

CALL FOR PAPERS

San Rocco 12: The Client Issue

San Rocco is interested in gathering together the widest possible variety of contributions. *San Rocco* believes that architecture is a collective knowledge, and that collective knowledge is the product of a multitude. External contributions to *San Rocco* might take different forms. Essays, illustrations, designs, comic strips and even novels are all equally suitable for publication in *San Rocco*. In principle, there are no limits – either minimum or maximum – imposed on the length of contributions. Minor contributions (a few lines of text, a small drawing, a photo, a postcard) are by no means uninteresting to *San Rocco*. For each issue, *San Rocco* will put out a “call for papers” comprised of an editorial note and of a list of cases, each followed by a short comment. As such, the “call for papers” is a preview of the magazine. The “call for papers” defines the field of interest of a given issue and produces a context in which to situate contributions.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

A External contributors can either accept the proposed interpretative point of view or react with new interpretations of the case studies. **B** Additional cases might be suggested by external contributors, following the approach defined in the “call for papers.” New cases might be accepted, depending on their evaluation by the editorial board. **C** Proposed contributions will be evaluated on the basis of a 500-word abstract containing information about the proposed submission’s content and length, as well as a list of the number and type of photographs, illustrations and/or drawings it includes. The abstract must be submitted as a PDF file that begins with the author’s name and the title of the proposal and includes reproductions of all images intended for publication. The PDF should be named using this format: SUR-NAME_TITLE.PDF. The editorial team of *San Rocco* will not review abstracts that fail to follow these guidelines. **D** Contributions to *San Rocco* must be written in English. *San Rocco* does not translate texts. **E** All texts (including footnotes, image credits, etc.) should be submitted digitally in .rtf format and edited according to the Oxford Style Manual. **F** All illustrations and drawings should be submitted digitally (in .tif or .eps format). Please include a numbered list of all illustrations and provide the following information for each: illustration source, name of photographer or artist, name of copyright holder, or “no copyright”; and caption, if needed. **G** *San Rocco* does not buy intellectual property rights for the material appearing in the magazine. *San Rocco* suggests that external contributors publish their work under Creative Commons licences. **H** Contributors whose work is selected for publication in *San Rocco* will be informed and will then start collaborating with *San Rocco*’s editorial board in order to complete the preparation of the issue.

Proposals for contributions to *San Rocco* 12 must be submitted electronically to mail@sanrocco.info by 12 July 2015.

Architects like to blame themselves. They believe they are responsible for how bad contemporary cities are; they always confess to being politically irresponsible, culturally out of fashion, morally reprehensible. They like to be insulted by businessmen, blamed by sociologists, derided by artists. And yet the misery of contemporary cities is only marginally caused by architects: it is first of all a problem caused by *clients*, or better, the lack of *proper clients*. If contemporary architects are guilty of ruining our cities, then it is only because they are not able to teach their clients, not because they fail in designing buildings (that is just a consequence, given that most of the time these buildings are requested under circumstances that can only lead to failure).

And why can't architects teach their clients? It's not just that they are lazy or cowardly; the fact is that clients do not want to be taught any more because there is no such thing as a sense of guilt any more.

The issue with the client is that the reasons why clients should pay for architecture (i.e., the reasons why rich or powerful individuals could become *clients*) seem to be disappearing. In fact, architecture corresponds to a singular mixture of exhibitionism and shame that leads people to try to acquire public renown (and at the same time erase the memory of how they used to make money) by contributing to the construction of the spaces of public life. And while there is no shortage of exhibitionism nowadays, shame has been going ever more out of fashion, a fact which leads to the contemporary condition in which art is in quite good shape (in fact, for art, exhibitionism alone is sufficient, so art actually fares well, although only as *private art*) while architecture, in contrast, seems more and more unfashionable (indeed, architecture can only be *public*, and so it requires the involvement of both exhibitionism *and* shame).

