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## BOOK REVIEW:

STEN GROMARK, JENNIFER MACK AND  
ROEMER VAN TOORN (EDS.)

*ARCHITECTURE IN EFFECT VOL. #1 (2)*

*RETHINKING THE SOCIAL IN ARCHITECTURE:  
MAKING EFFECTS*

HÉLÈNE FRICHOT, GUNNAR SANDIN AND  
BETTINA SCHWAM (EDS.)

*ARCHITECTURE IN EFFECT VOL. #2 (2)*

*AFTER EFFECTS: THEORIES AND METHODO-  
LOGIES IN ARCHITECTURAL RESEARCH*

REVIEWER: LEIF DANIEL HOUCK

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Physically, volumes 1 and 2 of “Architecture in Effect” are two thick green and blue paperback books, where the first volume comprises 470 pages and the second 412 pages, filled with text by researchers. The obvious question doing a review is to give an answer to whether the books are worth reading or not. However, in this case, larger and more complex questions emerge. The volumes represent hours, or more correctly weeks or probably months, of good reading and learning in a variety of architecturally related themes and research methods. Reading the book chapters is hard, challenging work, but also rewarding through new insights and intellectual joy. The themes are interesting, and the methods used, especially in volume 2, are a discovery in themselves. The authors are well formulated, have a well of insight and bring forth both appealing and sometimes (to me) provoking reflections.

During my reading through the first volume – an enduring process spreading across weeks – I was attending a birthday party. I was seated next to a professional musician. He soon found out that I was an architect and asked me: what do you think of the phrase “architecture is frozen music”, which is usually attributed to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. I believe, prior to the reading of “Architecture in Effect”, I would have answered: yes, this is a good metaphor. But after my reading about the awareness of architecture as part of a socio-physical reality, I had to answer no.

A building exists solely because of human thinking and activity, it is part of human interaction, and in this world of rapid change there is no such thing as a constant. The new building will at some point become the old building, it will be part of peoples' lives and may even become the site of a country's revolution. The interpretation of the building, the use, the function, will be in a constant development. There is no such thing as frozen architecture.

The structural format of the books is familiar within the genre. The books each have three editors, there is a table of contents and an introduction. Volume 1, "Making Effects", is divided into concrete yet open chapter titles: The Welfare State and Beyond..., Towards New Subjectivities, and Urban Architectural Explorations of the Social. Volume 2, "After Effects", is divided into Critical Historiographies, Architects in Formation and Material Conditions. Some chapters have an additional thematic introduction, often very useful and a necessary preparation for the reader to understand what is to come. Each chapter has a new author, or authors, all followed by an alphabetical overview of the contributors in the end.

### Getting an overview

A reader trying to piece together what these books substantially are about may intuitively start to look at the table of contents in volume 1. But there is no subtitle signalling an introduction. So, you intuitively throw yourself into the first text, "Architecture & Socio-Logics", written by Dana Cuff. She explains the actuality of the social element in architecture and the built environment. A well written text, but there is nothing about the concept of the books – things I want to know like, why two books, do they contain scientific work, articles or essays or something else? Are they a result of a conference, and if so – which one(s). After the introduction, the reader meets the next text with the title, "Rethinking the Social in Architecture: Making effects". This happens to be the editors' introduction, vital information unfortunately blended in with the names of the editors. All in all, this made it difficult to understand where to read about the concept itself. The introduction first spends three pages explaining the meaning of the book's title; a rather complex text, though with a well formulated conclusion referring to Lefebvre: "Society remakes architecture, as architecture remakes society". Then, without any guiding title, the editors introduce the context of the books: from 2011 to 2016 the Swedish Research Council, Formas, funded the national research initiative "Architecture in Effect". This gave the four (my underlining) Swedish schools of architecture the possibility to establish a body for interaction on research, including researchers, students and designers. The four schools of architecture are KTH, Umeå University, Chalmers University of Technology and Lund University (this is not explained in the text, but their logos are printed on the last page). The project also included national research training for doctoral candidates. We can read

