

What value does architecture have for society?

Architectural practitioners and educators are starting to proclaim more and more that architecture has no value for society. Architecture can't solve society's problems—war, crime, poverty, global warming, mental health, etc. Architecture is dictated by failed economic and political policies and can't do anything about it. Architecture can't contribute to education or intellectual development because of the loss of representation. The one thing that architecture can do is act as an effective tool for technological development. Ironically, while colleagues at my university are complaining that architecture has no value for society, design studios are using DALL-E for design development. Does the technological development further alienate the architect from society? Is it too utopian to think that architecture still might have redemptive value for society? Can there be anything more than the pure play of the signifier? What role does psychoanalysis play in this relation between architecture and society? As *Architecture Post Mortem* declared, "Architecture is not irrelevant to fiscal and political contagion as is commonly believed; it is the victim and penetrating analytical agent of the current crisis. As the very apparatus for modernity's guilt and unfulfilled drives—modernity's debt architecture is that ideological element that functions as a master signifier of its own destruction, ordering all other signifiers and modes of signification beneath it."¹ Is an apocalypse the only possibility? Is it already happening? Is psychoanalysis an "Alamo" of architecture theory?

Architecture is not necessary for survival. Structures and shelters maybe, but not architecture. The elements of architecture that are necessary for survival are all that's left of it (technology and sustainability, which aren't architecture). Architecture was the primary text of a culture before the printing press. According to Pérez-Gómez (*Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*),² science stripped architecture of its value for society, made worse by technology and media. It could be argued that architecture is also an impediment survival. It weakens immunities and causes diseases, according to Beatriz Colomina. It creates barriers between people, and contributes to global warming, going back to the Romans, whose mining increased atmospheric lead concentrations tenfold, and contaminated the air with toxic metalloids, according to Jorge Otero-Pailos.

Architects should be banned from society. Engineers can design buildings, contractors can design houses. Architecture no longer has any value for society. As Nikolaus-Hon Terzoglou wrote in *The Cultural Role of Architecture*, "Architecture has concentrated mainly on technological means and instrumental procedures that, in certain cases, manage empty forms without conceptual content This situation has marginalized architecture as a form of mental expression and spatial imagination. An almost exclusive and one-dimensional emphasis on material and technological means reduces the ontological complexity of architecture and often leads to results which lack mental depth."³ Architects have abandoned the elements of architecture which have given architecture value to society: the expression of ideas, the communication of cultural values, the modelling of

philosophical structures. Psychoanalysis could provide fertile ground for those elements of architecture if the practice of architecture were able to return to them. Most students coming to architecture school say that they want to be architects to make the world a better place, but they soon discover that that is not possible, given the constraints put on the architecture profession. The elimination of architecture is necessary for the survival of the human race.

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¹ *Architecture Post Mortem: The Diastolic Architecture of Decline, Dystopia, and Death*, ed. Donald Kunze, David Bertolini, and Simone Brott, Routledge, 2014.

² Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, MIT Press, 1983.

³ *The Cultural Role of Architecture*, ed. Paul Emmons, John Hendrix, and Jane Lomholt, Routledge, 2012.