Architecture is something that is paid for with either public or private money, but regardless, it always corresponds to a public agenda. Architecture is a *public activity* even when it is funded by *private money*. All of the private buildings that are somehow relevant for architecture are relevant because of their public dimension. (Farnsworth House is important precisely because of this public ambition, no matter how remote the house

is, and it is exactly because of this extreme publicness that the villa was impossible to live in in the end: it was impossible to live in because it was architecture, and thus public – exactly what you do not want in a villa.)

In the past, the clients fuelling this *public activity* were public (kings or something similar, governments with a socialist/populist agenda and the Church), semi-public (huge industrial companies producing hardware) and private (*nouveau riches*).

All of these subjects had a *public* and *long-term* agenda: kings thought in the long term because they imagined leaving their kingdoms to their sons; socialists believed in progress and consequently in the far-off future; the Church believed in eternity; modern industrial companies manufacturing solid, heavy things like tractors, cars or even typewriters believed that these things would always be in demand; and the *nouveau riches* had to build with the long term in mind in order to erase from public memory what they had done in the short term.

All of the aforementioned public clients are now dead or nearly so: kings no longer hold power; the Church seems to be sincerely committed to humbleness in order to try to save its ass before it is too late; socialism disappeared. In the West, in the current neo-liberal climate established by Reagan and Thatcher, paying taxes is considered a form of stupidity and public programmes are systematically expected to fail. As a consequence, investment in public facilities is being minimized, state property is being increasingly privatized and, of course, resources for architecture are disappearing. Even when timid centre-left coalitions are in power there is little hope for architecture. In these cases, a castrating notion of political correctness imposes the avoidance of any public representation, which is immediately perceived as risky and not worth the challenge. As for large industrial companies, they do not want to *look stable* any more. In the event that they still manufacture durable goods (and of course some of them do), they do so in places that are as inconspicuous as possible and often even want to make you believe they are in a totally different business – candies, organic strawberries, handwoven carpets . . . Also, most companies are now run not by craftsmen/entrepreneurs, but by managers with no specific knowledge of the product. Companies have

become global, so they do not need architecture any more given that architecture is unavoidably local: what a globally operating business needs is not local representation in the form of a nice headquarters (i.e., architecture) but a global branding (web site, advertisements and so on). If such a business needs a building, it is just as the backdrop for a commercial. And by the way, this is not a theory of the *Ceci tuera cela* type; this is not a theory of the decline of architecture as a medium (architecture has never been a real medium and has never been in competition with books or TV or the Internet); this is an argument about a physical context, one that businesses like Amazon, Apple, Google, Vodafone and Red Bull don't need any more. Of course, there are still plenty of *nouveau riches*, and yet, at least in the West, the *nouveau riches* are no longer ashamed. The new *nouveau riches* have no desire for public recognition. They do not even buy football teams any more, let alone build architecture. The smart California kids who made money selling apps do not want to assume a public role; they do not feel ashamed about the money they have made (they are just smart, and what's wrong with that? Since they are smarter than us, they *deserve more* than us – isn't this our morality?). They do not drive big cars, and they deliberately dress sloppily. Their extreme politeness signifies just a further descent into arctic capitalistic indifference: the fact that rich people used to dress like rich people was ultimately an act of social responsibility, but the new *nouveau riches* are thoroughly invisible. And architecture cannot be invisible. Finally, real-estate developers are not a solution for the lack of proper clients for architecture either. If the goal of real-estate development is to make money, and if that money ought to be made quickly (in fewer than twenty years, because you want to make money before you die), then real estate has – by definition – no interest in architecture.

So what is left?

In the last twenty years the only people to invest in architecture were Chinese billionaires, despots from Dubai and a few Western private foundations (which they did mainly to avoid paying taxes). With Chinese

billionaires being fundamentally indifferent to architecture – at least, judging from the mediocre results they achieved and their quickly waning enthusiasm – and with Arab despots being simply too ignorant to ever produce anything decent, contemporary architecture's only hope lies in the last remnants of our society's disappearing sense of guilt and the passion for tax evasion in the West. None of this is particularly promising.

