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Meaning in Architecture, now

*Original*
Meaning in Architecture, now / Deregibus, C., Alison, A.. - In: PHILOSOPHY KITCHEN. - ISSN 2385-1945. - ELETTRONICO. - 21:(2024), pp. 1-258.

*Availability:*
This version is available at: 11583/2995796 since: 2025-01-23T13:39:45Z

*Publisher:*
Università degli Studi di Torino

*Published*
DOI:

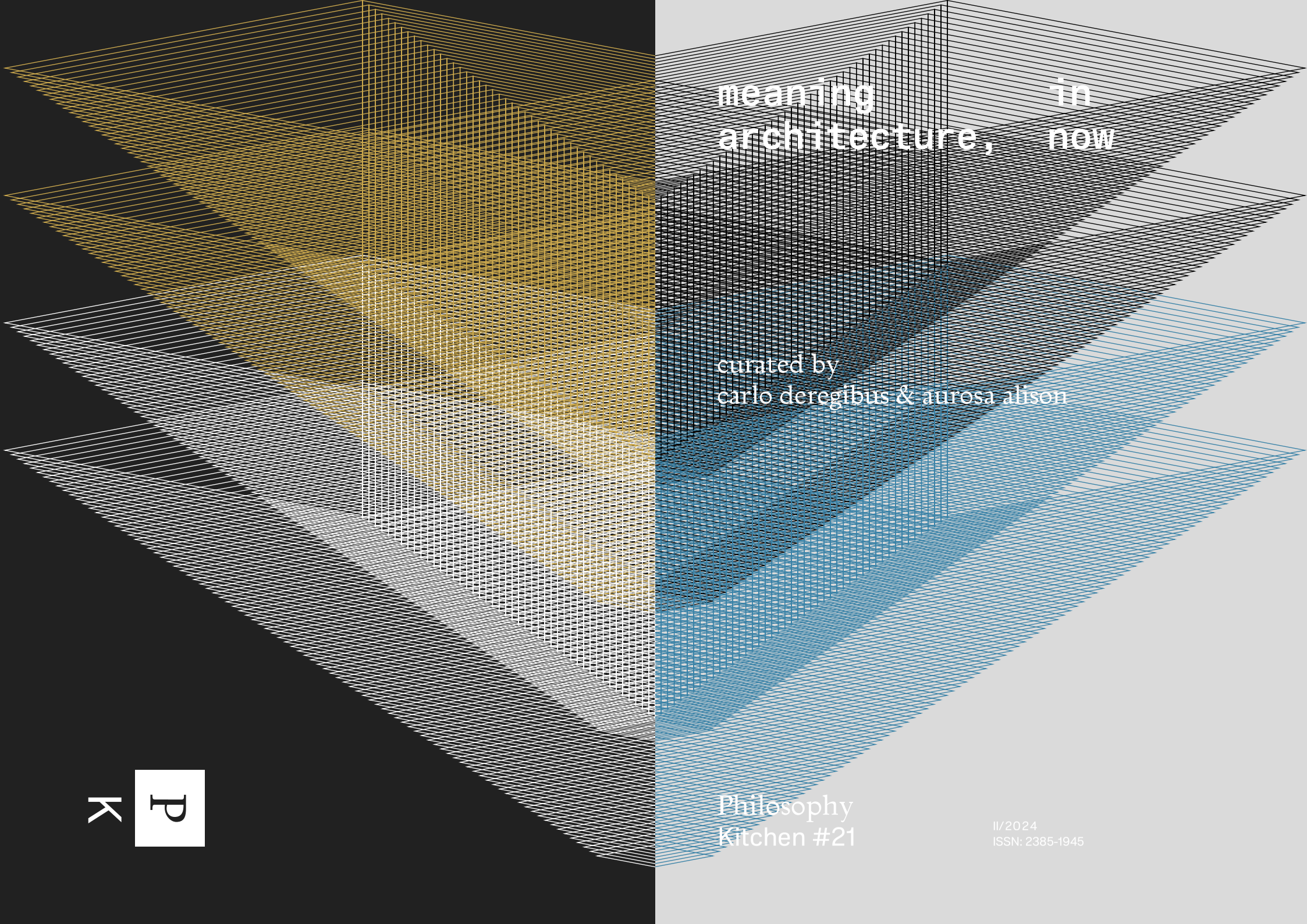
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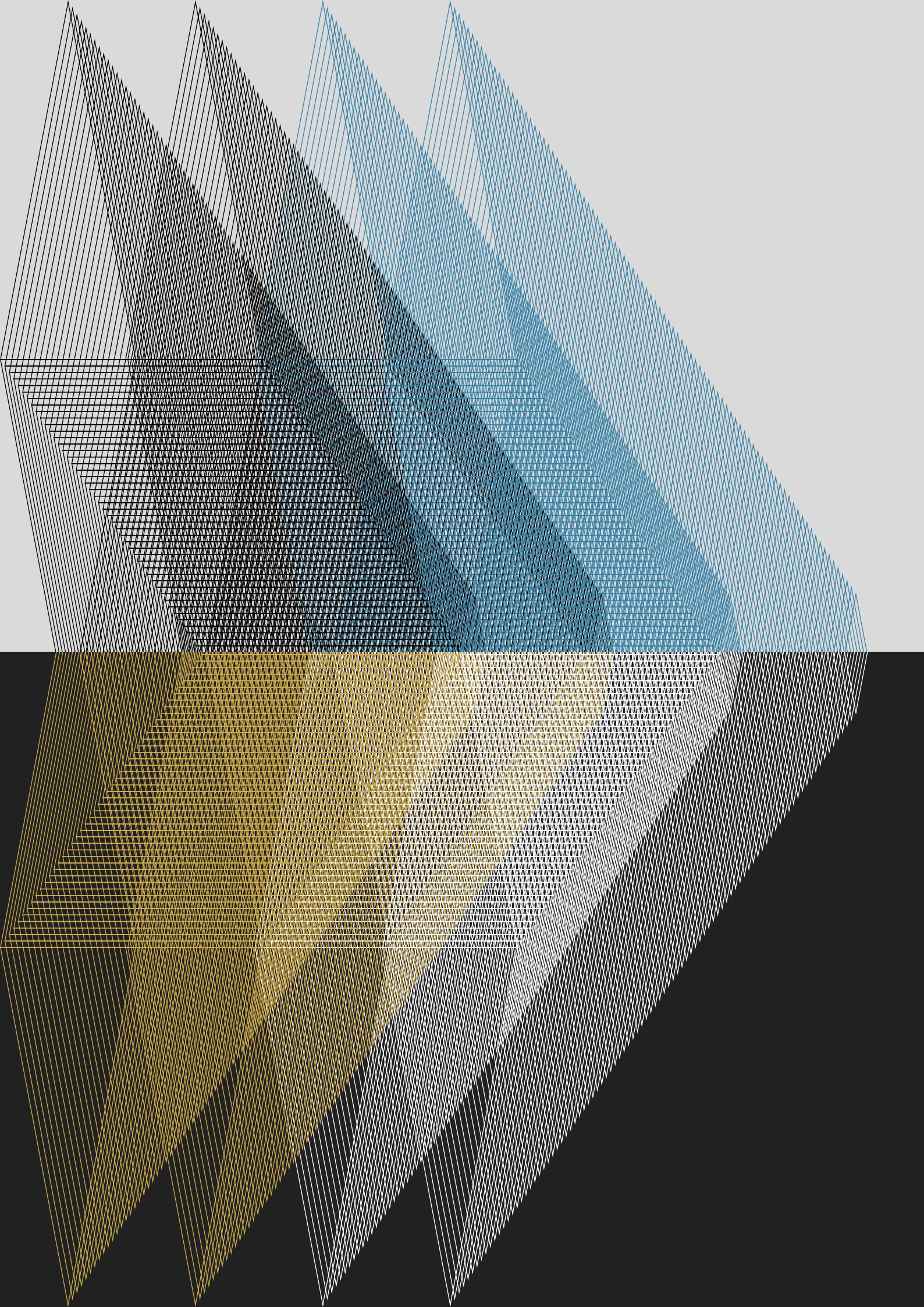


# meaning in architecture, now

curated by
carlo deregibus & aurosa alison

Philosophy Kitchen #21

II/2024
ISSN: 2385-1945



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This issue is dedicated to the memory of George Baird (1939-2023), whom we contacted at the beginning of this adventure and whose involvement we so hoped for, and Gevork Hartoonian (1946-2024), who enthusiastically answered our call, though he was unable to fulfil his contribution. May their legacy continue to inspire us all.




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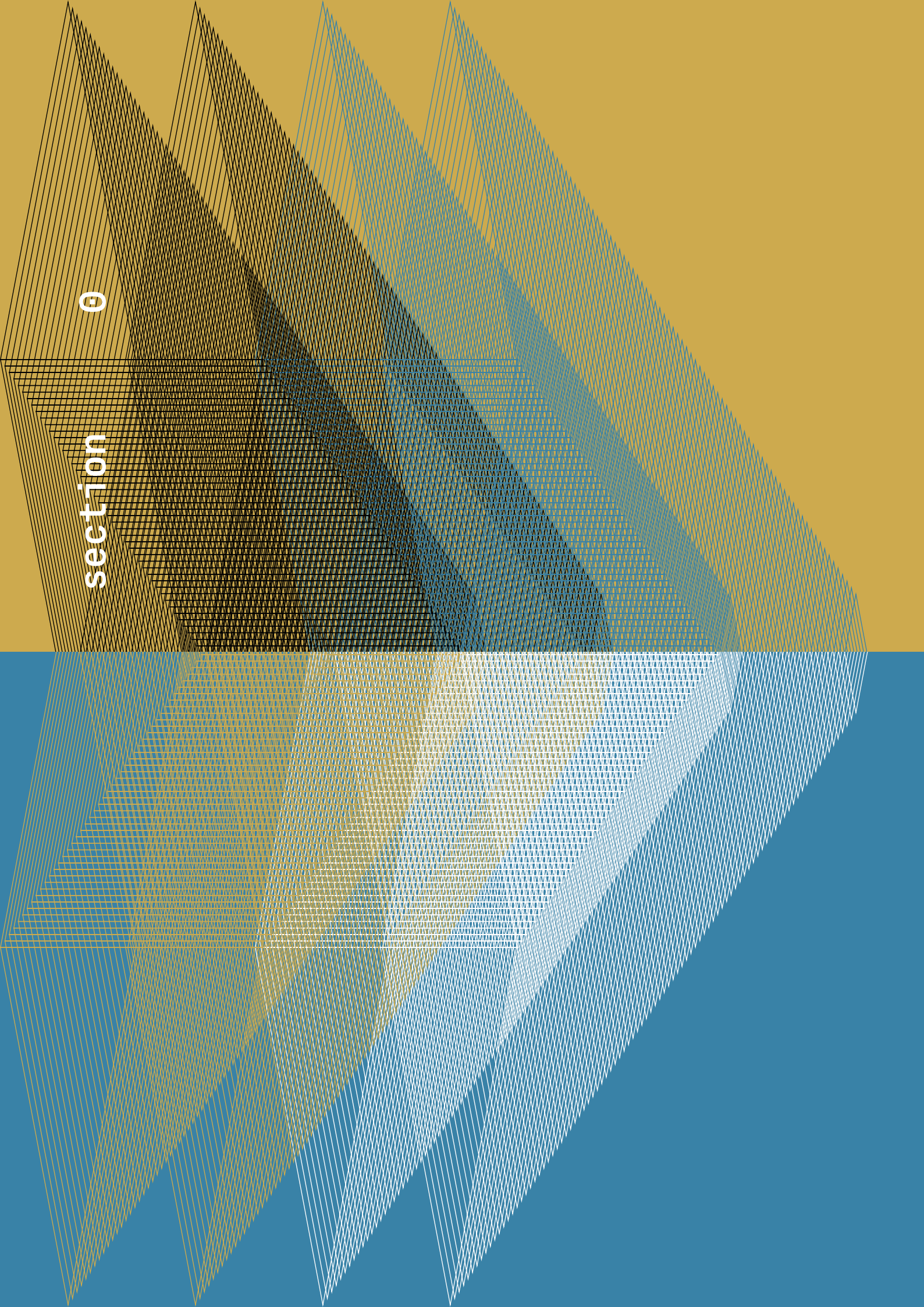
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Section 0

FOREWORD

# Introducing Meaning in Architecture, now*


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The connection between form and meaning has been so intrinsic that it has stayed mainly hidden for centuries. Then, around fifty years ago, the issue of meaning suddenly began storming in the architectural world, with many scholars and practitioners attempting to rebuild the fading link to the form. After the globalisation and the atomisation of thoughts of the last decades, debating the issue again could seem meaningless. The form is now a purely aesthetic feature or a counterfeit fetish for everchanging meanings. Yet, we continue to design, produce, and critique architecture, and attribute meanings, intentions, and hopes to its forms. We want, once more, to discuss and explore the elusive but, at the same time, inescapable connection between meaning and architecture.

*The whole conception of the issue is shared by both authors. The "answers" in parallel columns are by each credited author



Philosophy Kitchen. Rivista di filosofia contemporanea
#21, II/2024, 7 — 15

## One issue

We are used to looking at architecture as a bearer of meanings. For centuries, the connection between form and meaning has been so intrinsic that it stayed mainly hidden, implicitly inscribed in the stones, like an alleged premise relying on unexpressed – but jolly performative – social conventions. Through Egyptian, classical, mediaeval, baroque, renaissance, industrial and many other architectural times, this link survived till the Modern – where the meanings would be as new as the men to whom it was destined. It even lasted in the so-called Post-Modern architecture: in any case, shapes were expected to vehiculate a meaning of a kind – albeit a commercial, pop, or ridiculous one. But the streams of meaning were starting to scatter, questioning the unambiguousness of its link with the form.

The new problem suddenly gained fantastic attention in the world of architecture. Designers started to map everything in diagrams, critics and scholars began reading Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, and philosophers were invited to teach in architecture schools, all figuring out how to confirm what had been revealed as the paramount basis of architectural design. The storming debate is well represented in a book curated by Charles Jencks and Georges Baird: *Meaning in Architecture*, first published in London and quickly translated. It was a pretty uncommon book, collecting more than a dozen often contrasting texts that dealt with the issue of meaning in various ways. Some adopted a semiological approach, others were more phenomenological; some analysed case studies critically, others experimented ethnographic techniques; some used many images, others just some diagrams. The original point was that there was no communal basis: quite the opposite, the papers pushed opposite directions – with the conflict highlighted by the curators, who promoted a series of reciprocal comments on the texts, animating a written debate. So various were the alternatives that *Meaning in Architecture* resulted in a *map* of many possible interpretations of the main issue – even if all relied on the (indeed vain) belief that defining *a* relation between shapes and meaning was possible.

Half a century later, this debate on meaning seems relatively meaningless. Time has proved that the mission of Modernity, so absolute as to polarise any debate, eventually turned out to be aleatory; that the freedom claimed by the Post-Modern architecture was deceptive and evanescent; that those were just the first hints of a change that became overwhelming in the new millennium, with an overpowering globalisation and a mesmerising pulverisation of thoughts. The form is now perceived as a purely aesthetic feature, devoid of any deep meaning or, at most, as part of a system of communication of meanings: in any case, its unambiguity is given for granted. Or rather, it is considered absolute, endless time in different ways: in fact, as no judgement is absolute anymore, each can claim to be such.

Meaning resists: only, so multiplied and fragmented that cultural geography is not evenly possible anymore. New meanings – globalisation again, but also issues related to Anthropocene, gentrification, ecologies, resilience, gender studies, and many others – offer endless possibilities for theorising: still, they refer to practices separate from each other,

disconnected and void of any possible communication point. Such fragmentation is confirmed, too, by the evolution of art theories and the growing distance between art and market, meaning and experience, perception and understanding.

Yet, despite this overwhelming uncertainty, we design, produce, and critique architecture, and attribute meanings, intentions, and hopes to its forms. We continue to perform a relation between meaning and form, with the awareness of not controlling it. Once again, we want to discuss and explore this elusive but, at the same time, inescapable connection. And we wanted, too, to promote a debate again, just like Jencks and Baird did half a century ago: hence, fighting the solipsistic, atomising tendency of contemporary scholar works, all authors were invited to reciprocally comment on their papers, making meaning a living element all through the pages.

## Three premises

This whole issue relies on three methodological assumptions that we consider paramount.

The first is that today, far from disappearing, meanings vastly exceed forms. Hence, it is always and again possible to rediscover and redesign the relationship between them, and this relation will change continuously and unpredictably, depending on various systems whose mutual irritation often produces unforeseeable changes; nevertheless, it stays. Therefore, even if meaning trends are much faster than shape transformations, the second can intercept or anticipate them. Better said, shapes can make meanings possible depending on their design features.

The second is that it is impossible to separate architecture's practical and theoretical dimensions, or rather, theory and practice constitute what Derrida would have labelled an oppositive couple. Therefore, architectural design must always be understood through its performative dimension, and according to the effects it produces. To those effects, the distinction between *design* and *architectural design is* as closely as problematically bounded, as both bear meanings, albeit of different kinds.

The third is the systemic dimension of architecture, which intertwines sociological, technical and economic conditions. This net has always been there, but today, it implies a constitutive relationship with a pervasive neoliberal system, a confrontation with a productive dimension that completely cancels the traditional craftsmanship associated with architecture, and a profound change in architectural workflows that changes how design is conceived and developed – with fantastic effects on meaning.

The connections between these three assumptions – for example, the tension between individual action and the systemic dimension, from which the tactical and strategic sides of design emerge – are equally crucial.

## Four questions

We posed four main questions, allowing the authors to answer with theoretical and practical approaches, using examples and case studies or elaborating a speculative perspective. Then, as usual

## — New forms of meaning

Places have always been gatherers of social meanings in symbolic and experience senses. How can this traditional practice of inscribing meaning into places match the continuous increase of new ways of concrete and virtual socialising (here considering from the metaverse to the visual turn) with the ontologic and practical dimension of design? In the wake of the rhetoric of democratising communicative, social, and relational processes, is it possible to graft meaning into public space, or do these co-design approaches merely make their participants *believe* they are doing so? Is it the *process* (or the program) that gives meaning to an architecture whose forms have no relevance but as a technical transposition, or, on the contrary, should architecture be considered and treated as a *palimpsest* that lives indifferently from its uses, just as a neutral backdrop? In between, an infinite nuance of practices and approaches.

### Carlo Deregibus

There is a very narrow road for architects to graft meanings into processes. On the one hand, any possible design actions define a boundary of what can and cannot be done, experienced and felt in a place – hence, a set of possible meanings. On the other hand, this possibility will remain in the future and cannot be explained in real terms; hence, those meanings cannot be pre-determined.

Processes tend to give the impression of reducing the risk that these "predictions" are wrong, as all involved people "decided" it – thus, they accepted sharing the risk. However, this way, we produce a *present-of-the-future* and lose the potential of what we don't know. Conversely, especially in the processes, designers can work with the *futures-of-the-present* by exploiting the tactical power of the project. This means passing from the ideal vision of architecture as a purely artistic act to a systemic dimension, where many (if not endless) ideal alternatives can be developed by maximising the situation's potential, merging design's creative and tactical sides.

### Aurosa Alison

Renato De Fusco, in 1973, published *Signs, History and Design of Architecture*. A fundamental text definitively clarifies the binomial meaning and signifier in architecture. The focus of design intention is on the plan, which De Fusco describes as the leading figure of interior space. A space in the aesthetic sphere turns out to be the result of the union of form and content, which instead appears impossible in the semiotic sphere where sign and signified are divided. Architectural elements, such as signs, are thus revealed in the interior space, where everything arises as a more significant factor than the architectural sign.

In the light of De Fusco's far-sighted theorizing, we should reestablish synchrony between all the binomials that rational thought likes to disunite signified/form, signifier/meaning, form/content, interior/exterior.

Spaces inhabited, experienced, and experienced all confront all that is perceived and introjected beyond the dialectics provided by confirmation

## — New meanings of form

There are some transversal and substantial meanings that likely impact architecture strongly. The first one is sustainability. How could we overcome aestheticising practices or, conversely, purely performance-based approaches, to develop an authentically ecological dimension of design? Is it a matter of norms, culture, actions, techniques, methods, forms, strategies, or other factors? The second meaning is the so-called design-for-all. This approach collects practical measures – to gran accessibility, for instance – and cultural ones – such as gendered urban studies – and yet, curiously, it substantiates in variously normed bureaucratic limitations only: as if the design did not, ontologically, define the limits of *some* freedom. How could we overcome this view, clinging to the logic of protecting minority groups while developing the theme of freedom *in* design and *in* shapes?

### Carlo Deregibus

Periodically, new trends likely revolutionise architectural practice. Sustainable design has been studied since the fifties, and traditional architecture has been often described as sustainable *de facto*. Many design-for-all proposals negate solutions considered inclusive and ethical just some years ago. Understanding those trends in their systemic dimension is paramount in the neo-liberal system that connects politics and the market to unprecedented levels. Sustainability protocols are the clearest example, pushing a set of connected solutions whose combined effect condemns building costs to incredible levels. The fragmentation of the sciences reinforces this shift, continuously updating unrelated technical norms. Hence, sustainability would be far more effective if it was less mediatic and technical but based on design, and design-for-all should be developed in the opposite direction, that is, designing-for-*any*, as any definition of groups ontologically produces exclusions. However, those collective tendencies undoubtedly originate meanings, but their relation to forms is always, again, to be defined in the project.

### Aurosa Alison

Taking up De Fusco again, the architectural sign would belong to a cultural intention and not a natural symptom. The associative role of *Einfühlung* remains at the basis of the transcription between subject and object. The empathic contribution of the meaning of architecture is not placed in the background but is revealed as an advocate of a whole, where forms assume the role of meanings and vice versa. In the case of the relationship between architecture and atmospheres, the fundamental union of design, which becomes such only if it is perceived, becomes evident. From Harry F. Mallgrave to Lao Tze, what happens within a space is (or is configured) the reality of architecture. Schmarsow reminds us that architecture is a creative discussion with the subject; in that creativity, the most fruitful exchange takes place, which is that of existence. In this regard, forms take on new meanings by illustrating the mutual relationship between designed space and lived space. De Fusco's enclosure is no longer such now when form and meaning intercede for new forms of living in a unified message.

## — Resilience of meanings

There is architecture, and Architecture. Most designers never really deal with extraordinary works (like theatres, churches, museums), the buildings we typically think of as bearers of shared meaning. Instead, they work on ordinary, much less exciting constructions. A remarkable ordinary is explored in little, advanced *Architectural* experimentations – an élite issue managed by leading architects as they were proofs of concepts. However, we are speaking of the most annoying routine works, and of the meaning that arises from ceaseless variations and repetitions, in real estate projects just as in slums. Devoid of any Architectural semantic layering, we just have architecture: perhaps far from academic discussions and glossy magazines, this immensely performative architecture shapes our world. Ontologically and practically speaking, is Architectural design different from architectural design? And how the advent of AI-based tools will impact this last one?

### Carlo Deregibus

In my life, I have designed many ordinary buildings and some extraordinary ones. My firm belief is that nothing changes from the point of view of architectural design. In any case, there are functional and non-functional requirements, and expectations of various kinds. In any case, the challenge is to define an architectural idea while controlling so many technical issues. In any case, the final building will be "alone", entering various systems of experience and communication. What truthfully changes is the system of meanings that sustain and somehow inflate the buildings. In extraordinary cases, narratives will be mainly about big abstract concepts and supposedly shared (or politically relevant) meanings, while in ordinary cases, there will be meanings of different kinds, close to the relevance for the individual – think of how important it is to buy a house for most people, or how relevant are production systems and the indirect meanings they bear. *Architecture*, and *architectures*, shape all these direct and indirect meanings, composing everchanging systems. the design will be just as challenging, meaningful, and potentially successful – where the success is the possibility of making people's lives better.

### Aurosa Alison

In *Structuralism and Semiology* (1974), Gillo Dorfles takes up the concept of shelter and necessary protection as essential factors in constructing a space. In the question of shelter, there is, according to Dorfles, no need to communicate something; somewhat the need to defend oneself. In responding about the need to protect oneself, Geoffry Broadbent uses the metaphor of the visual clutter around us. Perhaps that disorder is precisely the order of the contemporary, in which symbolic factors have taken over the pragmatic side of reality. Architectural significance, for Dorfles, remains non-conceptual and non-rational but symbolic. What remains of architecture is it taking on ethically and aesthetically original and revolutionary aspects, public and private, substantive and decorative. It is all part of a single system that, over the years, has been tried to split but which history describes as indissoluble, unique, autonomous, self-producing and self-regenerating. The hope remains that we can start talking about architecture again, not through new forms and meanings but through a new multidisciplinary network capable of introducing and manifesting the same language.

## — Resilience of forms

The built environment is incredibly resilient. Indeed, this particular kind of resilience does not always fit uses, or meanings. The Italian case is epitomic in this sense, with the continuous calls to regenerative processes opposed to desperate heritage safeguard measures. *Palazzo dei Diamanti* in Ferrara or the *Meazza Stadium* in San Siro, Milano, raised impressive media storms, but they are the tip of an immense iceberg: the fight between different values and meanings layered on shapes and in shapes. How can this clash be solved? Should the correct answer be pursuing the quality of the project or, rather, of the process? Does the problem originate in bureaucracy and procedures or, rather, in management and devising skills? And how do diverse conflicting meanings – for instance, the usage of historical buildings, seismic safety, energy saving, the cost of interventions, fire safety, accessibility, and so on – intertwine in the shapes?

### Carlo Deregibus

The cultural dimension of the past depends a lot on place and time. Until some decades ago, the possibility of changing heritage balanced the preservation issues that now seem much more pronounced. This is only the last and strongest result of the *crisis of critics*. Indeed, never in history have there been so many possible styles, nor has architectural judgment been so tricky. Hence, how can we properly evaluate the past? The result is the rise of an over-precautionary approach – indeed, a bureaucratic drift. All buildings over 70 years old are now automatically considered "important" in Italy. Minor modifications are allowed, but not on their "principal" features. Consequently, urban-scale radical changes are now impossible, and every new building must be "compatible" with this enlarged heritage. No surprise that contemporary architecture in Italy is so weak. Nevertheless, we can (and must) overcome this general situation only *through* design. Mastery in architecture is precisely the ability to tactically exploit the constraints to merge the resilience of form with new meanings, pursuing new architectural aims.

### Aurosa Alison

As an architect should feel a duty to ask what happens or what should happen within their projects, let us also take a step forward concerning the concept of form. Form is not solely what appears but is realized through what happens in space. Gillo Dorfles, in the introduction of *Sense and Meaninglessness in Today's Art* (1971), emphasizes the mutual relationship between sense and meaning. To this day, he dwells on a clarification that is still very important, namely, to the refinement of common sense. What we now like to call society has for years been described through the collective figures of meaning: collective imaginary, collective sense. This means that what happens within the meaning (architecture) is the form. The form, in turn, is reflected in its envelope. Picking up on Vico, Dorfles defines collectivity from not only the people or a nation but also from humankind. Humankind possesses the pre-existential form of dwelling, which, echoing Vitruvius, builds huts to defend itself from the wilderness. Even today, we are a genus inclined to protect ourselves and share meanings.

## Two terms

The four questions were variously answered, even if rarely in a direct way. Hence, we organised the contributions into four main sections, based on the reciprocal and traditional articulation between *theory* and *practice*. Aware of the conceptual prejudgements that this distinction implies and the problems it poses, the four sections work more on the relation between them than on their definition. In other words, we used this oppositive couple (theory-practice) to articulate their in-between. Hence, the first section articulates a continuous shift between the two categories. In contrast, the second, third and fourth ones illustrate a gradual balancing, with more theoretical papers – where the references to practical cases sustain a conceptual position – to critical analysis of case studies, where the practice has the central role.

