AUTONOMY RECONSIDERED

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Like the inaugural issue last summer, the present issue owes the lion's share of its contributions to an international conference held by the *International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture*, the society behind *Architecture Philosophy*. Entitled 'Autonomy Reconsidered', the conference raised a host of questions to both disciplines, indeed calling the disciplines to join their efforts in answering them:

> *Contemporary philosophy and architecture discourse alike marginalize the ethical dimension of architecture. Yet, it seems that the ethical dimension in both architecture and philosophy has been compromised because both disciplines have not established a clear interdisciplinary understanding of autonomy. Together, and in service to both fields of study, we must reconsider what autonomy means for both architecture and philosophy, or rather, for architecture philosophy.*

> *Without consideration to design intent, societal (at times, utopian) agendas and programs, architecture is still largely deemed to be ethically 'neutral' or silent. But is architecture ethically neutral? Is it ethically silent? Can ethical evaluation of designs and built objects operate autonomously from evaluation of the human agents that create them? Can a designer's activity be considered autonomous, and hence allow for questions of attribution and responsibility? Once we isolate the architectural, landscape, or urban designer from outside pressures, and only focus on her core métier – to what extent is*

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that isolated activity autonomous? And if an architect's actions cannot be autonomous, would architecture stop having to answer to itself?

Philosophical ethics has opened its purview beyond human action to animal ethics and environmental ethics, but has not yet found a way to expand its existing reflections to designed objects, particularly built ones. Perhaps in parallel to ethics, contemporary aesthetics discusses the moral repercussions of art works with clear representational content – socially critical novels, figurative paintings – but has not paid closer attention to architecture. Is the lack of attention in aesthetics due to architecture's representational content being elusive, or because architecture's aesthetic appraisal is taken to proceed autonomously from moral considerations? How would architecture be considered otherwise?[1]

The conference's call went on to, "invit[e] papers which probe these questions, or re-draw the assumptions behind them."[2] It is in that spirit that we present to readers the opening contribution, a keynote at that conference. In "The Myth of Autonomy," Nathaniel Coleman exposes and dissects foundational myths that, he argues, drive various autonomy projects in architecture to this day. Such projects, Coleman argues, operate on assumptions that cannot be upheld, and presuppose the unavailability of architecture's live relation to the social and the ethical. That unavailability comes into stark question once architecture's relation to utopia is reconsidered: not autonomy, but its great other, merits reconsideration if we are to redraw present day assumptions. Coleman's authoritative tour de force across the prominent figures in today's autonomy debates in architecture sets the stage for the journal issue more widely. Its claim that philosophers' (especially Kantian) notions of 'autonomy' are of limited use in such concerns should certainly not stand unanswered for long.

Tackling the call for papers' challenges to the philosophical community head-on, Noël Carroll and Christoph Baumberger also argue against the self-insulation of architecture from ethical considerations, as Coleman does. Yet, they appear more conservative about the means required to get us there, while disagreeing between themselves on those means – thus inaugurating the proliferation of viewpoints and arguments this journal seeks to promote. Carroll and Baumberger's implicit disagreements are delicate precisely because both authors are driven to a similar position: 'moderate moralism'. Moderate moralism is a position Carroll himself coined and developed for various art forms, but never before for architecture. The position's validity – especially its claim to an internal relation

of architecture to ethical values – both authors remind us, has vast consequences for how we build and design. Autonomism, once again, is found to be unsupportable. Will no one stand up for its defense?

This brings us to the papers of Mark Jensen and Felipe Loureiro. Jensen considers autonomy from a different point of departure. What, he asks, if autonomy were primarily concerned, not with the status of the object, but with the status of its producers? Could their relative autonomy be an important determinant of the quality of the built environment? To consider these questions, Jensen draws from Aristotle's ethics as a framework. Felipe Loureiro's essay on the applicability of philosopher of media Vilém Flusser's ideas to architectural images engages the topic of autonomy indirectly by examining the increasing opaqueness of the means of architectural image production – from hand drawing, to photography, computer images, and now protoyping – in contemporary times. While the means of image generation becomes increasingly abstract, the decreasing distance between conception and production is blurring the distinction between design and craft. Could this development be bringing the modern-day designer's unhappy choice between irrelevant celebrity or embedded anonymity back into some sense of real control and significance?

If the journal's inaugural issue introduced features not often encountered in an academic journal – follow up questions posed to authors or their targets, an interview, room for sidebar notes – the present issue inaugurates a further such feature central to the journal's concept: the continuing of conversations previously left open, as befits philosophical reflection. The second part of Paul Guyer's essay on monism and pluralism, and the interview with Andrew Ballantyne both take off where we left them in

" WILL NO ONE STAND UP FOR [AUTONOMY"S] DEFENSE? "

the previous issue. With both conversations having run their course thus far, we look to readers to pen questions of their own – whether to join conversations already begun, or to start a fresh thread of exchange.

ENDNOTES

1. Fahey, Carolyn, and Stefan Koller, June 27, 2013, "Autonomy Reconsidered," *International Society for the Philosophy of Architecture*, http://isparchitecture.com/events/call-for-papers/