Now, let's accept the progressive disappearance of the client and try to see its positive aspects.

The problem of contemporary architecture – at least in comparison to contemporary art – is that architecture is *naturally public* and this, in the context of our increasingly capitalistic society, is becoming more and more difficult. So, contrary to contemporary art (and mostly unconsciously), contemporary architecture is still not 100% OK with the complete privatization of life and with the complete privatization of the scope of the artistic production that results from this. Here and there – in a somehow clumsy way – contemporary architecture still argues for the potential existence of a public realm. This untimely attitude is *incredibly precious*, and not only for architecture. In fact, this is the reason – the only one, and a truly fundamental one – for why architecture actually *matters*.

And architecture matters precisely because it is probably the only contemporary practice that can still be carried out with a long time horizon in mind, one that breaks free of the frantic rhythm of capitalistic economic cycles. This means not only that contemporary capitalistic societies are an extremely unfavourable context in which to make architecture, but also that architecture has a small potential for calling into question contemporary capitalism (one which all other contemporary arts seem to have happily discarded). So architecture, the by-definition-uncritical art, seems to be the only art form that has not entirely renounced doubts about capitalism, at least as far as its time horizon is concerned.

It is thanks to the irrepressible association of architecture with the long term that it might be possible to rethink the role of the client. This is a task for contemporary architects, and hopefully they will be less moronic

about it than their predecessors have been over the last fifty years. Indeed, the architects of the last half-century are largely responsible for the client's extinction. By repeatedly trying to denigrate architecture and by systematically trying to escape architecture in order to shift – like the most ridiculous of dilettantes – into whatever other discipline, they helped clients not to understand the reasons to spend money on architecture. After all, why would anyone waste money on something that is despised by its very own producers? To mention just one example, a few years ago a then director of the NAI (Netherlands Architecture Institute) published a book entitled *Architecture Must Burn*. Can anyone blame the Dutch government for shutting the NAI down in 2013?

Architects should find a way to find new clients, and new clients can only be found in places where there are real architectural issues: in Egypt, Indonesia, Peru. These clients should be discovered and educated (does this sound paternalistic? Paternalism would be such an improvement over indifference . . .). And by the way, only these *real* questions would be able to provide some *real* opportunity for innovation in contemporary architecture.

Beyond finding new clients, architects must also assume the task of finding convincing reasons for clients to spend their money on architecture, and a good reason to invest in architecture should not, in the first place, be based on an architectural argument. Here the autonomy really ends.

And the reason for investing in architecture is probably just *time*: the possibility of liberating our lives from the confines of an oppressive present, and of imagining something shared over the long term. Some sort of friendship with the faraway past and with the faraway future. Something as simple as an architecture of Humanism.

• Pick Your Favourite Client •

Please select the client you would most like to work for. The client should be a real figure from the past or present. Each submission should include a portrait of the client and a biography of 100 words or less. No explanation of your selection is necessary.

• The Money of the Delian League •

The Parthenon supposedly cost 469 silver talents. The vast majority of the money that funded the construction came from the Delian League (a defensive alliance of Greek city-states under the guidance of Athens). To get an idea of what 469 silver talents meant, it is enough to realize that each trireme, the most advanced warship of the era, cost a talent to build, and one talent also covered the cost of paying a warship's crew for a month. According to Donald Kagan's *The Peloponnesian War* (Penguin, 2003), Athens had 200 triremes in its service at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War while its annual gross income at the time of Pericles was around 1,000 talents. Just imagine the U.S. asking NATO for a sum of money equal to half of its gross national income (about 16,000 billion dollars, according to data.worldbank.org) – in other words, 8,000 billion dollars for a single building.

