

# The Autonomy of Architecture?

This issue of the Nordic Journal of Architectural Research focuses on artistic development work. This is not the first time this much debated field of research becomes the theme of this journal. The last time was in no. 1, 2003 when the editors Pia Bille and Anders Munch asked how artistic development work “can be a research practice that meets the requirements of the university system for research and researcher education”.<sup>1</sup> They sought answers to this question partly by inviting researchers dedicated to artistic development work, partly by inviting researchers engaged in more general considerations about the possibilities – or the impossibilities – of letting artistic development work meet general research criteria.

This issue revives parts of this discussion but rephrases the question to ponder why the ways of working with architecture are not transferred to architectural research more often than they are. Often there is a considerable distance between the tools and the forms of recognition employed in the work of architecture and the research of architecture. Instead of raising the – important – question of how artistic development work can meet general research criteria, the journal asks how intensified reflections concerning the ways of working with architecture can contribute to the development of architectural research.

This issue of the journal makes its own contribution to this question by presenting architects engaged in artistic development work. The discussion of the more fundamental question of how such works can form part of architectural research has been toned down and replaced by examples, whereby the journal makes attempts at perspectivising the complex discussion by offering a number of specific examples of artistic development work.

For the same reason architectural forms of representation, such as drawings, model photos and computer graphics, take up most of the space in this issue. In most cases the texts supplement these examples, describing the thoughts, correlations and themes behind the projects.

The emphasis on this material has been important to the peer review procedure which was handled differently from the usual standard, by agreement with the chief editor. The procedure was changed according to the view that the usual scrutiny is ideal for critical text review processes but less suitable for evaluation and criticism of the kind of material exposed in this issue. Instead two miniature symposia have been realised, at the beginning and at the end of the summer, during which the project and the texts were discussed by a selected group of researchers at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture. These ‘workshop discussions’ have aided in refining the selection of the project material and its interaction with the text.

## The open work

The journal provides a description of the artistic development work carried out at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture in Copenhagen, Denmark. There are contributions by Anders Abraham, Claus Peder Pedersen (together with Claudia Carbone), Cort Ross Dinesen (together with Birgit Skovfoged Østergaard), Helle Brabrand and Carsten Juel-Christiansen (together with Steen Høyer). They are all part of Institute 1 at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture in Copenhagen, and all work with artistic development work under the framework description *The Open Work*.

Anders Abraham works with the states, physical or otherwise, between fluid and solid and examines these through different media and methods. Models, photos and drawings develop a universe of form consisting of local architectural statements reflecting over typological and structural themes of architecture. Claus Peder Pedersen and Claudia Carbone present a study of dynamic forms developed in a dialogue between formalised analyses of architectural works from e.g. the Baroque and architectural development works. Cort Ross Dinesen and Birgit Skovfoged Østergaard contribute with an artistic development work entitled *The Ziggurat*. This is a new interpretation of the monument. At the same time it is also a reflection of the ability of the architectural model to transgress the representational relation to a project and manifest itself sensuously as a 1:1 piece of architecture. This project is accompanied by the article *The Architecture of the Section* by Erik Werner Petersen. Helle Brabrand shows two artistic development projects: *Spacebody Actual Virtual* and *Mixed Movements in the Composition Plane* under the title *Architecture and Embodiment*. These two projects focus on the exchanges between body, space and movement in multi-disciplinary collaboration including a choreographer, musicians and dancers. Carsten Juel-Christiansen and Steen Høyer present a further elaboration of the competition project for *Geocenter Møns Klint*. A critique of the competition programme is the point of departure for this artistic development work, which is used to examine “the integration of significant, architectural formation of differences in an open and variable space”. This contribution closes with the article *Models* which describes the ‘act of pointing’ as an indispensable element of artistic practice. Finally, there is a contribution by Henrik Oxvig, who is associated with *Theory and History* at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture. His article deals with the relationship between artistic development work and philosophical aesthetics through a discussion of Umberto Eco and Plato.

The framework description *The open work* is derived from Umberto Eco’s text, from 1962, of the same title.<sup>2</sup> Eco describes how the work as a form was introduced, and at times nearly came to a conclusion in Late Modernity. He points out how the artist – or in this case the architect – withdraws from an authoritative command of the work as a concluded composition and expands the frames for the receiver’s active participation in the decoding, creation and perception of the work.

Eco’s text is clearly a product of its time. It envelops an interest in the serial and the structural elements that are characteristic of a number of arts, not least architecture, during the period. From a present day perspective it could appear as if

these structuralist architects open up the form of the work in an indefinite number of combinations and yet almost at the very same instance close it again imagining they will be able to establish permanent structures over time. The framework description for Institute 1 is therefore only in part based on Eco's contemplations about the opening of the work form. Instead it describes an opening that integrates architecture more critically in the openness and which does not leave it as a neutral frame, like the structuralist architects of the 1950s and 1960s.

The framework description is thus formulated as such: "The open work adds distance to totalising efforts. Its composition is delayed in relation to the space in which it enrolls. It is constructed through operations that are not subordinated established rules but always directed against partial joints, partial constructions, and always involved in something already there. ... *The open work* denotes a category of artistic development works in which the combined and dispersive forces of the architectural work are displaced and scrutinised."<sup>3</sup>

The Royal Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture defines artistic development work as follows: "Systematic development activities carried out in order to acquire new knowledge, develop new perceptions and improve existing materials, processes, techniques or systems. The development and the testing are based on a combination of stringent, registering methods, sensing and artistic insight. The work is realised with a conclusive contemplative process that can be disseminated and can contribute to the development of new methods and new ways of perception.

In the projects displayed here, the contemplative process is part of the architectonic statement. They enter into a research relationship by exposing and opening discursive crevices in the architectural statements whilst at the same time insisting that the results of the artistic development work can be assessed as architectonic statements in their own right.

They thus attempt to establish a fragile balance between architectonic statements of a certain authority that are not objectified or generalized in an effort to be scientific, but on the contrary nor are locked into an indisputable or inaccessible concept of the work.

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## Notes

1. Nordic Journal of Architectural Research 1, 2003, p. 2.
2. Extracts translated into Danish: "Det Åbne Værks Poetik' i 'Æstetiske Teorier. En antologi ved Jørgen Dehs', Odense, 1995.
3. See the full description at [www.karch.dk](http://www.karch.dk) under Forskning/Institut 1 (in Danish).