that the content of the two books evolved from the different events during the project, but more especially from the original research symposium in Umeå in 2013, called “Rethinking the Social”. A great help in understanding the totality of the undertaking of the strong research group, unfortunately neither mentioned in the editors’ introduction nor in the table of contents, is the overview figure hidden on one of the last pages in volume 1. Here the achievements are all beautifully visualized (but not explained). From the figure you can draw the conclusion that there has been an opening seminar at KTH in the beginning of 2012, followed by different activities such as three international conferences at UMA in 2013 and two at KTH in 2015 and 2016. According to the figure, four PhD dissertations were conducted through the project. At Chalmers, there has been a Joint Conference, and there have been several workshops and symposiums at KTH and Lund. If you wonder how much money Formas has invested in the research initiative, you find this information in small letters in the lower left corner of the hidden overview figure: “Formas Grant 80.000.000 SEK”. It is an overwhelmingly impressive sum, probably exceptional and unheard of in both the historical and Scandinavian context of architectural research. According to the overview figure, 500 international peer reviewed contributions have been produced, and of these approximately 55% are book chapters. This would mean an impressive 275 book chapters! Investigating the overview figure one more time, there seem to have been about eight other books published as part of the research initiative between 2012–2017. A natural question is: how does this double volume publication, the culmination of it all, position itself compared to the other previous publications? Unfortunately, this is not explained. Later in this article I will attempt to investigate this.

## What are the books investigating?

Today’s challenges are pointed out in different ways: human-affected climate change, large scale migration, neoliberal capitalist economic dogma (volume 2, page 010). “Concerns and matters of environmental care” are also mentioned. But if you are fed up reading about sustainability and how to participate in the green shift as an architect, this is not the issue here! Inquiring into what the essence of these books is leads to more answers than one. With multiple editors, authors and books, no wonder the aims are explained in different ways. This could be regarded as problematic, like having several versions of a research question in the same article. But I guess the right thing is to look at the bigger picture, the high number of researchers involved, the research as an endeavour with a starting position, knowledge developing across several conferences, universities and years – there will be more versions, even contradictions or, at best, ambiguities. To the question what the books are about, I believe some lines in volume 2 page 011 explains it well – that the research initiative has placed emphasis on the plural expressions of theory in architecture, and how the development of theory as an open-ended project



enables a response to contemporary challenges; within this approach, the book focusses on social and political responsibilities. But to illustrate how it is totally possible to be confused when trying to grasp the goals more precisely, you can have a look at this (my underlining): the editors' introduction explains on page 023 (volume 1): "The innovations of the resulting approach constitute the interdisciplinary methodological profile of our common findings." Then when you get through ten more pages and reach page 033, you finally read what should have been the very first sentence in the editors' introduction, namely that the books "mirror and sum up" the enquiries and scientific research that evolved from the "tripartite" (wasn't it four?) strong research environments, consisting of interdisciplinary core groups within architecture, urban planning, art, design, landscape design, community planning, sociology, psychology and philosophy. Then looking closer at this, on page 026 the editors explain the research strategy as a primarily intradisciplinary endeavour, as the goal is to renew the "research agenda for architecture based on critical historiographic foundations and using innovative theoretical methodological approaches". The editors close the text on page 034 by saying that the research has achieved its primary objective: "to provide a platform for intradisciplinary research". Struggling to sort this out does not become easier when reading the problem statement in volume 2 in the editors' introduction on page 009: "Architectural research tends to be wildly transdisciplinary...". The way I interpret all this is that the project could be regarded as interdisciplinary due to the range of disciplines involved, but intradisciplinary as the research focus is on architecture only. This probably applies to a greater extent in volume 1 than volume 2, where actually the focus seems to be on new methods conducted partly by researchers from different disciplines to create new methods. Although the transdisciplinarity within architectural research is problematized in the introduction, this seems to be exactly the quality of the methods used in volume 2.