• Canto XLV •

Giotto painted the Scrovegni Chapel in 1304–5. The chapel was painted for Arrigo degli Scrovegni. His father Reginaldo had made a lot of money as a usurer; as a result, Arrigo felt ashamed and tried to give something back to the community by hiring Giotto to paint the chapel. This basic psychological mechanism was at work in the Renaissance as well: all of Renaissance art was made possible only because of the combination of a new economy providing the resources, a new aesthetic providing the necessary technical means and a mediaeval sense of shame providing the motivation for a new work of art. Ezra Pound expressed the idea with an unsurpassed precision (although failing to accept that it was the money accumulated by the brutal merchants of the Renaissance that paid for the incredible art of the time):

. . . *with usura*
seeth no man Gonzaga his heirs and his concubines
no picture is made to endure nor to live with
but it is made to sell and sell quickly
[...]

Pietro Lombardo
came not by usura
Duccio came not by usura
nor Pier della Francesca; Zuan Bellin' not by usura
nor was 'La Calunnia' painted.
Came not by usura Angelico; came not Ambrogio Praedis,
Came no church of cut stone signed: Adamo me fecit.

▪ "Public Space" ▪

In the case of the Italian Renaissance, the public nature of art wasn't just a consequence of the mere lack of a proper private sphere in the context of the society of the day (as was the case in archaic societies and, all told, also in ancient Greece and Rome). It was also the product of an explicit cultural project developed by a few crucial intellectuals – Dante and Giotto, above all. Indeed, Dante imposed upon his contemporaries and followers an idea of culture that was entirely *public*, entirely *political*. Excepting perhaps a few peripheral places in the *Purgatory*, there is no private space in the *Commedia*, and this is not an obvious choice, particularly with respect to very different cultural projects of the same period (just think about Petrarch) and even with respect to some of Dante's classical models.

▪ Where Did the Money Go? (Part I) ▪

In the modern world there is increasingly less money available for architecture. While up until Napoleon public money could be invested in only two pastimes – architecture and war – from the beginning of the 19th century public money in Europe started to be wasted on pensions and health care. Considering that in Western Europe the number of voting pensioners is increasing, we can only expect an even greater decrease in the financial resources available for architecture in the future: pensioners, of course, vote for political parties

that promise to invest in health care, the police and – *ça va sans dire* – pensions.

▪ Where Did the Money Go? (Part II) ▪

Not only has the budget for public architecture been incredibly reduced, but of what funding remains, around 40% has to be wasted on HVAC.

▪ Bureaucrats ▪

While in the past state employees (including Baron Haussmann, Karl Friedrich Schinkel or Martin Wagner) could spend endless sums of money because they were fighting to create an ideological state committed to a "better world", bureaucrats are now afraid to make mistakes and lose their jobs. The result is that bureaucrats are afraid of public architecture. If architecture looks too good, looks too ambitious and looks too expensive (note: this is not the same as *being* expensive), then architecture immediately becomes something that needs to be justified. Bureaucrats like ugly buildings because they represent the sought-after neo-liberal reality (built with a limited amount of tax revenue, these buildings are ugly *precisely because they are public*, because *only private enterprises can be efficient and because they prove that public expenditure was reduced and thus make it possible to reduce taxes*).

(It thus follows that you should never participate in competitions in Germany.)

▪ Small Countries ▪

Over the last two centuries, France, England and Germany have been the motors of European architecture. This was quite logical, because these big imperialistic states had enormous economic resources, relatively efficient bureaucracies and fast-growing populations with major social problems. They wanted to update their infrastructure and produce something that could represent their public ideology.

Examining the current situation, we see an altogether different Europe. Which of its countries are known for investing in architecture today? The most reasonable

answer is probably Austria, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland (it would be interesting, on a side note, to consider how this could be calculated or quantified). And why do these countries still spend on architecture? Is it just because they are rich? (In fact, the Netherlands is actually not that rich any more.) Or is it because they already operate like companies (something that is possible given their small size) and thus see architecture as a marketing tool? If so, this would be in contrast to the current decline in the use of architecture as a marketing tool by actual private companies . . .

