

Letter to a Young Architect

Dear publicum here in Aachen, dear young recent graduated architects, dear professors, dear supporters of new architectures (and I say it in plural),

As I was quite surprised to get a phone call with the invitation to analyse the graduation projects from the 5 architecture institutes located in the Euregio, - and I have to thank the EAP team of Schunk for insisting on my presence - it was obvious for me that I should explain and reflect on my past presences in architectural education and the passing by of some generations with different approaches in life, attitude and architectonic content. And we all are taking notice of the fact that nowadays a generation doesn't take a period of 25 years, as it was when I was studying, but today nearly every 5 years another generation is present on the international scene. Thus, we cannot go on with the sequence of Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z, as we are now at the end of the alphabet! Even the term Millennials doesn't seem to fit well. So, we need to invent something else, and young graduates therefore help me, as part of the baby boomers to declare that something. But, regarding the 2018 movie '*When Arabs danced*' by Jamad Rhalib in which the mother of the film director tells the public 'Each generation has to sacrifice oneself so that the next one would be free', this debate is focused also on the mix of generations, call it inter-generational, so don't interrupt me with "*OK, boomer*"!

Besides of all items such as the dramatic misinformation as for 120 years to be seen and read in Emile Zola's '*J'accuse*', the impact by new ideologies which resulted out of the sixties with the most influential themes on sexuality, religion, freedom as concentrated in the *Woodstock* event, and the nowadays '*American dreamers*' who want to find a new world, searching for new perspectives, on the risk for being banned out of the beloved country, you, dear young architects, you, *Riders on the Storm* - to recall the Doors -, are standing in front of new challenges, new *Space Oddities* - to mention David Bowie -, to write down a new 'My Generation'.

“You ask whether your projects are any good. You ask me. You have asked others before this. You send them to magazines. You compare them with other projects, and you are upset when certain editors reject your work. Now (since you have said you want my advice) I beg you to stop doing that sort of thing. You are looking outside, and that is what you should most avoid right now. No one can advise or help you – no one. There is only one thing you should do. Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to design; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to design. This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: must I design? Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple “I must”, then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even to its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse. Then you come close to Nature. Then, as if no one had ever tried before, try to say what you see and feel and love and lose. Don’t design love projects; avoid those forms that are too facile and ordinary: they are the hardest to work with, and it takes a great, fully ripened power to create something individual where good, even glorious, traditions exist in abundance.”

These are the words of Rainer Maria Rilke in his first *Letter to a young poet*, dated February 17th 1903 as published in 1929 only 90 years ago, in which in a shameless way the words '*poems*' and '*to write*' are replaced by '*projects*' and '*to design*'. (I am guilty!)

Dear young colleagues, I have a big question: can you go on the way generations before you were doing, designing, writing down, presenting all architectonic fragments as we have been doing for years? Or, even worse, what is your opinion about the strategic manipulative debate in architecture in which the local, the regional, the non-screaming is displaced into over-intellectual, theoretical, or even absurd *extravaganza* or the endless research on '*du jamais vu*'? Are you scared of being intelligent, or having a '*peasant's mind attitude*'?

Looking at your projects, I don't think so, it makes me happy that you are also '*zipping up your boots, going back to your roots*', the real roots of architecture.

In the current world, this attitude even looks like a new manifesto, and every period needs its proper manifesto. I call it *A manifesto for regaining the sense of a lost reality*, so let me explain what I noticed in your projects:

1. We want to sing the ambition for justice, the relation between structure, space and slowness.
2. Knowledge, research and ambivalence will be essential elements of our building culture.
3. Recently the architecture praised the noisy agility, ecstasy and scream. We want to price the silent stillness, the experience and atmosphere, the interval, the break, the listening ear and resolute glance.
4. We declare that the bigness of the world needs again to be enriched with a renewed beauty: one of spatial usefulness. A place, with walls built with moving materiality as surfaces with an implosive breath... an enlightened space that looks as natural silence is reaching far beyond the *Burj Kalifa in Dubai*.
5. We want to bring a hymn to the story behind the built and non-built space, whose theory doesn't pass geography, economy, geology... which on its turn doesn't seem to be fired out of the discourse of a proper vocabulary.
6. The architect needs to position himself full of passion, integrity and humility, in order to continue the enthusiastic question of main necessity.
7. There will be only beauty in reality. An architectonic piece without any silent identity can never be a masterpiece. Architecture needs to be seen as a profound result of exploratory will power, to position itself for the human being.
8. Again we are at the base of the mountain of a new millennium!... Why would we continue to invent unknown things while we only need to find again the doors of the known? Today time, space and maintaining are again important. We are living into the tactile, because we interpreted the all over presence of images speed as excelled.
9. We want to declare the war to self-adoration – the biggest illness of the contemporary world – the orchestral in competitions, the who-knows-who

