

Unsolicited, or: The New Autonomy of Architecture

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Volume's former Editor-in-Chief presents the most concrete materialization of 'unsolicited architecture', an idea he has articulated in this magazine since its very first issue. Exemplifying how the notion of going beyond architecture can be brought into action, Bouman accelerates into a new dimension of critical practice by establishing the Office for Unsolicited Architecture.

Remember when people talked about the death of this and the death of that. We attended a lot of funerals. Michel Foucault claimed Man had died. Roland Barthes asserted that the author had died. The novel, authenticity, progress, enlightenment, you name it and some philosopher talked about it at the memorial service. And although people were still living, books were still written and progress was still made, it was all about a culture of living deaths. Yet one with no past and no future because history too was declared dead.

You can imagine how architecture was effected by this tragedy of cultural mass destruction. Although buildings too continued to be built, architecture as a cultural endeavor found itself lost in the morass of meaninglessness, devoid of any representative power to materialize true values. All that remained of this old respectable discipline beyond sheer pragmatism, was 'architecturearchitecture', architecture which first and foremost wants to be a statement about architecture. It increasingly met profound disdain ending with the lethal judgment: the 'architecture of the absurd'; the arbitrary and capricious fakery of designers with only one clue: their ego.

This is the tragic story. And as the famous Marxian jingle goes: if it happens again, it is called farce. Architecture's struggle to keep some of its artistic autonomy and self-respect, only to find enemies too big for it to escape its sublime demise, has now become a new mantra to embrace the new conditions and become 'realistic'. Architecture, whether designed by agents in the real estate market or the small elite of star architects, is giving up its utopian impulse, only to become a modest player among many in the average building

process. Architects as demiurges, geniuses or saviors who didn't really die in a heroic struggle. No, they just became outdated. Even death has been taken away from them.

The good news is: if the architect is still alive, s/he can also start living independently again and stop acting as either slave or clown. For instance: why not act as an initiator by exploring all those opportunities to which architecture can come to the rescue, but nobody has thought of yet? If the architect turns out to be immortal, why not revive the role attributed to him in the first place: to organize our spaces intelligently.

If professional choice in recent decades has been reduced to either becoming a passive facilitator or a court jester with special permission to do weird things every now and then, perhaps the time has come to no longer respond to others' questions and expectations, but to pose them yourself. Perhaps the time has come to design not as solicited by client, site or available budget, but to design unsolicited architecture and find clients, sites and budgets for it.

For the sake of a relevant career and an interesting life: don't rely on the motifs created by others. Motivate yourself.



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Why is unsolicited architecture undeniably superior to any other?

Because it keeps architecture autonomous. The autonomy of architecture once meant hermetic seclusion from reality, but now we know that it is a matter of becoming inclusive beyond any client expectation. Autonomy is in the drive, not the territory.

Because architecture as art, science, innovation, ideal, adventure, aid and rescue always relies on self-motivation, curiosity, a sense of urgency and an antenna for opportunities.

Because it ultimately preserves architecture's long-term relevance and legitimacy. Unsolicited architecture is acquisition for the long-term and finding new objects for the application of architectural intelligence.

Don't ask what architecture can build for you; ask what it can do for you.

Don't wonder where you can find a client; ask where you are needed.

Think about situations and opportunities nobody has yet thought of.

Think about an architecture that would no longer simply respond to what is given, an architecture that would not be reactionary but actively pursue its challenges.

Think about moments when architecture can make a difference, even without clients, a budget or specific locations, by intervening with decisive concepts and powerful scenarios to shift deadlocked discourse and role play.

Think about architecture as strategic intelligence, a medium for developing cultural concepts, a mode of thinking, a tactic for social intervention, a strategy to mitigate conflict, a weapon to fight a battle, a metaphor for the rest of the world.

Think about an architecture liberated from building.

Now go practice unsolicited architecture.