

Media Practices of Architectural Design

Editorial

Issue 32 overhauled the classic, media-theoretical concept of medium as it had been formulated in the 1970s by Charles Jencks, Aldo Rossi, and Heinrich Klotz¹ for the field of architecture and by Umberto Eco and Algirdas Greimas for the field of semiotics. These architects and theoreticians understood the crucial role of the medium in the transmission of a message (comparable perhaps to a telephone conversation) from one side to the other, meaning from the side of the architect to that of the user.² Through various articles, Issue 32 explored the signification of the medial work as well as its social appropriations.

Now that medial techniques have quickly, and downright hastily, developed and changed, Issue 40 sets a new focus with the topic *Media Practices in Architectural Design* on the basis of a critical questioning of the instrumental definition of the media.³ The idea is to investigate the influence of all media that is used in the design process from two points of view: first, in the sense of the influence of design media on the design process, i.e. of its transforming influence on the concept production and on the implementation of architecture, and second, in the sense of the effect on the users and thereby of architecture's impact. Architecture not only communicates something, but also triggers actions, emotions, and physical reactions in its viewers; the perspective on the architecture changes, and the architecture changes, resulting in a mutual reciprocity. The media of the design process are further developed or replaced by others; over the course of their existence, buildings are furnished and converted multiple times.

For a long time, the design was seen as the result of the intellectual and aesthetic genius of an architect. In this context, 'hard-' and 'software' (often described as tools, instruments, and procedures of design) were understood as useful but neutral aids that served the idea. Nevertheless, even if it was not addressed, the architects and artists were highly aware of the fact that the media in which they were working, be it pencil, technical pen, watercolor illustration, or cardboard model, also always play an essential role in their work and are in no way neutral. This is wholly in keeping with Friedrich Nietzsche's observation: "Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts."⁴

1 See Charles Jencks, *Die Sprache der postmodernen Architektur: Entstehung und Entwicklung einer alternativen Tradition*, Stuttgart 1988, and Heinrich Klotz, *Moderne und Postmoderne: Architektur der Gegenwart*, Wiesbaden 1987.

2 See Eduard Führ, *Architekturen im Archimedium*, in: Wolkenkuckucksheim. Heft 32, p. 186 and Vera Bühlmann, *Nachricht als Medium. Generische Medialität, Städtische Architektonik*, ambr, Wien/New York 2014: „Vielmehr gelte es, darauf zu achten, dass Medien ihre eigentlichen Botschaften verkörpern und sich somit direkt als ‚Veränderungen des Maßstabes, Tempus oder Schemas‘ [Marshall McLuhan, *Die magischen Kanäle*, S. 18] in die Ordnungen einbringen, in denen sie die Zirkulation von immanent-erzeugten Inhalten gewährleisten. Medienfügen sind erinneheneigentlichenthaltene Botschaft ‚der menschlichen Situation‘ etwas hinzu, und zwar das Modulieren im Umgang mit Maßgabe. Zugespitzt formuliert heißt das: Medien verkörpern formatierbar gewordene Maßstäblichkeit“.

3 See Christophe Barlieb und Lidia Gasperoni, *Media Agency – Neue Ansätze zur Medialität in der Architektur*, transcript Verlag 2020.

4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Briefe von Friedrich Nietzsche Januar 1880–Dezember 1884*, in: *Briefwechsel. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari, München 1981, Vol. III/1, p. 172.

Every architect knows that a soft pencil is needed for the design sketch, and a hard, sharp pencil for the working drawing. In this conscious use of tools, these very tools become media that do not merely mediate but make an essential contribution to the expansion of the architectural imagination: media offer an experimental dimension to the expansion of the spaces of architecture through the inclusion and realisation of discursive and perceptual dimensions. For examples of this, we can look to the dynamic architectural sketches of Erich Mendelsohn, which were created in the medium of ink drawing or soft pencil, or to Karl Friedrich Schinkel's⁵ brilliant pen-and-ink drawings with which he put his ideas for the Altes Museum and the Schauspielhaus in Berlin to paper with great precision. Media can truly co-write our thoughts. This also applies to other visual media, like photographs, which are never mere depictions, but instead always encroach on the object and change it according to their own modes of being. In this sense, mediality—according to the philosopher Dieter Mersch—always exists as an independent middle that inserts itself between the thing and its impacts. This applies to the images of existing reality and their appropriations, i.e. to the perception and habitation of architecture. In the design and physical realization processes, on the other hand, the focus is on the creation of reality. Here, the medial in the process of design and realization planning inserts itself into the objects.