behaviour, the global positivity, the cultural consumption, the destructive facts of manipulators, the strategic ideas for which one is bowing, the intellectualism and the antipathy for the discreet and the intelligent.

10. We take distance of the current bankruptcy of profession and craftsmanship of architecture. We want to undermine the internet, the false factor of fashionable 3D-renders, the seduction in websites, the request for references, Facebook and twitter of every kind, the collage curricula, the mental marriages, and will fight against image building before content, manipulation, exclusion of every kind of opportunistic, political or generative restriction.

11. We will sing of the great collectivity, run by work, pleasure or consciousness; we will admire the multi-coloured and multi-voiced layering of history in addition to developments in cities and landscapes; we will appreciate the daily dialogue of living and working, put in planning from thoughtful decisions; insatiable acceptance of programs next and through each other; the generosity of new landscapes; houses and warehouses, placed on earth in emergency, need and necessity; bridges that span the rivers as metaphors of generations, constructed as energetic relationships; well-considered skylines that examine the sky; oases with wide fields that move the earth as caring sources, and the lasting experience of atmospheres whose shadows like stains fall on the ground and seem to applaud as an enthusiastic crowd.

I will explain later the basics of this text, but let me continue now with some personal analysis and please approve my responsibility in this debate through a proper continuing guideline also my manifesto called *A letter to a Young (recently graduated) Architect*.

It was Beatriz Colomina writing in 2014 the article 'The Ghost of Mies' - and I think this ghost is in Aachen! - about new manifestos as following:

The manifesto is media.

Design is part of the media. An architectural project can be an integral part of a manifesto.

The manifesto precedes the work. It is a blueprint for the future.

Every manifesto reworks previous manifestos. The call for the new is minted from the old.

New media = new manifestos.

This way I classified the 29 EAP projects into 6 manifestos.

1_ The manifesto of the Social Interaction

ESAGAC by Alexandra Marion & Nicolas Sougnez is a project of reconversion of a former bank branch and hotel into a faculty of arts. The most challenging is the way so-called awful constructions can be dismantled into something new: i.e. eliminating to densify, reducing complexity and inserting an injection for a new social condenser. The option for not demolishing such a building is a hard statement.

wALL by Hanne Philtjens is showing a catalogue of possibilities by infinity, just restricted by two walls in a *hortus conclusus* system. The volumes to be placed in between tell about a no stop city based on a grid, resulting in a dense social dialogue, a strategy of orchestration.

SPORTFABRIK (SPORTWORKS) by Matthias Welk fills the need of sports accommodation as a social factory into the city centre. A container Mikado that is more than just a closed box but which is participating in urban life.

2_ The manifesto of the Individual Memory.

In this group the sequence of private spaces over collective ones towards the public is of a main order. Contemplation, personal narratives and remembering are statements out of an individual life to form a content, somehow autobiographical, somehow secret (not everything in life needs to be explained or shown).

SEE / SEA by Judith Engelbosch is a statement on the sea, to see and be seen. The building, based on serving and served spaces, also as well shown in the plan, talks about the typology of water as a program for more than an aquarium, but

resulting into a fortress. The model in sliced sections explains to us that architecture is about space and atmosphere. It is a carved-out ruin in which the program results by erasing instead of adding.

THE CABINET – A HOUSE FOR/OFF MEMORY by Olivier Eurlings is a museum for everyday objects, the reality of the banal. But the quartet ‘studiolo – cabinet – gallery – hall’ recalls the vocabulary of historical buildings. Here we can’t do otherwise than remember the fantastic Danteum project by Giuseppe Terragni in which Dante’s *Divina Commedia* was transposed into a labyrinth, just as in this project the notion of a ‘city attic’ is used as a proposal which maybe doesn’t need to be built for entering the history of architecture.