▪ Fancy Restorations ▪

In contemporary Italy, the state has been gradually abandoning the management and conservation of the country's built heritage. This situation has encouraged a growing number of entrepreneurs to shift their activity from the construction of new buildings to the restoration of collapsing or endangered monuments (in Rome, for example, Della Valle's restoration of the Coliseum and the Fendi restoration of the Colosseo Quadrato). Restoration probably yields a more immediate return in terms of visibility, and it relies on an almost unanimous consensus and support. While absolutely necessary (no one wants to see ancient masterpieces fall to pieces), restoration shields its rich patrons from any of the debate and/or criticism that can often come with the construction of contemporary works of architecture. Restoration requires less effort; it doesn't force its patrons to expound their conception of beauty.

▪ Mediators ▪

Most of the time architecture needs somebody to convince rulers or rich people that *they* need architecture. These *architectural diplomats* can be architects (e.g., Bramante, Giulio Romano, Charles McKim, Daniel Burnham, Lucio Costa, Cio Ponti, Philip Johnson) or other figures (Monsieur de Chantelou, Sigfried Giedion, Phyllis Lambert). Nowadays they are mainly curators, critics and journalists. Should this role be better defined? Or

would it be better to keep it as undefined as possible? And what kind of preparation or education would be desirable in these mediators?

▪ The Senescence of Iconic Architecture ▪

Like any kind of crap produced in the West that doesn't sell in its natal country any more, Iconic Architecture is now being sold in what was once called the "Third World" (the part of the "Third World" rich enough to afford Hadid).

▪ Niemeyer for Rothschild and the Communist Party ▪

While exiled and living in Paris to escape Brazilian colonels, Niemeyer once gave a lecture in an Italian workers' club. Somehow he showed a project for a villa designed for Rothschild. Then a worker asked comrade Niemeyer to explain why he had accepted the task of designing a house for Rothschild, since it did not seem to be about social commitment to him. Niemeyer apparently answered, "to increase the contradictions of the capitalistic mode of production".

▪ Invisible Clients ▪

Crowd-funding allows the formation of groups devoted to achieving a specific common goal. Might it be possible to pay for architecture with crowd-funding? And would we want to? Wouldn't this just be a way of accepting the state's further abandonment of its duties?

▪ John Deere / Facebook ▪

If you make money producing tractors, you think your business will be around for decades at least, so you commission a building for your company that is designed to endure – a building constructed of iron and designed by the best American architect of your day. If you make money producing online social-networking services, on the other hand, you think in the short term, concentrating on making your money quickly before some nerd out there who is even nerdier than you screws up all of your long-term plans.

As a result, John Deere chose Saarinen and California IT companies don't choose anybody.

"There is this myth in Silicon Valley that if you build a 'vanity campus', you are destined to fail immediately", says John Marx, a principal at the San Francisco architecture firm Form4.

▪ Facebook ▪

In truth, Facebook eventually chose Gehry, so what is stated above is wrong, but maybe this is a starting point for understanding Gehry's project: Is it an attempt at invisible architecture? Is it, ultimately, an architecture of the plan instead of an architecture of the façade? Is it a – very welcome – un-iconic late Gehry?

▪ . . . and Google ▪

Meanwhile, Google chose BIC and Thomas Heatherwick. The result is actually not that bad. And again, it is surprisingly un-iconic.

▪ Dear President Xi Jinping ▪

Dear President Xi Jinping, *San Rocco* would like to let you know that we despise weird architecture as much as you do, and we wish Beijing could start a new era of proper realist and socialist building. In the hope of meeting you soon, please accept our kindest regards.

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Francis Bacon, portrait of
R.J. Sainsbury
1955
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