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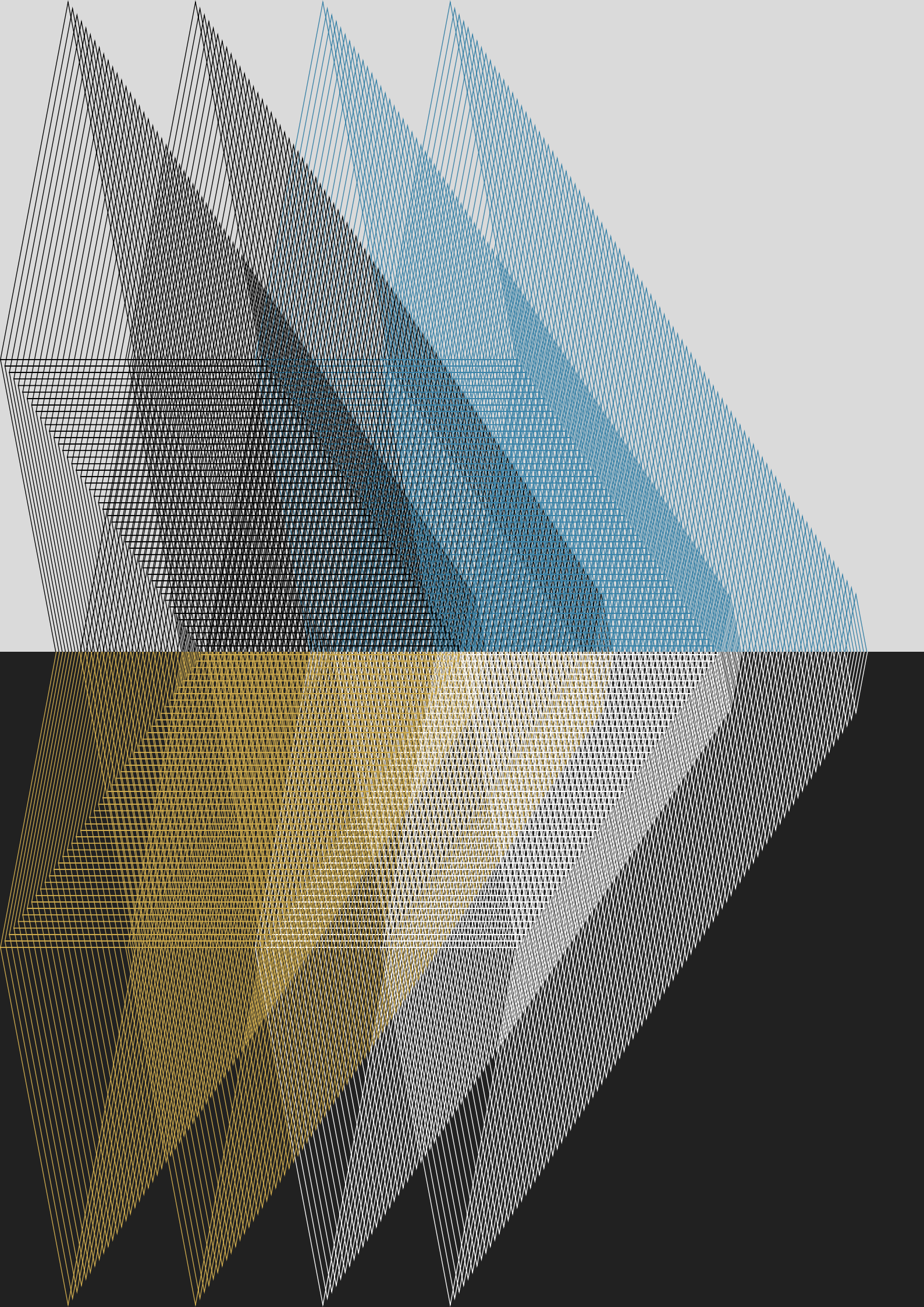
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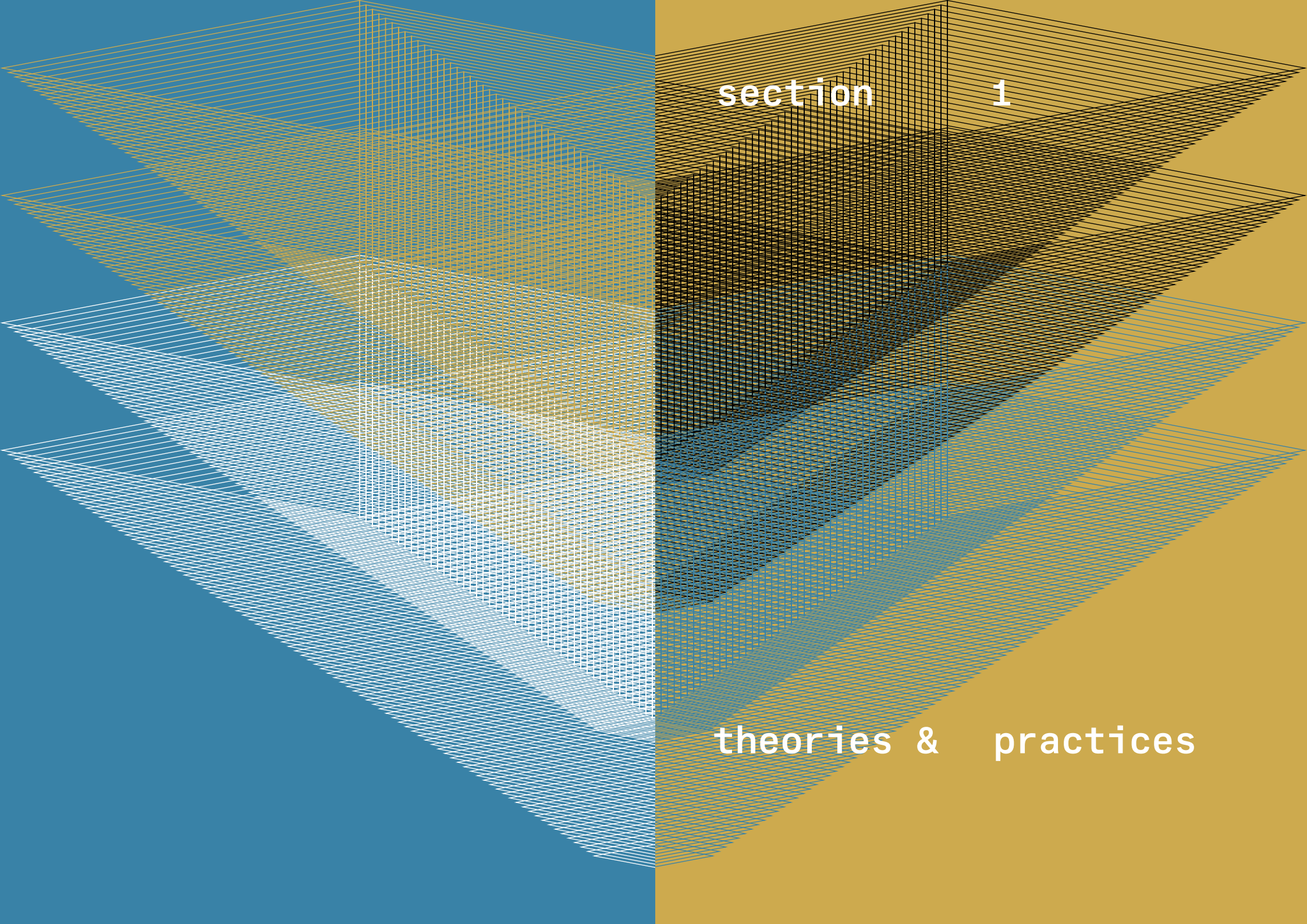
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section 1
theories & practices

# Meaning in Architecture, now. A debate*


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More than fifty years have passed since the publication of "Meaning in Architecture", yet the debate on the issue of meaning in architecture continues to evolve and engage the architectural community, even if in subtler, less apparent ways than in the past.

Five questions. Five women. Five places. Five sensitivities. Five visions of architecture. This debate looks at the most critical emerging architectural trends, using the peculiar multivalence of meaning to discuss its architectural nature in a rich discussion involving various architects and scholars in five parallel interviews. Delving into the independence (or not) of architecture, the relevance (or not) of the process, the confrontation between shapes and uses, the economic dimension of design and the rise of AI, the debate aims to give a multifaceted interpretation of meanings, or rather, to explore how architectural design is evolving, and why. The answers were blind and even unknown to each other, so to better highlight the different approaches and ideas: to the reader the possibility of side-reading them and adhering to one, all or even none, postulating a distinct personal position.

* The introduction, the questions and the conclusion are by Carlo Deregibus. Answers and comments are by the credited authors.


— MEANING IN ARCHITECTURE
— ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN
— DESIGN-FOR-ALL
— ANY
— DESIGN PROCESS
— FORMALISM
— AI




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## Always again

The one thing we can safely say about *meaning in architecture* is that no one honestly knows what meaning means, or rather, each refers to meaning by meaning different things. (GL) That was, in fact, the programmatic premise of the book edited by Charles Jencks and George Baird, a "veritable Tower of Babel" (Bletter 1971) where the meaning of meaning continuously shifted. Partly, this vagueness comes from the apparent confrontation with the emerging philosophical dimension of meaning: for example, architects rarely master the difference between semiology (after Ferdinand de Saussure) and semiotics (after Charles Sanders Peirce and then Charles William Morris) – even Jencks and Baird were likely on opposite parts on that – nor can discern the meticulous definitions by Charles Kay Ogden and Armstrong Richards that Jencks seemed to love. Party, it is the result of the misuse of technical terms and common language, where meaning can alternatively be akin to "reason", "sense", "value", or "trace": architects are used to explain the reasons for their proposals, and the whole debate between modernism and post-modernism can be defined using these terms. The combined result of those two factors,

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
Thinking back at Sarah Robinson's essay [see the paper at the end of Part 1], I think this same problem applies to the meaning of ecological architecture – and certainly to the term "sustainability", as described by Guy and Farmer nearly two decades ago (Guy & Farmer 2001).

indulging the rhetorical tendency of architects, led to fantastic results, produced a decade of debates and, even more importantly, redefined the language of architecture both in theory – with new use of figures of speech as a tool for analysing design methods and an extensive application of language rules – and in practice – with more and more designer eager to fill their proposal with symbolism and metaphors devoid of any political or ethical afflatus.

Far from arriving at convergence, the discussion on meaning spread uncontrolled, involving philosophers, historians, and critics, ending with being rejected and criticised. Up to the point that, even if the book by Jencks is considered a classic (Broadbent 1977; Nesbitt 1996; Hays 1998; Mallgrave 2005; Schumacher 2012. Cfr. Martin 2002; Steen 2015), this inconclusive character always emerges (Eisenman 1970; Bletter 1971; Hays 2010; Mallgrave & Goodman 2011; Heynen & Wright 2012). Indeed, strange would be the opposite, as Jencks and Baird «have consciously sought out views which contradict our own and each of the others» (Jencks 1969a, 7). The inescapable freedom granted to anyone – to attribute meanings at preference – joined with the fallacy of architectural position after modernism – made it possible to ascribe to everything, whether it was a chair, an entrance or a plan, supposed or real meanings as deep as obscure. But at the same time, this radical ambiguity (Dorfles 1984) or multivalence (Jencks 1969b) made it impossible to derive a veritable and reliable design method from those reasonings. In other words, paraphrasing the famous quote by Rafael Moneo,

> a discomforting thought arises: was it not perhaps at the very point when the idea of *meaning* became clearly articulated in architectural theory [...] that the reality of its existence, its traditional operation in history, became finally impossible? Did not the historical awareness of the fact of *meaning* in architectural theory forever bar the unity of its practice? Or to put it another way, is not the theoretical recognition of a fact the symptom of its loss? Hence the extreme difficulty of applying the concept of *meaning* to current architecture, in spite of our awareness of its value in explaining a historical tradition. (Moneo 1978, 40. The substitution of *type* with *meaning* is mine)

Not casually, the concepts of type and meaning share another feature. They both rely on the past. The present understanding is described as the natural evolution of history, with a positivist allusion to the construction of values and a romantic blindness toward all that has gone wrong in the past. Moreover, two critical elements vanish when shifting toward the design issue (how to apply this new knowledge in new projects): the time needed for meaning to emerge and the absence of authors. In fact, collective values and meanings are visible only when looking from a distance (a typical and exquisite example of the system's theory), while the designer is *within* the system of the project and, hence, cannot control the emergence of meanings. Therefore, those glorious years faded away, and the discourse on meaning knew a quick consumption (Agrest & Gandelsonas 1973).

Nevertheless, always again, we design.

Hence, we continue producing architectural meaning, or rather, occasions for meanings in architecture, whether we want it or not, continuously entering and exiting the realm of meaning while quite ignoring it.

I

Places are collectors of memories and meanings: it was clear since Riegl's distinction between commemorative values and contemporary ones (see Burgos Vargas & Mora Alonso-Muñoyerro 2022), but a long series of studies have made it clear that this signification concerns not only monuments and intentionally connoted buildings, but any urban place, and that meanings rise, change and fall in a continuous, even unexpected and unpredictable way (Boyer 1994, Massey 1994, Alderman *et al.* 2004, Crinson 2005). In the past, some emerging meanings (e.g., hygiene, safety, housing) led to immense changes in old cities. What is perhaps less obvious is that those potent meanings then transformed into a series of uncoordinated, hyper-specialistic and over-powering (albeit well-intentioned) norms: a system of constraints so strong that all emerging collective meaning (e.g., sustainability, inclusivity, soft mobility) struggle to change spaces anymore, other than uses (Gaffikin & Sterrett 2006; Lemp *et al.* 2008). At a practical level, quite all designers have to deal with this system: the possible exception is the work of many starchitects, who appear to have the power to claim derogations from norms.

Does architecture consist of combining all these less evident but performative meanings, or rather, does it happen despite them?

## Dora Epstein Jones

I would argue that architecture happens *because of them* – and what I mean by this, is my very firm belief that architecture owes much of its nature as architecture to *constraints*. (GL) Think of any great historic architecture, say *Notre-Dame de Chartres* or the Bernini Piazza of the Vatican, and try to imagine it without the burdens of its symbolic functions, or the liturgical functions, or the shaping of the city and the relation to the perspective of the mobile viewer, or even the availability of materials and craftspeople. What we see in these historic examples is that the constraints, while onerous, might develop a type, but they do not develop a single *a priori* architectural answer. And, further, among architectural answers, let's say that we compare the many Notre-Dames in France, we can create a culture of judgment about their goodness. So, I think at the heart of your question is really a question of how we can make good places when the multiple criterium is so difficult to manage. In more contemporary architectures, we might tie constraints to many of the performative qualities that you are describing, of course, and you're right, those can be both hyper-specific and weirdly populist (a green roof should be the color green,

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
I agree entirely! I had this exact point in my answer to question II, but eventually took it out because of space constraints (ha).

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
:D

## Eleanor Jolliffe

To ask if architecture is formed from collective meaning, or happens in spite of it is to presuppose that architecture is a known value. In order to answer this, we need to be sure of the definition of "architecture". At what point does building, or city planning become architecture? If I were an academic, I could propound a theory backed up by multiple footnotes. I am not though. As a practising architect I suppose that technically the buildings I work on constitute architecture. However, on a day-to-day basis when coordinating ductwork or answering queries on site I don't feel like I am contributing to the "art" of architecture: I am a construction professional providing a necessary service. The point at which this pragmatic service transcends to "architecture" is uncertain and arguably subjective. (CD) Perhaps though, this is where we find architecture – the moment at which the pragmatic and the picturesque meet – at which the artist and the professional are held in balance.

With that in mind architecture cannot happen without the prevailing

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree, and I think that most people forget this difference. On the other hand, it is true that many architects nowadays design in what Juhani Pallasmaa (1996) called a "retinal" way, trying to using the motives of trending architecture. Only, in this sense, the problem seems to be more moral than real...

## Georgia Lindsay

Meaning-making and space-making are often conflated, so it is important to disambiguate what each is. The first of these is about the rise and fall of our understanding of how people use and think about space, about who and what behaviours are welcome where. The second is about insertions, about the creation of buildings which are at first imbued primarily with the meanings that architects have given them, but quickly shift as uses and practices create collective and individual meanings for the people who use them.

Architects make form and space, and in one sense, architects can only respond to the known meanings at the time of the design. However, occasionally architecture can propose new meanings. Star architecture is interesting to think about precisely because it is given a pass on some norms and thus is allowed to make new meanings and propose new uses of spaces. This is largely related to the exceptional resources devoted to these buildings, although the causal direction of this relationship is not always stable: sometimes the necessary capital gets raised because of the norm-breaking nature of the architecture, while other times the funding available allows architects to break norms. For example, the board of the Denver Art Museum was able to raise additional funds for their new building once Daniel Libeskind unveiled and passionately presented a model for the building, a model which revealed new ideas about form and public space (Lindsay, 2013).

## Akiko Okabe

For more than 10 years, I have been practicing architecture with students in urban "informal" areas, so-called slums, in developing countries. We have proposed and erected common spaces for a local community. It has been a must that the main members of the team live together with the community in the field. This is to reach the root of the unconscious needs of the dwellers, rather than just taking their words literally. (CD)

Initially, we started with the image of improving the environment, or "giving" something. On the contrary, however, we asked ourselves a lot about what architecture is and what "meaning in architecture" is.

Indeed, if the world we live in is defined by a larger and larger system created by humans, then there is less and less room for meaning to be entrusted to architecture by architects, and architectural works may be atrophying.

Society's priority on values that architecture is judged by has shifted from explicit ideologies to social

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I completely agree. Too often, present meanings are so given for granted that people (and architect) struggle to understand how infinite is the unknown and the possible (Deregibus 2021). This is why I doubt many contemporary participatory practices, while I advocate a co-design approach able not to answer to apparent issues, but to open the potential (see Eleanor Jolliffe answer).

## Philippa Tumubweinee

To question whether architecture successfully commemorates or reflects the meanings derived from memories of place, we must study the origins of the practice that brings the architecture into being. Its origins are in practice. By practice I refer to that process of thinking that comes from the complex process of conceptual negotiations. Practice in architecture is a long-term commitment to understanding multifaceted issues as they manifest, and the negotiations that must be made between diverse constituents. It is in these negotiations that the architecture can solve programmatic and technical problems within the aesthetics of creative endeavors, in a manner that is representative of past, present, and future socio-cultural and sometimes political sensibilities.

When practice sets out to discover or construct relationships between the different and differentiated fields in which a society identifies and classifies itself, it moves architecture beyond the performative towards «the inextricable relationship between material forces, social processes and the production of knowledge» (Aronowitz 2012, 3). In its manifestation as architecture, practice can acknowledge the past, respond to the present, and speculate about an imagined future. This form of practice that produces architecture is part of a practical relationship between various factors that express material, social-cultural, and conceptual relationships that can commemorate and

for example), but I think that we need to weigh the sources of judgment more critically and more carefully if we want to see progress on the fronts that your question concerns itself with. Judgment, following Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, but a little Bourdieu as well (Bourdieu 1979), and definitely Erving Goffman (1959), can be bound by norms, and most often, it is. The same judgment that can be practiced by the architect to wrest from constraints the value of powerful aesthetics and meaningful spaces, is all too often the judgment that tampers creativity, whether from the architect themselves or from a client or from a critic or from popular opinion. This is why I passionately advocate for an architectural discipline. In the Classicist past, the discipline provided means of judgment that were geometric, proportional, axial, and Humanist. Then, as the discipline moved and changed, the rubrics for judgment have also changed, for example, the judgments imposed by modernist dictums of parts, assemblies, organization, and ideology. The last time we, in architecture, enunciated new judgment rubrics was with postmodernism, and as such, were more reactionary in tone – different, challenging, heterogeneous, non-normative. I have argued that where we are today in architecture is "late postmodernity" (Epstein Jones 2024), and what I mean is that the values for difference in architecture have not changed much, and this is why we think mostly in terms of architects who seemingly have freedom (a Thom Mayne or a Frank Gehry) versus the absolute majority of architects who are CAD stamping floor plans or doing door schedules in large firms. (CD) So, I think that the discipline needs to embrace a new set of judgment rubrics, and I do think that "ecological" must be one, but perhaps also "artful" or better "culturally significant". And, the fact is, yes, it's a frustrating moment in many ways because there just aren't the opportunities that even my generation had, and frankly also because architecture is becoming heavily monopolized by giant firms. Furthermore, we are frustrated more and more these days by a sort of populist merger of neocon and neolib sentiments that control our work through financial success. But, I think

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I love the concept of architecture happening because of constraints. I always recall Luigi Pareyson and his "theory of formativity", where art (and architecture) makes its own rules all during its development, finding its success if and when it becomes necessary. I would also say that an architect, being within the system of constraints, must be able to turn his design moves into constraints, as well as other ones, so as to enter a "game of forms" where the success is precisely

"meanings" in a city. We can post rationalise the motives, or the outcomes – but that is mostly for historians and academics. The primary work of the architect is to effect meaningful and beneficial change; but this is usually driven around a brief. Few architects have the luxury of primarily creating "architecture", instead we are designing and building a new school, or a block of flats, or an urban masterplan. (GL) That this becomes architecture is the skill perhaps of the individual architect, or the post-rationalising of those whose role it is to classify buildings. It is certain though that in order to have "architecture" you must have some elements of human design and construction. A beautiful drawing of a building is not architecture, this is art.

All building projects though happen in a specific and unique context. No building can be built in a floating void. This context, let us call it a site, has its physical constraints (site boundaries and transport/ utility infrastructure); its legal constraints (local laws and building regulations); and its cultural context. (DEJ) This last is less immediately obvious to deduce. Here though is where we find the role of the collective meaning of a site, and, perhaps, the potential for its architecture. (CD)

The cultural context of a site could be pragmatic – a community in desperate need of better sanitation – or it could be driven by the context of historic buildings around it. Even less tangibly it can be driven by the community local to the site, the meaning given to the site by their experiences and the rhythm of their lives. It is in this space that we may find masterplans driven by a "desire line" walked across the site by hundreds of feet on their daily commute, or a reference in

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
And to return to your previous paragraph, perhaps it is in the elegant balance between the pragmatics of that school, those flats, the details needed to make a masterplan work and some artistic vision, locally-held meaning, or cultural norm that the architecture emerges.

ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
Very true! Thank you!

(DEJ) DORA EPSTEIN JONES
I love this whole sentence and I will quote it in my classes.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I'm particularly fond of the concept of potential, as described by Jullien (2004), because the strategic dimension of architectural design emerges – in the sense that the potential can be revealed only through a design action (Deregibus 2020). In connection with the answer given by Dora Epstein Jones, we could say that the potential comes from the constraints (Deregibus & Giustiniano 2021).

Regardless, and the valorisation of creative destruction notwithstanding (e.g., Koolhaas, 1978; Page, 2001), a rapid change of space and form in response to changing meanings is not really something that is socially desirable. War, natural disaster, neglect, policies of coercion...these are the forces that allow for rapid changes to space, for architecture to step in with responses to new meanings. Many of the changes wrought in previous centuries to old cities were possible because of political or social norms that made rapid and un-consultative change possible. Haussmann remade Paris for Napoleon III, redefining a medieval population centre as a modern metropolis only by displacing the poor and recently re-disenfranchised people who lived in the oldest parts of the city (Ching et al., 2017, p. 675). More recently, urban renewal fundamentally changed the shape of many American cities. It could be said that this was in response to the changing meaning of the central areas of cities, from places of home to places of commerce; or to racist policies and generations of dis-investment; or to the relentless pressure of capitalist desire for land. Regardless, the policy has since been amended to require slower changes to the city precisely because those "renewal" projects of fifty years ago were so disastrous for so many people who had valued the use value of their homes over the exchange value of the land they sat upon (Logan & Molotch, 1987). EJ

Now Haussmann's Parisian boulevards host, among many other things, the triumphant final stage of a world-famous bicycle race through France, a use neither intended nor anticipated by the designer. And the meaning of big-block commercial buildings created in downtowns throughout the United States has quite recently changed rapidly in response to the global pandemic, as the very air we breathe became suspect and the location of much more white-collar work shifted away from the office (Casselman et al., 2024). Architecture happens neither because of or despite the use or meaning granted to space, but is one component among many that shape, colour, encourage, and regulate the complexity of the human condition. CD

EJ ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
I agree and similarly post WWII planning moves in many UK cities made bold changes to cities that have not stood the test of time, and are being slowly unpicked by the present generation of urban designers.

CD CARLO DEREGIBUS
However, architecture may or may not enhance the possibility of change, being open or not to further uses and variations. In this sense, star architecture seems to be the most bound to the justice and political correctness, which are difficult to link directly to architectural form. Also, regulations and guidelines have become more sophisticated. Furthermore, data sciences have become more technologically advanced. Thus, the discretion of architects has become more narrowly defined, and it could be said that the meaning in architecture is in crisis.

On the other hand, informal areas don't depend on a man-made established system. Informal areas are, essentially, to be included by the current formal system, and their very existence is ignored in it.

Legal regulations are absent, and basically, the built environment naturally emerges from people's living necessities. The built environment is a result of adding hands to the ground of the earth's environment to survive. Though the built environment of informal areas can never happen without human hands, it is not a materialized result of what is planned and designed intentionally. It is an incomprehensible, meaningless, unmanageable, and uncontrollable environment for humans. It is an "impossible" world for humans. Occasionally, certain rules may happen autonomously from below. It is a modest but "possible" world grown from the ground of the impossible world.

Now, inspired by informal areas, I propose to reframe the possible/impossible world. The world with meanings for humans, that is the possible world, depends on the relation with the overwhelming impossible world. Therefore, the meaning in architecture can be a subject of reflection.

Occidental philosophers have exclusively regarded the possible world as an absolute subject of exploration and have attempted to expand it. Even when the notion of "uncertainty" has been discussed, it has been for clarifying and looking for its meaning. It was different in oriental thoughts. Okakura Kakuzō described the spirit of Teaism based on the relational concepts of impossible and possible: «[Teaism] is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life» (Okakura 1906). Also, the idea of Daoism by Laozi, frequently cited from the environmental approach, to harmonize the human microcosm with the macrocosm of ecosystems (Callicott 1994), stands on the premise that the latter is an impossible cosmos.

If we adopt this relational framework of possible/impossible, the admiration towards the imperfectness and the impossible world as a ground where humans are embedded is a precondition that humans can create a small but possible world where we can give meanings to both tangible and intangible things. If we feel that reflect on the specificities of history, traditions, customs, representations, and self-identifications (Friedman 1992).

Architectural practice, more than architecture itself, is where one can intelligently respond to the ever-evolving rituals of a gloriously disorderly affair of humanity in a localised context (Selasi 2014), reflecting the characteristics of society back to itself. DEJ CD

This view of architecture as a derivative of practice allows for its transformation from artefact into a process, and a system that can be applied in diverse conditions in a world with intertwined and superimposed rules and values. In this form, architecture can incorporate «the actions of subjects both individual and collective» (Lefebvre 1991, 33). Architecture emerges as something that is symbolic of the realities and opportunities in the objective and subjective understanding of a society. In this form, architecture is a mechanism from which to attach value to the way "we" locate ourselves and our experiences of being in a place. And from this meaning derives.

When architecture embodies the socialites, aspirations, ambitions, and aesthetics of people, it captures and makes visible the specificities of place. It does so in the way it allows for the performance of everyday rituals that portray to us, who we are, where we are. If we understand that the "we" in the "who we are, where we are" commits any number of individuals into what we understand as our society, then "we", as a collective humanity, can determine if architecture, the material manifestation of place, is meaningful.

DEJ DORA EPSTEIN JONES
I love this thought, as in I think its accurate and somehow also poetic. Framing practice in this way also allows for error and chance. Thom Mayne speaks of "chance" often in his works on Combinatory Urbanism, and I think his work aligns with the thought expressed here. We are ever really done, are we? There's always feedback.

CD CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree with the distinction. Even if it is not obvious to require to architects such a monstruous moral commitment: most often, architects will be paid (not so much) to design a building, following requirements more or less clear. Curiously, even if quite all scholars and architects stress on this potentiality of architectural design, the world does not seem too convinced to give architects the occasion "to respond". I think we should ask ourselves *why*, and the last Century's history is, for me, a clear answer.

sublimating constraints and building a system of architecture...(Deregibus & Giustiniano 2020).

ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
While I agree with your comment, I think it academicizes the reality of architectural practice a bit too much. Sometimes a specification isn't architecture or a constraint as such – but it is vital to the process of making architecture. There's an element of needing to keep our feet on the ground!

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
Eleanor, yes, to your point. In fact, I find building within codes or the regulatory environment to be the most direct example of using constraints to locate the opportunities and often the (c)leveraging of design. In the academic worlds of our discipline, constraints help us to recognize meaning, to attach signifiers to the "game of forms" (beautifully said!). I would say that all of these contexts are the grounds of our practices however.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree: so many things have direct or indirect effects on architecture!

we need to shift OUR understanding to see how OUR judgment can determine what we want architecture to be in the world. We need to do this in schools of architecture, and on competition juries, and in awards, anywhere where judgment is the call to duty. I know this is possible not just because I can look through the lens of history. It's possible because there are quite a few new projects in the world that I think exemplify new judgment criteria – such as those exposed in the second *Sharjah Architecture Triennial* (curated by Tosin Ohsinowo and entitled *The Beauty of Impermanence: An Architecture of Adaptability*), Vo Trong Nghia's *Urban Farming Office*, or Jimenez Lai's disuse sculpture (*Outcasts from the Underground*) at *Art Omi Sculpture & Architecture Park* – and from work such as this, I think we can break out of the dilemmas that you describe. Ultimately, it's a call to a new goodness.

the cladding patterns or building form to the history of the people groups who have gone before.