WIJKPLAATS – REFUGE FOR REMEMBERING by Suzan Gelissen is, for me, a specific, respectful case. Very autobiographical, it tells about a building with silos or cylinders becoming a silent motor or *machinerie* behind closed doors where the encounter with everyday life is taken down to earth in full humbleness.

DOCUMENTATION CENTRE by Felix Mayer explains the reality of the ruin (we need to build ruins so next generations can go on using them). The emptiness – *Leere* – and the loss of homeland are taken to the most extent by the use of just one material and images which are dramatically empty.

GRANDMA’S HOUSE by Tran Boi Linh Nguyen is a lesson for every architect. Peacefulness = loneliness = melancholy = body and soul. Nothing is superfluous, everything is just pure necessity. It is a house as a dream, floating above the ground, longing for belonging. But mostly it is about the real core of ‘being’: a place to feel well, the real remembering.

MOVING (ON) by Sien Swinnen is ‘moving’ and ‘emotional in a proper way. The western world has a big problem with the acceptance of death in daily life. Aldo Rossi’s ‘House of the abandoned’ designed on the basis of Georges Bataille’s *Le Bleu du Ciel* in which Eros and Thanatos are to be traced, can be seen as a reference for this tower project upwards the blue sky. It is a confrontation, a transformation, also

a *contradictio in terminis*, a vertical necropolis, a cathedral tower. A bigger metaphor is hardly possible.

3_ The manifesto of the WORKING COMMUNITY or the dialogues, discussions on education and working.

MEET YOUR CITY by Marie-Sophie Heckmann is placing or even displacing us into the world of pragmatism as requested by a given program, an administration town hall as an urban landmark. It expresses the wish for presence of collectivity, even in a most expressive way.

KLARE KANTEN ZEIGEN by Dominik Merres fulfils the same desire, the same program, the same site, also the same realism. It shows the nowadays appearance through all kind of websites in which one gets confused by asking 'is it built or is it still a 3D-render'?

NEW SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE by Breno Paternostro is confronting us with the thematic of Bau-Haus, Bau-Schule, Bau-Akademie ... Here *Learning from Karl Friedrich Schinkel* becomes interesting: what is a possible typology for educating architecture. What was it in history, in the present, what will it be in the future?

L'ADMINISTRATION COMMUNALE GESVES by Magali Renard is not about the power of the city, but about 'a house in total collectivity. The new, added wing to the existing building is more than just for administration, it's going beyond the monofunctional program adding new concepts such as a biomass plant that recalls the simple needs and maybe obligations as task for a town hall.

4_ The manifesto of the PROGRESSIVE PRODUCTION is a group of projects in which working is connected to a process of production related spaces.

WORKBENCH; THE ADAPTIVE WORKPLACE by Arnaud Charoy is a project of simplicity becoming form and the generic becoming specific. No screaming architecture but it is full of functional capacity, although with a sense of openness – *ampleur* - to make other functions possible. It recalls the idea of '*Das Gute Bauen*'.

CREATING CHORWEILER by Johann Eckartz talks about the problems of existing monofunctional suburban areas with only social housing and by mixing it and adding with other programs in terms of production to get rid of more unused spaces. The architect as a manager in political issues regarding future interventions on a higher level is the main item in the research for new tasks for the architects to come.

INNOVATION FACTORY DER RWTH AACHEN by Dominik Hagn and Carolyn Sarah Herzog explains the duality of production and realizing ideas while also presenting it or making them open to the public. Here the process towards a definitive critical mass is an interesting idea: a building in an additional progress for future situations till the good balance is to be found.

URBAN PRODUCTION SITE_ALKMAAR by Carolin Möllers contrasts in a proper way with the former project: the urban, the aim for community are at the core of a composition but state more a definitive situation than an eventual growth.

PRODUCTIVE COMMUNITY CENTER by Luisa Ropelato is starting as a neighbourhood centre, out of an inventory, a catalogue of materials and elements. Recycling is the main theme.

5_ The manifesto of the URBAN ACUPUNCTURE inserts elements in the urban fabric, reinventing the city functioning as a main theme.

TEMPORARY USE. SPACES OF INNOVATION by Anna Greta Bayer is a bottom-up project in designing city interventions. It has the balance between built and non-built spaces such as the New York's 'High Lane' and Luc Deleu's 'VIP City' but here in a more informal way by inseting existing schemes and sustainability. Berlin is taken as a continuous palimpsest, a city ruin to get a future positive meaning.

