

Mit zivilem Ungehorsam gegen die ökologische Katastrophe. Das ist das Motto von Extinction Rebellion und Carl Fuchs, der im Herbst sein Masterstudium in Architektur in Aarhus beginnt und sich in den letzten Jahren intensiv für die gesellschaftspolitische Bewegung „XR“ eingesetzt hat. Wir haben mit ihm über Aktivismus und die Verantwortung als angehender Architekt für unsere Gesellschaft und Umwelt gesprochen.

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*How does the structure of XR itself help the movement reach its goal(s)? (What) Do you think architecture schools + institutions could learn from the structure of XR?*

CARL FUCHS During the last weeks the internal structure of Extinction Rebellion Deutschland showed its real beauty and power: XR DE was able to plan and carry out countless actions across all of Germany. The movement could rely on strong local structures which are growing around the two pillars of decentralization and anarchy. The structures are never perfect and need to be constantly questioned and improved in order to avoid any form of hierarchy.

I do believe that in order to achieve real change we need to address and question the accumulation of power. Architecture schools or institutions in the professional realm are inherently exclusive and create a strict 'hierarchy of knowledge'. Academic institutions need to redistribute the accumulated knowledge; this especially applies on a global scale.

Student associations, I believe, can grow their power manifold not by channeling their members' voices into few elected ones but by empowering their members to raise their voice themselves and get loud together.

*Do you see your work as an activist in XR as separate from your work as an architecture student / architect? How (not)?*

CF As of now I am looking to activism in XR and the study of architecture as two separate fields of my political agency. They will certainly merge once in a while – e.g. If I'd be chaining myself to the gates of Heidelberg Cement and give an interview from there I can use the extra credibility of having worked and studied in that field, or when I am doing research on sand mining to support such an action that's done from an academic perspective. But on the broader level I find myself differentiating between these two.

The production and distribution of knowledge about mitigation of and adaptation to climate change is to provide answers and solutions while activism is to pose the questions, push the discourse ever further and make possible the implementation of the solutions. Today we find ourselves in the position of having a whole array of answers to the climate crisis at hand, yet we do not see sufficient or even significant political change. Recently a heap of credible climate scientists jumped up the barricades and turned activists, perhaps the time to abandon the academic consensus of 'staying neutral and simply providing the research' is now and we all must become activist architects.

I can recommend this short piece by Keefer Dunn: ['Radical Praxis: Activism Within and Beyond Architecture'](#)

In his text Keefer Dunn makes the following points about activism and its pitfalls within architecture:

1. Cultural criticism is no substitute for activism.
2. Participatory and community focused design are not equivalent to system change.
3. There is no such thing as an activist architecture, only activist architects.
4. The site of political agency is not the product of our labor, buildings, but rather in the conditions of their production

*Given all your experience as an architecture student, an employed architect and an environmental activist, what 3 specific things would you change about the way we're educated to be architects? And how will you approach your education differently now that you're starting your masters, after your experience with XR?*

CF “[...] our understanding of the system is all superstructure and no base.” This quote by Dunn in above mentioned text tries to describe what I realize now about our education as architects. During our studies we look in awe at the rise and fall of the radical ideas of the 60’ and 70’ and keep in our comfortably bubble of theory. Between focusing on these utopian ideas of the past and focusing on workplace skills, little space is left to address real world issues in a critical way.

When it comes to our education I’d love to see these points taken on by the schools and faculties:

1. We need to address the financial, economic side of building. Courses on macro- and micro-economics should be mandatory as the built environment plays such a major role in (re-)distribution of wealth. At the moment architects are merely passive bystanders of injustices, often claiming that we at least have that little bit of influence by being the right hand of the devil.
2. We must stop to make ourselves and everyone else believe that we are artists of a gentlemanly profession and therefore it’s ok to work long over hours with no pay. We are merely servants to an economic system and the apparent gap between our education and the work reality needs to be addressed and communicated early on.
3. One point that bugged me during my education was the inherent competitiveness. From beginning on we learn that if you are not winning those competitions, you will never get your genius designs to be built and no one will remember you as the great artist that you were. Let’s move on from this egoistic and self-destructive point of view towards a cooperative future.

I will soon start my masters in Aarhus School of Architecture and while in the past year I was constantly questioning my role in the profession and even if I should continue on this path, I am now convinced that architects will be playing a much more critical role in the future and that I can be part of a change in this field. As described above, mainly two very broad fields of practice and research in architecture open up to lead a way into the future: Mitigation of and adaptation to climate change. Mitigation (the slowing of global warming and thereby its dangerous effects) right now is a lot about material knowledge, grey energy, life cycles etc.

Though I can see the importance of getting down the greenhouse gases ASAP to prevent the worst, I also see a growing need to address issues of adaptation to the unavoidable changes we will face on a global scale. While working with activist groups in the last year I am more aware of the ever more frequent catastrophes that are already taking place in the global south because of our lack of immediate action. In the coming years of studying my master’s degree I want strive towards using the inherited privilege that I have as white cis-male architect in the minority world to the fullest and work towards a fair redistribution of knowledge. Let’s decolonize our institutions and bring about climate justice!