A building which responds to its physical and legal constraints alone may struggle to become "architecture". There must, I believe, be the sense of something more: architecture generates a response in the human soul – it "strikes a chord". The note struck may be discordant – our reaction is driven by personal taste – but it is struck nonetheless. Without the influence of culture, of "collective meanings" it would be all but impossible to strike this chord.

Marc Augé describes the theories of "place" and "non-place". "Places" are imbued with meaning. "Non-places" are divested of meaning. I would not argue that all architecture is imbued with meaning; an airport could be architecture and yet still not a "place". However, the way in which the airport is designed and constructed must be imbued with a sense of meaning, a sense of "place", in order for it to become architecture. For, if architecture happens at the crossroads of the pragmatic and the picturesque, this collective meaning is crucial. Without it we just have buildings.

meaning desired by the architect. The *Denver Art Museum* is quite an example, like the *Gilder Center*, which Sarah Robinson described in her paper.

GEORGIA LINDSAY
In my research on the Denver Art Museum, I found a plurality of meanings ascribed to the building, some of which were intended by the architect, and some of which were a result of the form but not necessarily intended by the architect... happy accidents, perhaps. What I have found in my research is that the spectacularity of star architecture projects leaves them open to a variety of meanings granted by the community (see for example Lindsay & Sawyer 2022a).

architecture has transformed into a mere combination of less evident and performative meanings, it can be warning evidence that the man-made possible world is becoming impossible.
CD

CD CARLO DEREGIBUS
So inspiring, thanks!

II

Place-making practices were born precisely to help architects understand the actual effects of their design actions, reducing the misunderstanding of hidden or less apparent meanings and, at the same time, involving communities in lending significance to new or renewed spaces (Duconseille & Saner 2020; Cilliers & Timmermans 2014). Participatory policies and co-designing practices are now so diffused and politically correct that rarely they are discussed. However, considering how variable meanings are and the much-increased mobility of people, it seems complicated even to recognise communities: or rather, design acts in a multiple memory system, and that is why perceived meanings, in any case, shift from the intentioned ones, with the paradoxical effect for projects to be both meaningful and meaningless (Toth & Hunt 1999; Green 1999). On the opposite side, many architects – especially the so-called starchitects – promote their last project with visual metaphors and symbolisms (e.g., Frank Gehry's iceberg headquarters for Warner Bros, Jean Nouvel's *Desert Rose*, Herzog & De Meuron's *Bird's Nest*): an aesthetic approach that seems to ignore any process of co-signification.

Therefore, does architecture come from the process, thus having a political dimension (Bojanić 2022), or rather, is it a matter of pure form which the process could at most legitimate?



## Dora Epstein Jones

Wow, what a question – it hits the nail hard, and will also give me a chance to talk about place, which I mostly adverted in the first question.

Place is nothing without signification. Signification plus space equals place. Just like building plus judgment equals architecture. Simplistic, I know, and maybe completely wrong – but let me continue. When we speak of place, what we really are referring to is a fairly late 20th century idea, whether that's Spiro Kostof (1991) or Norberg-Schulz (1976) or almost any environmental psychology text. And, of course, a LOT of money depends on a definition of place, as a way of, well, guaranteeing the gathering of peoples. Some places are far more agnostic to people gathering – a historic artifact such as the Colosseum or the Forum, a mountaintop, a great spot to watch the ocean or the Northern Lights, or a watering hole in the desert. But, the places we speak of when we architects talk about place, well, that's more of a means to create aesthetically and spatially a sense of authentic (or authentically felt) phenomena, in spite of modern culture's tendency to flatten human experience, in order to what, commoditize it, whether through direct exchange or tourism, OR, and this is the fun part, to create monstrous visual affect. Of course, we now live in a post-virtual era – we can gather and/or commoditize any space, even if it's not material or physical. And, we can turn almost any space into a place for political exchange,

## Eleanor Jolliffe

In the earlier answer I defined architecture as "the moment at which the pragmatic and the picturesque meet – at which the artist and the professional are held in balance". As such the briefest answer to this question *must* be that architecture is formed by the balance of collaborative placemaking and skilfully applied form.

For example, Zaha Hadid's MAXXI in Rome is not, in my opinion, architecture. It is a sublime sculpture, but it is not a good art gallery. Here the sculptural form created by the artist has taken precedence over the practicality of exhibition design, efficient circulation or comfortable user experience. I have visited twice now, and spoken with curators who described their "fight" with the building in order to display art. It is the only building I have ever entered that made me feel physically disoriented and dizzy. It is a fantastically interesting exploration of the effects of space, of the historic links of the site to railways, and of the nature of form. It is not architecture though, as it does not effectively fulfil its function. Were this beautiful and intriguing space to have been designed in more effective collaboration with those who wish to display and view art within its walls, then, only then, would it have become architecture. As it is, the MAXXI is simply sculpture. (CD)

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I can't agree. I was so critical about MAXXI before visiting there, but after spending more than a day there, I've surprisingly changed my mind. I

## Georgia Lindsay

All architecture is political. For a building to be built, it requires the input of massive human and material resources, resources that must be invested up front, before anyone can use the building and before any return on the investment can be made. It is this investment of labour, capital, and material that makes architecture political, not participatory or co-design processes (see Brott 2019; Sklair 2005, for examples of discussion of the subservience of architecture to capital, although these are hardly the only two scholars to make this point). (CD)

Architecture can never be pure form. Exercises in pure form do not yield buildings, they yield sculptures; buildings hold people, plants, objects, animals, and institutions, all with their own needs, desires, restrictions, limitations, and shifting understandings of meaning, to take an object-oriented and bio-inclusive ontological approach (see Lindsay 2016, the concluding chapter, for a discussion of how this works in the museum context). Architecture as a discipline and in practice must necessarily bow to practicality and shared meanings. Star architects might promote their buildings with visual metaphors – or sometimes

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I completely agree. And I think that the same works for many practices other than architectural ones.

GEORGIA LINDSAY
Yes, for sure!

## Akiko Okabe

According to Nicolaas John Habraken, «It is us [professionals] who must participate. Humanity has done without us for a long time and would, we can be sure, survive and continue to build if we were to disappear overnight» (Habraken 1986). If so, without the process of participation, there would be no space for architects who design architecture as professionals. I will try to consider the process of participation, adopting the framework of impossible and possible worlds, as proposed in answer to the previous question.

People have built vernacular houses in Japan called *minkas* as living spaces, using locally available materials and working together as a community. Over the years, materials and forms have become fixed to those suitable for the local environment, forming an identity.¡@Shinohara Kazuo, a Japanese architect, whose housing works have been appreciated in architectural history, said that «*minkas* are fungi» (Shinohara 1970). A *minka* is a building that is created outside of people's consciousness, and it adapts to the climate there – temperature, humidity, wind, and seasonal variations – just as different fungi or moulds grow under different conditions, so a *minka* takes root and grows in the earth. A *minka* is a physical environment that would not be possible without human hands, but the way it arises and disappears is a natural phenomenon, and it is a building of the impossible world where

## Philippa Tumubweinee

In the context from which I write, the Global South, for the most part architecture is political. And by political, I mean that the built environment has the arduous task of negotiating a problematic past, a precarious present, and an uncertain future. (GL) The built environment must do so if the resultant architecture is expected to deliver on aspirations of the urbanites that live out their lives in an emergent urban form, a condition that dominates the majority of the developing Global South. This means that the design process must allow for and identify points of entry and exit within it for the possibilities embedded in shifting conditions of an urban landscape. One of the ways that this can be made possible is through participatory and co-design practices. The process of participatory and co-design practice, in this instance, is used to generate knowledge about a place and bring to light its «multi-faceted and multi-voiced realities» (Markova *et al.* 2007, 17). It is not intended to dictate and/or to orientate the architectural design process and the resultant aesthetic or form; it should be inclusionary across scales. To position architecture as relevant in the tensions between

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
I would argue that this is true in the Global North as well – even if it is (perhaps) more obscured by easy capital and overweening confidence in a nation's position at the pinnacle of politics.

like the *Barclay Center* in New York during the *Black Lives Matter* protests. So, to answer the first part, I doubt very sincerely whether it matters from where any contemporary place arises. It would be wonderful if place could still arise, and be designed, from the many fingers of authentic community reach, but you're correct about its pitfalls. Therefore, I am OK with place arising from non- or even contrary-signification. The *Cloud Gate* by Anish Kapoor (nick-named *Chicago Bean*) is weird and idiosyncratic, and I don't know what it has to do with Chicago, but it's undeniably a place. The *Bird's Nest* by Herzog & de Meuron or any Olympic disjunctive icon, they create places of cities to which we've never travelled. I had no interest in traveling to Bilbao 30 years ago. Sometimes, places follow.

As to the sharper edge of the question – the idea of a pure form and a process – I'm afraid that I believe in neither in its entirety. I don't know that I've ever seen a pure form because my eyes are in my head and my head is attached to my body and I itch and blink – mostly I see images, and here I do agree with John May (2019) for the image of form is also mediated. And mediation implies process. I do not mean to evade your question. I just want to be clear that I am not clear on either concept because I don't think either form nor process are clear. Everything is mediated. There is nothing outside the text. (GL)

But, as for the legitimation of architecture, I will continue to yell this out – architecture legitimates itself. If enough of us say the *Bird's*

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
I totally agree that everything is mediated! But I wonder if calling it all "text" is perhaps to flatten it too much. Image is such a vital part of mediation now, with the rise of social media platforms that prioritise images over text, and of course the nature of architectural drawing highlights the differences between what one says with text versus what one "says" with an image.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
I don't think that text has here a literal sense, I wonder if we could use a word like "narratives" for including all media, but at the same time this term implies even too much a desired meaning, undervaluing the emerging ones...

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
I agree, Georgia, that the term "text" seems flat, but I am trying to paraphrase Derrida badly, I suppose, in that "text" can be of any medium, and that would include image. Your point is well taken, though, as I think images are beginning to overtake text (See May 2019)



highlight two things. The first is the urban space in front of it, which is beautiful and usable, much more than, for example, Renzo Piano's City of Music nearby. The second is that this kind of museum is not strictly a "museum" in the Western sense: to me, it recalls more of a Far East museum, a place where you spend your time more than looking at pieces of art. I understand the difficulties for curators, but I would say that, in this case, the meaning of the building far surpasses the museum's function, and this is also an issue of judgment, recalling Dora Epstein Jones and Akiko Okabe's first answers.

ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
Perhaps, and I agree it's an interesting space. It still fails on its brief though which was to create a place to allow people to comfortably view art. This is a crucial failing to me, and the sort of thing that would mean I would not a practising architect for too much longer were I to practice in this way.

GEORGIA LINDSAY
I thought this about the Denver Art Museum, too (which is what I wrote my dissertation on). And what I found was that there were multiple programmatic requirements on the brief, including showing art but also making public spaces and putting Denver on the map. The building did some of these better and some worse, and some curators did not want their collections shown in the new galleries. But some curators embraced the creativity required to make art look good in the new building, and artists absolutely loved getting commissions to work within the odd angles and interesting spaces. So I think it all might be nuanced.

To take another example. In the MAXXI we see skilfully applied form, but a lack of collaborative placemaking. In this next we see collaborative placemaking but little application of form. A good factory building is superbly designed in order to affect the efficient manufacturer of its products. The ergonomics of the space have been tailored to maximise the efficiency of the workers and ensure the smooth running of the production line. This can only be done with a thorough and full understanding of how the building will be used and the needs of those who use it. It is not the most glamorous example of collaborative placemaking but it is an effective one. However, I have yet to discover a factory that could be described as "architecture". The form fits simply around the function – fulfilling needs of shelter, daylight and ventilation – but there is no moment at which the soul is lifted or the veil between here and thereafter feels thin. The factory is not architecture, it is simply well-planned functionality.

And now we come to the most difficult example, as I have led us to

visual metaphors are assigned to their buildings perhaps without their endorsement as in Norman Foster's headquarters for Swiss Re, now called the *Gherkin* – but this does not set the meaning, it just offers a shorthand, acting as a propositional placeholder until collective meanings emerge. Iconic buildings may be enigmatic signifiers (Jencks 2005), but they are also places, and the Guggenheim Museum at Bilbao building is much more than an architectural form: among other things, it is also an economic engine of tourism to Basque (Plaza 2006), and a museum space (Fraser 2006). Any building operates at a variety of scales, requiring varied levels of analysis to truly understand how they work, for whom, and under what conditions (Cranz 2011; Davis 2020; Lindsay 2013).

Process is inescapable: architecture does not get built without it. Even emphatically formal buildings, buildings named after the shape they mimic designed by international star architects known for their iconic structures, require a process. Taking the *Michael Lee-Chin Crystal*, the 2007 addition to the *Royal Ontario Museum* by Studio Daniel Libeskind as an example, the architect's website lists fourteen collaborating organizations (Studio Libeskind 2024), each of which would in turn have multiple people working on the project for multiple years. That is a process, even without the public consultation which helped legitimate the institution and foster support for the museum (not necessarily the architecture) amongst the general public (Patterson, 2012). That the process of design is rendered invisible by the shorthand of giving credit for the building to a single person or partnership who represents the face of the firm behind the winning bid does not make it any less of a process or any more devoid of political implications.

Architecture helps construct reality, both physical and symbolic, and architects add cultural authority to that construction (Jones 2009; Sawyer *et al.* 2023). Moreover, when architects consult with a wider constituency – true consultation, that is, not an exercise in "process" meant only to give the appearance of broader participation – they produce better, more nuanced, more useful buildings. (CD) And often learn something in the process.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I think the point is precisely here, between the "cultural authority" and the "true" consultation. No true consultation is possible, in my opinion, without that cultural authority, in the sense that in any process, the roles of the actants must be recognized by others to make their agency effective. It is an institutional problem. In Italy, for example, this usually leads to very conservative approaches to architecture: seeing Philippa Tumubweinee's answer, I would love participative processes to work as she describes...

people cannot manage it as they wish.

It is difficult for a single individual to self-build a house, so anywhere in the world, human beings have been working together for a long time to build them. (GL) Such collaborative activities are known as *fushin* in Japan and *minga* or *minka* in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. While the recent participatory processes in which many people participate create architecture in a possible world, *minka* construction is an activity outside of consciousness, in an impossible world. In the possible world, it is of course the indivisible individual who participates, but in the impossible world, it is the "hand" that participates in the collaborative activity. The hands of family members, neighbours, and other people participate, as well as the hands of the backwoods, be it wood or bamboo. The hands of the earth also participate with its soil. Thus, the bundle of hands becomes materialized as a *minka*. It is as if a magnificent fungus will grow eventually when it is lucky enough to have good conditions.

The *Meghalaya bridge* in north-western India is bridged by people hauling in vines of trees from both banks of the river. (EJ) Then the vegetation grows and the bridge connecting the two banks becomes stronger. Consecutively, people will put their hands on it and it will become a bridge that people can walk. The vines reach out and people provide hands, and that's how bridges are built. It is a collaborative work of nature and humans.

In an impossible world, the built environment is created by chance through the combined efforts of many hands, including human hands. These buildings are built on the basis of participation, and the buildings we are now seeing are a mere cross-section of the process, rather than a consequence of the process.

The architectural works designed by architects are something possible and differ from the aforementioned built environment of the impossible world. Recently, architectural works that are given meaning through participatory processes have become prominent, but insofar, as these are participatory processes within a human-manageable system, the process can't go beyond legitimating

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
This is such an important point! Collective building is ancient, it is only recently that architects have formalized procedural professional processes for participation.

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
I find it very interesting that the two examples you cite are both forms of vernacular construction. There's long been a debate in the UK about whether this 'counts' as architecture due to the lack of formalised

shifting temporalities.

When they are conceptualized as holistic and inclusionary, participatory and co-design practices in the design process cultivate intersections between individualised subjects, citizens, and the architecture as the material object. These practices in an active and dynamic dialogue between the communities for whom the architecture is conceptualized and the persons who conceptualize it – the practitioners – moves architecture beyond the pursuit of pure form as a conceptual driver. When architecture is conceptualized and realised as more than pure form it can be assessed in terms of the opportunity it creates in the maximization of resource and return. This approach positions architectural practice in a vantage position from where it can deliver on the imaginations of a community (participation and co-design) in the realisation of architecture that speaks to and is meaningful in a particular place.

However, the weaponisation of participatory and co-design processes through the regulatory statutes of policy minimizes the benefit of the architecture in the community for whom the building is being provided. Simply accommodating participatory and co-design process in the design process as a policy requirement is neither sustainable nor beneficial in the long term for a community long after the architectural intervention has been actioned. (CD) The argument here is not to delegitimatize policies that encourage participatory and co-design processes, rather it is to make the point that when these processes, aimed at inclusion, are hampered by the inefficiencies of onerous bureaucratic rules and oversight, they fail in their intention to speak to the hidden or less apparent meanings that come from the specificities of place.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree, both concerning the potential of co-design processes, and the «weaponisation» of participatory processes. However, considering the previous answers by all, I would say that in any case these processes have a limited effect, in the sense that meaning, in any case, will emerge after, surpassing those initial meanings maybe in a completely unpredictable way. This opening toward what Akiko Okabe calls «the impossible», or Dora Epstein Jones refers with «place arising» and, in the next answer, "chance", could be difficult to promote in a co-design process, while it should be maybe its most important feature.

*Nest* is an architecture that created a place, and it's good, then the *Bird's Nest* moves towards canon, and canon delineates the definition of "place and architecture". The *Bird's Nest* becomes precedent. (CD) But, if we continually say, "eh, I don't know, it's just a compelling visual form but otherwise, not so much," then the *Bird's Nest* will really only occupy a place of kitsch or folly. It CAN be a signifier that can help form a place, but what really matters is if the design and the flow of the city around it supports possible gathering, and then, if that gathering has the potential to carry political care. In that sense, cultural significance is really the key, and that goes back to my comments on a new judgment.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I think that the concept of canon deserves more consideration. Clearly, as Walter Benjamin's back-faced angel, we continue designing while the canon shapes at various intensities, with buildings continuously rising and falling in the debates, maybe disappearing after some years or, instead, staying there (like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao). And I think most discussions on meanings depend on our unavoidable tendency to build canons.

GEORGIA LINDSAY
I think it's worth considering whose canon, and whose meaning. Even historical buildings – seemingly settled into the canon – are being examined anew as to whether they truly mean more to the canon than others that had previously been left out...and why those were excluded in the first place.

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
Truth. On both points. Canon deserves so much more study, especially now that we can understand how it is both dynamic and historically, privileged.

the illustration of the perfect marriage of collaborative placemaking and skilfully applied form. There are so many buildings which could illustrate this. It is highly subjective. This though is where the imposter can sneak in – the perfectly serviceable building that demands to be called architecture by parading a form so deliberately performative that it tricks us into naming it "architecture". Resist if you can. This is a misuse of the subjective nature of style. (CD)

But I have prevaricated long enough. I don't want to use an example that I have not visited, spatial experience cannot be gleaned from photographs. The illustration I will use therefore I have visited multiple times. It is an old and uncontroversial example of good architecture, it is also, like the MAXXI, Roman. It is the *Pantheon*. Here we have a building in which efficient structural engineering and knowledge of materials combines with skilful form. The dome of the *Pantheon* sweeps across the space as is emulating the heavens themselves. The materials operated at the limit of contemporaneous technology, and have lasted for centuries.

Crucially though, it was designed with an understanding of human worship. The very fact that it has stood as a space of worship for around two millennia suggests that the "collaborative placemaking" displayed here transcends an understanding of contemporaneous *zeitgeists*. The designers of the Pantheon understood something about the essence of humanity that allowed them to create a space that has resonated with the souls of millions of people, over thousands of years. This is collaborative placemaking at its finest – where the pragmatics of the ritual of worship can be fulfilled, but also adapted as humanity's tastes change – all with barely a change to the space itself. Here is a place at which the veil between "here" and "there" becomes thin. Here is architecture.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I would say that this kind of buildings is dominant indeed...in this sense, I don't agree with the idea that factories cannot be architecture: Florian Nagler, Matthias Müller and Almut Schwabe's *Kuhstall des Rasshoferhofs*, Kraaijvanger Architects' *Van Gelder Fruit and Vegetables*, Voss Architekten's *SKF test center*, so many vineries all around the world, show that factories can spread between pure functionalist sites to architecture, I think.

ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
I think I would agree on those examples. I don't think any of them fall into the category of a standard serviceable factory though!

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Well, architecture is never standard: or rather, any factory that is designed is beyond standards. Only, just a few are designed in an architectural way... :)

ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
Yes. I really enjoyed this part – and agree!

GEORGIA LINDSAY
:) thank you!

education of the designers involved and its proximity to the building crafts.

the resulting form. We must remember, however, that the possible and impossible worlds are not symmetrical; the possible world is embedded in the impossible world. Therefore, everything including architecture in the human operable world can't be denied to participate in the built environment of the impossible world.

Just as natural landscapes such as mountains and rivers participate in the physical environment, so do man-made forms of infrastructure or architecture. No matter whether natural or artificial, those hands all together configure the physical environment of the impossible world. If architecture, which has been based on the premise of a possible world and individualism, were to step into an impossible world of *dividualism* governed by the logic of fundamental participation of hands, participation would acquire a post-human, unknown political dimension. CD

CD CARLO DEREGIBUS
I'm fascinated by the concept of *dividualism* you highlight. I think that here the point is, which kind of involvement do people have in the process. You speak of buildings and communities where people have a *direct* involvement: whether they use their hands or minds, there is an adhesion at a personal level. I'm not if the same approach can work in bigger processes (the ones that «can't go beyond legitimating the resulting form», as you wrote), where personal involvement is much more indirect.

## III

Many contributors to *Meaning in Architecture* (Jencks & Baird 1969), like Baird himself, Norberg-Schulz, Broadbent, Rykwert, and Silver, investigated meaning through how shapes affect freedom. Then, in the last decades, discussions slowly diverted from liberty to inclusivity, changing into pervasive norms and approaches – universal design, design for all – aimed at removing possible obstacles and sensible elements (Persson *et al.* 2014, Zallio & Clarkson 2021, Lamirande 2022). All these approaches aim at maximising the so-called *negative liberty*, or the freedom from constrictions, but surprisingly seem quite to ignore the *positive liberty*, or the conditions that give people the capacity to do things (Berlin 1969). Nevertheless, any project defines a field of freedom while imposing limits to the use/form compatibility. In other words, it seems that architects concentrate on expressed requirements and desires – which are part of the metaphysical dimension of architecture (Derrida 2008) – without leaving space to the unknown, undesigned and unpredictable (Agrest 1974) – which could be the expression of the concept of *any*, instead of *all*, applied to design (Davidson 1996).

Should architecture concentrate on reducing contrast and valorising the *design-for-all* approach, or rather, should it aim for a less obvious but potentially more interesting *design-for-any* attitude?

### Dora Epstein Jones

Obviously, this question ties back to the earlier discussion on norms and constraints, and how those are differently impactful. But, I should acknowledge that I'm not without bias on this particular question. I work frequently on writings with Thom Mayne, and we discuss often how we need to not just design away from the a priori, but also embrace *chance*. Chance invites the unpredictable, and again, I believe that chance is the "God particle" in terms of making architecture, Architecture. I did my dissertation on travel trailers and prefab housing in the immediate postwar period in the USA. The story is quite interesting because it's a story based on the immigration of architectural knowledge from Europe to the USA, and then, the subsequent institutionalization of that knowledge. Basically, the European emigres were excited about the American freedom to use standardization to make architectural objects like travel trailers. But, once they arrived and WWII started, they mostly turned to prefab. And, while prefab is always exciting at first, it very quickly becomes so regularized and predictable that architects almost always end up abandoning the prefab project. Did you know that Walter Gropius led a prefab housing effort after WWII (*The Packaged House for General Panel*, 1941-47)? He got so bored with it that he started farming the system out to other architects like Richard Neutra. Let me be clear, I'm not saying that prefab is bad. In fact, it can solve many of the housing crises

### Eleanor Jolliffe

Is architectural design too constrained by solving today's problems? I can only really speak to UK practice, but it is a serious consideration. A significant percentage of my time is spent proving that accessibility, fire, sustainability and inclusion standards and best practice are met. Not to mention that building regulations, spatial standards and local planning laws are followed. Since the building boom of the 1950s to 70s building regulations and bureaucracy has grown almost exponentially in the UK. The amount of reports, consultations and stakeholders for larger projects is a major part of any architect's workload, inevitably impacting design.

It may be true that architects in this era were able to experiment more freely, but I think there are several factors at play here. Firstly, we should be careful not to fall prey to chronological bias. The architectural failures of the post war years are significant and famous in Britain. Not everything that was built was of high quality or suited to its purpose. (GL) What has survived and is well loved tends to be the best of what happens in an era. There is every chance that our age will be seen as a golden era

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
I tell my students that every clause or policy in the syllabus has an awkward story behind it, and while it is not exactly true that every single building code or policy has a failed structure behind it, I think a parallel could be drawn.

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
I love it.

## Georgia Lindsay

There are two different, yet both important, answers to this question.

The first one responds to the critique of accessibility and universal design paradigms as they have been codified and practiced in architecture over the last half century or so.

By focusing attention on design, and positing better design as *the* solution to exclusionary objects and environments, Universal Design ignores the social, cultural, and political relations that structure human existence (see Imrie 2012 for a thoughtful discussion of this with ample links to other scholars making similar points).

While the built environment can play a role in disabling and othering people (Heylighen 2015), it is certainly not the only thing that does and to focus on design as a solution can allow for social practices, legal frameworks, and other immaterial structures to continue unexamined in their role in erecting barriers.

The second emphasises the fundamental importance of making spaces that do not exclude, by design, entire groups of people. (CD)

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree plainly with the necessity of reducing and eliminating known barriers and making buildings inclusive. However, I have some difficulties with the concept of "groups" (see also Akiko Okabe's answer and my comment on it).
For example, in the Seventies (following the 1968 riots), many institutions built separate bathrooms for women. It

## Akiko Okabe

In a possible world ordered by man-made systems, there must be no exclusion, as long as respect for individual freedom and equality are global universal principles. In this possible world, definitely, architecture for all would be politically correct. Architecture is expected to play a role in promoting inclusion through physical space. However, because exclusion is persistent, it is oriented toward inclusion, and inclusion is possible.

For example, in my field, informal areas, which are areas of vulnerable environment in developing country cities, there is support for the unfounded hypothesis, in response to neoliberalism, that if land ownership is normalized, environmental improvements will occur. The so-called slum in the past is called now the informal area with the expectation to be formalized. Formalization means inclusion in the current dominant system. However, the reality for those who are targets of inclusion is that they are clearly positioned as poor rather than becoming economically rich through being included in the formal market. (CD)

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I think you are absolutely right. Most times, indeed, practices of regeneration either formalise things by officialising poor districts, somehow officialising their state, or dislocating inhabitants through gentrification processes. Less sure I am of the formal intentionality of norms. I think they were born for the same reason – the system's control – but I think now they

## Philippa Tumubweinee

Both design-for-all and design-for-any as approaches to architectural design are with their own merits and shortcomings and should be seen as such. It is not a question of one or the other, rather it is a question of whether a design approach within the specificities of place concerns itself, through creative endeavours and experimentation, with the reciprocal relationship between the architecture, as a functional programmatic intervention, and the realities of society for which it is being built. (GL) When place, the container of society's reality, is an active ingredient in shaping thinking about design, it nuances how one approaches the design process. The nuance of place offers a conceptual "opportunity space" from which to imagine and instantiate approaches that are universal by design but are differentiated in how they translate concepts and ideas in different contexts and conditions. (CD) Considerations of place do away with the need for a

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
What an important point, to ensure that the thing being designed fits its context instead of into some arbitrary dichotomy! Thank you.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I really love the definition of "opportunity place". I also think you touch on one critical point when speaking of the «relationship between the architecture... and the realities of society»., as they could be separated. It is a critical distance (in Husserlian terms, an *epochē*. See Paci 1961) we cannot reach but should always again commit to. That

that we face worldwide. I'm saying that the architectural portion of prefabrication is mostly in designing the system of assemblage and parts such that they produce certain aesthetic and spatial outcomes. And then, it's over.

