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Scapegoat: architecture | landscape | political economy

Abstract

Scapegoat is a publication that engages the political economy of architecture and landscape architecture. The figure of the scapegoat carries the burden of the city and its sins. Walking in exile, the scapegoat was once freed from the constraints of civilization. Today, with no land left unmapped, and with processes of urbanization central to political economic struggles, Scapegoat is exiled within the reality of global capital. Its burden is the freedom to see space from other angles and from uninhabited positions. The journal examines the relationship between capitalism and the built environment, confronting the coercive and violent organization of space, the exploitation of labour and resources, and the unequal distribution of environmental risks and benefits. Throughout our investigation of design and its promises, we return to the politics of making as a politics to be constructed.

Keywords

economy, political, landscape, scapegoat, architecture

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Editorial Note

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When we began thinking about this journal, the latest financial crisis had just destabilized markets around the world, causing a deep recession. We understand the ongoing economic instability in Europe, Japan, and the United States, as the result of the reckless expansion of the US property market—internally through the promotion of subprime mortgages, and globally through the invention of new financial instruments designed to spread the risk of these mortgages. We decided that our inaugural issue should examine the centrality of the problem of property because *it is the*

literal foundation for all spatial design practices. This buried foundation must be exhumed. Architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design each begin with a space that is already drawn, organized, and formed by the concrete abstraction of property lines. From our perspective, property stands as the most fundamental, yet underestimated, point of intersection between architecture, landscape architecture, and political economy. What is a "site" except a piece of property? What are architecture and landscape architecture but subtle and consistent attempts to express determined property relations as open aesthetic possibilities? And, decisively, how can these practices facilitate other kinds of relation?

We begin with property in order to make present what is absent in many recent attempts to expand the fields of architecture and landscape architecture toward and around adjacent disciplines and territorial practices. The promotion of architecture and landscape architecture's expanded fields can be seen in the proliferation of new urbanisms: Landscape Urbanism, Infrastructural Urbanism, and Ecological Urbanism. It is also seen in new forms of architectural and landscape architectural research, which appropriate techniques from the social sciences, including geography, sociology and economics. Let us be clear: Scapegoat supports, endorses, and facilitates transdisciplinary research and development. However, we see many recent moves by architects and landscape architects to make claims about

new territories as attempts to literally enlarge their zone of professional influence. Whether these appropriations follow a form of 'dirty realism' or attempt to solve social or ecological problems, many attempts at disciplinary expansion create new forms of managerial administration or act as professional primitive accumulation. At the very least, these approaches promote the apolitical management of properties, following Le Corbusier in his call for architecture as a means to discredit political struggle. We refuse the dichotomy 'architecture or revolution.'¹

In place of the relentless expansion of architecture and urbanism into new territories, we argue, in accord with Fredric Jameson's prescient analysis of "the constraints of Postmodernism,"² that these new practices are still trapped and enclosed within the biopolitical structures of globalized Neoliberalism. In response to this condition, we propose contestation, confrontation, and decolonization. We do not hope for an escape toward some imaginary outside, nor do we wait for a messianic reversal of fortunes. Rather, we will mobilize neglected, discarded, and undervalued components of the existing social field to sharpen new weapons for political struggle. Following George Jackson's prison writings, Scapegoat flees, but in order to find a weapon.³

Where many contemporary designers claim to solve problems through a liberal politics of social integration and charitable service, Scapegoat strives to create better problems by attacking,

unmasking, and reorganizing the role and function of design.

Finally, we focus the first issue of Scapegoat on property in order to illustrate the hubris of architects who still argue for the autonomy of architectural design. Fortified behind the walls of the discipline, many aesthetes privilege experimentation with new digital and parametric drawing tools as the first imperative of design practice and education. In response, Scapegoat argues that these practices necessarily bracket property, in an attempt to bypass the processes of valorization imbedded in capitalist relations of power. Who owns these properties? What dispossessions do these projects produce? Are architectural effects worth such extravagant expenditure? The aesthetic autonomy lauded by designers and theorists is too often a conservative retreat into classist modes of distinction. We assert, following Walter Benjamin, that isolated objects must be inserted back into the context of living social relations.⁴ This insertion *cannot* be a denial of form. Instead, form itself must be produced in relation to the forces hidden beneath claims of aesthetic autonomy.

As a foray into this lived context of our social reality and its incessant mediation, Scapegoat seeks autonomy from the capitalist mode of production, even as we are forced to inhabit its territories. In response to the property relation, Scapegoat aspires to the deterritorialization of both physical and theoretical con-

structions. As Brian Massumi writes, "A concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window."⁵ Through this broken window Scapegoat sees the potential for creative and experimental design. It is in the particular tensions of each situation that unique possibilities for contestation emerge. With our first issue, Scapegoat argues that the necessity of design cannot be reduced to logical, technical, or professional registers because it is property, and relentlessly, an existential preoccupation.

Notes

1. Le Corbusier, "Architecture or Revolution," *Towards An Architecture*, intro. Jean-Louis Cohen, trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2007), 291-307.

2. Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 129-202.

3. George Jackson, *Soleled Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970).

4. Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Seligson (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 222.

5. Brian Massumi, "Translator's Forward," in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizoanalysis*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xii.