COEUR D'ILOT SERESIEN by Quentin De Pryck is putting the notion of "Nous" as a social/cultural investigation in the centre of an urban block. It's 'Architecture not Architects' in the real sense, and as a concept it holds a certain '*genius loci*', an urban *follie* along a sequence of passages and relating programs for urban survival.

OBSERVATORY by Youri Dor is a multi-purpose tower. It has a signal function, a landmark, more landscape acupuncture but nevertheless without forgetting its notion and purpose of spaces. The way the volumes are stacked onto each other, questions the architect as a designer but with the knowledge of an engineer. Here it is obvious: the engineer is not taken as a problem solver ...

EN GOLETTE by Alexia Di Carlantonio starts out of a masterplan, from big to small scale. The richness is to be found in the minimalistic approach on the scale of the village, the *ensemble* becoming a centre on its own.

HASSELT BRIDGE by Philip Vliegen questions the efforts that need to be investigated towards a final result. The challenge and triggering by inserting slow mobility are taken as a main item for the result in re-use of an overdone infrastructure by adding a personal touch.

6_ The manifesto of CULTURAL PRESENCES. 'Architecture is art' stated Oswald Mathias Ungers in 1984. This group is based on projects with the link between both worlds of architecture and art.

COOL REFLECTIONS by Kaat Bloemen shows how far one can go into curating space by art. Promenade, atmosphere and artistic interventions by well-known artists feed the temporary installation.

BIBLI-O-THEQUE by Larissa Cataldo is, although a library, also to be seen in this group. The circular form requests the notion of the 'most beautiful space': is it the courtyard, of the forest? The preciseness of placing it into the wood and by which existing trees are making the dissonance with the structure is most ambivalent.

THOUGHT IN CONCRETE by Thomas Goossens starts out of an abandoned telecommunication building in ruin. Also circular as the previous one, here added with a volume based on a stunning view. A lot of artistic references support the idea of 4 different rooms.

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION VENICE by Wolfgang Philipp is about dismantling the palimpsest of building and city and the non-finished. Materials and colours of Venice design this order of rooms in sequences for art without any guideline. The city is to be found as a labyrinth in which one can get lost or will find and find again new perspectives. A city sometimes is a building, but here the building is an enclosed city, an invisible city, to mention Italo Calvino.

MUSLIM CIVIC CENTER BERLIN by Sophie Schüttler takes secret and injection in an urban block as a main concept in a sequential of open and enclosed spaces between *Brandmauern*. The abstraction of visual presences through figures comes out of the Islamic world and is taken in account for a concept of reduction in which the mind survives all urban sound *-Lärm-*. Like many historical buildings, i.e. the churches by Borromini, here also interior becomes exterior, thus architecture.

CENTER FOR INDUSTRIAL CULTURE by Leah Stockburger poses culture as an attitude. Although a mix of urban situation and spaces such as ateliers, production ateliers and others, it is an incubator for a new quarter. It gets the mind shift saying production is not only technical but without culture it all becomes meaningless.

So far so good the explanation of the 29 projects. But as I was mentioning above eleven points for a new manifesto, and I believe some of you have noticed they were manipulations of Filippo Marinetti's *Futurism Manifesto* as published in *Le Figaro* in 1909, some 110 years ago, I will end with some other slightly changed paragraphs out of the end of the same manifesto, placing myself into the position of looking today to all architectural generations and I am telling you the end of my story called *A Letter to a Young Architect*:

Too long the architecture world has been a flea market. We have to free it from countless publications and PhD's covered with a huge *gefundenes fressen*.

Once a year a gossip talk experience, as one goes to the village fancy fair or Christmas market ... OK, as far as we are concerned. Once a year, an accolade for all theatrical gimmicks, OK, as far as we are concerned ... But we need to disapprove

that our brain, our fragile urge, our tireless search for the existence, are daily taken to populist entertainment and false discourse. Why does somebody want to poison himself? Why to slide down?

Do you have something against it? ... Shut up! We know it already ... Understood! ... Our beautiful true accountability tells us that we are the summary and the continuation of our ancestors. — For sure! ... It was always like that! ...

Query yourselves! ...

Straight ahead in the middle of the world, we challenge the future again! ...

Therefore.

Christian Kieckens, Aachen, 2019