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fundamentals of work.

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How are we to understand labour in architecture, *again*, today?

'Again?' they ask. While this question causes neoliberals to shiver (labour talk stifles 'innovation,' they say) more and more architects (mainly young ones) appear to be reframing this question toward the centre of their discourse.

The conventional protocols and procedures that script how we make architecture, a discipline connected to a massive infrastructure of capital, development, histories, and cultural conditions, seem dated and stiff — the kind of stiffness that comes with the quaint idiosyncrasies of a gentlemen's profession.

This 'stiffness' could be said to have two visible poles. On one side, there are those who peddle the currency of purity, in its various guises — they maintain the church of authenticity and represent the views of the liberal-bourgeois architect: The 'good' city, keeping spectacle at bay, enshrining the early modern architect-as-craftsman, warn of the 'dangers' of contemporary technologies, blah, blah.

On the other side, we have the church of corporate megalomania: the making of a spectacle of seamlessness for those indulging the quasi-fascistic ethos of hi-tech-and-high-performance-hygiene, conveniently repressing, negating or censoring the mess they produce or leave behind: a trail of ('creative') destruction in the shape of ravished, depleted and polluted environments; an army of permanent migrants and exploited workers forced to live diminished (when not 'bare') lives; a trail of horrendous, unbearable inequality, 'etc etc etc' (to paraphrase our dear colleague and ultra-hygienic meteorarchitect, Patrik Schumacher).

Perhaps one could brutally reduce the history of the last half century to how these two sensibilities have applied to architectural work, by highlighting the false distinction between human nature or human capital advocated by those from the church of authenticity and the church of technocracy, respectively. For the former, institutions, procedures, technology, and forms of normalcy constitute an obfuscation of the real self that is being sacrificed at the altar of modernity.

Creativity, freedom, and all those other imponderable metaphysical qualities are weakened under the pressures of spectacle.

Thus, 'human nature must be defended.' For the latter, all activity (human or not) irredeemably falls into the category of 'economic,' and the logic of economy is, in this particular discourse, the logic of competition. Human nature is human capital, and we must all understand this nature as something to be constantly invested in (by ourselves), trained and developed in every aspect of life and the world, so that our ultra-competitive self-interest and those of society will become magically aligned — 'eventually.' (Neoliberals are very good at asking for patience but giving none.)

Our challenge today is to find a way out of the trap or false distinction between these two poles of human nature or human capital. Between the totalising hold of these two positions, to construct a more substantial discourse upholding the idea that talking about architecture can also be, and in fact, should also be, talking about 'architectural work' *per se*—and not aesthetics, concepts, contexts, formalisms, structures and gadgets, or the cult of private profit so lauded by the neoliberal consensus.

The socio-technical materials, plus the quasi-automatic procedures that recursively animate them — class distinctions, professional habitus, organisational systems, normative channelisations — constitute what I am calling the Fundamentals of Architectural Work. It's time we open them up for critical examination and experimentation.

In a totally provisional and purely suggestive manner, we might consider the importance of taking as many gains as possible, however small, without worrying (too much) about compromised positions. All positions are compromised, but we must have a 'total' strategy despite its impossibility.

Finally, we must understand the difference between causes and effects of the current conditions: low wages, lack of work, unpaid overtime, etc are symptoms of the problem, not its causes...

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working on paper.

s.hearne

The plates of this Work are all ACTUAL PHOTOGRAPHS, and not (as some have supposed) Engravings in Imitation. They are formed and impressed upon the paper by the action for LIGHT alone and therefore do not require the operator any knowledge of the Art of Drawing.

H.Fox Talbot Esq. FRS, Advert for No. 2 of The Pencil of Nature, 1839.

In 1951 Wallace Kirkland photographed artist Robert Rauschenberg, and his then wife Susan Weil, in their home for TIME magazine. The resultant images provided a staged demonstration of artistic production, and also, significantly, an instance of procedure sharing between art and architecture to vastly different ends. The documentary photographs show the making of large-scale Prussian-blue images of bodies and floral arrangements, laid out in the living room and developed in their bathtub.

Perhaps more curious about these documentary photographs or the work, is the appearance of the workman-like blueprint — a reproductive technology that was nearing its own redundancy in architecture. The material descriptions that accompany these large-scale works in several publications vary in terminology from photogram to blueprint, and it is in this indeterminacy that one can see a fascinating entanglement of skill, labour, and authorship between the earliest photo reprographic technologies and drawing.

In 1839 William Fox Talbot published his photogenic drawing process, which emerged conceptually out of a frustration with the camera obscura in the copying of 'artistic' landscapes. In his innovation he claimed to annihilate the skill of drawing altogether. The publication being, in its own way, a public demonstration, was titled; *Some account of the art of photogenic drawing or the process by which natural objects may be made to delineate themselves without the aid of the artist's pencil*. The objects, in other words 'drew' themselves. Later calling the technique the 'pencil of nature' and thus attributing the labour to the Sun's operation on chemical compounds, his language produced the effect of a strange vitalism in place of human labour.

This basic technique found its way into architectural practice three years later through Sir John Herschel's accidental discovery of the pigmentation and technique of blueprinting. Like photogrammetry and photography, these serial mediums accelerated production and highlighted the problem of authorial distance. Benjamin noted this through the exemplar of photography, which provided the first degree of separation from the tactile labour of drawing. Through the form of an operation (ie. taking a photo), the eye became the contact point between the photographer and their subject, over the hand. This detachment produced temporal acceleration, given that the perceptual faculties involved in taking a photo move faster than the labouring hand. It also provided a claim about the presence or evacuation of skill that echoed Talbot's claims that the operator of photogenic drawing no longer required artful knowledge of drawing. Despite Talbot's promise, the blueprint technician replaced the hand copyist, who was no longer required in the drafting room.

The twin notions of authorial distance and acceleration of production are key features of the late Industrial era and widely impacted the practice of both art and architecture.

If movement, flow and efficiency have historically formed the key concerns in the fabrication of architectural drawings, many of the technologies in the transitional moment between mechanisation and the digital might be described as an underexplored territory of liquid-based techniques, (against the dry techniques of pencil, crayon and charcoal). Liquid processes (photo emulsion techniques but also inking) produced a new economy of labour around office practice and structures. Returning to the Rauschenberg's domestic blueprints to rest finally on the contemporaneous techniques of screen-printing, both represented a labour of commercialised practice (unknown at the time, a practice on it's way out under pressure from newer technologies). Despite this, they entered art as a method for examining the labour of making work, on paper.

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Untitled (Sue), Robert Rauschenberg blueprint, 1950.