⁵ See Kurt W. Forster, *Schinkel. A Meander Through his Life and Work*, Berlin 2018.

⁶ Dieter Mersch, *Tertium datur. Einleitung in eine negative Medientheorie*, in: Stefan Münker und Alexander Roesler, *Was ist ein Medium?*, Frankfurt a.M. 2008, S. 304–321.

In this context, Mersch⁶ also makes reference to the active participation of the medium in the knowledge and awareness process itself. Wherever we are affected by the things in various ways, wherever the things trigger thoughts, actions, and feelings, mediality is more than simply intellectual and visual: it takes place at many different levels of perception. The connections between media theory, aesthetics, and ethics can also be seen wherever the sensory conveyance of world experience becomes the subject of discussion.

Issue 40 is dedicated to the theoretical reflection of contemporary media practices in design. Not only the theoretical systematisation is relevant, but also the description of the generative potential of already known practices, such as photography, and newly introduced techniques, such as BIM, the development of new software for spatial visualisation. In the design process, practices are described by researchers from the field, where they are experimented with. Teaching is an essential part of these descriptions. The medium can therefore not be separated from the media practice, which—generally speaking—is defined as self-willed and as an important factor of the identity of the design, of the building in its spatial situation, and of its perception and usefulness.

The phenomena of the medial are also described using concrete observations and case studies. The core of this issue is the questioning of the separation between the analogue and the digital. How these medial dimensions are to be understood—whether the so-called new media (e.g. CAD, BIM) are analogue or digital ways of thinking or perhaps intermediate forms with which the phenomena of the medial can be described with greater precision—are central questions of this issue. Or simply: is the separation of analogue and dig-

ital even sensible? Are they so clearly separate, or can it be said, particularly in light of the architectural design process, that the digital also has a historical dimension that dates back far beyond the computer? It is enough in this context to refer to the breaking down of media into bits and bytes through information technology and to the representation in digital imaging processes on monitors or virtual-reality headsets? Or shouldn't digital media be defined instead by its possibilities for transformation, modification, and reproduction? These questions are addressed in the first part of the issue, which looks at emerging technologies through an experimental stance and questions them specifically in relation to the distinction between analogue and digital realities in the second part. The third part addresses the role of media as social practices in architectural design and the fourth concluding part examines the connection between media and embodiment for the exploration of innovative design practices. In doing so, it is questioned to what extent one should not go deeper beyond the visible and follow a differentiation of physicality and cognition in the tension between material spaces and spaces of imagination.

Media-philosophical Foundations

Medium, mediality, and mediatization have become central theoretical concepts since the second half of the 20th century through the development of reproduction technologies and mass media. The theory has repeatedly made both a historical narrative of the media of modernity and their social and cultural significance the subject of its investigation. The book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* by Marshall McLuhan⁷ can be understood as an attempt to define not only the conciseness of technical media, but also their function as dimensions of the medial. In this sense, new light has been shed on the medial as a general dimension of human perception and activity.

Since then, the debate surrounding media has been significantly expanded: on the one hand, there seems to be a tendency to describe everything as a medium, and on the other hand, an attempt has been made in philosophy to understand the concept of medium as conceptual abstraction. In this context, the question has been raised again as to what a medium actually is, because, as was noted by Stefan Münker and Alexander Roesler in their book *Was ist ein Medium?*, “the theoretical examination of the concept of the medial” is nothing new, but “the theoretical examination of the concept of medium is.”⁸

Starting with the attempt to gain a new understanding of the concept of medium in its specificity, the philosophical examination of the medial has once again made it to the forefront of a history of philosophy, that, from its very beginnings, has dealt with the constitutional function of medial relations and perception processes, like in *Texte zur Medientheorie*, a collection of texts published by Günter Helmes and Werner Köster.⁹ The question of *What is a medium?* is therefore not simply a question of abstraction, but rather a critical analysis for generating a new way of viewing the differentiations that shape the media-theoretical discourse, e.g. between old and new media, natural and artificial media, analogue and digital media, and sensory

⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Cambridge 1995.

