

Editorial

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This journal is an instrument of power. It represents the values and interests of contemporary Western culture in terms of research, education and popularization. Though shrouded behind a veil of honesty, objectivity and scientific impartiality, academic publications, like any other, are merchandise: their physical format and the structure of their contents are the result of a long process of adaptation to the publishing market under contemporary capitalism, which clearly includes the knowledge capital produced by public universities. As with all institutions in our society, universities have a clear agenda whose primary objective is the uninterrupted growth of productivity and consumption. They must seek out and work in conjunction with the plans of major public and private enterprises and successfully place their graduates at these enterprises. Historically, the products of our disciplines – buildings, cities and, in more recent times, objects and landscapes – have more or less been successfully inserted into the market structures that represent power.

Foucault has taught us that everything – or almost everything – is an expression of domination. Architecture, like all expressions of our societies and our cultures, inevitably expresses the power relations in which we are submerged. It could even be said that, due to its nature, architecture expresses stability, force and the permanence of human action over the territory and that therefore, for society, architecture is an intrinsic expression of power over the material world.

Due to the high material and labor cost of buildings from the design stage through the negotiations with sponsors and the construction process itself, in each material decision and the way in which the project is promoted or presented by the media, as well as its role and its presence or absence in historical discourses, architecture can be read in terms of its relationship with power.

Political regimes – whether totalitarian or not – have used architecture to express certain ideals with which they wish to associate themselves. As a means of communication, architecture allows power to seduce, impress or intimidate. Its monumentality and weight (typical of classicism and many pre-Hispanic cultures) and its permanence (in the majority of cases) have functioned almost perfectly to express and perpetuate the ideals of greatness that new governments wish to associate themselves with. Neoclassicism communicated – or communicates – order, solidity, stability and a sense of traditional beauty (which implies a certain confidence in the experience), all attributes of the image that a certain type of government wants to project. It should be said, however, that what a government wants to communicate isn't necessarily a reflection of reality – the weighty Mexican pavilion at Osaka '70 covered up the reality of a fragmented country, although it did show the strength of a government that was capable of slaughtering an unrestful civil population; this year, we mark the 50th anniversary of the tragic events at Tlatelolco in 1968, and we continue to witness similar events to this day (such as the 43 Ayotzinapa students who were disappeared in 2014). It would be interesting to reflect on the physical and architectural characteristics that would communicate the qualities of a government that we would want.

When going over the histories that have been written on architecture and the city, we can observe that the majority of the works and creators they describe have been totally committed to those in power; sometimes these works have been justified with conservative discourses,

other times with “progressive” ones. Except for a few rare exceptions, these histories have always been written from the perspective of power and they have perpetuated the interests, values and objectives of those who control society and, in the case of democracies, those who control and attempt to reinforce contemporary capitalism. We live in so-called democracies in which decisions are allegedly taken for the benefit of all, yet we know that, in reality, decisions are made by those who control capital, in their own self-interest. Buildings tend to be profitable, cost little and produce major dividends.

In modernity, from Haussmann and his transformations of nineteenth century Paris through Brasilia to our own University City, nation-states (hand-in-hand with large corporations) have utilized architecture and the city to make the societies they govern (and control) understand the way in which they should look at themselves and be understood by others. These discourses of power are expressed and reproduced in print and digital media – sophisticated technological tools that express and promote a particular way of seeing and controlling the world that satisfies interests that are often far removed from disciplinary logic. In spite of ourselves, these discourses have formed our identities and defined our place in the world.

Nevertheless, if this is our reality, we also have to understand that not everything is black and white and that, despite being representations of power, there are good things about cities created under the logic of control and power. Paris, Brasilia and Mexico City's University City are not inhospitable places where daily life cannot be fully developed. The last case has even consolidated itself as a space of freedom where society can openly express itself.

We would have liked to undertake a detailed analysis of the way in which power is managed architectonically for those who have daily experience of these spaces, as well as how small-scale domestic spaces are controlled and surveilled and how nature and the landscape are dominated. Instead, we received a variety of proposals on the political management of territory and the use of public space. Architects, urbanists, industrial designers and even landscape architects necessarily express a vision of the world and its attendant values, mentalities and principles, which today represent the objectives of capitalism and the contemporary media. To turn to Foucault once again, none of us can escape this. However, at least in theory, academics can locate small fissures in the power structure in which proposals for resistance can be made and the path that has been laid out for us changed. Effectively, the interests of the majority are not taken into consideration (we are not taken into consideration) for any purpose other than that of perpetuating the system of consumption in which we have to perpetually produce and purchase merchandise. Nevertheless, it is worth asking if the critiques that can be made in academia and the fruits of our disciplines are also products and merchandise needed by capital. Or if, behind the morally correct discourses on – for example – the recuperation of public space, citizen participation and sustainability that are starting to inundate contemporary media (including this journal), we might even see the machinery of capital and power. All these questions contribute to the stimulating and disconcerting atmosphere of uncertainty and confusion in which we experience modernity.

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