

## Interview with Patrik Schumacher: A Response by Peggy Deamer

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Patrik Schumacher's interview with *Paprika* editor Patrick Kondziolf has to be taken seriously. Not only is he smartly and persuasively calling on architecture to analyze its role in a larger socio-economic context, but he alone amongst architects is willing to stake his claim on a *particular* analysis, a thoroughly courageous act. It is all the more aggravating then that his analysis of the current state of architecture, society, and the economy is based on such wholly outdated (and often contradictory) tropes, indeed, three very big ones.

### History:

Behind Schumacher's view that the economy has moved from fordism to post-fordism and with this, from economic constraint to full actualization, is the old teleological Hegelian view of history. In this trope, history is not just socially progressive, but the previous era must be seen as radically insufficient and the new, transcendent present the culmination of historical self-realization. Schumacher's descriptors - post-fordism's "life-enhancing potentials;" "old bankrupt" modernist certainties [that require] new ways forward;" parametricism's "trajectory that allowed cumulative collective elaboration and continuous progress" – are truly German Romanticism applied to contemporary circumstances.

To identify someone's approach to history as Hegelian should not, in and of itself, be cause for dismissal. (Marx was Hegelian.) It just needs to be pointed out that 1) this view was one of the first "grand narratives" to be dismissed by a contemporary theory that Schumacher embraces; 2) that Schumacher falls in line with all the Hegelians who put themselves at the center of the transcendent "arrival"; and 3) that the philosophic affinity to Hegel and the economist Hayek is surely seamless for the German-born Schumacher.

### Economics:

Bypassing the nearly incoherent argument that Schumacher makes regarding the economics of housing – the housing problem is caused by state regulations that prevent the city to be a non-habitational place of pure production – and moving on to the larger trope of the virtues of the free-market (the best idea always does and should win!), Schumacher's championing of neoliberalism is, while courageous, based on willful allegiance to economists whose limited historical prevue is taken to be universal truth-speak. Schumacher has every right to pick his own economic guru; we all grab on to narratives that suit our own world view and personal circumstances. But it is odd, given Schumacher's infatuation with the today's technological advances and the ability to access rich information, that he refuses to address Thomas Piketty's data driven analysis of capitalism. Piketty's comparative method tracking wealth in all western nations from the industrial revolution to the present not only reveals that there is indeed no "progress" regarding capitalism's social enhancement but, on

the contrary, left unregulated, capitalism's unequal distribution of wealth historically leads to economic disasters.

Equally weird is Schumacher's depiction of "anarcho-capitalism" as a free-for-all allowing all experimenters to self-realize and, when deserving, rise to the top. It is not just that concepts such as the capital/income ratio for determining social viability are never mentioned; it is the naïve belief that there is (or ever has been) such a thing as the 'free market'. We all know that the state agents that he condemns regulate, through agreements favoring "non-profit" university links to industry, the very technological winners – Google, Apple et al – that Schumacher so admires. Tinkerers in garages are not fueling neoliberalism.

Aesthetics:

The notion of an aesthetic Zeitgeist that has its "avant-garde" generals leading us to a harmonious, transcendent present/future comes from the precise modernist rhetoric that Schumacher is so anxious to dismiss. You don't have to believe Peter Bürger's astute analysis of the "avant-garde" - an historically specific phenomena that is an empty signifier when used today - to question the simplistic identification of an inevitable "avant-garde" style that ushers in a new social order. Schumacher's coupling of our digital, information, post-fordist economy with (his) digital, knowledge rich architecture; his assumption that the parametric style is the chosen one (by Darwinian selection) to represent neoliberalism; his belief that the style in and of itself contributes to neoliberalism's advancement – these all are ideas made possible by the above described Hegelianism as well as a reductive understanding of each term. We can't ignore the irony of someone supporting the chaotic economic mash-up of anarcho-capitalism with the insistence that only one style – parametricism- is acceptable. Let's be experimental as long as it looks like this!

A reflection on these tropes doesn't need to bring up the missing concept of labor, class, or ethics. Their elisions are merely the by-products of Schumacher's higher order of analysis. We agree that we should enter into the "comprehensive theory of the built environment's... specific historical tasks," just not one so out of touch with current intellectual acuity.