So, to get back to your question, universal design has been valorous in concept but too often much too normalized and predictable to even be called architecture, if you understand architecture as an essentially creative act. So, I would say that the unpredictable, the unknown, the various exceptions, that invariably winnow their way through existence itself, is really the architecture part. You can call it positive liberty – I like that – but more to the point, I think that the unpredictable should not be seen as a choice but as a necessity. (GL)

Our discipline cannot be the same kind of discipline as before. If a discipline, following Foucault, attaches itself to rigidities of rules, of bias, of control over bodies, of market valuation, and so on, then I think we can move towards a discipline now, in a contemporary era, an era that is as much virtual as physical, as much AI as just I, that is dynamically moving, more like an algorithm than a mathematical formula, more like 4D chess or a baseball game – and that means welcoming and necessarily including chance. I call it *Discipline and Reward* instead of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977).

Finally, I want to add a more philosophical take on this question – and that is I think that norms and rigid rules are illusions. They can be very

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
For whom? For the architects to keep finding it interesting? Or for the people who inhabit and use the buildings?

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
Georgia, good question. In the biggest picture, I think human consciousness has an obligation towards chance. I think it would be difficult to advance without a continuous opening up to the unpredictable. But really for design to flourish, I think the mindset has to be open. I think we have seen the disastrous effects of "top down" design. Alternatively, we have so few "bottom up" examples that I don't think we have a good sense of judgment about them. I would also add "sideways" and "particle shifts" because we want and need to see design as an activity within so many variable contexts. It bugs me in so many ways how much the good properties of the unpredictable were subsumed by purely formalist architecture, and only to promote what, some kind of privileged frisson of excitement. I think that embracing the unpredictable can be a kind of universal.

of design in a hundred years, when the more mediocre has passed out of use and perhaps even been demolished. (GL)

Secondly there is always a risk when considering well studied and feted architects. Those who are feted are rarely representative, otherwise they would not be interesting. There are great architects in every era and they are always in the minority. There was only one Inigo Jones, there was only one Alvar Aalto, there was only one Filippo Brunelleschi. As such we cannot allow ourselves to believe that the well documented are typical. Between the destruction of urban fabric and the faded memory of the everyday architect we are left with what is likely a false sense of failure in the intellectual rigour of our own times. A rose-tinted nostalgia of a glorious past if you will.

That being said however, I do believe the administrative burden today is a significant constraint. After World War II, architecture in Britain was dominated by architects employed by the local governmental authorities. The housing schemes and public buildings for which the modernist and brutalist eras in my country are so famous were usually built by architects who were not being briefed, and paid, by the end users of the building. They were employed by the state. Anyone who has ever worked for a private client will therefore understand the relative creative freedom this allowed. There was also a lot of work, British cities were heavily damaged by bombing raids during World War Two and there were opportunities to build big, and to build quickly. The bureaucratic burden was considerably lighter and there was a glut of new building materials and techniques driven by military breakthroughs and severe material shortages. This combination of factors led to a level of responsibility, opportunity and creative freedom that has rarely been seen in UK history. Some spectacular architecture came from it, but also some noted and significant failures. (CD)

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
This is such an excellent point, to not glorify the past based on what we still see of it in the present.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I perfectly understand you, and my experience is the very same. This sequence – emergency > design freedom > norms' setting > design restrictions – is typical, I think, of any country facing an emergency – wars, natural disasters, etc. – because emergency highlights priorities. All the rest is just optional. Hence, the first norms were about jolly critical things like properties, limits, and standards, while now we have local, national and international norms on handrails, closing the door to new possible, unexpected and new design solutions. I think this is the strongest confirmation of the often-misunderstood critique of the metaphysics of architecture made by Jacques Derrida (Deregibus 2015).

was intended and perceived as a victory by the feminists. Now, the separation of bathrooms is perceived (even if it is not intended) as offensive by the LGBTQIA+ community (each letter staying for a group), which claims to have gender-free bathrooms. The design issue, indeed, is just about how one uses a bathroom: standing up or sitting down. However, the political issue is about group contrast. And I think that norms, most times, follow the second issue more than the first one.

Notwithstanding the universalising and technocratic critiques of the current approach to reducing or eliminating known barriers to equal access to spaces, this codified framework has made it so that more people with more diverse physical and neurological characteristics and abilities are able to engage with, and are indeed welcomed into, a wider variety of places.

Those of us who live in countries and cities with well-developed accessibility requirements perhaps take for granted the ease with which many of us can move through the city and into buildings.

Cities with old infrastructure or with a less-developed codification of accessibility create many more limitations for many more people. Even in cities with the best intentions for adapting old infrastructure to increase accessibility still, in practice, exclude many from public services (see, for example, Wilson 2017; Fitzsimmons 2019; Kim 2024).

Buildings (the embodied results of architectural designs) are artifacts that encourage, discourage, allow, and refuse actions by users, and Jenny Davis' mechanisms and conditions framework provides a useful way of understanding for whom and under what conditions the built environment affords different actions (Davis 2020).

Universal design, design for all, accessibility standards and the like all seek to expand for whom the built and designed environments work, broadening the conditions under which people can use public (and often private) spaces. This reduction of barriers, this maximisation of negative liberty, is vital to ensure positive liberty. It is a necessary, if perhaps insufficient, condition for liberty.

The real answer to the question is, then, that architecture should – and, I would hope, *can* – do both. (CD)

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I find it interesting, and also revealing, that you inverted the typical ethical issue: " If you can, you should." Firstly, it shows the moral imperative – what one should do is an ideal way to overcome actual conditions. Secondly, the problem, more than

reflect a multifaceted system where various institutions – including professional orders and universities – have interests consistent with the market without being strictly inside of the market by taking advantage of it.

Of course, inclusion in a larger system protects individual liberty, and the sacrifice of individuals for the collective benefit should no longer occur. Meanwhile, our lives are determined by the larger system that covers the entire planet, and the monstrous system is so far out of our hands that even though the freedom to alter it is institutionally guaranteed, the reality is inaccessible. This resignation has become a blockage that is causing us to suffer.

We are looking for an escape to free ourselves from the big system. It can be identified as an asylum in the impossible world. However, the place where one escapes when one thinks one has finally escaped may also be a place of refuge prepared in advance by the larger system, and already encompassed by the system. Through the creation of physical space that meets the demands of "design for all" in a possible world, we may feel human and relieved by architecture in which spaces for nobody are unconsciously interwoven as a hidden path to an impossible world. (CD)

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
So inspiring...I think this vision is what can balance a liberal view (in the sense of a system where individual freedom is not sacrificed to groups rights) with a social justice, and we all should act for that, I think.

is why architecture is indeed a political practice (see Georgia Lindsay's previous answer).

singular approach to design, it allows designers to take inspiration and have their thinking be influenced differently by different things.

Any approach to design should have at its core the ability to adapt and change, across different places and differentiated scales. What was considered an appropriate approach to design one hundred years ago might not be applicable in a contemporary context or in an unseen future. Any approach to design, good design, should neither valorise nor debase difference. It should rather focus on being clear in its identity as a revelation of the values and codes in the specificities of a society and the environment in which that society exists. It does not refute the possibility of anything or anyone that is not of the same mind and thinking, rather it opens itself up to a dynamism that has evolved from lessons in the past, concerns in the present, and speculations of an unseen future. The flexibility with which we think about how we approach architectural design, is important if architecture is to remain a going concern. (EJ) (CD)

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
I think this is such a good point - and one of the main struggles inherent in practicing architecture well.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I think this clearly highlights the main problem, which is ontological: the contrast between the universal perspective of the norm and the specificity of the project. That is why prescriptive norms are so bad. They look at an ideal world that is contrary to actual contingency and stops any possible new unknown. In terms of Luhmann, such norms define a present-of-the-future instead of proposing futures-of-the-present (Deregibus 2021).

DEJ

useful illusions as they help societies functioning, and I think it's good to make certain norms and rules appear rigid to young children, as well as to create moral codes among groups of peoples. All good. But, understanding that rules and norms are illusions may also be key if we are really committed to social and political change. For example, instead of viewing the earth as a system of exchanges, or resources as a "standing reserve", to vaguely refer to Heidegger (1977), we could view our planet from a much less human-centered view. (CD) And doing so, could free us to think much more ecologically. My desire would be that eventually we could see the "norms" as the most impermanent aspect – the lines on a football pitch for example or to be more precise, the "regulating lines" of a plan – and really dig into all of the extant and exciting layers of being and change, just like the organic world has always done. Have you ever seen the verticalized operations of a dense forest or jungle? It's a kind of satori for me.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS

I agree completely with the importance of chance and including chance in the project (Deregibus 2021, and I recall Akiko Okabe's first answer). At the same time, I think that your vision is about what norms should be – like providing desiderata instead of prescriptions or not being continuously, almost yearly updated (see my last comment to Philippa Tumubweinee 's answer): these problems come exactly from the separation between the deepest sense of the law and its bureaucratic dimension. Besides, I will note that architects rarely write norms and are able to control them, even if famous examples like BIG's *Vancouver House* or Richard Seifert's buildings in London, or the whole Manhattan setting, show how important this would be.

EJ

Today British regulations around buildings and planning are heavy, contradictory and multifaceted. They have led to safer, more spacious and more environmentally friendly buildings but they heavily inhibit creative freedom. For example, there is only one diameter of handrail that is acceptable on a publicly used staircase – and so most handrails now have the same profile. Regulations around building fabric efficiency and minimum light levels prescribe a very strict wall to glazing ratio, and as such there are only a handful of ways a residential facade can be composed. Arguably this is dull and restrictive, but only time will tell if this ultimately leads to a higher percentage of longer lasting architecture that continues to serve its functions well into the future.

For all that we may live slightly differently in fifty or a hundred years, we will still need homes to live in, buildings to gather in, places to watch entertainment or transport nodes – and there are only so many ways these activities can be carried out. The regulatory restrictions of our time prevent truly dangerous buildings, for all that they do not encourage greatly imaginative ones. The truly great architects of our day though will not be inhibited by this, constraints are part of the joy and skill of practising architecture.

what one *can* do, is precisely in the opportunity to do or not do a thing (Deregibus 2016).
In fact, besides respecting the norms, understanding what opens up possibilities without simultaneously closing others is often beyond our comprehension...

It can respond to desires and reduce barriers while simultaneously celebrating the particulars of any project and allowing for unpredictability, through deep attentiveness to program, place, and people.

## IV

An expression of the power and economic system of the time, architecture never has been a cheap affair (Rowe 1994, Aureli 2008). Nowadays, nearly all published projects are much more expensive than "ordinary" buildings, whose possible spatial qualities are irrelevant. And The Line, in NEOM city, whose concept is quite the same as many failed projects such as Corviale or Prora (just on steroid), shows that the actual difference is its stellar budget – and that is why so many renowned firms joined the project despite all polemics (Aly 2023, Bullough 2023). Therefore, Tafuri's and Foucault's pessimistic idea that architecture cannot change the system it is a part of seems true (Karim 2018). However, there exists a tradition of social engagement, magnified in many international expositions (MoMA 2010-2011, Biennale di Venezia 2023, 2021, 2016, 2008): once the result of illuminism and colonialism, in the XX Century, it was championed by the Bauhaus and, more recently, by architects such as Anna Heringer and Alejandro Aravena. Yet, these cases always concern pretty extreme situations, more than ordinary ones: there, architecture seems not to exist.

Can architecture truthfully impact society, or is this just an illusion to give a moral legitimation to its hedonistic essence?

### Dora Epstein Jones

Oh, yes, of course architecture can impact society! I wouldn't have joined the architecture world if I didn't think so. Just think of how the efficient and migrating kitchen (from the 19th century to modernism) impacted women's lives, for example. (GL) Or Richard Neutra and Christopher Alexander's total redesign of education buildings.

But, my question today is the other way around – how can society impact architecture? This is where I would return to my thoughts about a more contemporary version of a discipline. Maybe today if we set new rubrics, obviously ecology would be one, but ecology is really only a piece of a much larger set of concerns about environmental and spatial justice.

We need to understand and hold closely now that society is not just a client or people "out there" (I've become annoyed lately at the generalized manner in which architects and students see people by the way – see my essay on the "populated plan"). (EJ) (GL)

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
What a great point! I think when I was answering the question, I was thinking about big public or cultural projects and big societal shifts, so I really appreciate your emphasis on the personal and the domestic.

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
very much agreed! Humans are human but not all people are people in the same way!

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
Lovely thanks.

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
This is such a great way to say this!

### Eleanor Jolliffe

The British Prime Minister Winston Churchill once said, «we shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us» (Churchill, House of Lords, 28 October 1943). He was referring to the design of the debating chamber for the House of Commons, the elected house of the UK Parliament. The relatively compact debating chamber is designed as a rectangle, with two sets of benches for the Members of Parliament, set more than two swords width apart. Its design grew from tradition and conflicts within the British governing classes over centuries, but also has shaped the two-party democracy system that we have today.

I think it is an apt example for the power of architecture. (CD) It has never been designed in a vacuum. It has never been realised without the backing of individuals with power and money. Therefore architecture, not theoretical exercises but realised projects, is driven by the powerful, usually to suit their priorities. If the future we move into suits those buildings I am not certain if it is the building or the powerful people that shape it.

Architecture has also been co-opted by the powerful throughout history to shape cities, or reinforce messages of power or ideological control. It is easy to list dictators, such as Hitler, Imperial powers such as

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree, a clever example. At the same time, buildings are (or rather, can be) very resilient. Older ones were, for sure – just think to the famous essay of Moneo on the Cordoba Mosque (Moneo 1985).

## Georgia Lindsay

Because of its close ties to power, architecture *can* impact elements of society: it can change how people move through public spaces, it can change how people work together, it can offer safe shelter or it can further engender feelings of dis-ease amongst people experiencing trauma, among many other ways it subtly impacts the human experience. To take one recent example, the thoughtful design of an aged care facility in Nhulunbuy (Yolŋu Country, North East Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia) has meant that Yolŋu elders can continue to care for *Country* and *Culture* while accessing the care they need, in a deeply respectful setting (Kaunitz Yeung Architecture 2024). The care the architects took to engage with and support the community has transformed what aged care means to people who have been subjected to centuries of hostility and marginalization.

However, architecture sits within a web of policies, programs, and financial decisions that constrain its impact. Pruitt-Igoe, a housing estate in St. Louis built in the early 1950s to offer new and state-supported housing, is an older example of design transforming lives. Initially, the residents were delighted to live in the building, and appreciated many of the design innovations championed by the architect Minoru Yamasaki, but two decades after opening it was famously demolished and the modernist design was blamed for its failure (Freidrichs 2012). However, careful scholarship has demonstrated it was a series of financial, programmatic, and managerial decisions that caused the demise of the housing project, not

## Akiko Okabe

If the question is whether architecture in the narrow sense has the power to change society, I can only say that it may or may not. It is a contingent question. Besides, I am convinced that architecture as a verb, practicing architecture, or building is a realistic tool for social change that starts with each of us. (CD)

Rwanda is a society that is still suffering from the past genocide, where there have been attempts by perpetrators to build homes for victims and their remained relatives. By having the victims live in a space that the perpetrators "built" with their own work and in which their handiwork remains, the reconciliation that could not be achieved no matter how much they talked about it, has gone one step further through a physical space. It was, however, a difficult and conflicting process, and an experience that confronted them with a wound that could not be erased no matter what they did.

The thirst for social change is even more acute in many ordinary countries and regions where there are seemingly no pressing problems. The great systems that order society are human-made, but they have become monstrous. Almost nobody attempts to change it. While there is widespread disappointment with revolutionary change based on the ideology that solidarity and collective action can change things towards betterment,

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
So concise and so true! Sincerely, I love the continuous balancing between the practice of individuals and the nature of the possible/impossible world that emerges in your answers.

## Philippa Tumubweinee

On the African continent, the rate of urbanization soared from 15% in 1960 to 40% in 2010 and is projected to reach 60% in 2050 – a conservative estimate indeed: some reports, and scholars such Pieterse (2011) and others place this at 75%; the need for housing and infrastructure that supports urban living is therefore vital. (GL) This means that most urban environments, at least in Africa, will have to accommodate almost 50% more people in the next 25 years or so. That means a significant increase in the current built footprint of these environments. The scale of the built form (architecture) that is required to meet these predictions is significant and therefore the development of architecture in these environments cannot be divorced from their ability to provide adequately humane conditions for the people that are expected to live in them. Speaking from an African perspective, the notion that Africans will return to a rural hinterland and bask in the warm glow of a setting savannah sun is misguided; we are urbanising, and we are doing so rapidly. Thus, if we acknowledge that we need to build more urban settlements, and that the architecture in those settlements is intended to provide shelter and provide a functional envelope for the programmes and ambitions of a rapidly urbanising society, then the short answer to the question, can architecture impact society, is yes.

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
Such a fascinating contrast with the situation Akiko Okabe describes in her answer!

Society is both the locus of meaning and totally heterogeneous.

I would say that this is also why chance is so important. Society moves, changes, has varying needs, and it would be folly to assume that the architect could possibly know all of it. Instead, we in architecture must first reject our own bias towards being a design colonizer, towards the thinking that leads to us assuming that we know better, and instead, be gatherers first. (GL)

I think in the early 2000's, we were pretty cautious about "big data." But data is quite necessary if we want to put societal needs first. I really appreciate the work of Neeraj Bhatia and The Open Workshop or Ersela Kripa and Stephen Mueller of Agency because they are both using data and narrative and place to really locate where architecture can be useful to a society in situ for a time. Plus, their work is gorgeous to look at.

Maybe we can get to a point where we can mark a project down for hedonism? I'll tell you though, there's a lot of work out there that might appear hedonistic but it really isn't at all, and a lot of work out there, if not the majority of the built environment, that seems mild that is really blunt force architectural colonialism. (CD)

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
What a lovely concept, to think of architects as gatherers.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I think you hit the mark: what is hedonism, in fact? I believe that too often, we (architects, critics, scholars) stigmatise buildings as hedonistic (and self-referential) because we simply don't like them.
A problem of judgment (as you highlighted in your previous answers).
However, just as it is «folly to assume that the architect could know all», I would say that the importance of data is in the opposite sense.
It is the project that recalls and gives meaning to the data: data are senseless without the project, and their meaning changes following the project.

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
True. It's an important point to direct the causality. And I agree.
These architects that I have mentioned, and especially Agency Architecture, actually have to create entirely new datasets simply because there's a paucity of data that tells us, for example, how many people have shade at their transit stop.
And I think it's just crazy to think about how many transit stops have been designed by architects based on a mere guess, or what a transit authority guesstimated. They're literally designing algorithms to understand and interpret GIS data alongside border data, census data, really



Britain, or religions such as Christianity of Islam that have used architecture to signify power, influence, a new regime, or local dominance. Nothing feels quite so permanent, or so powerful, as large buildings. To wield the political and financial might to shape buildings and cities signifies great power without a word being spoken, in this instance buildings become psychological facilitators of their patron's whims.

Saying this however, architects across the centuries have influenced their patrons and considered space in ways that shape the experience and lifestyle of less fortunate building users. Whilst architecture cannot be realised without the powerful it isn't realised solely by them – somewhat like society itself.

The international exhibitions in the question are interesting but again display an elite interest – those with the time and money to explore form and space for its own sake – no matter how altruistic their motivations. Building is expensive – financially and emotionally. However, it does shape us. Anyone who has lived in a poorly designed home badly converted into a flatshare, or worked in an office with ceiling too low or not enough light or ventilation knows just how considerable an effect architecture can have on daily existence.

People who feel comfortable, connected to others and are regularly in contact with beauty and moments of life that lift the soul are arguably more likely to have better mental health, and therefore to interact more generously and kindly to the world around them. Ultimately buildings do not shape society – people do – but buildings impact people. So well designed buildings, architecture, does shape society – but perhaps not as directly as some architects would wish to imagine. (CD) It's a responsibility I try to be aware of on every project I work on – no matter how tedious or mundane – as it is the ordinary and the mundane that shapes our lives.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I completely agree, and I think that it is critical to make clear that the impact of architecture on society is always indirect. The failure of the Modern comes from the will to directly impact society, and the same holds true for the experiment you recalled in your previous answer. Recalling my first comment to your answer, I would say that any architect can design the condition for the buildings to change as the Mosque, *grafting potential* into it.

the design (Bristol 1991). To put it more directly, the best most evidence-based hospital design will not matter if nurses and doctors and aides and others are not paid enough to staff it.

Occasionally buildings might revolutionize building practices or assumptions about what buildings or a type of building might do. For example, Maya Lin's minimalist 1982 *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in Washington profoundly altered the paradigm of memorialization, and echoes of her formal and material choices are seen in contemporary examples from the *National September 11 Memorial* in New York (by Museum Michael Arad Peter and PWP), to the *Civil Rights Memorial Center* in Montgomery, Alamba (also by Maya Lin). A similarly phenomenological and embodied experience of remembering was offered by Daniel Libeskind in his building for the *Jewish Museum* of Berlin, which was arguably just as powerful empty as it was as a vessel for artefacts (Schneider 1999).

But even for those examples, examples of monuments and museums that propose new relationships to the meaning of monuments and museums, their impact on society more broadly was limited. In spite of the emotion and introspection encouraged by Maya Lin's memorial, twenty years later the United States entered another war of ideology on another continent, a war which lasted twenty years and by all accounts the US eventually lost. In spite of the powerful argument about what is lost made by Libeskind's museum, genocide continues to be perpetuated in multiple arenas at the time of this writing.

Architecture is not likely to be a truly revolutionary force, fundamentally changing society (as opposed to paradigms of space). It requires too much investment, too many resources to truly overthrow the power structure. However, that does not mean that revolution oughtn't be attempted, and there are proposals out there for how to approach it. (CD) (EJ) Feminist

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree (see also Eleanor Jolliffe's answer and my comment on it). Architecture influences and impacts people's lives, but its actual capacity to revolutionise things is limited by the socio-techno-economical system it belongs to, aside from finding "opportunity places", as named by Philippa Tumubweinee in previous answers.

GEORGIA LINDSAY
Absolutely, and there is the paradox of any one attempting revolution through buildings!

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
I entirely agree – though this is something that is almost always at the discretion of the client or funding body. A building can usually be only as overtly revolutionary as the person paying to build it will allow!

small, quiet anarchic actions that start by changing what is within one's reach physically are attracting people and holding out hope for change.

For instance, in Japan, the structurally increasing number of vacant houses is a major social problem due to depopulation. A movement among young people to take on vacant houses and renovate them with their own hands is spreading simultaneously. (GL) They range from temporary art events to those that live while renovating it. Looking back through human history, people have the ability to shape their own environment (Illich 1973), but as housing has become more sophisticated, it has become inaccessible to the dweller. (EJ)

Sakaguchi Kyohei has responded to this situation by beginning with a survey on houses built by homeless people, non-professionals in the field of architecture, and has questioned the situation of being comfortably ensconced in a system created by humans. Sakaguchi's mentor was architect Ishiyama Osamu. Unlike big-headed anarchists, they throw themselves into social change that begins with modest modifications of the real, everyday environment by their own hands. This is in keeping with the quiet anarchism of Shunsuke Tsurumi, known as a pragmatist thinker.

Living primarily in human-made environments, both tangible and intangible, I am most interested in the possible social impact starting from everyday interventions to man-made environments by the users' hands. (CD)

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
Very cool. I would be curious to hear how it works – do they have to buy the homes or are they gifted them? There were some interesting strategies tried in Detroit in the late 90s when it was similarly hollowed out from population loss...

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
In itself I wonder if this is an impact on society – a negative one in that it decreases the agency and ability for people to feel they are educated enough to hold opinions on their environment.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
This is something I, too, care a lot. Ordinary design actions, ordinary architecture – not just buildings. When Dora Epstein Jones says in her answer, «yes, of course architecture can impact society», I'm not sure if it is really Architecture (that is, the sequence of extraordinary cases selected by history) or architecture (the many ordinary cases shaping canons) that do it. I believe both, in different ways. And, in my practice, I've come to think that if I'm able to improve the life of even a single person, then I'm «making architecture, Architecture» (again, Dora Epstein Jones, in her previous answer).

A longer answer: the truth of architecture's impact on society attempts to deal with the way the architecture impacts on the ability of a society to provide shelter for its inhabitants (housing) and accommodate the systems and structures that allow for it to operate (function, programme, and ambition). The relationship between the built form (architecture) and the society that exists in it is complex, but not complicated. Complex because this relationship is governed by the murky undercurrents of political, social, cultural, and environmental dynamics; uncomplicated because, at a very basic level, architecture provides shelter and contains functions and programmes that support a society's growth and development. The truths of architecture's impact on society lie in the ambiguous territory between these two. (CD)

If architectural design explores questions related to the rationalities of development processes assigned to the creation of place (Watson 2003), it can reveal characteristics about that place that provide insights into how that society functions as a network of intersections, connections, and relationships. This puts the design process and the architecture in an interesting relationship with shifting temporalities – in an emerging urban environment this is sometimes rogue and sometimes ad-hoc (Pieterse 2011). The conceptual positioning of architecture as a tangible outcome of a process, a system of thinking about place, can bring into focus the creative practice that is composed and invented by a society. The architecture in its exposition of novelty and originality meaningfully contributes to the way in which society begins to understand itself (Mbembé & Nuttall 2004, 348). The point being made here is not that architecture in and of itself can locate itself across different modalities, temporalities, and histories; rather,

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
And, I would add, here lies the *meaning of meaning* in architecture. This «territory», as you've called it – and I also recall the historical essay by Vittorio Gregotti (1966) – is truly ambiguous and variable, not only between different situations but also in the very same place at different times. Your example of urbanisation process is just perfect. In Italy, we lived a similar situation in the Fifties, with a strong urbanisation; then all stopped in the Nineties. The meaning of those settlements changed consistently. During the emergency, people were proud of those new houses – *their* houses, earned the hard way. Now, these neighbourhood are seen as problematic – failures (as Eleanor Jolliffe reported in the previous answer). Meanings fluctuate in this ambiguous territory.

any data that they can piece together to form an impression of some really specific places for needed intervention. The fact that they need to do this when supposedly we have a saturation of data is just horrifying.

approaches to architecture, for example, suggest methods or practices to respond to environmental and socio-political issues (Frichot 2016), and related ideas of bio-inclusive design and ecological architecture pose radical perspectives on who is considered when buildings are designed (Frichot *et al.* 2017; Veselova & Gaziulusoy 2022). For architecture to impact society, it must open itself and engage in deep and meaningful ways with the subalterns whose voices are often ignored.

Undoubtedly, there are many architectures that have had a great impact on society since ancient times, both in the West and in the East. In an age when such architectural works are valued as inseparable from the individual architect who is the author of them, once an architect achieves fame through the power of his or her work, a cycle is created in which being a prominent architect increases his or her appeal to society. But I regard them as directly changing the physical environment or changing the way people view architecture, just as a volcanic explosion or natural disaster can transform the world. This is the opposite of the social impact that I myself am more interested in, but sometimes architectural works of renowned architects, significantly, can stimulate small but countless actions by laypeople and possibly shake the earth, as if large disasters do so.

it is that, if its conceptualisation takes on the tensions borne from what is visible (built form) and what is hidden (socio-spatial), then it can successfully bridge the complexities of its realisation in the complications of its perception to have a truthful impact on society.

In conclusion, although both the short and long answers do not adequately address the grandeur of architectural projects that are a product of individualised creativity and aesthetics from so called star-architects or "starchitects", they attempt to refocus the debate on the impact of architecture in the realm of the ordinary urbanite from whom most of the built form is intended. And for the ordinary urbanite who requires shelter, schools, office-space, hospitals, markets, transport nodes, recreational facilities and more, the impact of the architecture that contains these necessary functions, programmes and ambitions is significant.

## V

Nowadays, the most tremendous debate about architectural design is around the explosion of artificial intelligence (AI). While most critics and theorists reflect on (job) threats and (formal and managing) opportunities (Desouki et al. 2023, Wainwright 2023), AI tools are already consistently part of the leading firms' workflows – such as Midjourney for BIG or Dall-E for Zaha Hadid Architects, without speaking of urban design software such as Delve or Spacemaker or managing programs like Forma or LookX (Leach 2021, Bernstein 2022). Far less discussed is how architecture will change in non-architects' eyes, who mostly look at architecture as an image (Bergera & Esteban 2022, Del Campo & Leach 2022). But if easily accessible tools make it possible to generate architectural images with no apparent difference from proper design images, then the added value of design, too, becomes less evident. This problem won't affect big firms and starchitects – whose signature style is indeed a source for AI – but "human ingenuity" will inevitably affect (the market of) ordinary architecture, – as photography and music are experiencing.

How will AI-generated images affect people's perception of architecture, and how will this changed perception affect the practice and teaching of architectural design?



