

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

OASE 116

The Architect as Public Intellectual

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A recent publication on Ernesto Nathan Rogers is subtitled *The Modern Architect as a Public Intellectual* (Bloomsbury, 2021). It's a fine characterisation of Rogers, recognising his special role as a powerful actor in design practice as well as an important voice in the Italian cultural and political debate. It raises the question of what role the architect can play beyond the design table. What impact does he/she have in connecting architectural design to social issues?

In the 1990s, literary critic Edward Saïd defined the intellectual as someone who actively engages in public debate. He added that the intellectual has the ability to see beyond 'phenomena', and thus knows how to reveal power structures and to represent 'forgotten/oppressed groups' in society in public debate. Other definitions mainly stick to the beginning of Saïd's description: the intellectual interferes in the public debate. It is often added that the intellectual also knows how to think outside his or her own discipline, or has the ability to think outside the established frameworks. It is about connecting one's own field of expertise to broader social issues, making an actual contribution to the debate in society, as well as having an impact on public opinion.

It is often said that architects are typical generalists. The expertise they gain is about more than building skills, as architecture (and space) is always related to social issues and challenges. Architects therefore seem very well positioned to make contributions to the social debate on challenges such as climate change, mobility, the housing crisis, healthcare and migration. Their spatial components and impact require architects to take on such a role. At the same time, we have to conclude that in practice, this hardly ever happens. Many times, the built environment and social issues are linked by social geographers and sociologists, by journalists and planners. Designers hardly seem to get involved in the debate, or are not given the space to do so. Perhaps because in the profession and in the social debate on architecture, the profession is narrowed down to aesthetics, and the architect to designer. As a result, social, ecological, economic and political challenges are lost from view, along with how and with what knowledge and skills architects can contribute to the debate.

In this issue of *OASE*, we want to broaden the picture of the architect as designer, and investigate in which way architects have been active in the social debate in the past. At times when society and architecture were in strong flux, a number of figures played a key role in connecting the two. Active within education, the press, or policy, figures such as the aforementioned Ernesto Rogers, as well as Jacqueline Tyrwhitt and Lotte Stam-Beese, steered the development of an architecture culture. They confronted clients with new perspectives, brought parties together and guided public opinion. In short, they made architecture negotiable within a wider social debate. Their instruments were not limited to architectural design. These public intellectuals made exhibitions about architecture, wrote in the general press, made their voices heard in (their own) radio and television programmes, played a crucial role in education and initiated public debate.

This issue of *OASE* examines the role of architects as public intellectuals, and thus how architects contribute to society beyond design. By 'architect', we mean a person who has completed training as an 'architect' or 'urban designer', and thus in a sense has gained design experience. In doing so, we focus particularly on a number of historical figures from the late nineteenth and the course of the twentieth century. It was precisely during these times, when society was in a state of flux and

existing values in the profession were constantly being challenged, that architects showed how architecture, with its design experience and spatial knowledge, could contribute to society, and vice versa, how social debate could be introduced into the field. Through these figures, we chart the breadth of the field, and highlight the different roles architects can take in the field and in society. In doing so, we additionally focus on female actors. History is too often told through heroic male figures, leaving the role of women (and collaborators) underexposed. As pointed out elsewhere, it is high time to highlight the role of women in the development of the profession, the city and society.

Specifically, we focus on the following questions: In what ways were these architects active in connecting architectural design and society? What instruments did they have at their disposal, and what strategy did they implement? From which positions and/or institutions were they working? And what was the effect of their work on the architecture culture of the time?

In particular, we would like to focus on the following figures:

- **Jacoba Mulder** (2 March 1900 – 5 November 1988)

Dutch architect/urban designer. Designer of the Amsterdamse Bos and other parks in Amsterdam. Worked with Van Eesteren on the AUP and with Van Eyck on the playgrounds. Professor at UVA – and active in the social debate on urban development from that position.

- **Carmen Portinho** (26 January 1903 – 25 July 2001)

Brazilian urban designer. With others, she introduced the concept of popular housing in Brazil; advocated for the position of women; introduced young artists and architects to Brazil, by organising exhibitions (at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio).

- **Lotte Stam-Beese** (28 January 1903 – 16 November 1988)

German-Dutch architect and urban designer. Social involvement in 'Russian period' and employed by the Rotterdam Urban Development Department.

- **Jaqueline Tyrwhitt** (25 May 1905 – 21 February 1983)

British urban designer, editor of *Ekistics*. Professor at Toronto and Harvard. Tyrwhitt played a crucial role in the CIAM, *Ekistics* and later in the UN.

- **Alison Smithson** (22 June 1928 – 14 August 1993)

English architect, worked at London County Council before she and Peter Smithson founded their well-known firm. She was active in the CIAM, and co-founder of Team 10. She also published a novel in 1966, and contributed in many ways to the debate on architecture in England and far beyond.

- **Astra Zarina** (25 August 1929 – 31 August 2008)

Latvian architect and professor at the University of Washington. Best known for her publications on public space and activist work in the field of conservation.

- **Khaleda Ekram** (6 August 1950 – 24 May 2016)

Architect, professor and researcher from Bangladesh. Through her publications in the field of urban planning and conservation, she had a major impact on architecture education and culture.

We would like to invite authors to submit an abstract of up to 500 words, indicating for one of these figures, or another female architect of their choice from the nineteenth or twentieth century, the way in which she intervened in the social debate, focusing on the different domains of architecture and society, and the media available to the public intellectual in the process. Abstracts should be submitted no later than 23 December 2022 via the following email address: info@oasejournal.nl.