

86 = Unsolicited Architecture

Unsolicited Architecture
An account of RSVP Events

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Unsolicited Architecture

Architecture used to be seen as built objects. For most part, this is still the case. The last decade a new trend has emerged, trying to liquidify architecture by means of electronic devices, creating flexible, interchangeable, updatable, reprogrammable, and scenographic environments that are no longer necessarily based on space and matter, but on bits and moments of interaction. Whatever the revolutionary power of this new character of architecture as a time based art, many things remain the same. Most of the time it can only come into existence if there is a site, a client, a budget, and a

pre-selected technology. Moreover, people who hardly challenge their own conception of being an architect produce it. Whatever the radical innovation of the profession, it sticks to its reactive pattern .

The question here is: can we go beyond this pattern and anticipate architecture before it becomes a request? Can architecture emerge, surface, show up at times and places where nobody thought of architecture to solve a problem? Can architecture exceed its own procedural and conceptual scriptedness, and invent scripts for time, space, and the production of meaning beyond the project? Finding new definitions and mandates for itself? In other words, can architecture be an unsolicited act?

Here are some proposals, taken from one year of Archis RSVP events worldwide: new forms of activity, where dialogue and reflection coincide with architectural intervention, spatial intelligence, and social performance.

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The Weight of History



We all know people tend to forget about their past. Not just because they are forgetful, but because modernization takes command. Every day, again and again and again, the juggernaut of the new. But sometimes History might impose itself, just as modernization does. It can even become a category of modernity itself. Which means: people have to obey its rules, it becomes inexorable, unavoidable, a true regime. When icons become brands, escape is no longer possible. Then you will find out how a source of inspiration becomes a prison in itself..



Once you identify history as a prison, you will notice it can be a very oppressive one. It turns out to have an extreme appetite for swallowing energy, money, space, and intellect. Historic sites turn into crime scenes, gated symbols of deadly annexation of what cities really need: life. They prevent neighborhoods from becoming, transforming. Pride is only allowed to reside in the necropolis.



Why not finally accept history again as a living thing? Why not expose history to the challenges of contemporary life? We went to Ancient Greece and stole some relicts of the past. While traveling across the sea, these relicts became lively again, and ready to play with. So, when we brought them to Istanbul and threw them from the Galata Bridge, they happened to remain floating. Local kids, swimming, brought the parts on shore and this way, history became young again.

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Losing Time, Using Time



We know it is a predicament. Using architectural means to demarcate is as old as humanity, but seldom has this been more literal than at the borders between Israeli and Palestinians. This is, of course, not just about a division of territories. It is about dividing, holding apart, the prevention of encounter.



Most of the time the predicament is defined as a battle for and over space. It is conceived as a conflict about control and surveillance, property and appropriation, taking land and claiming land. But on a daily basis it is as much an issue of time. Both sides are dramatically losing time, most of all the Palestinians who wait for anonymous decisions to let them go through or not. Lining up is the name of the drama that unfolds itself, every single day.



When people are waiting, they lose time unless they do something with it. Most people resolve the issue by doing the obvious: reading, talking to your neighbor, and memorizing something important. But think of it. You get together with many people on a daily basis. You are suffering the same time loss, the same humiliation, and the same anxieties. So why not capitalize on this as an asset? For finding your fellows. For public speech. For negotiating culture and commerce. For nation building. We discussed this possibility right at the core of the tension, in Ramallah. Maybe this is too pragmatic and unprincipled. But in letting time being lost forever, other principles are violated.

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Ban the old banners



The obsolescence of much of what we say is an obvious fact, and still we hardly do anything about it. And it is not just that what we say can wear out, but also the way we say it. Using concepts, categories, parameters, criteria, formulas, phrases, just words. We keep using them while knowing they have lost their meaning. This happens in language, as it happens within modes of expression that can be equaled to language. Like art and architecture. Buildings can also be worn out, as monuments of symbolic orders, long forlorn.



Can we discuss the way we stiffen discussion with dead language? Of course we can. We even have to, if we take our own acts of communication to still be relevant. And where better to discuss the urgent need to revitalize our language than within a relic of an abandoned ideology. Against the backdrop of the remains of that notorious icon of the hammer and sickle: the emblem of the Communist Party, the Palast der Republik in the former DDR.



In the dark and empty hall of the Palast we held a funeral ceremony to bury the old hat in our cultural communications. Words, concepts, and phrases, beautifully designed for their last usage, were submitted as candidates for concepticide. A solemn ritual of cleaning up our language. After, a whole armor of linguistic snobbishness and communicative emptiness was left behind in the building that is destined to be destroyed itself.

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Transport of Holy land



Read the Bible: the last glance of Moses, looking out over the Promised Land.

Read the Koran: the last glance of Musil, looking out over the Holy Land.

Two books, two belief systems, both with a passage about the same moment in history. Undoubtedly one of the most important ones. One that still decides the destiny of millions of people.



The gaze became a claim. The mission became a zeal. Hope turned into a new exclusivism. After all, it is sheer magic to see a concept of land and holiness surviving millennia. It must stem from a very deep source of culture, the unbeatable desire for belonging. Meanwhile, this desire prevents us from sharing, from pragmatism, from togetherness. People get stuck in the mud of fear and superiority.



We went to the Holy Land to collect samples of the soil. Grains of sand, little rocks, small plants. Counter the territoriality with nomadism. Transform groundedness in travels. Pass borders and shift contexts. In the end, we brought our collection back to the source of its antagonisms and animosities: Moses' Gaze from Mount Nebo, looking out over the Holy Land.

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