### Dora Epstein Jones

OK, so first, AI is us. It's totally chock full of bias, and it gets that bias from us. It's like a child using a curse word – the parent is the source of that word. The same with AI images. That's all just us, and us collectively by percentage. (GL) I think you're correct that leading architects can influence AI images but that's only because of the superfluity of images that show the Norman Foster so-called *Gherkin* or Herzog & De Meuron's *Bird's Nest* or whatever. But, for the majority of AI images on architecture, there are some common themes that derive from more popular aesthetic sentiments. One is dusk lighting. I think it comes from Thomas Kinkade (often called "the Painter of Light") but also probably that odd fixation that mostly Western people have on the Impressionists. Another is wet-weather plants, like vines, often envisioned as ornamentation, which seems to be inflected by a much more European ideal of lushness and luxury. And finally, just so much glass, so much glass. And all of this together tells me that AI images are deriving

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
Such a good point...but also, it's not even really all of us, just the part of us that are online or the artefacts we have created that have been put online.

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
Ooooo good point!

### Eleanor Jolliffe

At the moment the images generated by AI are useful tools. However, without significant guidance they are unrealistic, structurally unsound and unachievable in reality. They come closer to video game graphics than real buildings. It is likely that this will change quickly though as the tools are used more, and learn more about what makes buildings work, and the constraints of physics, building regulations, budgets etc. This is the key I think, "the tools". AI is not a new species – it, like any other software tool, is only ever as good as the source material that its foundations are based upon. We need to be careful how such a powerful tool is used however, and we also need to be aware that it cannot discriminate between users. It has no knowledge of which information is fed to it by an educated professional, and which by a playful teenager. We need therefore to be careful of its outputs.

At the moment we have trained without AI and can see the flaws when we pause to look for them. We know that panes of glass can only reach a certain size before they become difficult to manufacture or transport. We know that buildings must be supported by structure and not by "sky hooks", and we know that buildings are not made in the surface image but in the complex interfaces

## Georgia Lindsay

Images generated by AI programs such as Dall-E or Midjourney are unlikely to have much impact on either people's perception of architecture or the teaching of architectural design for the foreseeable future.

I am not convinced that the general public pays much attention to *architecture* at all, per se. When I have studied how people talk about architecture online on sites like Yelp and YouTube and TripAdvisor, my collaborators and I have found that even at famous buildings, works of star architecture, many or most of the comments are not about architecture, and when people take pictures of even famous buildings, most of their images do not focus on or highlight the architecture, but instead focus on the program or on experiences (Lindsay 2016, Chapter 12; Lindsay & Sawyer 2022b; Sawyer & Lindsay 2024). Even in newspaper coverage of star architecture projects, journalists often use famous buildings as locators (what my co-author and I called "urban intertextuality") and talk about how they will increase visitors and tourism, rather than focusing on the architecture itself (Lindsay & Sawyer 2022a). When asked which features made a LEED-Platinum building energy-efficient or sustainable, the general public was more likely to point to the signs about recycling than any

## Akiko Okabe

Architects stand on the premise that architecture is a perceivable object. However, if we define architecture in the broadest sense as an environment in which humans have placed their bodies, then the vast majority of people live in an environment of architecture that is not conceptually perceived. In other words, it is not architecture that is created with intention, i.e., designable architecture, but architecture or the environment just happened, i.e., non-designable architecture.

As I said in my response to the first question, I have been working primarily with so-called slums, which are self-generated built environments that are not designed as intended. Digital science allows the translation of these naturally formed agglomerations into algorithmically and automatically generated information. Generative AI makes it possible to create artificially these naturally occurring environments. Until now, naturally occurring cities such as slums have been a nuisance to urban planners. In this respect, I believe that generative AI is ground-breaking in the sense that it looks positively at informal areas.

Furthermore, there are growing expectations that generative AI will be able to generate natural ecosystems as humans wish. In this way, we will be able to regenerate and artificially

## Philippa Tumubweinee

Although AI has been around and part of some specialist practices, for most people, sentiment around its proliferation ranges from trepidation to excitement. The premise of both sentiments, in their extremity, is an angst that comes from engagement with an unknown.

The question should not be about the proliferation of AI generated images, rather the intuitive relational engagement of society with those images. In this relationship, AI can provide the opportunity from which to explore architecture as undetermined in its practice, education, and perception. In the imaginative process of speculation about AI generated images, it may be possible to develop an aesthetic, an identity of architecture that means something to, and is relatable, to a society. When we encourage speculation about architecture through AI generated images that combine place-based imaginaries in the particulates of architectural experiments, we as practitioners and educationists can locate practise across different and differentiated modalities, temporalities, and histories. To suggest a process of design whose narrative is representative of localised histories in broad geopolitical economic, social, cultural, colonial, and postcolonial realities. In this instance, the speculative process of generating

a ton of visual information from sexy architecture in movies, magazines, and ads. So, my first point is that AI is doing a lot of work within the comfort arena of the privileged image producers and consumers. That's not so good. (EJ) (GL)

Second, I really want to shift the conversation from AI images generally to data sets more specifically. Each AI platform has different data sets. And, these data sets cost money. So, if you want more heterogeneity in the image-making, you need to pay for it. I think you can see how that might be a problem then. I really, really believe that all data sets need to be much, much larger, and open access, if we want the image-making to be useful to architecture on the terms of the ecological and diverse architectures that I have already laid out. (EJ)

So, to answer your question about the practice and teaching – I think the best aspect of AI image-making is the audacity of the forms. AI doesn't care if it's buildable, or if everything is on square, or is normal in the terms that Western architecture has mostly laid out, and so it proposes some very exciting formalisms, and some really delightfully improbable tectonics and detailing. It's really great then for pushing everyone – practitioners and students alike – in a much more fun way to explore and discover forms. (CD) Moreover, I think it shifts some of the design work into a curation of prompts and a super-multiple output of images. You know, after recognizing bias and

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
I entirely agree with all of this!

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
Totally agree!

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
The difficulty with data sets being open access is that architects derive their living from owning intellectual property. Trying to make too much architectural data open access could wipe out the profession.

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
I so did not know this. Whoa.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
Referring to your second answer, wouldn't you call this «a pure form» or an almost pure one? On the creative side, the potential for designers is clear (and already in use), but this potential also works for the others. And, if anybody can create architectural images at such ease, with no awareness of their «improbability», the perception itself of «audacity» will change, as we could live in sci-fi movies, starting a senseless race. Just as fake news, there are and will be more and more fake architecture, and how could beauty be «mindful» in these imaginaries? The limit between what is creative and what is fake is so thin that I think AI will force us to break the very basis of our usual distinctions.



usually hidden from view. Will we always know this though?

My greatest concern with AI is not that it will make unrealistic images that will somehow change public taste. Every revolution in drawing technology in history has done this. Changing architectural styles are as much part of fashion as changes in clothing styles or tastes in television programmes – albeit moving at a slower pace due to the relative investment. My concern is that the tool becomes so powerful we come to rely on it uncritically. That it makes us lazy, and we cease to be able to properly monitor its output. To use a silly example, I can no longer follow directions or memorise maps. I have become so used to the power of the mapping app on my mobile phone that my short-term memory for directions has gone. I have no need to exercise that skill and I have lost it. I'm sure I could re-learn should I need to but I don't.

My fear is that AI will de-skill the architectural profession in the same way. As it becomes increasingly powerful it may carry out many of the mundane tasks in architecture that we all hate – the checking of door schedules, the monitoring of regulatory compliance on layouts etc. there may be a pop up that tell you where you have made an unconscious error. At the moment we are used to operating without this, we can override these prompts, or critique the images generated with the knowledge we have gained in carrying out these tasks, day by day. In the future we may lose this "muscle memory", much as I can no longer remember verbal directions – we may become reliant on the tool, and therefore on the information on which it bases its information, this is the concern I see in the increasing power of AI. (CD)

How this may impact architectural education though. This is an even greater concern. I can only speak to UK architectural education but it has seen a significant de-skilling and movement away from the art of construction over the last fifty to sixty

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
For sure, I think, architects will lose some skills, just as they did in the past and are doing now – it is the typical complaint of older generations toward the newer ones. However, conversely, they will gain new and different knowledge. In education, I think we need to maintain one basic skill for architects, that is, the ability to grasp different subjects through the project. But for the non-educated, the risk of seeing architecture even more as a strange shape (at most, a series of «sublime sculptures», as you said in your second answer) is strong and hugely impactful for meaning in architecture – even if

feature of the architecture (Cranz *et al.* 2014).

Furthermore, I suspect that many of the non-architects who do consider or pay attention to architecture in the media might already think of it as obsessed with visuals and impossible-seeming forms. The buildings that make international news are star architecture projects such as the Beijing National Stadium, colloquially referred to as the *Bird's Nest* (a moniker gifted to the building by local residents), a project that from the beginning had visual and symbolic aspirations and included Chinese artist Ai Weiwei on the design team (Herzog & de Meuron 2007). Local news stories about architecture might focus on buildings such as the *Aspen Art Museum*, where much of the discourse about the architecture from the public was dominated by complaints about some outsider swooping in to plop an over-the-top form into the setting which had nothing to do with the local place, in spite of a place-inspired design by the sensitive and Pritzker-prize winning architect Shigeru Ban (Shelby *et al.* 2022). In that and other similar projects, the image is part of the controversy, which is driven by a narrative that some outsider is imposing an arbitrary form. How much can it matter if that arbitrary form was created by the latest controversial star architect or Midjourney? (CD)

Moreover, even if the public changes how it understands or perceives architecture, that will not necessarily change how architecture is taught. That is, there will be minimal impact on architecture pedagogy for quite some time. Emerging architects – architecture students – will still need to know about architecture history even if AI models can offer images of a building "in the style of..." (the contestedness of

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
You're surely right. Just like any art, people live without it until they experience it for some reason. At the same time, if it was truly irrelevant, discussing architecture would be pointless at all. But I think the problem is the opposite. It is precisely because people less and less understand and accept what you called, in your second answer, the «cultural authority» of architects, that AI tools could change the game. Because, for the first time, everybody can (think of being able to) easily design architectural shapes: and why not propose it in a competition? Why don't select trending styles (full of the biases Dora Epstein Jones highlighted)? It would be "democratic" and "inclusive", a typical posthuman evolution. To exaggerate a bit, only legal responsibility now prevents this dystopia. I think AI will change architecture in the realm of *unthought* (Hayles 2017), becoming apparent only after.

restore the natural ecosystems that humans have damaged in the past. It responds to the social demands of a circular economy while opening up design possibilities that have never existed before. This is why regenerative design has attracted strongly today's architects.

But if the mechanisms of the biosphere, which have been mysterious until now, are clarified in the near future and can be generated as humans wish, both cities and the global environment will become boring. This assumption, however, is implicit in the fact that generative AI is a tool for human use.

But what if the generative AI becomes a tool that cannot be controlled by humans to create a built environment? The unmanageably left natural environment and the AI-generated environment jointly form an even more uncontrollable and impossible environment. Amid the man-made but impossible world, architects can only create a box garden of modest man-made wild nature. I see the recent regenerative architecture as a Noah's Ark of wildness floating in such a dystopia. (CD)

What I have attempted to do in my own architectural practice and education is the opposite: to deal with the environment of the earth as it is, without going through the process of conceptualizing it and making it graspable, just like the Geddes' diagram of organism-function-environment (Geddes 1915).

In any case, architecture in the narrow sense of designing with intention can only create a small possible microcosm after accepting an incomprehensible macrocosm without meaning. Which one are we to deal with as the incomprehensible and impossible world, the mother-earth environment from the ancient past, or the Anthropocene earth environment beyond human's control?

Up to this point, I have answered the questions about "meaning in architecture" with the framework of "a small possible human world within a vast impossible world that is beyond human's perception" in mind. If so, architecture in the narrow sense of design with intention has to do with the creation of a small possible microcosm, accepting an

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I don't think we can really "control" AI. It is part of its fascination and, more generally, of technology fascination, that we don't and can't understand how it operate, but just use it, grasping its algorithms. Maybe, precisely this impossibility to fully control it could be, in a future, the way for overcoming the limit between what is possible and what is impossible, what is the intentioned creation and what is the incomprehensible world.

AI images is fertile ground for design processes that are deeply implicated in the everyday imaginaries of urbanites and the urban contexts in which they exist. (CD)

Architectural practise, in engagement with AI, can separate itself from premediated foundational knowledge about what is good design and the principles that make it so. In the space of AI, architectural practise can creatively engage with questions in a manner that breaks with tendencies that reduce observations and explanations to a materialist reading of known and existing conditions. And, in the hands of untutored masses, provide a level of access to processes and insights that have been confined to the protected realm of architectural practice that creatives and architects have had dominion over, tended to, and developed over time. This level of access means that as practitioners we can structure consequential discussion about architecture and in the process develop meaningful approaches to practice that truthful speaks to a broader society.

In the classroom, AI generated images cannot replicate the richness born from intuition that translates through creative process into design. It can, when it is intelligently incorporated into an architectural curriculum, render the extraordinary to the ordinary in a commonplace approach to thinking about architecture and its practise. Although the nature of AI generated images, a simplistic approach to design that stiches together images taken from revolving algorithms, can provide alternate pathways for thinking through place-based architectural interventions, it does not replace the critical nature of architectural education nor the

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I think that your answer perfectly balances Dora Epstein Jones' one. Thinking about the work you did in your university – the imaginaries of working places for different departments – I think it is clear that AI allowed these imaginaries to become images and that those imaginaries were just biased from dusk lighting, glass and indoor plants. Therefore, the result can be involving and inclusive but also promote a standardised, non-local, unrelated to experience vision of the desired future. Here the «cultural» role of architects mentioned in her second answer by Georgia Lindsay would be critical, I think.

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
I agree, and I love that we are demonstrating here exactly the collective thinking-through that the world, and especially architecture, needs. Something must dislodge the privileging of current AI images. We also might think in terms of establishing, really establishing, new ethics!

DORA EPSTEIN JONES
Carlo, I think about the point you are making often. And, it does hurt my brain, which may be a symptom of my age and context. You know, Vivian Sobchack, a film theorist who writes from a phenomenological perspective, once told me that people in the 19th century and earlier may not be able to see a virtual space, like a video game, as in, their brains would not let them perceive it. And, I think we are at a similar point with AI and what is true or real, and what is false or fake. We know that we still value the real over the fake (gemstone and jewelry needs to change the "value of the real" yesterday - so much needless suffering) but we are getting to the point where we can't discern it. I do not know what the new distinctions will be, but I'm holding out hope for the compassionate over the exploitative.

the limitations of the data sets, you're only as good with the AI image-making as your prompts. And I think that really expands some of the critical-thinking dimensions of design work. I'd love to see an emergence of a new expertise in prompting and curating, and it would really be wonderful if we could guide that expertise with a sense of meaning, and politic, and justice. AI is very aesthetical, obviously, but I hope that we can finally end the seeming divide between the aesthetic in architecture and the value of social consciousness. Everyone deserves mindful beauty, don't you think?



Georgia Lindsay's answer seem to say different things.

ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
They will gain new and different skills – but even in the last fifty years there has been a decrease in the technical ability of UK architects due to the widening gap between their education and the process of construction. The new skills that have replaced this more material understanding have led to better images – but poorer built architecture. I fear AI is an exacerbation of this (even speaking as a younger less technically skilled architect!)

years. Much of this was driven by a mis-placed snobbery, and a belief that there was no intellectual value to knowledge of manual or mundane skills. AI could exacerbate this leading to an architectural education that promotes the image over the actualisation.

The images created by AI are driven by our personal preferences, it shows us what we want to see. The images I see coming from AI are not sophisticated construction drawings, they are celebrations of imaginative concept. They are beautiful, but they are not really architecture. My fear is that what we have fed it drives the cycle of demand and preference and that we cease to see or to celebrate skill in drawings, and architects, that understand the process of construction. Architecture is not about image creation. My fear is that the eventual conclusion to this trajectory is the death of the belief that architecture is about creating buildings.

historiography and the nature of the canon notwithstanding). Architecture schools will still be responsible to accreditation boards, which require teaching professional practices such as contract management and budgeting, and an understanding of technical specifications and codes. They require some cultural competencies, although whose cultures and what exactly is the relationship of architecture to place and to the traditional custodians of lands is currently shifting as well. (EJ)

Architecture is much more than the visual form-making that Dall-E can provide, and architectural pedagogy will continue to reflect that. For the foreseeable future, AI might streamline some steps in practice, but it is not likely to fundamentally change the nature of what gets designed or how architecture is taught.

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
I suppose there may be a question however as to whether people more generally would still see architecture as a valid career path. Many people perceive it (incorrectly) to largely be the making of images of buildings, if AI does this 'better' or faster will architects hold their value to society?

GEORGIA LINDSAY
That is the open question about so many creative industries right now, isn't it? I do see growing skepticism towards AI--even in the few months since we wrote these answers, the sheen of AI has worn off a bit as its limitations, expense, faults, and hallucinations become more apparent. Simultaneously, of course, newer versions of AI keep emerging. I do think it is important to think about and theorize...and also that we won't really know how this shakes out for a while!

incomprehensible world to which no meaning can be attached. Architecture can only have meaning relationally with the impossible world.

Hiroshi Naito, a Japanese architect, explains his works using an analogy with fragile boats made of a bamboo leaf floating in a huge current. The current is left as it is. We can do nothing with the current. (EJ) It is an impossible world. In the case of a museum surrounded by nature, the current is a natural ecosystem. In the case of Shibuya redevelopment, the current is a flow of numerous people. In both cases, the background current gives meaning to his architectural works.

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
While pointing to a broader truth I don't know if I agree. It's certainly harder to impact 'the current' but the artificial islands of many middle easter states, hydroelectric dams, artificial rivers, demolition of mountains, even climate change- would all indicate that man has an ability to shape their environment when they are truly motivated. I wouldn't argue this was necessarily good – but it is possible.

identity or architectural practise as a noble discipline from which meaningful architecture is conceptualised and realised. (EJ) (CD)

(EJ) ELEANOR JOLLIFFE
I would agree. I hope it's a viewpoint that remains current!

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I'm not sure of that. Practice and conception influence reciprocally, just as conception and design are not sequential. AI provides very effective tools, and just as previous media and discover influenced architecture – think how perspective changed it in XIV Century – its real impact is yet to be seen. However, I agree, in the sense that even our judgement on architecture will change, consistently :)

## In, of, from, to, after, for

Strictly speaking, this debate was not on Meaning in Architecture, or, in any case, not only. However, meaning has proven to be such an elusive concept when discussed outside its analytic dimension that strange would be the opposite. In the free and incompressible space of between – the individual and the world, the theory and the action, the conception and the realising, the possible and the impossible – the meaning is just as pervasive as ephemeral, as performative as evanescent. This is why the topic of Meaning has always been analysed in Architecture – without clarifying the limits of the term "architecture", thus surpassing the problematic character of the Meaning of Architecture – which would seem to be immediately monodirectional and intentional. Nevertheless, it is mainly the Meaning of Architecture, and of architectural design, that the guests of Jencks and Baird (1969) highlighted: or rather, the meanings, and more correctly, we should add, the possible meanings. However, the issue of Meaning can be seen through other, less (allegedly) apparent prepositions: from and to Architecture, for example, as Architecture is not out of the world – nor architectures, nor architects are. Its practices happen within the world and, thus, are political. Therefore, it is possible to look at architectural processes as a continuous exchange of meanings, incessantly extracted from architecture and attributed to it. It would be interesting to trace the way meaning changes, evolves, and transmutes, understanding how architects influence or not this transformation. Then, there is also a Meaning after Architecture, which would be a way to investigate the very edge of the discipline: not only since many of the trends – here, the debate seems solidly consistent – are not as revolutionary as often claimed, so there be Architecture after Architecture; but also to understand how Meaning is and will be changing after changes in Architecture. Lastly, and maybe even more crucially, we should discuss Meaning for Architecture. Not to: the point is not to give or decide a meaning to design actions, which would be senseless, but to decide the place of architecture and its role in the world. The debate above relies on very different ideas about what Architecture is (and should be) and what architects do (and should do). The issue of Meaning deserves renovated attention precisely to place Architecture and architects within the past, present and future world, not just adapting to the evolving, dominant ideologies – like the neoliberal overwhelming contemporary system – but also, above all, to make clear its and their capability to impact the becoming of our world.

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# Coriandoli di senso.
## Il significato in architettura, nel tempo

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*Meaning in Architecture* is, on the one hand, a possibly significant text; on the other, a theme that has crossed recent decades of architecture, with different and varied meanings and pervasiveness. It is, therefore, necessary to frame the historical value and the political nature of a look towards the opportunity constructed by Jencks and Baird, on the one hand tracing the matrices of meaning and opportunity, on the other looking at the meanings with which the term meaning lends itself both in the cultural geography of the end of the twentieth century and, in fading and negative, in the more contemporary debate, where the theme is programmatically evaded and, at the same time, placed at the centre of planning and cultural actions that take advantage of partial and political readings of a theme that instead it urgently needs a new thematization.



— MEANING IN ARCHITECTURE
— STORIA DELL'ARCHITETTURA
— CRITICA OPERATIVA
— POLITICA
— FORMA

Philosophy Kitchen. Rivista di filosofia contemporanea
#21, II/2024, 59 — 65

## Una storia del tempo presente

Nel 1929 Friedrich August von Hayek pubblica per la prima volta il suo paradosso degli anniversari: ma è in Inghilterra, con *Britain Can Make It*, la prima esposizione in cui l'impero si riduce alla Gran Bretagna (Maguire & Woodham 1998), che l'anniversario assume rilevanza assoluta. Per celebrare la *britishness* e l'epoca vittoriana, l'avvenimento infatti individua un ben singolare anniversario: i cento anni del Crystal Place e della prima Esposizione Universale (Aimone 1990). Le metamorfosi dell'anniversario accompagnano e esaltano così l'affermarsi di una dimensione circolare del tempo, che oggi arriva a manifestazioni paradossali se non grottesche (non c'è giorno ormai in cui non si celebri un qualche anniversario…). Così, la migliore dimostrazione della frase di François Hartog, "*l'histoire face au prèsent que ne passe pas*" (in Delacroix 2018), la si ritrova proprio nella metamorfosi dell'anniversario, che per altro è l'altra faccia di un fenomeno oggi ancor più problematico, quello della discussione sui canoni che verrebbero messi in crisi da un'*histoire du temps présent* (Kahn 2023), data per morta anni fa, e che oggi sembra invece trionfare in maniera quasi sfacciata (Droit & Reicheeerzer 2013; Beaupérin 2023).

Fare un anniversario del testo di cui sono curatori Charles Jencks e George Baird, *Meaning in Architecture*, pone dunque problemi di storia del tempo presente, oggi più che mai al centro della discussione che vede coinvolti architetti, antropologi, etnologi, storici (Nigam 2021). Non solo, incrocia un altro tema oggi dilagante, la *cancel culture*: ma rispondere anche solo alle questioni che pone Maurizio Bettini (2023) nei capitoli finali del suo ultimo libro richiederebbe un lavoro sulla ricezione del testo che non è neanche avviata (cfr. Holub 2003; Vinzent 2023). Con un ulteriore corollario. Lo statuto di classico ha, in questo caso per un testo, un percorso filologico e critico anch'esso tutt'altro che semplice da ricostruire [1] e si presta facilmente a un *usage politique du passé* (Fournier 2013) – la "malattia" oggi forse più diffusa nei *cultural studies*, ma anche nelle politiche urbane. E proprio la definizione di *meaning* è al centro di tanti equivoci: anche una più che modesta storicizzazione dell'uso di "significato" in architettura implica infatti il muoversi almeno tra linguistica, semiologia, filosofia del linguaggio, storiografia del moderno e del contemporaneo. Potrò qui solo accennare ad alcuni problemi.

[1] Carlo Sini e e Rocco Ronchi tentano una definizione nella collana *Sillabario* (edita da Et.Al.): «Ogni libro della collana presenta un grande autore, un classico. Della filosofia, della letteratura, della storia dell'arte. Ma lo presenta in modo tutt'altro che classico. Ne parla per tentare un esperimento con la verità».

Il testo si pone tra la crisi del moderno – cui ironicamente Charles Jencks (1977: 6) attribuisce una data, il 15 luglio 1972 –, il passaggio dallo strutturalismo (linguistico, antropologico, filosofico) al post-strutturalismo, e attraversa il torrente ancora in piena di una semiologia, anche dell'architettura che sembrava essere in grado di inglobare la linguistica (Panza 2023), in conflitto con la "morte dell'autore" che coinvolge da Roland Barthes (1967) a Michel Foucault (1969), – la cui lettura darebbe invero al testo di Jencks e Baird tutt'altra collocazione, visto che soprattutto il primo si muoverà quasi sempre per metafore ed eroi.

Ancor più complesso è cogliere lo spunto dell'anniversario del testo di Jencks e Baird se si volesse trarre un bilancio dell'avventura semiologica in architettura, e per rispondere alle domande dei curatori del numero, cioè ad una sua proiezione nel presente che vede il problema del

significato in architettura estraneo alla storiografia e troppo spesso abbandonato ai flutti spesso agitati di una *theory* dell'architettura che il recente numero 55 di *Perspecta* ci restituisce in tutta la sua scarsa cura delle parole [2]. La semiologia conosce in Italia una stagione molto fertile, tra 1962 e 1984, seguendo quasi la traiettoria delineata da Roland Barthés (1967) in *Système de la mode*. Tra *Opera aperte* (Eco 1962) e *L'immagine storiografica dell'architettura moderna* (Scalvini e M.G. Sandri 1984) si consuma infatti un'avventura che vede intrecciate le tracce di un'avanguardia che già Tafuri (1968) giustamente definisce utopica e una critica alla ricerca di un proprio statuto, proprio quando la storia dell'architettura moderna stava definendo il proprio (Olmo 2020). Ma forse, qui si entra in una topografia della cultura architettonica italiana degli anni settanta ancora da consolidare.

[2] Gli autori dei saggi sono: Orit Halpern, Matthew Soules, William Deringer, Gary Zhexi Zhang, Jack Hanly, Zeynep Çelik Alexander, Gökçe Günel, Davy Knittle, Adam Bobbette, Savannah Cox, Stephen Collier, Andrew Lakoff, Lindsay Thomas, Ross Exo Adams, Amelyn Ng, Justin Joque, Peter Polack, e Daniela Fabricius.

### *Meaning* e valore estetico

Gli anni tra il 1966 e il 1980 sono per la cultura architettonica italiana quelli che portano da *L'architettura della città* (Rossi 1966) all'introduzione de *La Sfera e il labirinto* (Tafuri, 1980). Sono anni studiati per presunte o reali genealogie, anni che hanno condotto a profonde semplificazioni: così Aldo Rossi viene presentato come un architetto intellettuale e morfologo, mentre Manfredo Tafuri, dopo aver attraversato la più profonda critica all'ideologia che ancora oggi la cultura architettonica conosca, viene ricondotto a una *philologhie als philosophie* che Marco Biraghi (2005) ha, non una volta sola, messo in discussione. Il testo di Baird e Jencks viene però discusso da un'altra genealogia storiografica italiana, in specifico fiorentina e napoletana, che ha in Klaus Koenig e De Fusco i suoi incipit (Zingale 2020).

Unisce queste e altre genealogie storiografiche un punto che è ancor oggi in discussione: la progressiva distinzione tra critica e storia. Non solo a seguito dell'accezione che Tafuri (1968) dà della critica operativa, categoria interpretativa che unisce critica all'ideologia e riduzione a merce dell'opera costruita, ma perché il radicalismo che accomuna le genealogie, con versioni quasi opposte, è il giudizio sulle avanguardie. Certo, tra la radicalità nietzschiana di *Per una critica all'ideologia architettonica* (Tafuri 1969) e l'affermazione semiologica – che nasce con il testo sin troppo citato di Marshall Mc Luhan (1964) di cui *Architettura come mass-medium* (De Fusco 1967) è l'espressione italiana più radicale – ci sono pochi punti in comune, se non uno in negativo. Nessuna delle due posizioni si pone il problema epistemico del *meaning*. Entrambi si chiamano fuori dalla narratologia che Maria Luisa Scalvini, che pur viene dalla critica semiologica all'architettura (cfr. Scalvini 1975), fisserà nel 1984.

