From authorial practices to network cooperation in the production of social space. An ANT approach to design

(Article begins on next page)

09 November 2024

eurau18
ALICANTE18

EUROPEAN RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM

9TH CONGRESS

retroactiveresearch

ARCHITECTURE'S CAPACITY TO CHALLENGE AND
EXTEND THE LIMITS OF OTHER DISCIPLINES

ALICANTE * 19/20/21/22 SEPTEMBER 2018

CONGRESS PROCEEDINGS

Titulación de Arquitectura

ESCUELA POLITÉCNICA SUPERIOR Alicante University

Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n 03690 San Vicente del Raspeig. Alicante (SPAIN)

eurau@ua.es

From authorial practices to network cooperation in the production of social space

An ANT approach to design

Rispoli, Micol[1]
1. Philosophy of Interior Architecture, University of Naples Federico II, Napoli, Italy

Synopsis

This paper describes my research topic, which is focused on exploring new approaches in order to rethink *design* in a "non-authorial" form, challenging the profession's dominant perspectives and highlighting that architects have the possibility to fill an ethical, social and political gap in our profession.

My research seeks to investigate on the issue of the production of architectural and urban space through comparing the traditional practices that favour an hegemonic role for the architect with those linked to Bruno Latour's ANT - Actor Network Theory -, in which the architect operates within a more complex web of relationships between other subjects, other actors, other agents of different nature and culture.

Therefore it suggests to go beyond the idea of architecture as an autonomous practice, questioning and crossing habitual disciplinary boundaries.

Key words: Actor Network Theory, loss of authorship, social network, social condenser, matters of concern.

1. A philosophy of space

Network cooperation means here an approach based on the ANT, a theoretical model developed by some sociologists - including Bruno Latour - who affirm that every scientific idea, technical artefact or social fact is the product of a complex web of relationships, in which human and non-human social actors interact.

To better understand the meaning of this model and how could be linked to architectural design, it's necessary to retrace the principles expressed by Peter Sloterdijk - philosopher to whom Latour makes reference - who first grasped the depth and extension of the concept of design.

In his most important work - *Spheres* - Sloterdijk considers the *microsphere* as the original unit of the individual: the fetal pre-subject suspended in the amniotic medium that will be the origin of the human need to create spaces within which to establish an atmosphere, an anthropic determination.

The *macrospheres* are, instead, the social collectors. In the third volume he describes the idea of *foam society*, at the decline of the European macrosphere occurred with the great explorations, which destroyed the unitary image of the world.

> With the concept of foam we describe an agglomeration of bubbles (…), aggregates of spherological neighbourhoods in which each "cell" builds a self-completing context (…), a "household" that is maintained by dyadic and pluripolar resonances and that is animated by its very own dynamic. (Sloterdijk, 2004)

According to Sloterdijk, historically the personal sphere has always been formed at the expense of the foreign. So he calls on us to think about the human subject, and the supra-individual subjects that we call "society" and "civilization", together with objects, things, nature, animals, plants and the environment. These "things", this "foreign sphere" so far has always been objectified, looted, taken for granted, exploited.

By using the term "co-immunity", he thinks of an unprecedented coupling between the personal and the foreign sphere: between human and non-human, as well as between human beings, to preserve themselves and the biosphere as an entity capable of guaranteeing their survival.

2. A new idea of design

The concept of *design* is undergoing a profound change.

> To think of artifacts in terms of design mean conceiving of them less and less as modernist objects, and (…) more and more as "things". (Latour, 2009).

The Actor-Network-Theory is the specific approach of the STS *science and technology studies* that - having represented, until a few years ago, a small part of the social sciences that wanted to transform the *matters of fact* produced by the *instrumental reason* into complex gatherings of human and non-human and demonstrate that "artefacts do have a policy" and that a "parliament of things" can be established - have now reached a dimension such as to produce a reorientation between powers and a very critical position towards authorship.

The reconstruction of our collective life on earth must be carried out with an attitude that underlies *design* with these new words: modesty, care, precaution, mastery, preservation, re-design.

Design must be open to operate in an open and changing cosmos of multiple relationships.

