

Abstract

As the 2012 Venice Biennale confirmed, the discipline of architecture is built upon a common ground of accumulated knowledge and experience, but whether a common architecture is a natural consequence of that is a much more complex question. Through an inquiry into the very meaning of the word common, as well as the recently redeveloped and expanded version of the medieval term commons, this dissertation investigates the potential of a common architecture and an architecture commons to house contemporary life forms.

Because the common by definition concerns all individuals, it is in essence a logical problem of the relationship of the one to the many, and needs to be understood within that discourse. Paolo Virno, and many scholars with him, has characterized the multitude as the category which best reflects the contemporary mode of being one and many. Thus the main theoretical context of the dissertation is recent theories on Post-Fordism and the multitude, as well as economists', law scholars' and activists' writings on the commons as a strategy for sharing and maintaining resources.

The architecture of housing in the city and in particular in Copenhagen is the concrete context and sounding board for a range of examples seeking to hone in on the common as a mode of operation as well as a strategy of architectural design. The Copenhagen courtyards are investigated as possible commons woven into the city fabric. Two early 1900s projects by Danish architects Ivar Bentsen and Carl Petersen are compared with similar projects by Ludwig Hilberseimer to suggest aspirations for the architecture of the city based on commonality. The housing project Kitagata in Japan (Kazuyo Sejima, 200) is analyzed and compared with the VM houses in Copenhagen (Plot, 2005) and with Unité d'Habitation (Le Corbusier, 1957) to outline the difference between individualization and a potential house of the multitude. Originating in a reading of the superquadra of Brasilia (Lucio Costa, 1957), a potential collective dimension of the horizontal plane is the basis for suggesting that the Copenhagen Sømærk housing project (Vandkunsten, 2008) represents a ground held in common.

The initiative to build Urbania, a housing project for about 300 people within 5 km from Copenhagen city center, is examined and compared to recently built collective housing project Lange Eng (Dorte Mandrup, 2009) to outline the difference between the collective and the common, and to discuss the ambiguous interrelation between a (economically and/or literally) gated community and an architecture commons. The dutch phenomena Zelfbouw is described with the theories of the multitude and the commons as a frame of reference.

The dissertation ends with a series of sketches (research by design) postulating that the common as an architectural project is not just an idea of the past, but rather a valid strategy for the housing of contemporary forms of life.