In realtà quasi nessuno storico dell'architettura italiano è interessato al tema, spinoso, del *meaning* e della conseguente ermeneutica. E questo mentre la critica letteraria vedeva uscire in successione testi come *La linea e il circolo. Studio logico-filosofico sull'analogia* (Melandri, 1968), *I segni e la critica* (Segre 1969) e, prima ancora, *L'epistemologia delle scienze umane* (Foucault 1967): tutti testi che portano allo scoperto concetti chiave per l'accezione che il termine *meaning* assumerà nei testi di Jencks

e Baird, ma anche nella critica architettonica, nei manifesti e nei testi discorsivi che accompagnano i progetti, in cui il linguaggio procede essenzialmente per metafore e analogie. È soprattutto la critica che, seppure in forme tra l'episodico e il narrativo, assume un suo statuto proprio "parlando per analogie e metafore" e, in questo modo, tenta di dialettizzare il rapporto tra storiografia e teoria. La ricerca del valore estetico, e quindi della possibile appartenenza di un'opera allo pseudo olimpo di nuovi eroi (cfr. Haddad 2009), avviene invece in modi molto diversi. Aldo Rossi (1967) lo fa con lo splendido saggio su Boullée, seguendo e dando forza alla "tradizione" che Kaufmann (1933) aveva tracciato in *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier*. Tafuri (1973), nel suo libro più tradotto, *Progetto e Utopia*, delineando un destino per l'architettura prossimo all'inutilità – e qui la matrice arganiana si legge quasi in trasparenza: la rilettura dell'architettura e dell'urbanistica moderna si muove infatti tra Nietzsche e Adorno e sottrae all'intellettuale architetto ogni "teoria del valore" e ogni pretesa di senso (Canclini 2023).

Così, gli autori che saranno raccolti in *Meaning in Architecture*, diventando i paladini di possibili teorie dei valori postmodernisti, contrapporranno, con tutte le loro diversità, il valore estetico di un progetto o di un'opera ad un *meaning* persuasivo o normativo che la modernità avrebbe cavalcato. E lo faranno in particolare proprio i due curatori, Jencks e Baird, costruendo, sia al passato che per il futuro, codificazioni persino tenere: paradossalmente aprendo la strada all'individualizzazione del valore artistico (Bonaccorsi 2018), quell'essere unico dell'opera d'arte che costituirà propria la massima barriera per un'epistemologia della storia dell'arte. Mentre la storiografia dell'architettura si stava misurando con lo sforzo di affermare una scientificità costruita sul paradigma indiziario, sul rapporto tra ipotesi e prova e sul ripercorrere i passi che lo storico aveva seguito, garantendone così la falsificabilità (Olmo 2010) , la critica angloamericana, soprattutto quella postmodernista e post-strutturalista, sposava il *Partir pour la Grèce* (Hartog 2015; cfr. Payen 2016), di cui la prima biennale di architettura del 1980, curata da Paolo Portoghesi e intitolata *La presenza del passato* è, non a caso, l'inizio: e lo faceva utilizzando una scrittura per metafore e analogie, sia scritte che formali, presentate come un ritorno all'origine, deposito di senso e insieme regole del progettare e narrare.



### *Meaning* tra memoria e oblio

Il richiamo esplicito a Paul Ricoeur è del tutto voluto (Salvioli 2002). Ma occorrono alcuni passi intermedi. La fine del racconto moderno sull'architettura – epico, eroico, etico – ha infatti numerose concause. La prima è il passaggio dalla memoria individuale a quella collettiva, di cui i protagonisti chiave e i testi istitutivi sono Maurice Halbwachs (1941) con *La Topographie légéndaire des évangiles en terre sante* e Albert Camus (1942) con *L'étranger*. I due testi agiscono mettendo in discussione il primo il rapporto tra memoria, mito e narrazione, e il secondo la rappresentazione dell'altro, cioè le chiavi di volta del *récit* fabulistico che segnerà la storiografia-mitografia architettonica sino al 1961. Il secondo colpo di piccone lo fornisce l'antropologia strutturale e in particolare il testo di Claude Levi-Strauss (1962), *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, e la relativa tesi che la sola relazione possibile tra l'uomo e il totem è mascherata e di

conseguenza metaforica – e sarebbe estremamente interessante rileggere i testi cosiddetti canonici alla luce di questa tesi. Il terzo, e forse decisivo, è il testo di Roland Barthès (1967, pubblicato in francese nel 1968) *La mort de l'auteur*, la cui tesi è che il legame sottile che unisce l'opera e il suo creatore è costituito unicamente dal critico e dal suo potere simbolico o istituzionale, che consentono di stabilire insieme quel legame e i suoi fondamenti epistemici.

Quando esce *Meaninig in architecture*, la cultura angloamericana sta assimilando quella che si chiamerà *French Connection* (Silverman 2007), e proprio alcuni degli autori che vi partecipano saranno poi i più presenti nella realtà statunitense (Ollion & Abbott 2015). In realtà, però, il lavoro di Jencks e Baird è un lavoro sulla memoria, e sulla distinzione tra memoria e storiografia, quasi che ad interagire nel loro lavoro fossero critica e memoria. E proprio il lavoro sulla memoria che Paul Ricoeur conduce può aiutare a non disperdersi nei tanti contributi che il testo raccoglie. Nessuno di questi, neanche quelli di Reyner Banham (*L'Architettura del Wampanoag*) o Joseph Rykwert (*La Posizione Seduta: una Questione di Metodo*) escono dalla dimensione critica e dalla ricerca di metafore per rispondere alla ricerca di un *meaning* che non sia ancora tutto dentro la dialettica tra memoria istituzionalizzata e memoria obliata (Ricœur 2000). Il muoversi del tema del *meaning in architecture* tra fenomenologia della memoria, epistemologia della storia e ermeneutica della condizione critica, segnerà anche la ricezione del libro e le sue traduzioni, tra cui quella italiana del 1974. Anzi proprio la particolare struttura del testo, in cui ogni saggio è accompagnato da una serie di commenti, rende ancor più evidente come l'ampliamento degli approcci – semiologia, linguistica, antropologia strutturale, cibernetica, *information technology* – non faccia che allargare lo statuto della possibile critica dell'architettura e le sue analogie, allontanandola dalla revisione del proprio statuto che la storiografia dell'architettura stava conoscendo [3]. Il testo di Jencks e Baird è cioè, anche rispetto alle bibliografie successive (Gold 2000), un'autentica chiamata alle armi della critica, in un momento di crisi profonda della teoria dell'architettura (Hays 1984). Ma è anche un testo che si misura con distinzioni fondamentali: quella tra moderno e contemporaneo, e quella tra ricezione e moderna *trahison des clercs* (Benda 1927).

[3] Una lettura trasversale del testo farebbe emergere come sia una ricerca di approcci che legittimino la riduzione a segni dell'architettura. Il testo più meditativo di quegli anni su questa riduzione è *L'architettura come semiotica connotativa* (Scalvini 1975).

## Ricezione, disseminazione e...sotto falso nome

Esiste infatti una divergente ricezione del testo tra gli autori, in una fenomenologa del postmoderno alla continua ricerca di genealogie ma priva della capacità di porsi il problema della fenomenologia, prima ancora che dell'epistemologia dell'architettura postmoderna. Il libro e i suoi autori seguiranno strade molto diverse, occupandosi delle origini della contemporaneità (Rykwert 1980) o del canone e della sua costruzione (Choay 1980), o ancora assumendo il postmoderno e dell'iperrealismo che gli succede come una rinnovata *trahison des clercs*. La disseminazione di una semiologia che riduce a segno l'architettura può portare a letture davvero "esplose" del *meaning in architecture*. A partire da quella di Henry Raymond (1977), Christine Hasenmueller (1979), e Alain Colquhoun (1988),

sino alla raffinata lettura di Luca Maria Possati (2009), anche se i testi che più danno il senso dello scambio tra ricezione e disseminazione sono soprattutto quelli di Geoffrey Broadbent (1980), Maria Luisa Scalvini (1980), Christian Norberg-Schulz (1983), e più tardi Adrian Forty (2000), Michael Baxandall (2009) e André Loeckx and Hilde Heynen (2020). Testi che tracciano le strade fondamentali del rapporto tra parole e architetture e, insieme, le ragioni dell'oblio così radicale della semiologia come strumento non solo per descrivere, ma soprattutto per interpretare l'architettura – e non solo quella contemporanea. Sono la crisi dell'ermeneutica, sia di scuola heideggeriana che di scuola foucaultiana, e l'emergere di letture assai più sofisticate, come quelle di Bourdieu, Ricoeur, Jullien (per restare alla sola Francia) – letture che tra parola e architettura inseriscono i temi dell'istituzionalizzazione dei saperi, del trasmigrare dei significati attraverso forme di memoria e conoscenza (Jullien 2010) e della comparazione come traduzione – che spostano il significato dell'architettura e del discorso che la racconta.

Ma vanno segnalati almeno altri due processi che mutano il significato dell'architettura. Il primo è l'esasperato *uso politico della storia* che entra nel discorso pubblico; nelle politiche istituzionali, di cui l'Unesco è solo la maschera; nel trasformare l'*Opera House* di Sidney o il *Guggenheim* di Bilbao in agenti costruttori di un nuovo immaginario dell'architettura che dall'esaltazione come opera unica diventa un brand immobiliare; e ancora, in modo ancor più banale, nell'uso quasi urtante della categoria di *patrimonio immateriale*, l'autentico "falso nome" che trasforma un prodotto, una tradizione, delle pagine musicali in narrazioni mitografiche. Il secondo è la *cancel culture*, che richiede la riscrittura di opere come l'Alhambra e insieme pone, anche per l'architettura, la possibile esigenza di un *forgetting classics* allargato a tutto ciò che è diventato celebre nel significato, attraverso le procedure che indicano Dubois (2008) e Lilti (2014), come attraverso la circolarità dell'anniversario: un "presente storico" che quasi naturalmente investe e investirà il grande spazio, fisico e narrativo, che la patrimonializzazione ha assunto in questi ultimi due decenni – *La fabrique du patrimoine* di Nathalie Heinich (2009) resta un testo, in questa congiuntura, irrinunciabile.

Oggi il significato in architettura non è quindi solo l'oggetto di un'archeologia del sapere, è una piazza d'armi per esercizi cognitivi, simbolici, narrativi che l'attuale *Zeitgeist* rende alquanto retorici: *words* e *buildings* (Forty 2000) si sono ormai allontanati, come critica, storia e teoria. E da qui bisognerà ripartire. In primis riconoscendo che il problema del significato si pone a vari livelli, che forse vale la pena almeno di accennare. Il primo è quello di cosa oggi significhi il progetto, in una fase storica dove ai trattati, ai manuali, alle scuole, si è sostituita una memoria pressoché indefinita, cui una mediocre intelligenza artificiale può accedere. Ma non solo. Gli interlocutori di progettisti erano la committenza (privata o pubblica), dunque il progetto, oltre che un atto conoscitivo, era una continua negoziazione: basti ricordare i quattro diversi progetti che l'atelier Le Corbusier fa per la famiglia Savoye (Quetglas 2009). Perciò il progetto comprendeva un'intenzionalità, ma anche una messa in discussione dell'iniziale significato, passando poi, per diventare *building*, attraverso modelli, sopralluoghi, adeguamenti. Il significato in architettura era quindi un coacervo di contributi conoscitivi (Olmo 2013), il cui ordine veniva dato ieri

da figure “tecniche”, e oggi da un controllo, da procedure, algoritmi, e soprattutto narrazioni, sempre meno autoriali (Biraghi 2019; Olmo 2020, 33; Armando & Durbiano 2023). E questo avviene in una congiuntura storica dove a dominare è un presentismo radicale (Batán & Renée 2021), in cui il significato della prova che l’interprete deve dare per distinguersi dalla critica mondana sfuma sempre di più [4]. Una strada assai pericolosa, perché ha come sbocco non solo un *new skepticism* (Matheson 2024), ma un inaccettabile naturalismo delle fonti. (CD)

[4] Esempio, anche ironico, ne è il testo di Nicolas Depoutot (2023), *Joséphine Baker, Loos et Le Corbusier, pour dépasser l’anecdote*.

Porre il problema del significato in architettura, oggi, implica misurarsi non solo con una costruzione del significato che avviene seguendo retoriche e semiotiche dagli scopi spesso molto distanti, quando non rifiutati perché teleologici, ma anche con una necessità di riflessione (a qualsiasi stadio di un rapporto sempre più intricato tra progetto e opera) sulla necessità di tornare a ricercare l’universalismo contro non solo il comunitarismo (Heinich 2021), ma soprattutto contro una frammentazione del sapere anche progettuale che riporta in auge Ivan Illich e i suoi *Esperti di troppo* (Illich 1977-2008). Bisogna cioè *fissurer la terre* (Jullien 2022), il mondo del *wokisme* e del conformismo (Bussigny 2023), se si vuole davvero riproporre criticamente il problema del significato in architettura, oggi. (AA)

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
Mi pare che ad alimentare la crisi di significato dell'architettura sia un profondo fraintendimento sulla politicità di pratiche e progetti. Si contrappongono sguardi che aderiscono al mercato dominante che mira a significati estetizzanti e facili, e posizioni che pretendono di attuare direttamente e attraverso il progetto una modifica sostanziale nel mondo (non solo di architettura, anzi non tanto). Più rari sono quei casi di architetti che riflettono e praticano l'architettura, e solo indirettamente, attraverso questa e usando questa nel processo, modificano il mondo. In modo magari più locale, ma non per questo meno radicale. E questa può (ancora) essere la strada per una autorialità che non sia sinonimo di cifra estetica o di aderenze personali, ma di capacità disciplinare di congiungere contingenza e assoluto nel processo.

(AA) AUROSA ALISON
D’accordo con la questione di proporre alternative rispetto alla frammentazione del sapere progettuale e ricercare nel rapporto fondamentale che intercorre fra progetto e opera. Qualcosa di più sul futuro, ne abbiamo bisogno! :)

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# Ecological Form.
## Tenets for an Evolving Architecture

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This essay addresses the urgent question of sustainability through developing an approach to generating ecological form. Through concrete examples of contemporary and vernacular architecture, the basic tenets of this approach reorient the objectives of building design from the construction of freestanding objects and abstract formalism to shaping habitats for animals whose flourishing is interdependent with other forms of life. This approach insists that form is always situated and emerges from specific places in all of their varied and multidimensional complexity and that built responses interact and interdepend within a system of mutually reinforcing strategies. And further, that material and form cannot be separated from one another but mutually inform and constrain one another. Aesthetics and performance are not two separate domains but are fused in ecological form, which emerges out of their very constraints and limits.



— ECOLOGY, SUSTAINABILITY
— GENERATIVE FORM
— VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE
— FORMALISM
— ECOLOGICAL FORM

Philosophy Kitchen. Rivista di filosofia contemporanea
#21, II/2024, 69 — 81

## The active meaning of form

This essay takes up the urgent question of sustainability: how do we, in the editors' words, «overcome aestheticising practices and purely performance approaches to develop a genuinely ecological design dimension?». And in particular, it questions the notion of form in contemporary design practice: how might a fresh understanding of form contribute to a genuinely ecological dimension of design? The question may best be framed in the contradistinction to how form is generally understood in architecture today. The education and practice of contemporary architecture understands its very work as a play of forms. Students are encouraged to explore form by carving polystyrene solids into various shapes, to model and draw forms for their own sake. The possibilities and constraints of the materials of construction are not tested, or reckoned with, and consequently remain secondary to form. Indeed, form in parametric design has been completely liberated from material, constructive and contextual restraints. Anything that is possible to draw using the new software, is now possible to build with extractive materials. In 3D printing too, form is not a constraint or a tempering force but an end in itself. Form – a word that is both noun and verb – has lost its active meaning.

Built form, like any other object of design, is chosen for its novelty, or justified for its metaphorical significance, but is otherwise devoid of an experiential interior. These striking forms, set as they are apart from their context, are best viewed from a distance, and ingested in a single gulp – which makes them easy to photograph. (GL) They make magazine covers, win awards, are the subjects of blogs, are copied for their coolness, their very lack of depth making them amenable to quick media consumption and serial reproduction. If my analysis seems too harsh, spend five minutes looking at the latest projects on the internet, the pageant of forms seems to clone one another, roofs no longer have overhangs to cast shadows or keep out the rain, cultural centres and sports stadiums tend towards the blob, and solid walls, and sense of refuge they lend, have been all but dissolved into texture-less glass.

A serious consideration of an ecological dimension must have the maturity to resist such temptations: just because something is possible, does not make it worth doing. Contrast this outward, object-oriented formalism to the form we find in nature. In nature, form is never random or arbitrary. Form cannot be severed from materiality, and materials are never cheap: wood demands the lifecycle of a tree, the long geological formation of stone is unrepeatable in the sum total of all human lifetimes, and something as seemingly plastic and benign as concrete requires dredging riverbeds for the fine sand that is the habitat of countless organisms. Biological form is, in D'Arcy Thompson's words, a «diagram of forces» (Thompson 1942, 45). Form is a process that does not end in a shape, it is an ongoing dynamic that is never only outward but inwardly organised, a faithful tracing of vital forces—in the grain of wood, the veins of stone, the motions of water that pulverised the sand. *Form and force*, rather than *form and*

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
And makes them easy for AI to mimic!

SARAH ROBINSON
Yes, good point

*function*, would be a more accurate portrayal. Which is not to say that form can be summed up according to its physics. Form not only expresses the forces acting upon and within, but constrains and allows what is possible without and around. Form results both from physical forces and also constrains and allows possible behaviors and cultural practices. It was in his meticulous study of natural forms that the zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1866) coined the term ecology, combining the Greek word oikos, which means house, dwelling place, habitation, with logia, meaning to study.

In the spirit of this naming, the first tenet of an ecological design approach must be that, in designing buildings, we are not merely shaping formal objects: we are shaping *habitats* for animals, whose flourishing is interdependent with other forms of life. And, in order to effectively do so, we must understand something about the behavior, physiology, psychology and the evolutionary history of the subjects in question. The founder of Ecological Psychology, James J. Gibson, also had keen insights into the nature of form and its misunderstanding in architectural education. He opened a lecture at a symposium on Perception in Architecture in 1979, proclaiming that, «architecture and design do not have a satisfactory theoretical basis. Can an ecological approach to the psychology of perception and behaviour provide it?» (Gibson 1982, 413). The possibility for a new theory of design, he contended, must be rooted in an active understanding of form. Conventional architectural education teaches form in the way that painters or sculptors understand form, as «aesthetically pleasing forms» or, in Gibson's words, «the forms of Euclid and his geometry, abstracted by Plato to the immaterial level». Instead, he insisted that forms must be, «rooted in the substances, and surfaces, and layouts that constrain our locomotion and permit or prevent our actions». Architectural forms, although they may appear to be static, have the basic power to *afford* certain behaviours and prohibit others.

## Abstract formalism versus ecological form

Let us consider the implications of the trend mentioned earlier, to delete overhangs from roofs and seamlessly blend the roof surface with the wall surface. While it looks very sleek and new, it obviates the possibility of placing windows on the downturned sides, meaning that light can only enter from the lateral sides of the building but not from the corners. (GL) This lack of intersecting light is decidedly less dynamic, as the sun's rotation will not be invited into the interior spaces throughout the day, but only at discrete times. Roof overhangs cast shadows and protect the walls

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
I'm not quite sure I agree with this critique – or perhaps I don't understand it. Don't most buildings have windows largely on the sides of the building? And whether or not there is an overhang doesn't necessarily change the placement of the windows (much to the detriment of weather-tightness, at times). I am thinking of the Denver Art Museum's Hamilton Building (among many others) which had windows and skylights and all sorts of window locations.

SARAH ROBINSON
My point here is that the move to delete the overhang doesn't tend to come from a careful confrontation with situational variables and constraints, but is done because it looks cool. The possibilities of window placement are diminished when this is done because the corners are closed off. So, yes you can bring in light from above, below and the sides, but not the diagonal, just one of the many implications of this formal design move, which is often done to make a statement rather than to uniquely respond to the place and occasion of the project.

MATTEO TEMPESTINI
I believe the example of roof overhangs is interesting, but not directly related to the issue of lighting, which depends on many other factors such as window size, their placement relative to the wall line, and especially the orientation of the building. Obviously, for example, in certain climates, roof overhangs can help regulate indoor temperature during hot seasons by providing shade. However, it is not a solution that is generally adopted in all hot climates. In fact, talking about vernacular, Mediterranean and North African architecture rarely features overhanging roofs, instead favouring flat roofs. I also agree with the point about water collection, which can indeed be easily done without overhanging roofs.



beneath them from the elements and rainwater collected along the edge can be stored for future use. (GL) This redirection of the movements of sun and rain change human movements as well – working or playing is more enjoyable while basking in interior light, that same daylight is cueing our hormonal levels to synch up with our position on our spinning planet, whose fluid passage has now been interrupted by two solid walls. The opportunity to collect rainwater from the gutters placed on the overhangs apart from its clear ecological benefit is one-time honoured way to participate in the cycles of the seasons and the moods of weather, to feel part of natural processes of accumulation and flux. These pleasurable necessities

(GL) GEORGIA LINDSAY
Which can also happen without overhangs!

SARAH ROBINSON
Could you provide examples? Perhaps a linear trough on the sides of the building?

GEORGIA LINDSAY
Sure. Or if the roof is a butterfly design, there need not be any overhand, but all water can be collected as it runs down the middle. There are many other possibilities. All roofs where I live are required to have gutters--to direct the rainfall from the roof directly into the storm sewers or into a catchment system. The overhang doesn't matter, they all manage to collect the water.



[FIG. 1] Gilder Center central atrium. Courtesy of Zeete, Creative Commons



are prevented by the formal treatment of roof and wall. Even seemingly insignificant aesthetic decisions always have behavioural and ecological consequences. Yet these consequences are seldom considered, much less reckoned with in their long-term impact. Indeed, the shift from "aesthetically pleasing forms," to the cultural and behavioral possibilities of their substances, surfaces and layouts, is a much-needed corrective, yet by itself is not sufficient to constitute a genuinely ecological approach to design.

Consider how form is approached in the recently opened and widely celebrated Gilder Center in New York by Studio Gang Architects. [FIG. 1] The building is an addition to the Natural Science Museum's cluster of existing buildings, whose central objective was to unify and rationalise the access to the abundant collections, and to resolve dead ends. The addition accomplishes this mundane organizational task with a cave-like atrium that is expressed on the exterior entrance facade. The form was inspired by geological forms, the architects visited the canyons and caverns of the Southwestern United States and even carved ice in their search for their ideal forms. The concept was to create a spectacular space modelled on the natural world, to appeal to the human need for exploration, which fuels the spirit of scientific inquiry, the proclaimed raison d'être of the institution. After ten years of work and 500 million dollars, the mission was accomplished. The building is lauded for its inventive form, its inviting curvatures and for cleverly directing traffic flow (Kimmelman 2023). The fact that the windows are fretted, so that birds do not crash into them, and that the addition has windows to allow in light, are hailed as features of

environmental sensitivity and "care." Yet daylight alone is not remarkable, it is required by building codes. Did anyone ask the more pertinent question of whether this glazing is operable? Does the building breathe or is it yet another container on life support, and if so, at what cost? And should it really be any surprise that people like and even love natural curvatures, since our very bodies follow those same formal dynamics (Tawil *et al.* 2024)? Or that circulation flows better along curves, since human movement is inherently non-linear? In an effort to respect the neighbouring period buildings that are clad in pink granite, the design team proudly advertises that the original quarry from which the stone was taken was re-opened to be gauged out again to provide cladding for the new billowing facade. The problem is that stone, unless it is carved by the slow processes of water and wind, like the canyons that inspired this formal exercise – is brittle, hard and does not curve, but must cut from the earth in flat sheets. To clad the curvatures, the sheets, once exhumed from the earth, were shipped to Germany to be precision shaped and then shipped back again, and fitted onto the new facade, all in the name of "respecting context". The absurdity of this design decision alone should negate any claim of awakening visitors' sense of respect for the living earth. GL

Yet, the project is successful GL as spectacle, and its appeal, like theatre, is its ability to conjure a sense of surprise and suspense. And like theatre too, the spell is broken once one peers backstage. What makes caverns and canyons enticing is their massive solidity, the sudden change in air temperature upon entering inside them, their darkness that disables



GL GEORGIA LINDSAY
Much less the environmental cost of opening up a closed quarry and all the shipping back and forth!

GL GEORGIA LINDSAY
I think this idea of "success" is such an interesting one, and really hard to measure. Is it financial success? Shares on Instagram? Increased revenue for nearby businesses? Newly inspired creativity on the part of the Museum? This question is so important for getting to the heart of meaning in architecture.

SARAH ROBINSON
I agree, one measure of success that would meaningfully support sustainability would be the extent to which a building is beloved. Loved buildings tend to be taken care of and not torn down, and the act of caring is healthy on many levels. It seems that spectacle could get old fast, unless it is changing, like the spectacle of light at sunset or of dappled light on water. It is questionable whether fabricated stasis that cannot be touched would evoke feelings of love, but I suppose it depends on the person.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
This is how architecture can truly change the world – recalling Gio Ponti's claim "love architecture!" (Ponti 1957). Even if this is far easier to understand when speaking of individuals than collective...

our eyes and activates our ears, the echo of our footsteps, these resonances enveloped in their voluminous space. Yet these manufactured shapes adorn standard rectilinear boxes. (MT) And unlike actual stone that has an authoritative visceral presence, these forms are hollow and crumble at the touch. In keeping with the nature of a stage set, this building, like the old dioramas it was intended to reinvigorate, is yet another inert display that was never meant to be touched. Is this really so different from Disneyland, that at least doesn't pretend to enlighten, but only to entertain? The opportunity to be transported to a fantasy world, a quick flight from daily life, would seem a perfectly valid goal. But in an age of climate change and environmental devastation, we have to ask why, and at what cost? If your objective is to kindle people's interest to science, rather than in fake news, wouldn't resources be better spent demonstrating innovative responses to ecological mandates, rather than constructing a fake version of the earth whose delicate balance is so under threat? And in a time of increasingly virtual reality, are not buildings one of the few bastions of resistance that, unlike theatre, film and digital art, can physically touch us, and be touched by us? Is not their unique contribution to ground us in physical presence?

So, despite its fanfare, the addition is yet another example of contemporary architecture's hubristic search for new forms – readily recognisable and infinitely instagrammable. Forms that were conjured from an individual's conceptual idea, rather than form as responses and adaptations to the constraints and possibilities of actual situations and all the myriad beings whose life is interwoven in them. This abstract formalism is a mockery of ecological sustainability. And if the alternative to this sounds drab, recall the source upon which Gang based her spectacle – the natural forms found in nature. To call form natural, biomorphic, or in this case, *geomorphic* does not make it ecological. Ecology is a process of interaction, mutual dependence: a process of negotiation and self-organisation between myriad human, biological and physical forces. Biological form is a diagram of forces, bones, shells, trees grow and move in certain ways depending on the possibilities and constraints of their situations, and larger systems in which they interact. The life-processes of each of these materials must be celebrated, not violated, or made to do what they cannot through the elaborate energetically costly interventions. Ecological form possesses an internal order gained through creatively integrating multiple living processes. Open-ended and capable of dynamic resilience, ecological form is never an end in itself.

(MT) MATTEO TEMPESTINI
I think that the concept of comfort, discussed lately by Daniel Barber in some of his publications as "After Comfort" or "Modern Architecture and Climate", comes fully into play in this reasoning. In fact this detachment between abstract formalism and ecological form is made possible by technologies, air conditioning above all, which allow for a "comfortable" environment - I won't go into the cultural differences in the meanings of comfort - whatever the morphology of the building.

## Lessons from vernacular architecture

As a counter to the superficial and consumptive forms that reign in architecture today, a wealth of insight can be gained from a study of vernacular architecture. Such a survey need not be an anachronistic back turning: vernacular architecture is relevant because it most closely resembles the growth, accretion, negotiation, tinkering, and resource conservation of natural processes. And it is crucial to recognise that, in an ecological understanding of form, human and natural forces cannot be neatly separated, so to even use the word "natural" already includes the human. Vernacular is another word for indigenous, like the way we speak of indigenous plants whose form is an adaptation to their local culture. Indeed, the word culture comes from agriculture, and at its root refers to the behaviour and adaptive strategies of plants. Vernacular is also used to refer to the native speech or language of a place. And like a local language, vernacular architecture results from an evolutionary, collective creative process that did not originate from a single mind, but emerged through shared experience in place – language belongs to everyone, and to no one. As the essayist Logan Pearsall Smith reminds us, «for human speech is after all a democratic product, the creation, not of scholars and grammarians, but of unschooled and unlettered people. Scholars and men of education may cultivate and enrich it, and make it flower into the beauty of a literary language; but its rarest blooms are grafted on a wild stock, and its roots are deep-buried in the common soil» (Pearsall Smith 1925, 62).



Vernacular architecture is rooted in and emerges from place, and like the collective wellspring of language, its invention ushers forth from shared embodied knowledge, and its refinement lays in the hands of architects, although this worthy task tends to be sorely undervalued by mainstream architecture. If we want to rethink form in order to respond to the urgent challenges with which we are confronted today, it is crucial to mine the repertoire of situational responses that have worked in the past. And in a time of increasing desertification, it is particularly instructive to learn from the built forms that allowed desert cultures to adapt and even to thrive. Traditional architecture was tested and honed according to the possibilities and constraints of their extreme climate. And as it turns out, this empirically achieved trial and error of tradition is based on what we now know to be scientifically sound principles. This process generated vernacular building strategies in which each element worked in balance with and served to reinforce the others, meaning that altering only one feature has cascading effects throughout the whole system. As the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy lamented with the advent of air conditioning, changing even one small element can destroy the entire validity of the building as a valid response to local climatic conditions (Fathy 1986, xxi).