3. The architect's tasks

The architect exercises his powers in a network made of a plurality of forces, of *actors*.

Awan and Schneider, Professors at Sheffield University, and Jeremy Till, Professor and Head of Central Saint Martins, are the authors of *Spatial Agency*, a research project that presents a new way of looking at how buildings and space can be produced.

Recalling Latour they argue that *as matters of fact*, buildings can be subjected to rules and methods, and they can be treated as objects. Priority is given to those aspects associated with their static properties: the visual, the technical, which is also the a-temporal. As *matters of concern*, they enter into socially embedded networks - in which the *consequences* of architecture are of much more significance than its *objects* - and more 'relational' and 'contingent' aspects are highlighted: the processes of their production, their occupation over time, their intrinsic temporality, their relation to society and nature.

A loss of control should not be seen as a threat to professional expertise, but as an inevitable condition that must be dealt with in a positive light: buildings and spaces are to be treated as part of a dynamic context of social and environmental networks.

The architect as *demiurge-author* must give way to the architect as *social condenser,* who effect change through allowing others to become actors of their spatial environments, opening up new freedoms and potentials.

4. Bibliography

AWAN, Nishat, Tatjana SCHNEIDER and Jeremy TILL, 2011. Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture. Abingdon; New York: Routledge. ISBN 978-0415571937.
BODEI, Remo, 2009, La vita delle cose. Bari: Laterza. ISBN 9788842095569.
ARMANDO, Alessandro e Giovanni DURBIANO, 2017. Teoria del progetto architettonico. Dai disegni agli effetti. Roma: Catucci. ISBN 9788843088195.
LATOUR, Bruno, 2008. Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design (With Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk) In: Proceedings of the 2008 Annual International Conference of the Design History Society, pp. 2-10.
LATOUR Bruno, 1998. On Recalling ANT. In Actor Network Theory and After. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 15-25. ISBN: 978-0-631-21194-5.
LATOUR, Bruno, Albena YANEVA, 2008. Give Me a Gun and I Will Make All Buildings Move: An ANT's View of Architecture. In GESIER Reto, Explorations in Architecture: Teaching, Design, Research. Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, p. 80-89. ISBN: 978-3-7643-8921-5.
SLOTERDIJK, Peter, 2009. Du mußt dein Leben ändern. Über Religion, Artistik und Anthropotechnik, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. [Devi cambiare la tua vita]. Milano: Raffaello Cortina. ISBN 9788860303615
SLOTERDIJK, Peter, 2004. Sphären III - Schäume, Plurale Sphärologie. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. [Sfere III. Schiume]. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

SLOTERDIJK, Peter, 1999. Spharen I: Globen. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. [Sfere II. Globi]. Milano: Raffaello Cortina. ISBN: 9788860307033.

SLOTERDIJK, Peter, 1998. Sphären I - Blasen, Mikrosphärologie. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp. [Sfere I. Bolle]. Roma: Meltemi. ISBN 9788883536335.

TILL, Jeremy, 2009. Architecture depends, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. ISBN: 9780262012539.

YANEVA, Albena, 2012. Mapping Controversies in Architecture, Farnham: Ashgate. ISBN: 978-1-4094-2668-4.

YANEVA, Albena, Liam HEAPHY, 2012, Urban controversies and the making of the social. In Architectural Research Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 29-36. ISBN: 978-1-4094-2668-4. Retrieved from doi: 10.1017/S1359135512000267.

Biography

Micol Rispoli. Italian architect and PhD candidate in Philosophy - namely "Philosophy of Interior Architecture" - at Federico II of Naples.

She graduated from University of Naples Federico II with a degree in Architecture in 2012 and in 2013 obtained a master degree in Events and Museum Curator from Istituto Europeo di Design – IED in Rome.

Since then she has been both carrying out research activities - at Federico II in Naples, Politecnico of Milan and ELISAVA Barcelona - and working to several projects with great interest in social and environmental sustainability, participatory design and bottom-up processes.

She recently started working on her thesis that - inspired by Bruno Latour's ANT - is concerned with the revaluation of the social and political dimensions of architecture, not considering it as an autonomous practice, but rather as one of the many that contribute to the collective production of space.