

Introduction

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After two decades of architectural euphoria brought about by unparalleled resources, new technologies and materials, novel possibilities opened up by the computer, and unforeseen media attention, we are unexpectedly in a situation where architecture seems to face the most dramatic shift of its paradigm since the breakthrough of modernism nearly a century ago. The urgency of the ecological perspective in architecture was not quite apparent even two years ago when the previous issue of the *SOM Journal* was published. In the current issue, Susannah Hagan calls the situation a “revolution”; now it is nature that is in revolt against human culture. The foreboding sense that our insensitive and unrestricted acts threaten the dynamic and subtle equilibrium of global natural systems has turned into an undeniable fact. Only during the past couple of years has global warming and its consequences come to our full knowledge. It is also becoming evident that the emerging situation, threatening the future of current technological culture altogether, is significantly caused by phenomena and processes related with construction. Now even architects cannot flee their responsibility. The unavoidable re-evaluation and re-orientation of architecture do not only concern the economy and technology of construction. The reassessment of the objectives, impacts, and responsibilities of architecture unavoidably imply new architectural ethics and aesthetics. Also the temporal perspective of design is bound to shift from nowness and newness to the evaluation of long-term impacts.

For roughly a hundred years, the functionalist ethos has served as the ideological and ethical backbone of architecture behind varying stylistic manifestations. However, functional and technical performance has been a metaphoric aesthetic motif, or architectural theme, rather than a question of actual and verified performance and efficiency. The era that we are entering now clearly calls for precise performance and an accountable efficiency, as well as an understanding of the causalities of all the environmental, material, energy, and social cycles related

with buildings and their long-term use. Instead of being judged primarily as aesthetic objects, architectural projects will inevitably be assessed more as processes and cycles.

During the past two decades the most widely publicized phenomena in architecture around the world have been obsessively driven by the visual image and aesthetic seduction, most often at the cost of reason as well as functional, structural, technological, and economic logic, not to speak of ecological consequences. Even in terms of purely human values, architecture has too often turned away from building the material and institutional foundations for a democratic, emancipated, and egalitarian culture. Instead of creating a shared material culture aspiring for equality and human dignity, as the pioneering generation of modernism envisioned, architecture has frequently become directly tied with individual profit making and mental manipulation for commercial purposes. The current globalized and placeless architecture is a consequence of unlimited ideological and physical mobility, placelessly fluid and immaterial capital, as well as the universalizing impact of uncritically applied technology.

The computer has brought forceful and dramatic changes to the architectural practice. Acknowledging the undeniable benefits of the digital reality, computerized design also poses serious problems in relation to human imagination and sense of compassion. Alongside the current digital enthusiasm we need a serious assessment of creative design processes and, in particular, the significance of the senses and embodiment in the conception and experience of architecture.

In the architectural development of the past two decades or so, form has been forcefully detached from its essential architectural dependencies and given an exorbitant position. However, architecture is fundamentally an art of mediation. It mediates between different contexts, periods of history, cultural institutions, tradition and invention, society and individuals, material and spiritual.