

TESTIFY!

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ARCHITECTURE



EDITED BY LUKAS FEIREISS
INTRODUCTION BY OLE BOUMAN

NAI PUBLISHERS
NETHERLANDS ARCHITECTURE INSTITUTE

TESTIFY!

2A+P/A / IAN+ / MAO ITALY

Page
9 / 20

2A+P/A is an architecture practice based in Rome. It was established by Gianfranco Bombaci and Matteo Costanzo, after ten years of experience begun in 1998. The office is involved in architecture, urban planning and landscape design, developing projects such as public and private buildings, housing and urban spaces. www.2ap.it

ARUP FORESIGHT USA/UK

Page
9 / 20

Arup's Foresight team identifies and monitors the trends and issues likely to have a significant impact upon the built environment and society at large, researching and raising awareness about the major challenges affecting the built environment and their implications. www.driversofchange.com

AT103 MEXICO

Page
9 / 20

at103 is a Mexico-City based architecture office in practice for over a decade, co-founded by Julio Amezcua and Francisco Pardo. Their architectural projects range from residential and commercial renovations to the design and construction of new buildings. www.at103.net

ATELIER D'ARCHITECTURE AUTOGÉRÉE (AAA) FRANCE

Page
9 / 20

Since the group's inception in 2000 as a collaborative network, its projects have focused on issues of self-organization and self-management of collective spaces, emerging networks and catalyst processes in urban contexts, resistance to profit-driven development, recycling and ecologically friendly constructions, collective production of knowledge and alternative culture. www.urbantactics.org

CINEMA JENIN PALESTINE

Page
9 / 20

Cinema Jenin is supported by Cinema Jenin e.V., a non-profit organization based in Germany consisting of filmmakers, cultural advocates and investors dedicated to globally promoting cinema culture in such a way that sustainable development and cultural understanding along with free and fair education are encouraged. www.cinemajenin.org

DECOLONIZING ARCHITECTURE PALESTINE

Page
9 / 20

Decolonizing Architecture is a project initiated by Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal and Eyal Weizman in 2007. Set up as a studio/residency programme in Beit Sahour, Bethlehem and recently re-established as the Decolonizing Architecture/ Art Residency (DAAR), they engage spatial research and theory, taking the conflict over Palestine as their main case study. www.decolonizing.ps

DHK ARCHITECTS SOUTH AFRICA

Page
9 / 20

South-African dhk Architects is an established architecture practice that has competed successfully at the highest level of the profession for 25 years. The company is active across the full spectrum of architecture, from the creation of new buildings, refurbishment and restoration of existing structures to urban and interior design projects. www.dhk.co.za

ALEJANDRO ECHEVERRI ARQUITECTOS COLOMBIA

Page
9 / 20

Alejandro Echeverri was the director general of the Urban Development Company from 2004 to 2005 and the director of urban projects for the mayor's office of Medellín, Colombia from 2005 to 2007 under Mayor Sergio Fajardo. He is an architect by training and professor of architecture at the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. alejandroecheverri-arquitectos.tumblr.com

ECOLOGIC-STUDIO UK

Page
9 / 20

ecoLogicStudio was co-founded by Claudia Pasquero and Marco Poletto in 2004. The office's work focuses on the development and application of a design method capable of exploiting the latest innovations in digital computational design as a means of developing hyper-realities, regimes of intense exchange between the artificial and the natural, the designed and the accidental. www.ecologicstudio.com

ARCHITEKTUR+ NETZWERK GERMANY

Page
9 / 20

Founded in 2000 by architect Sabine Eling-Saalmann, Architektur+Netzwerk is based in Magdeburg. The Open Air Library Salbke has been developed and implemented in close cooperation between KARO* and Saalmann's Architektur+Netzwerk. www.eling-saalmann.com

HAAS & HAHN THE NETHERLANDS

Page
9 / 20

Haas & Hahn is the working title of artistic duo Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn. They started working together in 2005, when they filmed a documentary about hip hop in the favelas of Rio and São Paulo. Inspired by this visit, they embarked on a journey to bring outrageous works of art to unexpected places, starting with painting enormous murals in the slums of Brazil together with the local youth. www.favelapainting.com

