

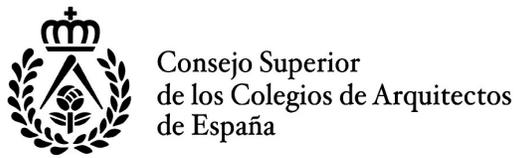
## **THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ILLEGAL ARCHITECTS (AIIA)**

Architectural institutions and guilds are the physical representation of the discipline and, therefore, the architects. The image that these institutions transmit and the symbols that they use are perfectly studied and precise constructions, offering a projection of architecture's ambition and desires. The perception that society has about architecture (including all the clichés, assumptions and legends) are deeply related to this collective imagery delivered in a very conscious way.

It is not by chance that the symbols of institutions such as the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the American Institute of Architects (AIA) or the Consejo Superior de Colegios de Arquitectos de España (CSCAE) refer to values that have been traditionally identified with architecture. Stability, prestige, wisdom and higher knowledge are represented in the form of lions, eagles, classical columns or compasses. The objective of these associations is to protect and preserve the status of recognition -probably the most valuable achievement of the profession- that accompanies architects since the times of the master masons of the European cathedrals. It does not matter if the values defended do not really match with the present situation. It does not matter if they are memories of a better time. Any possibility of muting or adapting themselves to the real concerns of the time is repealed by their rigid structure and bureaucracy fruit of ages of continuous self-indulgence. The only possible leeway is to react in order to keep everything in the same place, producing a sort of induced situation of status quo.

In a moment of crisis and global time for change, both the means of producing and communicating architecture need to be reconsidered (once again). The architectural project is no longer the individual effort of a sort of hero from the renaissance invested with the powers that modern technology provides. Reconsidering the approach to formerly considered invariable aspects of the architectural object (such as the program, the client, the budget, the material obsolescence or the time span of a building) but also the very initial sources of inspiration of a project. Reconsidering our clichés about architectural politeness and the manual of the well-mannered.

The perversion of these images and, in consequence, the assumptions that society has about architecture and architects, try to unveil a new field of exploration out of the established present time: the possibility of developing an alternative towards traditional forms of design, towards the notion of risk and legality and setting a definitive basis for the reformulation of future agendas.



The 'legality' or 'legitimacy' that these institutions pretend to instill to the exercise of the architecture that happens under their dictates is a cultural construction and in this way should be considered and revised: it is just one of the possibilities in which things can happen. Besides, this notion of legality implies a certain idea of what architecture should be and provide to the society; a precise conception of the profession and a praise of the individual authorship. However, some of the main issues and handicaps derived from the maladjustment to the passing of time can be overcome by reconsidering the framework in which it occurs.

Illegality is the only state that allows to contour the present institutional establishment and to push forward frozen debates and ideas without any kind of prejudices. This does not mean embracing illegality in a negative and destructive way but going illegal as a means of finding a new equilibrium and a strong enough inertia that allows us to change the way we proceed nowadays. It is a new situation in which architecture can readjust itself according to present times that demands more adaptability, more reflexes and more capacity of reaction. It is a pacific resistance of no retaliation.

There must be a problem in the position that architects have adopted If society is ready to travel in cars that look like space pods but are discarded after less than three years of use. If they are happy to wear synthetic clothes and fabrics that imitate natural materials. If they keep flooding their houses with the latest technological gadgets but still live in a way that belongs to a fifty years ago time.

The only possibility is reconsidering this position; this disconnection. Reconsider the opinion that we, as architects, have about what we do. It is necessary some dose of humor to accept that we are as naked as the king with his splendid new clothes<sup>1</sup>. It is necessary founding a new institution, a disturbing one, an uncomfortable one: irreverent and illegal from an orthodox point of view. An institution capable of accepting its own limits and life span. An Institution that does not rely in the consistence and coherence of the image that projects to the exterior. An institution that assumes any manifesto as ephemeral; with an expiration date that arrives along with its success.

Here comes the first series of architectural objects produced by the American Institute of Illegal Architects: its headquarters -a low-tech self-sufficient community that explodes the uncertainty of international treaties on international waters- and the first of its propaganda pamphlets -a praise of symbol and meaning in contemporary western Africa-

The king is dead. Long live the King<sup>2</sup>!

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- 1 The king mentioned here refers to the main character of the traditional short-tale by Hans-Christian Andersen: "The Emperor's New Clothes", widely published and adapted for children.
  - 2 This is a traditional proclamation, first used in Xvth century France. It was hailed during the ceremony of ascension of Charles VII as an announcement of the death of the previous and a praise of the glories of the new king (*'Le roi est mort. Vive le roi!'*)