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The Possibility of an Island

Productive architectures as an alternative model for intellectual development.

IE Architecture+ Prize

Nuevo Baztán, a productive village founded and built under the influence of Juan de Goyeneche in the first part of the 18th century, was one of the most paradigmatic cases at a national level of the so called productive towns, cities built from the ground up with the intention of placing there factories and new population in order to serve those productive complexes.

Almost 300 years later, we find an abandoned city, almost deserted and eclipsed by the residential areas in the surroundings, where huge low density housing areas for people working and commuting to the city of Madrid everyday are located. This decentralized model is completely opposed to the one proposed by Juan de Goyeneche in 1709, which was based on centralization and closeness.

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This work pretends to review and discuss the role of architectural design as a productive device. On one hand the productive model at a global scale has evolved drastically in the last few years, taking the production of material objects to a situation of crescent automatization where human beings intervene less and less each day in a presential way. On the other hand, and due to the incipient lack of necessity of physical work force, intellectual work as well as the production of sensibilities and affections are progressively colonising our reality. The intellectual is the worker of the 21st century. The proletariat has evolved into the cognitariat.

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In this context the proposal consists on the establishment of a new colony of intellectual workers in Nuevo Baztán, in a continuous settlement where their own life styles are progressively converted into added values inside the capitalist value chain. Where does the exchange in between equals start and when does so the industrial and precarious production of art, knowledge and digital content? In order to enhance the creativity and the exchange different kind of spaces are proposed to host activities, both digital (a productive continuous ring with workstations inside a generic liquid area) and analogic (sculpture and painting workshops, a glass oven, etc.) as well as knowledge and opinion exchange areas (auditorium, shared rooms) and quiet and silent spaces for introspection and personal self reflection.

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The role of built spaces inside these dynamics is the one of a visual background, where their forms, colours or appearances hide what is really important, a system of productive organization that controls and enhances the correct and efficient execution of the process. As Michel Foucault describes, these facts make different architectures such as hospitals, schools or factories look alike.

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Nowadays, when neoliberal labour precariousness is all around, and there are taking place productive changes that endanger certain social insurances that until now seemed to be irreversible, someone could ask himself: Is it possible to take advantage of the isolation of Nuevo Baztán to propose a new alternative? Can we use the same conditions that enabled the foundation of Nuevo Baztán to locate a new productive village where instead of producing objects there would be produced personalities? A place where the most prepared cognitarians would have the opportunity of relate to each other, increasing the production of knowledge, thinking and art exponentially, offering them a real exit to their current situation of precariousness and exile.