IAN+ ITALY

Page
9 / 20

IaN+ is a multidisciplinary agency, founded in 1997 by Carmelo Baglivo, Luca Galofaro and Stefania Manna, that aims at being a place where theory and practice of architecture overlap and meet, in order to redefine the concept of territory as a relational space between the landscape and its human user. In each intervention, projects explicitly question the contemporary urban condition through architecture. www.ianplus.it

KARO* GERMANY

Page
9 / 20

KARO* is a platform for communication, architecture and space organization based in Leipzig. Its members, Stefan Rettich, Antje Heuer and Bert Hafermalz, work as architects, urbanists, critics and journalists, as well as teachers. www.karo-architekten.de

LI XIAODONG ATELIER CHINA

Page
9 / 20

Chinese architect, educator and research Li Xiadong established his practice in 1997. His work ranges from interior design to architecture and urban planning. Xiadong's professional range of interest ranges from cultural studies, to the history and theory of architecture, and urban studies. www.lixiaodong.net

MAO ITALY

Page
9 / 20

The Rome-based architecture practice ma0 was founded by Massimo Ciuffini, Ketty Di Tardo, Alberto Lacovoni and Luca La Torre in 1996. Ma0 understands architecture as a system of spatial rules that modify the relationships between space and its inhabitants, between public and private, interior and exterior, and artificial and natural. www.ma0.it

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MARIA GRAZIA SCHOOL, AFGHANISTAN
Page 44 / 206



LE 56/ECO-INTERSTICE, FRANCE
Page 32 / 204



ESTONOSUNSOLAR, SPAIN
Page 56 / 204



EICHBAUMOPER, GERMANY
Page 56 / 204



CINEMA JENIN, PALESTINE
Page 56 / 204



SKATISTAN, AFGHANISTAN
Page 144 / 207

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

OLE BOUMAN

P 14

—

REALITY BITES!

LUKAS FEIRREIS

P 18

1.
**URBAN
ACUPUNCTURE**
REPROGRAMMING
THE CITY
P 22

—

2.
**SMOOTH
OPERATORS**
INTERVENTIONS IN
THE PUBLIC REALM
P 82

3.
REACH OUT
SPACES FOR
LEARNING AND
COMMUNITY
P 126

—

4.
**EXPLORING
HORIZONS**
PUSHING THE
BOUNDARIES OF
ARCHITECTURE
P 184

INDEX
P 230

—

CREDITS
P 236

INTRODUCTION

ARCHITECTURE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Is there anything in today's society that is still self-evident, that we no longer need to discuss? There's no simple answer. Situations within our culture in which we can rely on certainties are now rare. Almost nothing can be taken for granted anymore. The language we use, the place we live in, the social class we belong to, the trade we learn, the institutions we work for, virtually everything and everyone find themselves having to be justified or defended. The big questions are being posed every day: Is what you're doing actually relevant, challenging, useful, persuasive or inevitable? And will it still be so tomorrow? The outcome of the reality check is often a radical alteration of the situation.

Things are no different for architecture. The complacency with which this profession used to concentrate on producing unique forms and concepts – as well as the attendant publicity – have made way for a renewed interest in the public significance of architecture. At the same time, the unquestionability of the central role the discipline traditionally played in the design and construction of society is fading. As a profession architecture is now facing serious competition from other specialists in the building process.

As a technique it is now part of a chain of construction that reaches beyond its particular expertise. As an art form it is severely criticized as the arcane idiom of an elitist in-crowd. As an economic activity it is being undermined from all sides, and making a decent living in architecture has become a challenge. No wonder the profession is enthusiastically (in fact with a hint of panic) searching for the 'unique added value' of architecture and the 'role of the architect'. It is significant that coming up with precise definitions for these turns out to be a far from simple exercise.