I felt the need to better understand the two books as part of the total production of the research initiative. The other books were only mentioned by title in the hidden figure in volume 1. I therefore worked out the following list:

1. *Rethinking the social* (2013). 176 pages<sup>1</sup>. This is an outcome of the UMEÅ conference in February 2013, but there is no given publishing year. It focuses on four themes: Critical Historiography, Material conditions, Critical Projections and Architects in Formation. The publication format is somewhat unclear and there is no information on the editors. However, the symposium organisation is K. Grillner, S. Gromark, M. Kärrholm, H. Mattsson, E. Sigge & Roemer van Toorn, so we may assume that some of them are the responsible editors. The publication has 38 contributions from 48 authors, about 12 men.
2. *Deleuze and the City* (2016). Edinburgh University Press, 275 pages. Editors: H. Frichot, C. Gabriellsson and J. Metzger. About 20 chapters

1 [https://architectureineffect.se/content/10-output/01-publications/01-the-reader/rethinkingthesocial\\_revised.pdf](https://architectureineffect.se/content/10-output/01-publications/01-the-reader/rethinkingthesocial_revised.pdf)

written by different authors, 17 contributions from 21 authors, 13 men. The next three publications (3, 4 and 5) are outcomes of the international conference AHRA, Architecture & Feminisms at KTH in Stockholm in 2016.

3. *Architecture and Feminisms. Ecologies, Economies, Technologies* (2017). Routledge, 330 pages. Editors are H. Frichot, C. Gabrielsson & H. Runting. 23 contributions from about 30 authors of which 3 are men.
4. *Architecture and Culture, Volume 5, Issue 3* (2017): "Styles of queer feminist practices and objects in architecture. 15 contributions of which 3 are downloaded 800 times, others about 100 times. There are about 26 authors, of which are 2 men. [Architecture and Culture: Vol 5, No 3 \(tandfonline.com\)](#)
5. "Becoming a feminist architect" *Field* (2017) (7.1), 234 pages. Field is a free journal for architecture: [Reisinger | Editorial; Becoming a Feminist Architect, ... visible, momentous, with | field: \(field-journal.org\)](#). Editors: K. Reisinger and M. Schalk. This publication has 637 views. It has 14 contributions by about 24 authors (3 men).
6. *Feminist futures of spatial practice: Materialism, Activisms, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections* (2017). AADR (Spurbuchverlag). Editors: M. Schalk, T. Kristiansson, R. Maze (approximately 365 pages). Open access and downloaded about 6.300 times. 25 contributions from more than 45 authors (out of which maybe 3 men).
7. SPRDD "People's places" – I was not able to identify this publication (probably Arkitektur, No 8-2013)
8. *Ways of Residing in Transformation. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2017). Routledge. 303 pages. Editors: E. Støa, S. Gromark, M. Ilmonen & K. Paadam.

The scale of production is impressive, and the focus on feminism is striking – 5 out of 10 publications have this as their main approach. The publications with a focus on feminism have less than 10% by male authors. This could be worth a reflection or two when summing up the research initiative. Concerning the sister books (the term is used by the editors), *Architecture in Effect* vols. #1 (2) and #2 (2), the distribution is 31 female and 16 male authors. Also, the "Rethinking of the social" has a similar gender ratio. Only "Deleuze and the city" has a balanced gender representation.

## On the content of the books

Editors Helene Frichot and Gunnar Sandin's introduction text in "After Effects" write: "Where theory becomes too wilfully opaque and autonomous, it also becomes exclusive." In my opinion, there is reason to believe that the majority of essays in "After Effects" appear to be challenging and opaque to others than hardcore researchers in the given field. Often the titles use unfamiliar terms, the research questions and

methods seem hidden. The reader will soon feel there is a vast amount of literature theory necessary to be able to follow the texts. How comfortable do you feel reading these headlines: “Insomnia Viewing: Ecologies of Spatial Becoming-With”, or “Implementing Design Characteristics of Utopian Thinking in Mechanisms of Worlding”. Or this: “Delaying the Image: Towards an Aesthetics of Encounter.” Or if you seek to find out what the essay, “On the Irrational Section Cut” is about, how much sense does this explanation make to you: “The action of the cut [...] creates interstitial zones that demand of us a critical and creative reinterrogation of our local environment-worlds.” If this was not clear to you, then try this: “The ethos of this approach can be aligned with feminist practices re-emerging in architecture, specifically through the concept-tool of the feminist design power tool.” Other terms you should feel familiar with are these: “identitarian episteme”, “flirtation”, “transversal writing” and “Urban Heterology.” BUT if this did not scare you off, even if it appeared more opaque than crystal clear, if you are triggered to dive into this and investigate it, then you will be rewarded. A helpful invention is the so called “Heteroglossary”, a lexical list where 91 different, unfamiliar terms are explained. This is a great tool increasing the accessibility of the essays and making it possible for the reader to enter with some more confidence.

