



## Memo

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To:

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From: Ole Møystad

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Subject:

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Date: 01.03.13      Signature: O.M.      X-File: 1

## Conditions - The Last Issue - 2014

### ARCHITECTURE OF KNOWLEDGE?

"You seem to assume that architecture is governed by the laws of nature!?" - Alberto Perez-Gomez broke me off when I pointed out the relationship between architectural form and gravity. A young PhD candidate I admitted that, yes, even though there are a lot of other forces at play in addition to gravity, I did insist, quite firmly in fact, that architecture *is* part of nature. I added, as a matter of evidence, that even during the baroque, the Catholic Church would call upon the architect/mathematician Guarino Guarini to calculate the vault of the Turin cathedral. Only at the inauguration would the clerics come in and call upon extra-natural forces to give the cathedral their protection.

### KNOWLEDGE ARCHITECTURE?

During the first years after the Soviet revolution, there was a strong belief in possibility of questioning every pre-revolutionary truth. This endeavour took the shape of an energetic, artistic as well as scientific questioning of just about everything. We all know the incredible vitality of Soviet avant-garde art and architecture. During the years between 1917 and 1934 belief was almost limitless. This obviously represented a risk for excess and unrealistic dreams; such as projects for changing the direction of the Russian rivers, thus making water run upwards, and of flying cities. On the other hand, as long as the inquiry was kept open, the investigations produced incredible amounts of interesting, unforeseen and unpredictable insights and ideas. So much so, that at the 17<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1934, Stalin decided to stop the process, and to start pre-dicting by enforcing of 5 year plans.

The revolutionary project was about producing a new, never before seen society where all inequality and oppression was abolished. Such

a society inevitably needed an architecture which would serve these ambitions, and the architects boldly set out to question old forms and to experiment with new ones. One of the big discussions was the one between urbanists and de-urbanists. The first believing that the city, in spite of having evolved as a spatial structure serving bourgeois power over the working masses, should and could be redesigned to serve the new socialist Soviet republic. The de-urbanists, however, argued in favour of abolishing the city all together. The only way to overcome the opposition between not only the classes, but also the urban and the rural population, was, they argued, to dissolve it all together. They set out to replace it by means of an extensive infrastructure providing energy, high speed transportation, industrial production units, farming facilities, housing and social institutions and services evenly across the endless Russian plains. The historical city should be replaced by a network of smaller nodes woven together by an efficient infrastructure. The USSR was one big scientific investigation for a while - until belief and the method of authority kicked in at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress.

As it were, neither urbanists nor de-urbanists would be able to test their proposals. Russia did not have the means, neither in economical nor in technological terms to make experiments on that scale. The melancholy of the matter is, however, that the projects of the de-urbanists look very much like phenomena that we, 100 years later, discuss as the polycentric city, the network city, the rizomatic city, the down-up, the economic-ecological synergy or the 10km more or less urban (who cares actually?), coastal ribbon around Norway.

The topic of the Oslo Architecture Triennale is "Really Sustainable?". Good question. Do Economy/ecology *really* form a dichotomy - or are they rather modalities of the same *OIKOS*? Let us get the facts together. Not only Norwegians have a direct relationship with the forces of nature, and with the technology that makes it possible to live with and off it. That is a more or less planet-wide condition.

If our architecture is political, social, technological, economical, and cultural; so be it. Then that is what architecture needs to be about. Maybe it suggests the outline of a **new kind of urban environment**? Maybe the abolition of the urban-rural dichotomy; like the soviet avant-garde, the de-urbanists of the soviet avant-garde dreamed of? Let us ask those questions. What are the food chains here? Who decides what? Who owns what? One of the Soviet goals was to abolish the city as a power structure, as the spatial organisation of the bourgeois society. They were looking for an architecture of knowledge; a new **knowledge-architecture**!

Let us stop worrying about the prolific use of the term architecture, as in 'financial architecture', 'catastrophe architecture', 'management architecture', 'information

architecture', 'architecture of politics', 'the architect behind the treaty of Rome', 'the architecture of the Middle-East', 'the architecture of UN' etc. Sure; it is all architecture. If this is not what architects do, then architects may need to get the facts together and regroup. Maybe we do need to move out of the comfortzone of belief?

\* Charles S. Peirce, *Popular Science Monthly* 12 (November 1877), 1-15.