

Print a House

– A Case Study in Neo-Industrialist Production

Purpose

The aim of this project is to develop the idea of a neo-industrialist paradigm of production and to explore the potentials of this paradigm as solution to some of the economic and societal problems posed by the increasing outsourcing of industrial production to low-wage countries. At the centre of the project is a case study of the architect company eentileen.dk and their path breaking concept of 'Print a House'. This concept combines value creation through knowledge intensive and creative labour with locally based industrial mass production. The idea explored in the project is that eentileen.dk exemplifies a mode of production, which is neither classic industrial production nor post-industrial production.



we print your house !

To understand this particular mode of production and to explore the potential for implementing it in other industry sectors, we shall be coining and developing the theoretical concept of neo-industrialism. Besides satisfying pure academic curiosity, the purpose of the project is also to use the conceptual re-description of eentileen.dk as emblematic of neo-industrialism as leverage in marketing the company and to attract public attention to their way of building houses.

The Limits of Post-Industrialism

A common approach to understanding contemporary conditions of work and production is by invoking the concept of post-industrialism. The narrative supporting this concept suggests that the modern forms of industrial production as formulated in Taylorism and implemented in Fordism suffered a demise sometime in the 1960's and 1970's. The pivot point in global value creation is no longer situated in the factory, where products are produced in the form of physical object. Today value is primarily created at the drawing board, the open office landscape, at the café, or wherever the creative class of knowledge workers come up with innovative ideas. Furthermore, value allegedly no longer comes in the form of physical objects such as Ford automobiles or Philips flat screen TVs. In turn, value has the ephemeral character of immaterial ideas. We live in a knowledge society. The materialization of these ideas into physical objects is a secondary detail, which we may carefree leave to the Chinese to take care of.

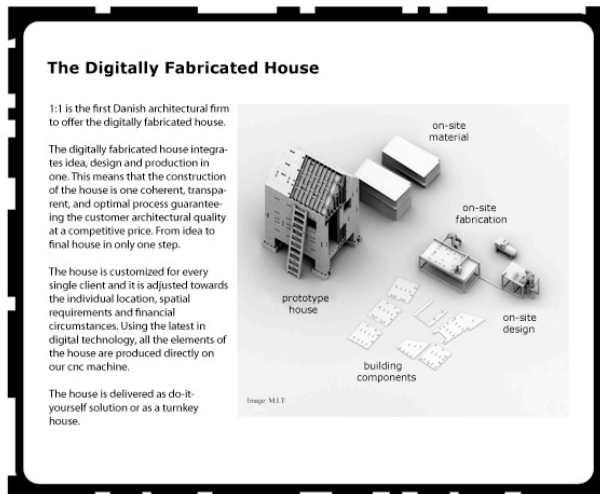
With the current project, we would like to question some of the core assumptions inherent in the concept of post-industrialism. We want to contest and perhaps even reverse the trend whereby we seem to be moving towards a society that does not produce things. There is little reason to dispute the narrative of post-industrialism as a powerful conceptualization of the condition of work and production in the Western world for the last three to four decades. However, today the concept of post-industrialism does not only function as a description of society but also as a normative framework that structures our way of imagining solutions to contemporary economic problems. 'What are we going to live from in the future?' This question seems to have surfaced as the key political question of today as there is a growing realization that the recent financial crises was perhaps not merely an accidental event in the sphere of speculative finance but rather the symptom of a more profound crisis in the real organization of our productive economies.

Nevertheless, most of the proposed answers to this question seem to be conceived within the framework of post-industrial thinking. 'Research and education' is the political mantra. The outsourcing of ever more aspects of the physical production of things to China and other low-wage countries is accepted as a natural law. The idea is that, as society, we can compensate for the loss of manual jobs by becoming even more innovative, and creative. The strategy is to *think* ourselves out of the crisis. Indeed, innovation and creativity is part of the immense growth in prosperity, we have experienced over the last three to four decades. The question remains whether these qualities are still appropriate answers to the challenges of the future.



Neo-Industrial Production

Eentileen.dk is a small architect company based in Nørrebro, Copenhagen. What makes this company unique and thus an interesting object of study is the extreme proximity between design and production. The first floor of the company looks like any other drawing office, complete with Mac computers and funky furniture. Yet, the basement is an in-house factory where actual manual labor is done. At the center of the factory is the digitally operated CNC machine. This is where houses are built. The machine converts drawings of custom designed houses into precision cut wooden elements, which are then assembled into building blocks. These building blocks are transported to the building site, where the final phase of production is much like putting together a house of Lego bricks.



At eentileen.dk, we find post-industrial and industrial production under one roof. Yet, the two paradigms are intertwined in a way that makes the whole into something, which seems to be something else entirely. While there is a crucial element of creative and immaterial labor in the production process, this element is combined with physical labor and material craftsmanship. Eentileen.dk thus seems to reverse the trend

seen in most other companies, where the material element of production is reduced and outsourced. Yet, eentileen.dk cannot be written off as mere backward looking nostalgia as the material element is reintroduced on the premises of a knowledge intensive production process. We shall be using the concept of neo-industrial production to describe and explore the specificities and potentials of this kind of production.

Project Phases

Phase one of the project is a case-study of eentileen.dk. The aim is to analyze the production process of the company while at the same time developing the concept of neo-industrialism. This phase has already been initiated and we hope to conclude it by the summer 2011. Phase one functions as a pilot study for phase two.

In phase two the scope of the project is broadened. Based on the conceptualization developed in phase one, we want to include two or three other companies in the study. These would be companies from other industry sectors than eentileen.dk, which also applies a form of neo-industrialist production. Studying these companies, we would like to explore some of the implications of thinking in terms of neo-industrialist production. Does neo-industrialist production imply a certain, and perhaps a new, form of consumer? To what extent may neo-industrialist production be generalized to other industry sectors? Which are the competitive advantages of neo-industrialist production companies? Which are the political and societal conditions that promote neo-industrialist production?

Budget and Organisation

Phase one is already initiated within existing means of funding. However, the project needs further funding, if we are to advance to phase two. At the present stage, we have only a rough idea of the organization of phase two. We would like to develop this in dialogue with the CED platform.

Participants

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