

Presence of Architectural History

Writing architectural history and theory is changing. Single elements of the theoretical system, which has been constructed over centuries, have always been removed or replaced. Such processes rarely made the system as a whole shudder, nor did they make it collapse. Meanwhile, it seems that many elements are missing, so that current architectural history can be compared with a messy construction site in danger of losing order, with a structuring logic no longer visible, and even with calling its importance for our present altogether in question.

But can, referencing philosopher Odo Marquard, future exist without an origin? Which role does architectural historiography play in the reflection of architectural production? Which role does it play for understanding architectural phenomena? Do we even experience architecture “historically”?¹ How does architectural history relate to politics, culture, sociology, or the philosophy of technology? How does it relate to society and globalization? In short: what presence does architectural history have today – in practice, sciences, and theory?

¹ Marquard 2003.

In 2024, *Wolkenkuckucksheim* | *Cloud-Cuckoo-Land* | *Воздушный замок* invited authors to submit contributions on the present understanding of architectural history, which we discussed in-depth with the authors and within *Cloud-Cuckoo-Land*. The double issue 44/45, *Presence of Architectural History*, collects current approaches stretching from theoretical discourses and methodological retrospectives to concrete analyses.

Theories and Theses

The first section begins with the question of the relationships and differences between architectural history and theory. Werner Oechslin shows that classical topics are hardly solved; rather, architecture is by necessity exposed to a continuous reflection process, which in turn reenters the discourse as part of history. He advocates for a comprehensive, dynamic, and practice-oriented understanding of theory, in which past and present, practice and theory, acting and reflecting, science and art are brought together in an Aristotelian sense while, at the same time, revealing their historical relativity. Andrew Leach and Jasper Ludewig’s contribution seeks to construct architectural history in a fundamentally new way as part of the colonial history of power. The authors

show how all continents are affected by European colonization, which, at least from the perspective of indigenous people, has not ended with national independence. It is within this context that architecture visually and spatially expresses its agency of power. Sascha Roesler's article on ethnographic investigations of Asian architecture since the 1960s confirms the marginalization of non-European architecture in architectural history. His contribution also shows productive methods of gaining knowledge outside of established classifications in architectural history, which might be due to the fact that architects, and not historians, pursued the discussed ethnographic research. Lynette Widder, too, asks the classical question of authorship in architecture and architectural history: Does the classification into "architecture makers" and "architecture interpreters" really make sense? Who makes architecture, who writes history and theory? And should architectural history, as architecture, be benchmarked against the pressing issues of our time: architecture-historical discourses on climate change, resource finiteness and resilience; migration and racism; self-determination and autocracies? Friedrich von Borries calls for buildings and their aesthetics, building stakeholders and contexts to be newly grasped in an architectural history of the Anthropocene, for example under aspects of energy consumptions and CO₂ emissions. A future architectural history of the post-Anthropocene, however, must address the overcoming of anthropocentric views, that is a history discussing architecture in its consequence for other living beings. By framing these new perspectives, von Borries shows the pastness of preceding architectural history, which however is always needed to determine directional changes.

Temporality and Time-Bound Nature

The second section asks about the time-bound nature and therefore the relativity of history and historiography in architectural discourses. Chronology seems to provide objective support, but the process of choosing specific past and present events is already an interpretative narration. Through a specific example, the texts published since the 1950s on architect and urban planner Robert Moses, Joan Ockman underscores that historiography, albeit striving for objectivity, depends on the disposition or "sentiment" of the time in which it originated. Thus, history writes history itself. Jörg van Norden raises awareness that time is not independent from us, but is instead constructed through narrations that connect present, past, and future. Nevertheless, historical narrations are neither always the same nor arbitrary, but are rather governed by the context and power structures of the sayable.

Manfred Klein's contribution circles, with reference to Ernst Bloch's theories, around the question of how architecture and its historiography affect concrete utopias, understood as the not-yet being. Speculating about the effects a newly constructed building could have for a society or a place in the future allows historians to develop a potential (future) history and thus to expand history with the dimension of the future. Redefining temporality within architectural history is also a request by Monika Isler Binz. It is not

the new construction and therefore the status quo assumed as ideal that historians should attend to, but rather the processual character of architecture and therefore the transforming and remodeling of architecture. In her text, using architectural examples from the second half of the twentieth century, she shows that this implies not only a history of change by users, but also that changeability and transformability can be a conceptual constituent of designs and buildings. Anne Scheinhardt presents the diorama exhibition at the German Architecture Museum in Frankfurt am Main as an example for the time-bound nature of architectural history in a double sense. The historian Heinrich Klotz and his idiosyncratic interpretation of architectural history, as built in the diorama models in the 1980s, have become a topic of architectural history themselves and therefore raise the question of how to deal with a potentially or supposedly outdated history of architectural history.