⁸ Stefan Münker und Alexander Roesler, *Was ist ein Medium?*, Frankfurt a. M. 2008, S. 7.

⁹ Günter Helmes und Werner Köster (Hg.), *Texte zur Medientheorie*, Stuttgart 2004, S. 7.

10 Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, *Handbuch der Medienphilosophie*, Darmstadt 2018, S. 14.

11 Sybille Krämer, *Operative Bildlichkeit. Von der Grammatologie zu einer "Diagrammatologie"? Reflexionen über erkennendes Sehen*, in: Martina Heßler und Dieter Mersch (Hg.), *Logik des Bildlichen. Zur Kritik der ikonischen Vernunft*, Bielefeld 2009, S. 94–123.

12 Dieter Mersch, *Philosophien des Medialen. „Zwischen“ Materialität, Technik und Relation*, in: Gerhard Schweppenhäuser (Hg.), *Handbuch der Medienphilosophie*, Darmstadt 2018, S. 20.

13 Otl Aicher, *analog und digital*, Berlin 2015.

and technical media. In this context, media philosophy is needed for conceptually clarifying “what media do as means of accessing and understanding the world.”¹⁰ The reflections of Sybille Krämer on the operativity¹¹ of the medial and the insights of Dieter Mersch with respect to the medial in its event components have contributed significantly to the definition of the medial. According to Mersch, mediality always exists as a middle that “inserts itself between the relata and their differences.”¹² As expressed using an older term from the field of aesthetics, the medium is a tertium comparationis that, in its intermediary function, exerts an influence on and attaches itself to that which is being conveyed.

Analogue and Digital Media

Today, architectural design is inseparably linked to analog and digital technologies. In his book *analog und digital*, Otl Aicher¹³ writes that humans are analogue beings, not digital beings. He defines the difference between analogue and digital as a fundamental difference in human kind’s destiny as thinking, perceiving, and designing beings. This is about a dichotomy: the digital is the exact construction of thinking and the precise control of perception, while the analogue is the understanding of relations in thinking and perception. In this sense, the digital is point-by-point, while the analog creates an overview in which humans are less exact but can think in more general terms.

While calculation is based on the digital, the analogue stands for the abundance of relations in thinking and perception that humans, as the discoverers and designers of their own lives, can make use of in society. In this context, the differentiation between analogue and digital media is of an epistemological nature. On the other hand, although the questions as to how people design their lives through analogue and digital media and how these medial spaces shape communication, society, and our cities have an epistemological basis, they also refer to practices that give substance to the medial spaces and therefore create the analogue and the digital again and again. In a paradigmatic manner, the architectural design process is a creative practice like that, to be understood as a hybrid act between the analogue and the digital that could lead to new interpretations or to the revision of the differentiation proposed by Aicher.

Relationship between Medium and Perception in the Design Process

The architectural design process is shaped by various media that open up a variety of dimensions of our spatial perception—from the imaginary space to the three-dimensional model and the practices of spatial experience. In this sense, the architectural design process generates a space in which things become perceivable through the senses, and our experience of architecture becomes possible in various scales. From a medial point of view, architecture is therefore related to other art forms, such as sculpture, painting, music, and literature, but at the same time, is different in several ways; it is

precisely from the investigation of the media of the arts that a theory on the media of architecture can be developed from the difference, a theory that is not only based on the repeatedly used visual media, but also incorporates other and new medial developments in architecture. In this context, special consideration is given to the artistic practices that operate with media's transgressions of limits. The aim is to explore the creative potential of media and, at the same time, their intrinsic connection to sensuousness, which nevertheless cannot be separated from architectural description.

Curators

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