## Numbers and goals

To get some sort of overview, I created an excel table and did some counting. In total, the two books house 43 texts by 31 different authors in the first book and 27 in the second. In these numbers, the editors and authors of the introductions of the different thematic chapters are included. 12 of the authors publish in both books, so in total the books represent the contribution of 46 different authors. Examining their background – based on the biographies listed in the last pages of the books – 18 of the authors are affiliated to KTH, 3 to Lund, and 1 author each from Chalmers, Örebro, Malmö, Linköping, Umeå and Karlskrona. The other contributors are affiliated to a wide range (13) of other universities in Europe and the US. Most authors have experiences from several universities during their career. About 8 authors are identified as PhD students or Postdocs. Again – based on the biographies, 37 of the authors are from the architecture, landscape architecture and planning field. (Only) four to six of the authors are architects with substantial practical architectural experience. I believe it is safe to say, from a practitioner’s view, that the books are very theoretically oriented. The authors are a mix of professors, associate professors, teachers, researchers, PhD candidates and artists. What do all these numbers tell us? One reflection is that one of the expressed goals of the research initiative was to establish a body for interaction on research, including researchers, students and designers. At the same time, examining the two books, and in including the majority of the total research production of the achievement, it appears to be a

collection of several individual works more than a joint effort between universities. It is evident that there has been communication across the four universities, and relations have surely been developed. But despite this, I am left with the impression that a great opportunity seems to have got somewhat lost, namely the potential of the research work you can achieve with a larger group than with 1 to 3 individuals. At best, there was a highlight and true development of the use of critical feminism within the architectural field, but I am uncertain to what degree this was intended or if these simply happened to be the most productive and engaged people. And I feel the need to ask – did the research initiative strengthen the general research cooperation between the four Swedish universities? In volume 1, 18 essays have one author only. Four essays have two or three authors. Of these only one is a collaboration between two authors from two different Swedish universities, namely “Acting in Common: Critical-Creative Participation in Controversial Urban Development Projects” by M. Schalk (KTH), A. Šušteršič (Oslo) and Gunnar Sandin (Lund). In Volume 2, 14 essays have one author only. Five essays have two authors. Of these only ONE has two authors from two different universities within the research initiative, “Anticipation and Other Affective Productions: Theorizing the Architectural Project in Action”, namely H. Runting (KTH) and F. Torrison (Lund). As these books are the culmination of the research initiative, this seems in some way rather disappointing. One gets the impression that the majority of Swedish architectural researchers in general want to work more or less alone, focusing on their individual files of interests.

## Final remarks

Studying the published books from the research initiative, I have the impression that the overwhelming majority of the participants seem unable to join forces to work on common research questions and to achieve results beyond the limits of one or two persons’ work. There is a total lack of quantitative methods, and this applies to all the observed productions of the research initiative. Why is it so? Everyone involved seems to be happy producing essays rather than more structured scientific articles, with explicit and precise research questions, detailed explanation of the methods, the findings and a proper discussion of the validity of the findings. This critique does not only apply to this research initiative but is probably a more commonly accepted phenomenon within architectural research in general. Regarded as two books with essays on the social and architecture, and on original research methods on architecture, they are good reading, offering a varied bouquet of themes and authors. The editors hope the double book will be a powerful means for an “unfolding research process that clarifies the vital potential contributions of architecture as a discipline that is *making* the future”. I do believe the research and methods used have expanded the range of research approaches and ways to examine the effect of architecture. Still, considering the books as a culmination of an 80 million SEK research project, I have the concern that its potential appears unfulfilled.

