



# FILARCH 2020

PHILOSOPHY AND ARCHITECTURE  
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SYMPOSIUM

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**ORDEM DOS ARQUITECTOS REGIÃO NORTE**

*Porto, Portugal*

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**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**



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19. **Carlo Deregibus**, *Designing toward the future. The project as a tactical tool for shaping utopias.*

The main problem about the future is, quite obviously, that we do not know it: we cannot decide it, nor we can invent it. However, we continuously try to plan it. This planning activity is a practical need, for any action requires some kind of management of its development: for buildings, the agreement between the client and the contractor is made possible by documents describing the result, that is, the project. But in this way, the plan *fixes* the future, trying to define its *expected* qualities: in systems theory terms, it is the present of the future, more than the future of the present. Therefore, defining the project also originates the conditions for the project itself to fail, because the future will surely be different and unexpected. Either due to accidents and anomalies or to main events – like the current emergency of the Covid-19 – the project will have to change, to adapt to new conditions, to answer to questions that were unthinkable at the time of its completion. We could say that the traditionally intended project is, somehow, ontologically false, because it tries to model the future while it is, indeed, nothing more than *a model of the expectations toward a desired future*. This also means that utopias are impossible to realize not because of their revolutionary nature, but because they describe futures: that is, they imagine a future without taking in account that, even by imagining it, we are already changing it. Therefore, we could simply say, “Plans are useless, but planning is indispensable”, accepting its aleatory side. Or rather, we could overcome the common way of intending the project, and develop its tactical and strategic power. Using the project as a tactical tool means taking into account the *radical contingency* of the process, exploiting its *potential*: that is, the most promising directions that continuously emerge, *whatever* they may be. This propensity of the situation cannot be imposed nor modelled but, at the same time, we can influence it through the project itself, by *evolving* it all through the process: in other words, such a project continuously sets *inception of potential* in the process, possibly evolving in a plan, instead of trying to define the plan itself. Time is a decisive factor, in this idea of the project. On the one hand, the project must adapt itself to the ever-changing contingency

while, at the same time, influencing it: this autopoietic character highlights its tactical dimensions, as it must be carried on continuously, in what we can call a *formative* way. On the other, this attitude may inspire a new way of intending and shaping utopias: instead of picturing an ontologically false future, a tactical project exploits any occasion for orienting its specific contingency toward that future, shaping it all along the process. Thus, a utopia describing future spaces by forcing their *facticity* will surely fail: but evolving the project in a tactical tool makes it possible to realize utopias defining the *qualities* of those spaces and their performativity.

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