A closer study of the elements that evolved for living in extreme climates exemplifies tightly intermeshed complex of behavioural, social and biological adaptations. Like layered veils protecting skin from aridity, dust and heat—dwellings were distributed according to a nested hierarchy of porosity. Their cellular pattern, unlike the gridiron arrangement with wide vistas that allow air to sweep through at a disturbingly high velocity, performs the same function as the courtyards; the narrow meandering streets with closed vistas retain the cool air deposited at night from being swept

away by the first morning wind. The shared outer walls reduced the heat load by minimising the external surface while opening the inner one. The largest opening was the courtyard in the centre – dwellings turned their backs to the street to afford privacy and air circulation. Life was lived in the mutuality of building technology and cultural practices. [FIG. 2] This entire system can be understood as a paragon of ecological forms, distinguished by their inextricability in the sane functioning of the whole (Robinson 2021).

One especially aesthetically pleasing and generative example is the brise-soleil typically used in hot arid climates called the *mashrabiya*, which derives from the Arabic "to drink" and originally referred to a place to have a refreshing drink. As its name suggests, it is a wood-screened cantilevered outcropping where jars of water were placed to cool the passing air through evaporative cooling. And, like the ecological forms we have identified earlier, it served myriad functions, controlling passage of light and airflow, reducing the temperature of air currents and increasing their humidity—and was also carefully configured to provide privacy. Designed with horizontal lines, the lattice was punctuated by balusters which created a silhouette to carry the eye from one baluster to the next across the interstices. The louvers were adjustable so that the contrast between darkness inside and light outside will not dazzle the eye. This design corrects the slashing effect caused by the flat slats while offering the outside view over the whole span of the opening. From the inside, the *mashrabiya* appears as a lighted wall that affords the freedom of a view while allowing

[FIG. 2] Qanat and Badgirs, Vernacular architectural forms, Yazd, Iran. Courtesy of Sarah Robinson



privacy and security. It is a nexus of thermal, psychological, physiological, behavioural and aesthetic dictates finely tuned to local conditions *and* human perceptual limits, perfectly exemplifying the untapped potential of generating form through the process of responding to multiple dimensions of situational factors. Its beauty is not cosmetic, or arrived through carving polystyrene or blocks of ice, but is adaptive, promoting long term life and decency. Ignoring these local possibilities and constraints leads to the all too common, dumbed down instance of copying the form of the brise-soleil, without its underlying sophistication and adaptive beauty. The many lost opportunities of brise-soleil typology are rampant, a quick internet search will turn up dozens of examples. Most sheathe inoperable windows, which means that they cannot interact with local air movement. And though they aspire to play an environmental role, they are largely decorative, isolated curtain walls. They lack what qualifies the *mashrabiya* as an ecological form: it was never intended to be a discrete formal element, but to function within a larger system, it was configured to keep air moving, to cool, to shade, to allow privacy, and a gentle rhythm between visual interest and visual rest. Aesthetics and performance are not two separate domains but are fused in the formal solution.

## The situational nature of ecological form

Ecological form is irreducibly situational and must emerge from and be grounded in place. Place is not merely a geographic point but the compound of air, water, earth, movement, mood, atmosphere, multi-species cultural practices, geology, history and their interactions and resonances. Like our brief survey of vernacular building strategies, another possible source of what we could consider ecological form is to study remodels, renovations and additions to existing buildings. Like vernacular architecture, this kind of work is forced to work within limits, to respond to and enhance what already is. Highly situational, this work draws forth creative responses to the qualities of place. It is often forgotten that even newly constructed buildings must be formed according to the constraints and possibilities unequivocally dictated by the processes of place.

One successful example is the San Telmo Museum in San Sebastián, Spain, which integrates a 16th century convent with a plaza and a mountain park. Instead of tearing down or compromising the convent, the architects Nieto Sobejano worked with and around it, creating a new addition that lightly connects to the existing buildings, to create a rational flow. The new building backs up to Mount Urgull, and connects the plaza to the path through the park via its multi-level roof. The perforated facade which is planted with local species was inspired by the rock formations in the park, that through the processes of erosion left openings to harbour plant life. The relationship is poetic, but subtle, one has to walk through the park and discover the geologic features to make the visual and metaphorical connection yourself. The facade opens to the plaza, people use the flaps to park their bikes and strollers, kids play hide and seek and bounce balls around them. [FIG. 3] And from the interior, daylight glows through the openings, and at night shines outward toward the plaza like candlelights. The facade was resource-intensive, made of molten aluminium, but it is limited in surface area. The addition recedes to the side




[FIG. 3] San Telmo Museum, San Sebastian, Spain, children playing around the pivoting panels on the facade. Courtesy of Sarah Robinson



of the plaza, and the dame of the ensemble remains the historic convent. The intervention innovates, connects, inspires, is climbed upon, played around, grown in and touched—performing all of these functions with a quiet dignity, throughly woven into the urban fabric, sewing it together to strengthen and renew it.

This building, completed in 2011 stands in stark contrast to another important cultural center in San Sebastián, the Kursaal cultural and convention center by Rafael Moneo. [FIG. 4] Unlike San Telmo, Kursaal is a stand-alone group of structures that are set on long stretch of a much beloved beach where it connects with the Urumea river. Moneo deliberately chose to disconnect the building from the historic center of the city in an effort to strengthen his concept: the building ensemble was to appear as massive stones that had been washed up on the beach. The architect explicitly stated that he wanted to highlight the abstract, geologic nature of the buildings: in his words, «this refusal to merely extend the urban fabric meant that conventional architecture was to be deliberately ignored» (Moneo 1999). The geologic associations are purely formal, but not material or enactive. The two large tilted masses are made of ribbed opaque glass, allowing light can softly shine in during the day. But only three windows look out at the actual ocean. The even light inside the building is lovely, but one could be anywhere, there is no sense of locality in time or place. The building was completed in 2000, after many contentious years of construction failures and delays. And twenty-four years later, my recent trip to San Sebastián revealed two dust-covered monumental glass cubes bereft of human presence. In that sense, Moneo partially accomplished his goal of abstraction: one side of the river bustles with life and overflowing



[FIG. 4] Kursaal Convention Center, San Sebastian, Spain, showing the empty plaza and the only three windows that look out at the ocean. Courtesy of Sarah Robinson






[FIG. 5] Kursaal Convention Center, San Sebastian, Spain, showing the roof which looks out at the ocean, forbidden to humans. Courtesy of Sarah Robinson

cafes, while the Kursaal cafe at lunchtime was completely empty. But the consequences of his design decision, the alienation of the buildings from the living fabric, is that he created lonely volumes that do not belong to the place, nor summon associations with massive boulders cast ashore, as he had intended. The plaza built to face the sea was similarly stark, not a single person was there, despite its prime position on the beach. And the roof which could be accessible from the plaza was off limits, while another wide recess on the opposite side was filled with wind-blown garbage. One of the pleasures of giant seaside rocks is to climb on them, to lounge on their sunbaked curves, but this enactive opportunity was apparently incompatible with the drive for abstraction. And although photos show the cubes glowing from within, they were never illumined during the time of my visit, and if they had been, the energy consumption to create the effect would not have been trivial. Because there are few actual windows to indicate signs of life from within, the building is disturbingly eerie at night [FIG. 5]. It feels unsafe. I noticed people speeding up as they walked past it to get to beyond it (Ellard 2020). Yet none of these mundane concerns seemed to have mattered: Moneo won the Pritzker prize, the highest honour in the architectural profession during its completion. This is another project praised for its formal inventiveness, but which actually repels life and all of its messy complexity.

We not only tolerate, but continue to reward this value system in architecture. Big flashy forms get noticed and replicated while truly innovative building strategies are undervalued and overlooked. (CD)



(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS:
This critique is jolly inspiring and revealing. My only doubt is, do architects have the power to influence the direction of architecture, or to make this idea of architecture the strongest one? Indeed, there are many architects working differently from the purely formalist cases you highlighted, and a couple of them even won a Pritzker. Only, in too many cases the market asks for «readily recognisable and infinitely instagrammable» architecture, and starchitects or less-the-star-architects provide them. Like musicians cannot change music, but can do a kind of music hoping for a change, here we, as architects, are called to a resistance, way more difficult and inglorious.

SARAH ROBINSON:
I like your analogy of musicians who cannot change music but can play it differently, but this is only partially true. Architects are given the site, the brief of the program and budget, etc, and that becomes the substance to be composed, more than playing the music, we actually compose it. I am arguing for a more bottom up approach that allows the ingredients and their histories to emerge in relationship and those ties constrain the form, form in terms of music is a much better analogy than solid form, it is situational, alive, enacted.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Yes, I intended to say composers :)

## Conclusions

The three projects primarily critiqued in this essay all draw inspiration from the geological forms of the earth, but only one of them succeeds in embodying that relationship in a way that is not absurd. To pretend that one's crumbly concrete canyon, or tilted glass cubes are poetic odes to the earth is pure hubris. To bring people closer to a living earth they can witness, touch, breathe and feel, requires a generous humility. Hubris and humility share a common root in *humus*, like humour and human, which comes from the Greek word earth and soil. In Greek, *hubris* meant to violate the bounds set for humans and was mercilessly punished by the gods. It is not an exaggeration to say that the punitive consequences of our formal hubris are well underway, not by the gods, but through the imbalances we ourselves have caused and continue to allow to take place here on earth. But rather than ending on this grim note, let us reflect on the possibilities of generating ecological form.

The first tenet is that in building we are not designing merely free-standing objects, but *habitats* for animals whose flourishing is interdependent with other forms of life. And, in order to effectively do so, we must understand something about the behavior, physiology, psychology and the evolutionary history of the subjects in question. From this flows the second tenet: form is always situated and emerges from specific places in all of their varied and multidimensional complexity. The third related tenet is that built responses are not isolated, but interact and interdepend within a system of mutually reinforcing strategies. Aesthetics and performance are not two separate domains but are fused. This web of interconnectedness leads to the fourth tenet: material and form cannot be treated apart from one another, they interact, and mutually constrain one another. The fifth tenet would be that insides and outsides inform and constrain each other in nontrivial ways. While this list is only a beginning, an essential feature of ecological form is the acceptance of and creative reckoning with limits. Perhaps we can end on the upbeat note. As Igor Stravinsky (1960) noticed when composing music, «the more restraints one imposes, the more one frees oneself of the chains that shackle the spirit». Indeed, in ecological form, constraints and limits are emancipatory, freeing one to create in synch with the multitude forces that in their dynamic balance affirm and promote life.

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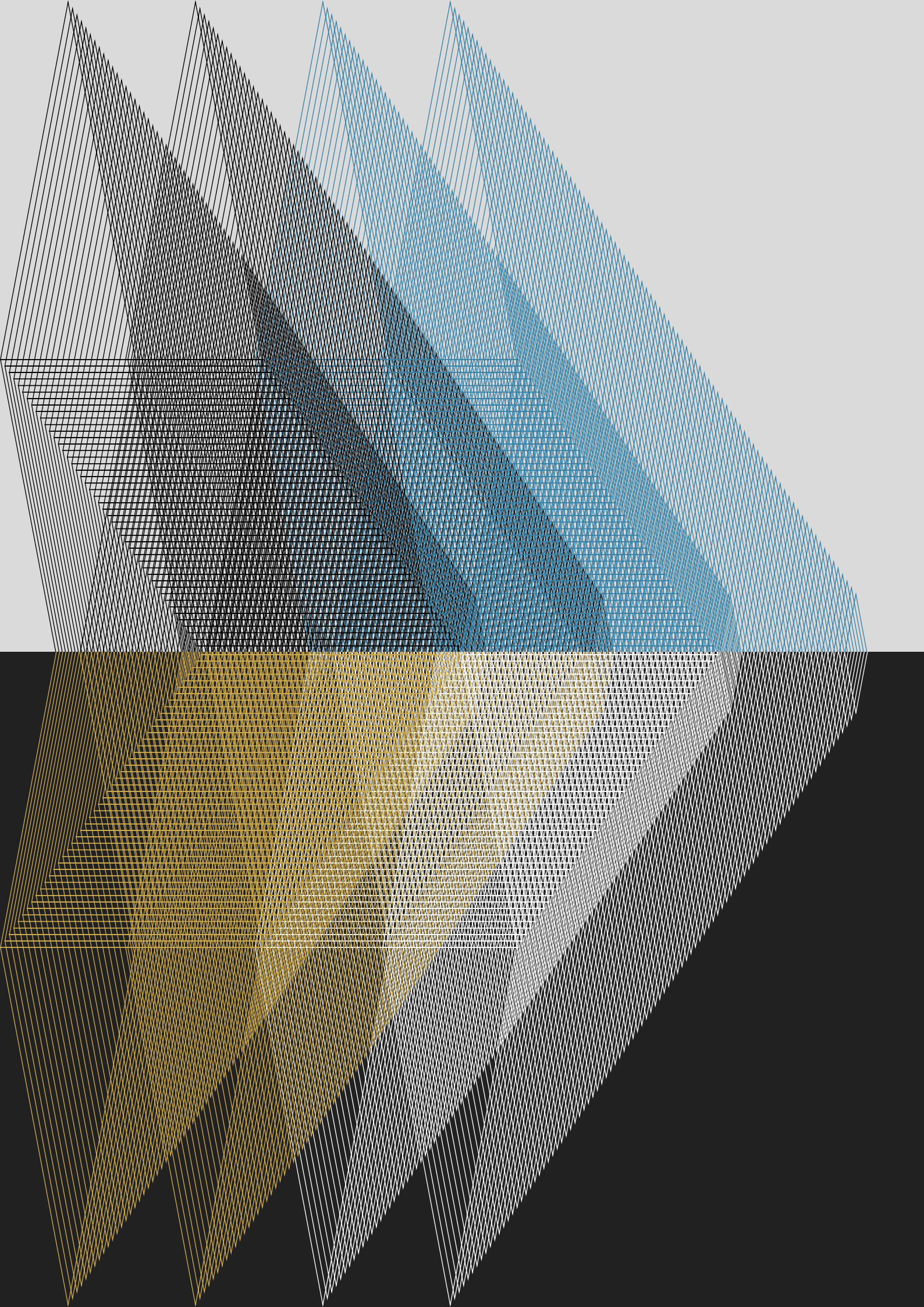
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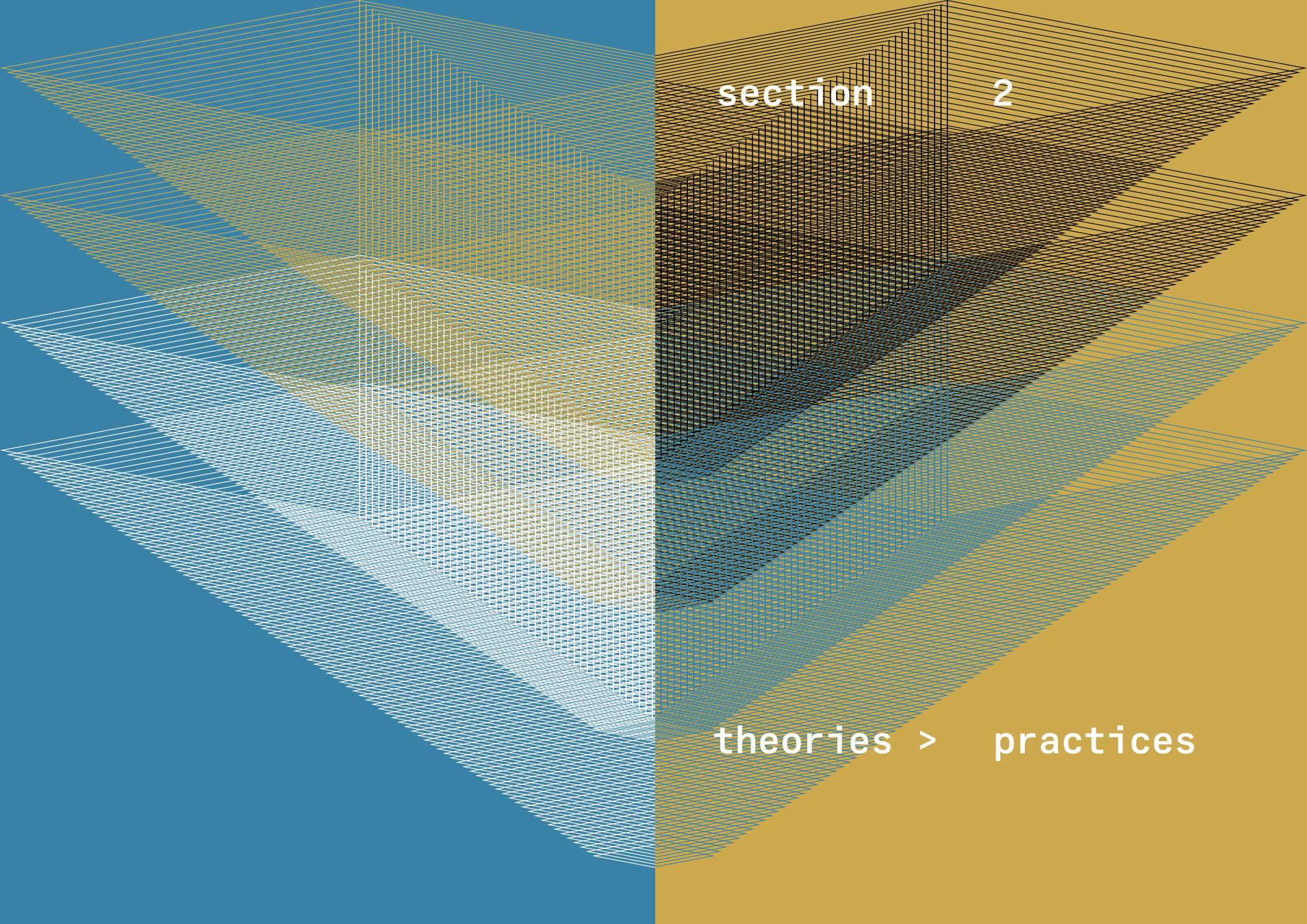
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section 2
theories > practices

# Architecture and its Metaphors. The Poetic Form as Experience

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While language can be understood as an expression of the phenomenal unity between the world and man, it is the poetic form that has always explained both mythical and physical phenomena of the human experience (Paz 1973). Following the idea of a primordial connection between poetry and understanding, I aim to explore the possibility of expanding the poetic model to other human cognitive experiences, and the architectural one in particular. The metaphorical relational structure between signifier and signified at the core of poetics can be translated in architectural terms in multiple ways: the relationship between container and contained space, built materiality and its experienceable in between, and many more. In this way, space as an external object becomes part of its subject: this is the limit and only possibility of knowledge. The emphasis given to the experiential dimension of the spaces we inhabit shifted the focus from what architecture is, has or does, to how its users feel and, ultimately, on who they are (Klingmann 2007). From the Situationist International to Antonioni's cinema and experience economy, this contribution addresses architectural forms as part of a social life which determines use, reception, and participation by communities, renewing the attention on experience rather than function.



— ARCHITECTURE
— POETICS
— METAPHOR
— EXPERIENCE
— PARTICIPATION

Philosophy Kitchen. Rivista di filosofia contemporanea
#21, II/2024, 87 — 98

## Introduction

In "Semiology and Architecture", the essay opening *Meaning in Architecture* (1969), Charles Jencks argues that the relationship between semiology and architecture is all-embracing. «This is perhaps the most fundamental idea of semiology and meaning in architecture: the idea that any form in the environment, or sign in language, is motivated, or capable of being motivated», he writes: «we are in a literal sense condemned to meaning» (Jencks 1969, 11-13). However, he continues, too much reality would be unbearable, and for this reason poetry became the primordial way to shed light on reality. Poetry has accompanied humanity through millennia and civilisations. From Homeric epics to Yoruba chants and divination, the poetic form long embodied the multiple functions later attributed to several disciplines, including science, philosophy, literature, and so on. While language(s) can be understood as the expression of the phenomenal unity between the world and man, Mexican poet Octavio Paz claims that it is the poetic form that has always explained both mythical and physical phenomena of the human experience. In fact, he writes, «there are no peoples without poetry; there are some without prose» (Paz 1973, 133).

The association of poetry with architecture also takes us back in time. Poetry was performed and passed down orally long before any form of writing was invented. Specific architectural structures and, later, theatres in particular served as dedicated containers for poetry. It is in these contexts that built space gave importance and sacrality to the poetic language. In religious and institutional buildings in particular, architecture has carried in itself poetic allegories for centuries: of power, devotion, and mythologies. Since then, as American poet and literary critic John Hollander (1996) highlights, a constant exchange of words and vocabulary between the two fields has been influencing our way of expressing ourselves. *Stanza* in Italian means room, while in poetry it is a group of words and lines of a poem [1]; there is *architecture* in poetry and *music* and *rhythm* in spatial patterns; we use *language*, *vernacular*, or *vocabulary* to talk about architecture and design, and many more. There can be poetry in architecture, in its structure and relation with the natural world, or when architectural elements resemble others, shaping a style. But there can also be poetry about architecture, about the feeling of inhabiting a space, the symbolic and emotional value of some interiors, and the perdition of the tentacular metropolis. After all, p*oiesis*, from the Greek term *poieîn* (ποιεῖν), means 'to make', 'to bring something into being'. Understanding the poetics of architecture means addressing the poem and the myth that exist in architecture, human thought, and the meaning behind and within built forms. It means considering heritage and culture without limiting the possibilities of human creativity (Bianco 2020).

[1] Arguing that a similar linguistic correspondence can be found in other languages as well, including Arabic, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben employs this metaphor as a tool to bridge the division that exists in Western thought between philosophy and poetry. The room becomes the symbol of the ideal unity in architecture and poetry, serving as a space of contemplation and reflection on the world, but also shaping desires and repair. To expand on the double meaning of *stanza* as both room and verse of a poetic composition and its implication see Agamben's book *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm of Western Culture* (1992).

Following the idea of a primordial connection between poetry and human understanding, I aim here to explore the possibility of expanding the poetic narrative model and its metaphorical nature to other forms of human experiences, and the architectural one in particular. If each group of words or words alone are for themselves a metaphor (i.e., they stand in

representation of something else), the relational structure between tenor and vehicle, target and source and, more in general, signifier and signified at the core of the poetic form can be translated in architectural terms in a variety of ways. For instance, this dichotomy can be found in the relationship between container and contained space, built materiality and its in-between, form and function, and many more. It is through the poetic scheme that architectural historian Alberto Pérez-Gómez understands the phenomenological experience of space and its fruition, claiming that «[a]rchitecture is not an experience that words translate later. Like the poem itself, it is its figure as presence, which constitutes the means and end of the experience» (Pérez-Gómez 2006, 8). In this way, space as physical surroundings becomes part of the subject inhabiting it: this is the limit and only possibility of knowledge. (AA)

This interest in spatial experience is not limited to philosophy or phenomenology of architecture. The emphasis given today to the experiential dimension of the spaces we inhabit, as German architect Anna Klingmann (2007) writes, shifted the focus from what architecture is, has, or does, to how its users feel and, ultimately, on who they are. Contemporary approaches including user-centred design and experience economy have contributed to renewing the attention on experience rather than architectural function in itself. For this reason, as Roland Barthes (1993) maintains, the consideration of a semiotic of space is only possible in the frame of a wider semiotics of culture. My reflection intends to address what we can learn from poetics and the poetic scheme to better understand the way we experience the architectures we inhabit.

## From space to place: poetics, perception, meaning

When Edmund Husserl (1970) introduced the concept of lifeworld, he described an intuitive and shared universal horizon, the surroundings of each individual and all of them as the human collective. According to the philosopher, lifeworld is pre-reflective and self-evident, and it is given as a framework and background of human life. While we grow accustomed to it with time and experience, it is in the correspondence of form with meaning that we become familiar with our surroundings or, as Edward Casey (1997) defines it, our bodily space. To this system of locations within which the core dimension of life is entangled belongs all meanings that are attributed to space and our experience of it.

Meaning, as a spatial attribute, together with human behaviour is at the base of the sense of place. If place is a matter of the factors that

(AA) AUROSA ALISON
In addition to understanding the significance of Phenomenology in Architecture, Perez-Gomez works alongside J. Pallasmaa and S. Holl to propose the relationship between phenomenology and design theory. Beware of this passage because the role of phenomenology in architecture, which is solely understood as a theoretical interpretation, is often misunderstood.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree

inhabit it, it is the «mission of architecture [...] to activate the potential content of environment by converting somewhere to a place» (Parsaee *et al.* 2015, 371). Though the interpretation of meaningful forms, which, in semiotic terms, could be discussed as meaningful signs, architectures are understandable and accessible to people. This relation, from architectural forms to meaning, or from space to place, is itself metaphorical, comparable to the poetic image that sees a word or group of words (the vehicle) standing from an evoked concept or meaning (the tenor). This relational analogy comprises a wide array of possibilities.

For instance, the potential interpretations of this metaphorical relation in modernist architecture are multiple. They span from the idea that 'form follows function', evoking functionalist correspondence as the essential approach to architecture (a position defended by the Bauhaus school, among others), to a more imaginative and even emotional interpretation of modernist-built forms. This is the case of Michelangelo Antonioni's representation of the architecture of post-war Italy and Milan in particular. Architectural forms become interlocutors of the human experience, and they contribute to building the cinematic narrative and shaping individual and collective existence. For Antonioni, modern man's alienation is tied to the modern city, a direct effect of spatial situatedness. In *La Notte* (The Night, 1961), the movie begins with a camera's downward movement from the inside of the elevator of the Pirelli Tower (designed by Gio Ponti), what Tomasuolo (1993, 5) describes as a descent into the urban hell of the economic boom. The clean geometrical shapes of the architectural space reflect and affect the psychophysical state of the protagonists of the movie, from aspiration and disenchantment to sublimity and barrenness. As Tomasuolo writes, «architecture may even be said to determine the figures' behaviour [...: in] Antonioni's alienated *and* ambiguous cinema, architecture becomes a veritable heterocosm of experience» (Tomasuolo 1993, 4).



The translation of physical and spatial experience into meaningful narratives involves a mediated version of reality together with self-perception and self-representation. According to Edmund Feldman (1976), this gap is contingent and intelligible according to three factors that combine individual imagination with cultural models. They are:

> (a) the physiological differences between thinking and seeing; (b) the capacity of the individual to distort, edit, or rearrange visual perceptions of himself; and (c) the power of the dominant culture to instill visual and other norms - norms that every person tries somehow to live up to. (Feldman 1976, 10)

Language is one of the principal symbolic contexts – or, even, the symbolic context, semiotician Per Aage Brandt (2004), argues – within which the mediation between inner perception and socialisation with the external world is possible. Language functions as a tool for translation of the complexity of our surroundings, supporting their understanding through concepts and image formation. In this respect, metaphors are fundamental tools employed for multiple purposes, from sense-making and representation to communication and knowledge transfer.

Simply speaking, a metaphor is a correspondence, a «projection of one schema (the source domain of the metaphor) onto another schema

(the target domain of the metaphor)» (Moser 2007, 155). Metaphors comprise and refer to both personal stories and cultural concepts, social systems, and collective references. Metaphors, philosopher Sarah Kofman claims, «must be understood [...] not as a rhetorical figure but as 'a substantive image [...] in place of the idea'» (Kofman 1993, 8), in support of expression and reception likewise, covering any aspect of human activity. As Kofman continues, «the deliberate use of metaphors affirms life» (Kofman 1993, 19). Metaphors shape the sphere of the unknown with the support of images that pertain to the sphere of the known.

It is indeed through bodily experience that we create systems of meaning. Abstract concepts are linked to concrete ones through metaphorical association (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), and spatial concepts in particular are essential to support the meaning-making process of many other domains of human knowledge and experience. As cognitive scientist and linguist Mark Turner argues, «our understanding of social, mental, and abstract domains [...] is formed on our understanding of spatial and bodily stories, namely by projection of these spatial and bodily stories onto social, mental, and abstract stories» (Turner in Brandt 2004, 33).

