examples create faith in the possibility of brave comment and critical practice. They enact meaningful effects in the world beyond representation and artistic intention, within the stranglehold of existing societal forces.

And then, of course, we are reminded that there might be room for counter-culture practices within everyday spaces. The literature taught in architectural schools abounds with theories and practices of appropriation, poaching, and tactics within the city by the ubiquitous woman without qualities.

Dialectic IV invites papers with new takes on the long-held proposition that architects are providers of design services. They service everyone from the status quo all the way to the subaltern. We know well how architects have historically fashioned themselves to be able to procure the most valued building commissions a people have to offer. There are temples, churches and shrines, palaces and private villas, and surely monuments, state institutions and corporate headquarters. But how have the members of the same profession managed to fashion themselves as the custodians of the public good?

Are the career paths of luxury providers and community supporters mutually exclusive or mutually beneficial? Does one make the other possible? How are the careers of community architects and activist-designers sustained? What about those who traverse these boundaries? What kind of a dialogue exists or should exist between agents of the elite, public agents and producers of counter culture? Do Marxist thinkers regard these as impossible questions?

Architects are also at the service of specific expectations - that of their peers, academia, and the media. We need to consider the kind of career choices, aspirations, and skills professional training and professional bodies (such as AIA, NCARB or RIBA) offer? Historians tell us that most of the socially and artistically progressive buildings are historical accidents. Only where the paths of talented architects have crossed the tracts of "enlightened" affluent clients, have we had progressive departures from "business as usual." Are progressive-minded architects operating in the luxury market restricted to mute representations and subject to the whims of chance?

Following the thematic issues of Dialectic II on architecture and economy and Dialectic III on design-build, the fourth issue of our peer-review journal will explore architecture at service - of whom, for whom, service to what ideals and realized how.

The editors value critical statements and alternative practices. We hope to include instructive case studies and exciting models for professional practice. Possible contributions may also include mapping of ongoing debates across the world, book, journal, exhibition and new media reviews. Please send abstracts of 350 words and short CVs to Ole W. Fischer fischer@arch.utah.edu and Shundana Yusaf shundana@arch.utah.edu by June 1st, 2015.

Accepted authors will be notified by June 15th. Photo essays with 6-8 images and full papers of 2500-3500 words must be submitted by August 15, 2015, (including visual material, endnotes, and permissions for illustrations) to undergo an external peer-review process. This issue of Dialectic is expected to be out in print by spring 2016.

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