Methods and Scholarship

The third section illustrates, once more, the multidisciplinary of architectural history. Reading Ita Heinze-Greenberg's investigation on excerpting and note-indexing reminds every researcher of their own conundrum when recording, summarizing, or ordering their readings or new thoughts. With this, she shows not only the historical development of this ubiquitous scholarly practice, but most notably the creative act of every writer—scientist or poet—that lies in sorting, rethinking, and newly arranging. Mehrdad Hadighi utilizes the concept of the shadow to approach the question of the scholarship of architectural history. Starting with Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, that is reflecting on "facts" as necessarily distorted shadows due to unavoidably confined view angles, he develops an interpretation of Le Corbusier's Millowners' Association Building in Ahmedabad through seven "shadows." His approach reinforces that scholarship in architectural history is necessarily a discursive act of continually negotiating its validity. Comparably, Rixt Hoekstra's text raises the question to what extent the past is factual-objective or continuously reconstructed. Referring to Jörn Rüsen's theory of historical studies, she analyzes texts on Dutch architectural modernism that were published between the 1960s and 1980s. While exploring (architectural) historiography between documentation, interpretation, and creation, she concludes that differences in interpretation are instrumental and necessary for understanding (architectural) history.

Irene Breuer grapples with recollection processes and images of history, which, she argues, always also point into the future. With reference to the work of Paul Ricoeur, she reflects on the so-called "difficult heritage" in Germany and demonstrates this through examples of commemorating the national-socialist and also the socialist past. Frank Rochow's epistemological contribution focuses on the relationship of architecture, architectural history, and historical sciences. Discussing architecture-sociologic positions, he argues that architecture impacts human actions and has therefore a general historical effect. He advocates for more awareness and analysis of these effects in the historical sciences, treating architecture as more than a bare time cap-

sule. Canse Yüzer, in her text, expands the spectrum of architectural history's sources by examining radio broadcasts. Utilizing the Turkish radio and TV programs, she analyzes how ideological mechanisms have an effect on the interpretation of architecture. Her text exemplifies that historiography is not politically neutral but depends on time-related contexts of historiographers.

The division of this issue into the above three sections was intended to raise awareness of internal challenges in architectural history. The authors' contributions could also be included in other sections or entirely rearranged to enrich arguments elsewhere. All contributions raise fundamental theoretical questions, refer to multiple temporalities, and utilize various methods for analyzing specific topics. Rearranging them is highly recommended. The curators and *Cloud-Cuckoo-Land* hope for critical reading, further differentiation, sharpening, and continuation of the discourse on the *Presence of Architectural History*.

Literature

Marquard Odo (2003): Zukunft braucht Herkunft. Philosophische Essays, Stuttgart.

Curators

Sylvia Claus, Dr. phil., historian of art and architecture. Since 2019, she has been Professor of Art History at the Brandenburg University of Technology, where she established the new degree program in Building History and Art History (B.A. and, from 2025, M.A.). Previously, she was head of the Master of Advanced Studies Programme in History and Theory of Architecture at ETH Zurich. Sources and media of historiography, but also the role of historical tradition for the design process have been the focus of her research ever since the 1990s when she worked at the architecture collection of the Academy of Arts in Berlin. Her other research interests encompass the land question, the Arts and Crafts Reform Movement (particularly concerning the transfer of knowledge and ideas) and the links between urban planning, literature and art theory.

Eduard Führ served as head of the Theory of Architecture Chair at Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus until 2010. He founded Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок in 1996 and has been co-editor of the journal ever since.

Ute Poerschke is a professor of architecture at the Pennsylvania State University, USA. She is a co-principal of Friedrich Poerschke Zwink Architects | Urban Planners and co-editor of Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок. Her research focuses on concepts of functionalism in architecture and the relationship of technology and architecture. Her publications include *Architectural Theory of Modernism. Relating Functions and Forms* (Routledge, 2016) and *Theorie der Architektur. Zeitgenössische Positionen* (co-edited with Sebastian Feldhusen, Birkhäuser, 2017). <https://fpzar-chitekten.de> and <https://arts.psu.edu/directory/ute-poerschke>

Recommended Citation

Sylvia Claus, Eduard Führ and Ute Poerschke (eds.)
Editorial. Presence of Architectural History

In: Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок,
International Journal of Architectural Theory (ISSN 1434-0984), vol. 28.,
no. 44/45, Presence of Architectural History, 2025, pp. 5–9.