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Plastic: The banal and the "interesting"

Unlike steel, glass, stone, wood, etc., plastic is treated significantly differently in architectural discourse than it is in everyday design and construction. Since the widespread expansion of plastic production in the postwar era, architectural discourse has increasingly focussed on plastic's "interesting" qualities, that is, its remarkable and protean material qualities, its potential for greater formal expressivity, and for the social benefits its streamlined production promised. Increasingly however, treatment of plastic in architectural discourse (academic and avant-garde practice) became separated from its treatment in everyday building. Essentially, plastic in buildings bifurcated into two disciplines: architectural discourse, and technical and industrial discourse. What fell between the two is the deeply transformative effect that everyday, "banal" plastic has had on the nature of the built environment and everyday architecture and construction practice. This paper suggests that an enervated boredom among design professionals is related to disempowerment on climate, the result of plastic lock-in (infrastructural, institutional, and ideological), which can be historically traced, ultimately to the intertwinement of plastics with the fossil fuel industry. Impelled by economic incentives within an increasingly petroleum-based global economy, plastic permeated buildings, embedded and concealed within prefabricated building products. Seen through this lens of the development of plastic in buildings, the concepts of the "banal" and the interesting help unveil stultified structures and habits within academic and avant-garde architecture and pedagogy that, ever striving to be "interesting", have contributed to political irrelevance, a sense of futility, and boredom, among day-to-day industry practitioners. The paper concludes by arguing for labor organizing as a strategy for building conviviality among design and building industry professionals in conjunction with a more informed, critical, holistic, and oppositional position to plastic in building.