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THE USERS ARE THE
WITNESSES YOU NEED
TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE
QUALITY OF GOOD
ARCHITECTURE.
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It may seem sardonic to say that this is of course a fantastic time as well. Yet it's the truth. How privileged we are to live in an age in which we once again have to prove what things are really for and in which our actions really matter. How great to stand for an Architecture of Consequence. An architecture the world cannot live without.

The same is true of the Netherlands Architecture Institute, for which architecture is its principal subject. The NAI, too, has to work hard to justify why it organizes a massive programme dedicated to the glory of this discipline every year – through exhibitions that showcase that glory and through the collection of archives maintained on the basis of that glory. This is why the NAI has explicitly made Architecture of Consequence the core of its innovation agenda. If architecture is to be celebrated, collected and discussed, let it be so only as a craft that can prove its indispensability.

In this the NAI also aims to come to the aid of contemporary architecture. This can be done by continually pointing out not just the beauty of architecture, but its genuine accomplishments as well. By asking to what extent architecture provides solutions to our problems and proves itself in the process. By placing architecture in the direct context of the most pressing issues of our time. By making the indispensability of architecture irrefutable. Out of all this emerged Architecture of Consequence as a long-term programme, a relief operation for architecture, and with it, of course, ultimately a relief operation for the NAI itself. After all, a cultural institution that salvages its subject also salvages its own reason for being.

We are now two years down the road since Architecture of Consequence was published as a book. Using projects by Dutch designers, this book demonstrated how much architecture can contribute to the alleviation of great social challenges involving food, health, energy, space and time limitations, social cohesion and value creation. The accompanying exhibition is currently touring around the world, eliciting tremendous response.

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ARCHITECTURE IS
REINVENTING ITSELF.
NO WONDER WE
CAN BE AMAZED AT
WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE.
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All over the world, it turns out, there is enormous demand for convincing examples of architecture that provides solutions. In many cases this takes the form of social projects, intended to bring about immediate improvement in living conditions, as seen, for instance, in the exhibition 'Small Scale, Big Change' ('in undeserved communities'), or the work of Architecture for Humanity. Increasingly, however, projects are also being set up in response not to a great need, but to a great opportunity that has long been latent and is suddenly perceived from a new social engagement perspective. This is architecture that proves that all sorts of unexpected possibilities exist for growing food in urban areas, for creating healthy and sustainable environments, for supporting social networks and for creating real estate value based on new revenue models.

With this innovation agenda, the NAI itself is frequently asked to present and elucidate the story. It is also regularly asked to calculate the profits achieved, to mediate in finding the right designers for particular projects and to advise on reassessing teaching programmes in this direction.

Words are not enough, however. So the NAI, at its headquarters in Rotterdam, is also using this reassessment to put its own house in order. As of this writing the last touches are being put to a renovation of the NAI that makes the building more sustainable, more social, more spacious, healthier and more valuable. In addition, a cultural programme is being devised that will end up giving people more time than it costs them (see a few images here). And yet we're not entirely satisfied with our own words and deeds. It's all very well to want to make architecture relevant again in your design and in the discussion it generates, but you can only really 'prove' this if it actually works that way in practice. And for this you have to look beyond the intentions and the design analysis. For this you have to listen to the users themselves, those who experience day to day whether the good intentions came true. They are the witnesses you need to find out about the quality of good architecture. And because they are users, the point is not a final verdict, but rather an ongoing insight that can be directly put to use in new projects.

That is the essence of this publication and accompanying exhibition. The title says it all: Testify! Prove that architecture works – not just in its direct function, but also in its programmatic reach, in its cultural effect, in its value to society. Demonstrate that architecture solves problems. Show those consequences of architecture. What's most striking is that in judging the success of their everyday surroundings, people do not immediately talk about physical architecture. The focus is much more on the way in which their space is organized and therefore how everyday life and its physical backdrop influence each other.

It is therefore no surprise that curator Lukas Feireiss, in selecting projects about which there is a great deal to say from the standpoint of use, has ended up choosing designs that some readers may not even recognize as architecture.

That's a risk we're happy to take. Architecture is reinventing itself. No wonder we can be amazed at what it looks like. At what architecture is. At what it turns out it can be.