Human experience is characterised, according to Christian Norberg-Schulz (1985), by the combination of life and place. Ethos is created and gains sense only by existing and being situated in an environment of meaningful structure: the complexity of human experience as a changing sequence entails changing environments. Places and architectures order gestures and acts into narratives which, in the urban contemporary western frame, can be defined as narratives of built spaces. Meaning in architecture is thus an experiential story, a sort of oration, a speech on space. Or, as Pellegrino and Jeanneret write, «the architectural project, project of a possible world is substantially a work of fiction» (Pellegrino & Jeanneret 2008, translation by the author) in which we participate and to which we refer to make sense of our present. While space is always essential in shaping any meaning – as Brandt argues, «anything meaningful is meaningful in a context» (Brandt 2004, 30) – the architectures we inhabit are in themselves meaningful objects.

The concept of dwelling, consistently taken up by Norberg-Schulz (1985), is dominant in Heidegger's reflection on the human condition as a form of inhabiting space and being in a relationship with one's surroundings. Not only does the German philosopher associate dwelling with poetry as its devoted language of expression, but he also indicates poetry as the very source of dwelling. In Heidegger's philosophy, «the concept of poetic measure might suggest a pragmatic rather than romantic account of the grounding role of poetry in architecture, particularly for architecture's key conditions: creativity and dwelling» (Hill 2014, 145). Poetry is here understood as a form of measuring, a measuring device for life, its daily experiences and routines, but also its broader understanding and meaning. If «measuring is the (back)ground that allows the world to presence meaningfully» (Hill 2014, 150), Heidegger extends this idea to architecture and buildings in particular, arguing that they only truly happen where there is saying and naming, where language exists.

The association of architecture and human language(s) is strongly present throughout *Meaning in Architecture*. In architecture, just as in any other human structure legitimised through language, meaning entails

users' cognitive understanding. However, it is as a relational whole (both on a micro and macro level – the city, for instance) that buildings gain sense as the cohesive complexity we inhabit. The harmony (or not) of architectural unities has often been assimilated with narrative structures, and in particular with the poetic one. Both poetry and architecture share a malleable relation between meaning and form. Namely, the question is not only about what we want to say but in which way, and with which tools (words, composition, materials, and so on) we want to say it. Chosen words and chosen architectural elements need to be carefully selected and placed with one another to create poetic or spatial meaning, harmony with words or numbers, rhythm and metrics, measures and proportions (Campo Baeza 2012, 21). It is not necessarily about the message we aim to deliver with words or the function attributed to space, but how we can master these tools. As for verses in poems, architecture also presents multivalence in its forms and structures, with both functional and metaphorical meanings. (CD)

## Form as approximation, or metaphors of use-situation

Spatial narratives are complex, ever-changing, and do not depend on static or absolute forms, architect Christian Norberg-Schulz (1969) claims. For this reason, he writes, «to participate effectively in this interplay man has to orientate himself among the phenomena, and to preserve them by means of *signs* [...]. The more complex and differentiated the environment becomes, the more we need a large number of different symbols-systems» (Norberg-Schulz 1969, 220). In this frame, it is unusual for us to perceive objects in isolation from one another. Human space is constituted by the ordered contextual system in which reality takes place. Space gains meaning through interrelation and co-dependence, and it is within preexisting spatial narratives that possible ways of moving and being are conditioned (Norberg-Schulz 1969, 225). Norberg-Schulz affirms that, both in physical and cultural terms, contemporary human life presupposes «*a system of meaningful places*» which entails the combination of «the physical milieu with a *symbol-milieu*, that is an environment of meaningful forms» (Norberg-Schulz 1969, 226, emphasis in original).

In architecture as in any other field, meaning needs means of communication, which are both understood in terms of cultural reference and individual experience. Architectures are meaningful wholes only if



(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS:
I could agree with pretty much everything. However, in poetry, language is directly used for creating metaphors, while in architecture there is at least a double metaphor: the first links architecture and language, the second this language to a metaphor. Therefore, architectural metaphors are always indirect.

FEDERICO RUDARI
Taking a phenomenological perspective, I also believe that language itself (in the case of poetry) comes as a second step in translating experience(s). I thus see both of them as indirect, as much as meaning is.

organized in relational unities and inscribed in specific systems of reference. In this regard, architect and scholar Nathan Silver (1969, 280) claims that it is precisely people's interpretation, according to their needs, that makes architecture. There could be architecture without architects and even architecture without buildings, but there cannot be architecture without people. Users are the ones setting intentions in the use-situation relationship they develop with and within space.

This is the case, among many others, of architectures dedicated to cults, religions, and more in general the relationship societies have established with divinities and the otherworldly. Despite the abundant presence of symbolic references in religious architectures as we think of them today, from the Ranakpur Jain temple in Rajasthan (India) to the Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, people have attributed sacrality and ritual value to caves (from Ireland to Mesoamerica), rooms and corners of the house, and even open-air locations including forests and rivers. According to use, people have adapted (or just occupied) pre-existing architectures for specific practices. It is the case of the Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque in Famagusta (Cyprus), consecrated as the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Nicholas and converted into a mosque (but still featuring the appearance of a French gothic church from the outside) during the Ottoman occupation in the XVI century. More recently, the Loew's Valencia Theatre, a lavish and gilded well-known cinema built by Marcus Loew in Queens (New York) in the 1920s, was bought by an Evangelical congregation and turned into a church. Today, the stage of the former theatre can accommodate the 300-member chorus of the Tabernacle of Prayer for All People Church (Shepard 1978). As the mentioned cases illustrate, use and intention play a key role in determining meaning in architecture. Indeed, specific architectures are often built with precise intentions, but both buildings and urban infrastructures have also been repurposed throughout time and civilisations. Architecture gains meaning as long as it has one for the people inhabiting it.

There is multivalence in every object, and to architecture belong all meanings that, through experience, are attributed to physical locations. The metaphorical dynamic pertains to language as much as to visual imagery and spatial structures, functioning as a transfer from tactile, gestural (and many more) domains to non-physical ones, such as cultural values and emotional attributes. In the case of architectural forms, this equation varies conforming to multiple perspectives. According to Jencks (1969), meaning oscillates between the one intended by architects (forms are instrumental to functional intentions) and the one people shape out of fruition through time (meaning evolves and shifts conforming to diachronic dept). When approaching a building or a piece of architecture more in general, its form communicates to its observers in consonance with cultural references and previously experienced notions, before being addressed in functional terms. These two elements coexist and complement each other. Indeed, «the *primary utilitarian function* is related to use and acts like a denotation; while the *secondary function* is related to symbolical values, cultural conventions and ideology and reminds us of a connotation» (Terzoglou 2018, 121 emphasis in original). Form is important, Terzoglou continues, when understanding the meaning behind architecture; space is central if addressing a particular function. The combination of the two creates architectural value.

Spatial metaphors in architecture enable tensions and dissimilarities to coexist, involving the difference between its reading (architecture in some way always about itself) and its designated use. The duality of the metaphorical relation can be assumed in architecture with multiple, and even opposite interpretations. For example, architect Geoffrey Broadbent (1969, 73) argues that the metaphors in architecture are reversed compared to poetic ones. While in poems abstract images stand for real-life experiences, narratives of built shapes and concrete architectural spaces recall abstract codes and styles, as well as mores and traditions. However, this dichotomy could also be addressed oppositely, and architecture interpreted as the signified of specific social philosophies. According to Broadbent, architecture is both the vehicle of abstract meanings and values and the tenor of a pervasive cultural philosophy, which changes and evolves in time, he argues, but also with use and attributed function, one might add. By agreement, resulted from more or less wide social contracts, meaning in metaphoric relationships is not arbitrary. As for rhetoric, architectural figures are «built upon a procedure of secondariness and [...] designed to persuade the receivers of the values to be adopted. But form is as an approximation as faithful as possible to the referred content, which remains unutterable» (Pellegrino 2006, 214). (CD)

Architecture thus combines the articulation of space for usage (denoted function, namely the indication or sign of usage) and the articulation of space for distinctive values of a cultural system (connoted function, or the signification of such values), which evolve, as well as their signified counterpart, according to habits and practices of consumption. The manifold «relation of semantic metaphor», Pellegrino claims, established between architecture and meaningful association, defines «resemblance that posits a gap in order to propose its reduction» (Pellegrino 2006, 215). Pellegrino borrows this perspective on metaphors from the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (1975), who argues that, by deviating from literal meaning, metaphors extend the significance of an object. However, they do not aim at ascribing a new idea to an object, but instead at reducing the gap that subsists between these two. Metaphors diminish differences through resemblance and emphasise the kinship of a perceived relationship.





(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
The concept of approximation is very important for me, and I have also written about it. I especially appreciate the concept of "secondariness", even if I'm not fond of the Platonic, idealistic approach that seems to emerge from this last part, which I think comes from the equalisation between the primary meaning and the function, imposing a fixity, in my opinion, conflicting with the uncertainty of meaning.

FEDERICO RUDARI
I see your point, but I rather see the imposition of fixity that you describe as a possible instrumentalisation of secondariness (often failed) rather than its nature. A different, more productive, way to employ it could be accessibility (of value or function).

## Towards a participative poetics of architecture

Metaphorically, architecture can also be understood in relation to the space we inhabit: the material container and contained environment, the substantial work of architecture and the space framed within. This space has always been interpreted in multiple and even dissonant ways. The Greek term for space, *chora* (χώρα)*:*

> is simultaneously the work and the 'space,' its ground or lighting; it is that which is unveiled, the 'truth' embodied by art, and the 'space' between the word and the experience. It is both a space for 'contemplation' and a time set out for 'participation,' a space of recognition. (Pérez-Gómez 2007, 18)

Whereas *topos* (τόπος) could be addressed as the combination of architectural elements that constitute an environment, while it also recalls a locus of becoming, where architecture evokes the natural world through the synthesis of geometry.

Generally, people perceive and experience architecture in a dual form. On the one hand, there is a certain distance in perception. Built form is seen as the given embodied presence of a cultural continuity. However, in its fruition, there is also a rupture and evolution from how architecture is first recognised. The intimacy of inhabiting and being in a certain space contributes to its re-interpretation at a linguistic level. The experience of architecture entails participative engagement and the creation of new meanings (Pérez-Gómez 2007, 18).

The semantic domains we employ to make sense of our surroundings, Brandt (2004) argues, are shaped by spatial metaphors. The bodily experience of relevant spatial frames contributes to the articulation of reality as an experienceable unity. The understanding of the different domains that shape the meanings we attribute to bodily and spatial stories is formed «by projection of these spatial and bodily stories onto social, mental, and abstract stories» (Turner in Brandt 2004, 33), and the experience of space and architecture is key to shaping our life-world perspective. Metaphors serve to transfer meaning with no restricted direction and integrate and enhance reality and our experience of it by combining basic domains:

> Metaphors and other semiotically composite and creative constructions, such as explicit comparisons, bring together imaginary formations - representations of thinkable scenarios: *mental spaces* - rooted in different semantic domains and produce more or less stable conceptual integrations, or *blends*. (Brandt 2004, 47, emphasis in original)

With experience, we can connect form with meaning, bridge contexts of reference and present ones, as well as incorporate different semantics and put them in dialogue. If language is the primary milieu in which we situate our experience, architecture functions just like any other linguistic domain to convey meaning, physical and spatial in this case.

The association of metaphor and architecture is not only central to the definition of meaning but also of our experience of it. In this sense, the metaphorical model can be a methodology too. It refers to our bodily ways of interacting with systems of knowledge, «a willingness to take the

unintended suggestions of language as reality and to pursue a figural and subjunctive hypothesis with a quite literal, demonstrative logic» (Dworkin 2004, 8). Knowledge in this case does not only rely on language, but specifically on the poetic structure of metaphorical association as a way to situate and confirm experience following specific categories. Architecture, as much as poetry, enables the dislocation of experiential knowledge of multiple and even opposite meanings according to use (Rasula 2004). (AA)

Space, given as an external physical complex, is incorporated and becomes part of a subject through experience. This change in perspective has today pervaded countless spheres of contemporary life. This trajectory, which spans from neuroscientific investigations to the emergence of experience economy (one of the latest trends within present-day capitalism) has caused a noteworthy paradigm shift. Architectural endeavours in production, and not only spatial fruition, are markedly influenced by the pursuit of specific body-centred objectives. The combination of neuroscientific understandings into the ethos of architecture accentuates a juncture wherein the cognitive and sensory dimensions become pivotal determinants in spatial design and built environments. Architecture becomes more and more entwined with the necessity of cultivating immersive and sensually resonant experiences. As Klingmann argues:

> this understanding necessitates a dramatic shift of the aim of architectural design, from producing static and discrete objects to the generation of a consciousness of desire and a desire for consciousness through a deliberate construction of context. (Klingmann 2007, 4)



To effectively understand and describe this consciousness, various elements have been borrowed from the poetic scheme so far, from its resorting to embodied consciousness to mythic recollection, metaphorical association and linguistic mediation. This position is emphatically supported by Bianco, who argues that architecture comes into existence «always through poetics» and it «is born through the dialogue of an individual with the world therein lies its existential dimension» (Bianco 2018, 112).

(AA) AUROSA ALISON
The context of linguistics certainly is interesting and referential, but what I suggest is not to limit the expression of experience solely in language itself. I remember that when using the realms of corporeality, one must at least mention contemporary aesthetics and all references from it. Aisthesis : the Greek word says it, it means "Sensibility," the aesthetic approach to experiential context and vice versa is one of the great theoretical themes about new design approaches.

FEDERICO RUDARI
I agree, I think linguistic articulation is one, and not the, practice that articulates experience and its meaning. However, I do not see it as a 'distanced' way of dealing with it, but rather a tool that we master while bodily and sensuously addressing the configurations that architecture entails. I see language as rooted in corporeality.

Discussing the work of Georgian architect Shota Bostanashvili, a pioneer in the study of architectural design in poetic terms, Bianco stresses how architecture must aim at creating an environment for people to interact, not in a close, pre-defined way but open to manifold readings. Bostanashvili proposed a poetics of architecture able to fill the void left by philosophy (and aesthetics in particular) and shape knowledge around space, shifting from words to physical object and back to words. If meaning is affected by the cultural contexts a subject is placed within, Bianco suggests that poetry should be the primary culture of architecture. In this context, he continues, «no architecture can be born without the ability of the subject to comprehend, navigate, and expand the boundaries of the culture that creates her and she, in turn, recreates» (Bianco 2018, 112).

The inspiration for an architecture that nurtures creation and exchange was endorsed by the Situationist International. In his 1956 lecture, *Demain la poésie logera la vie* [Tomorrow poetry will house life], Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys maintains that the architecture of his times has been able to overcome functionalism (and what he calls the 'rectangle' design model) towards a true art of construction. Through the manipulation of materials and voids, volumes and spaces, architects are able «to create the most complete of arts, at once lyrical in its means and social in its very nature» (Constant in Wigley 1998, 78). From Eero Saarinen's MIT Chapel (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956) to Hans Scharoun's Berliner Philharmonie (Berlin, 1963), architecture should invite for encounter, creation and, just like in a metaphor, transfer symbolic and built entities to non-physical ways of experience: «It is merely a way of ordering life so that it can be held and understood» (Chaplin 2005).

## Conclusions

Multiple, countless, even infinite meanings can be attributed to bodily experiences, and the bodily experience of space and architecture is no exception. In virtue of this, with this contribution, I aimed to look at architecture and its understanding and use through semiotic, cognitive and poetic tools. I found this exercise particularly interesting for one main reason: while many human fields of knowledge and cultural expressions including today's technology, but also language and poetry, evolve and transform themselves at a rapid pace, architecture, as any other built-up system, does it more slowly. For this reason, as French architectural and urban historian Françoise Choay writes, «the urban system is threatened in its very existence [...] and hence partly doomed to continual anachronism» (Choay 1969, 31).

What we can acknowledge today is the evolving approach to our fruition and comprehension of built space and its vocabulary. If through language we can mediate our ways of experiencing reality, spatial narratives and metaphors are tools of constant use to translate perception into sharable forms of expression. The specificity of architectural spaces provides unique ways of meaning-making that combine a more 'distant' visual and aesthetic approach with engaged subjective fruition.

The possibility of a poetics of architecture represents a reflection on but also a synthesis between practice and experience, a response to what is given and the way we inhabit it, symbolic references and use-situation

interpretation. There is no meaning in architecture without diachronic depth (Lotman 2005, 206), since «participating in a work of architecture has a fundamental temporal dimension», one that «constitutes a re-cognition that is, also, a creation of ourselves» (Pérez-Gómez 2007, 23). A poetics of architecture is not only about buildings but also about ideas behind and about them, people's creations and experiences of participation. It is a poetics about what architecture is as much as about who we are.

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# *Spatium Fugit.*
## An Alternative Approach to Understanding the Meaning of Space and Time in Architecture


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This epistemological study addresses the theme of the meaning in architecture from an artistic and phenomenological perspective by investigating the experience of space and time, questioning whether the multiple horizons (spatial and temporal) of modern space have led to the concept of place becoming antiquated – prioritising to address the abstract nature of space. The immateriality and transparency of today's architecture contribute to the acceleration of passing images, alienating us from ourselves. M. Augé suggests that the spaces of super-modernity create an excess of an overabundance of events and an acceleration of time, making understanding the modern spatial experience challenging. Revising Augé's concepts in current time, S. Holl suggested that vocabulary has the risk of *jettisoning* the authentic experience; words are inherently abstract, and the true meaning comes through sensation. As spaces and places are undoubtedly encountered as multisensory lived experiences, a Phenomenological framework has been implemented to exemplify the importance of lived experiences and the understand the dynamic interplay between the perceiver and the perceived.


All direct quotations in languages other than English have been translated into English by the authors, unless stated otherwise.


We extend our gratitude to Sara Edwards for her English proofreading.



— SPACE-TIME
— BODILY EXPERIENCE
— ARCHITECTURAL EXPERIENCE
— PHENOMENOLOGY

## Introduction. Unbounded space and non-place

> We treat space somewhat the way we treat sex. It is there but we do not talk about it. (Hall 2001, 14)

Is space escaping us? To begin this epistemological study, it is imperative to outline the mystical and intangible nature of the word space. Space, traditionally, was a topic of philosophy and natural sciences, but, surprisingly, it emerged in architecture in the late 19th Century as an abstract concept exclusive to metaphysics (Van de Ven 1987). The term *space* in modern architecture has an ambiguous meaning because it overlaps with a broader philosophical concept of space. On one hand, it refers to the physical object that architects can manipulate, while on the other hand, it is also a mental construct that helps us understand the world (Forty 2000). The term *space* in the discipline of architecture emerged from Gottfried Semper's theories of volumetric space, in which he suggested that architecture was the enclosing of space, where the material component – the tectonics – creates an enclosure, making it an integral part of architectural aesthetics (Van de Ven 1987). Volumetric space is formed through the containment of solids within a given area, whereas modernist space is established by positioning solids within a space, emphasising spatial stratification and layering, and being antithetical to Semper's ideas (Condon, 1988). Van de Ven (1987) describes Semper's concept of volumetric space as a container; Zevi (1993) similarly likens architecture to a hollow sculpture. Perhaps Semper's concept of space better suits the literal definition of the word space with its approach to the thoughtful arrangement of enclosed volumes rather than focusing on the meaning of the lived experience in today's world.



While Augé (1995) suggests that modernity and supermodernity have led to a vacuum of unbounded experience, modern space has completely changed these boundaries in the globalised world of non-places. They are no longer finite experiences, enriched with the *genius loci* – the spirit of place (Norberg-Schulz 1980); these non-places have led to an experience of a spatial continuum, or in the words of Auge, an *excess of time* (1995). Therefore, understanding the haptic experience of space in a globalised world's chaos and modernism's abstractness has become increasingly important.

Augé's concept of non-place (1995), which once effectively highlighted the alienating and homogenous nature of modern environments, now faces challenges, and requires refinement in contemporary contexts. The evolution of spaces, particularly with digital technologies and social media, has blurred the distinction between physical and virtual realms. The latter have become significant arenas for social interaction and identity formation, challenging the traditional division between places and non-places and altering how we perceive belonging and connection. Furthermore, his characterisation of non-places as homogeneous and devoid of identity disregards the unique qualities and local meanings these spaces may possess. While Augé's concept of non-place still holds relevance in shedding light on certain aspects of modern spatial experience, it necessitates reconsideration and refinement considering the aims of this paper.

It must be acknowledged that attempting architectural discourse cannot deliberate from stating that: «there is no space without event,

[and] no architecture without program» (Tschumi 1994, 139). Regardless of the boundless and abstracted experience of the built environment, «architecture becomes the discourse of events as much as the discourse of spaces» (Tschumi 1994, 150). Furthermore, instead of labelling the modern conception of space as a non-place with boundless experience, reflecting on Tschumi, the event of architecture inevitably implies the movement of the observer. The same author (Tschumi 1994, 162) states: «the meaning in architecture is derivative of the relation between Space, Event [Experience] and movement». Furthermore, when discussing the triad of sequences Space, Event and Movement (SEM), perception and body sensations must be considered equally approaching the meaning of architectural experience, as perception involves the whole body, which implies that the sequence of SEM experience is inherently expressive. Our movement in the world is intricately linked to our perception, and our effective perception relies on our ability to navigate space; in simpler terms, our understanding of three-dimensional space is fundamentally influenced by how we physically exist and interact within these dimensions (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Thus, meaning cannot be considered statically or univocally: rather, it is *suggested* by the actions that take place in that space.

## Observed space. Phenomenological approaches

Considering the aforementioned authors, their discussion of space emphasises the importance of the observer rather than the forms which create it, suggesting that architecture's effervescence comes from a mobile and individualised sense of space (Norberg-Schulz 1980). Hence, perceiving space qualitatively – through our bodies – is quite intriguing. As we penetrate the built environment with our bodies, our body's expression through reaching, rising, descending, sliding, encircling, gripping, tapping, and caressing conveys metamorphic and aesthetic meanings (Bacci & Melcher 2011). These gesticulations of our fluid and erratic bodily actions allow us to create a narrative and gain meaning through our actions that allow us to discover new and unexpected individualised spaces.

As this paper's methodological approach is through the lens of phenomenology, it allows us to reject the idea of perception as constituted by independent senses – rejecting Cartesian rationale and offering a valuable perspective for comprehending the intricate interplay between individuals and their encounters with spaces. Phenomenology in architecture emphasises how our perception shapes spatial experiences, underlining that architectural space and its environment are interdependent. This approach highlights the intertwined relationship between space and its context, significantly influencing our experience of the built environment. This philosophical approach accentuates the subjective experience of phenomena and underscores the importance of lived experiences within space. By embracing a phenomenological framework, we can unravel the complex relationship between the individual and their spatial environment.

Within the realm of architecture, we confront a tangible phenomenon where individuals traverse through a structure, encountering successive vantage points. As articulated by Bruno Zevi (1993, 27), these individuals actively shape these perspectives, effectively generating what could

be construed as the *fourth dimension*, [1] thus bestowing a cohesive actuality upon the space. While it could be argued that human presence imbues architectural space with vitality over time, the essence of architecture transcends the limitations imposed by a mere four dimensions. Zevi underscores the inherent ambiguity regarding spatial dimensions, affirming that architectural space eludes confinement within the confines delineated by painting and sculpture. Instead, architectural space manifests as a distinct and palpable reality (Zevi 1993).

[1] Krauss discusses the influence of the fourth dimension on modern art, mainly focusing on its treatment of space and time. Krauss argues that Cubism challenged traditional notions of perspective, space, and time in art, ultimately leading to a fundamental reconfiguration of these concepts (see Krauss, R. E. (1985). *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. MIT Press).

Summarising the authors mentioned above, architecture, unlike other arts such as painting or sculpture, introduces an experiential dimension through human interaction. (CD) This dimension, which transcends traditional dimensional measurements, is a testament to the significance of human presence in architecture. It challenges the notion of quantifying architectural space solely through mathematical dimensions. Furthermore, while volumetric space makes the demarcation of inside and outside the box explicit, they are linked by a transitional element – the body. Modernism's boundless, infinite flow can exist without closure or containment, even where everything is in the same geometric orientation.

## Chronotopes. A theoretical framework on space and time

> *Chronotope*. A term employed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) to refer to the coordinates of time and space invoked by a given narrative; in other words to the 'setting', considered as a spatio-temporal whole. (Oxford Reference, 2024)

The chronotope, a concept introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), finds a compelling application in architecture, merging the dimensions of time and space into a singular, expressive framework. In architectural terms, the chronotope emphasises how buildings and spaces encapsulate historical moments, cultural narratives, and the passage of time, thereby shaping

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS:
Nevertheless, many arts have a performative dimension and, therefore, an experiential one. As evident as it is in music or dance, without mentioning "oriental" arts, this could also be true for other arts, in the sense that, in any case, they happen in the experience. Paradoxically, here, it would seem that the term "architecture" could denote any space or building before the experience itself, thus being independent of it.

FEDERICO RUDARI:
I would also argue that, without interaction, there would be no artistic experience at all. Here painting and sculpture are mentioned, but they always embody the traces of another human consciousness and behaviour and therefore mediate intersubjective interactions (as much as it is the case with architecture).

JAMES ACOTT-DAVIES, MICKEAL MILOCCO BORLINI
The performative dimension spans across all forms of art. However, it can be argued that modernism has disproportionately emphasised vision, creating a visual hegemony. While seeing – such as viewing a painting – helps establish a connection with the world, other sensory modalities are often neglected. In the context of experiencing architecture today, it is crucial to recognise that the tactile dimension plays a vital role. Touch is a straightforward, reciprocal sense: when we touch something, we feel it push back, providing us with essential haptic feedback. Without this sensory interaction, the experience would lack depth and character.
This reciprocal relationship between the object and our haptic sense not only reveals the nature of the object but also deepens our understanding of our bodies as we engage with it. While it could be argued that architecture can exist independently of experience, modernism's boundless flow has arguably distanced architecture from its environment, diminishing the recognition of the importance of haptic experience in shaping how we perceive and engage with built spaces. Therefore, reflecting on the experiential dimension brings us closer to a meaning in architecture.



the experience of those who inhabit or interact with them. It suggests that architecture is not just a static backdrop but a dynamic participant in the storytelling of human life, where every design element and spatial configuration tells a story of temporal progression and spatial experience. Through the lens of the chronotope, buildings transcend their physical boundaries to become living chronicles of human existence, reflecting the intertwining of time and space in the fabric of our daily lives.

Contextually, Jean Baudrillard disrupts traditional views by proposing that time should not be seen as a straightforward march forward but as a series of simulated realities that intertwine and overlap, blurring the lines between the real and the constructed (Baudrillard 1981). In contrast, the architectural scholars Bloomer and Moore emphasise the temporal aspects inherent within our physical spaces, suggesting that architectural forms are not just inert structures but active participants in the narrative of culture, evolving and influencing societal memory over time (Bloomer & Moore 1977).

Alberto Pérez-Gómez ventures into the realms of history and phenomenology to argue that our experience of space is indistinguishly linked with our perception of time, proposing a view of architecture that embraces this dynamic interaction as central to understanding human experience (Pérez-Gómez 1983). Building on this notion, Henry Plummer champions a forward-thinking approach to architectural design, one that is cognizant of the current spatial needs while also being adaptable to future changes, thereby embracing the temporal dimension of architecture (Plummer 2010).

From an interdisciplinary stance, David Seamon draws upon environmental psychology to illustrate how our spatial and temporal experiences

are deeply intertwined, with certain environments capable of triggering profound temporal emotions and recollections, thus enriching our engagement with the world (Seamon 2014). Rounding out this discourse, Pierre von Meiss sheds light on the temporal challenges within architectural design, advocating for structures that stand the test of time and adapt and evolve, reflecting the ongoing dialogue between space and time (von Meiss 2013).

In *Où est passé l'avenir?* (Where has the future gone?), Marc Augé (2011) explores the themes of time and space, examining their interplay within architectural and urban contexts. Augé delves into the temporal dimensions of architectural spaces, considering how they reflect the passage of time and influence human experiences. He also explores the evolving nature of urban spaces, tracing their historical development and cultural significance over time, and explores how buildings and landmarks embody historical narratives, serving as repositories of collective memory. Augé examines the spatial dynamics within architectural and urban spaces, considering how they shape human interactions and experiences, contemplating the temporal continuum of architectural spaces, and exploring how they evoke nostalgia while also projecting aspirations for the future. According to the author, space and time delve into the complexities of modern spatial experiences, reflecting on the interplay between physical environments and human perceptions.

In addition, in quantum mechanics, Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle [2], asserts a fundamental limit to the precision with which certain physical property pairs, like position and momentum, can be concurrently ascertained. This principle elegantly captures the essence of indeterminacy—asserting that a heightened accuracy in measuring one property inherently compromises the precision of the other. To understand space, in accordance with discussing the meaning of architecture, while acknowledging Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, the experience of space must not be measured through singular quantitative means, as when measuring a single position of experience abdicates the crucial characteristics of the lived experience. The *body-as-subject* [3] is required to occupy space, as only then can it give it meaningful direction towards understanding the dynamic interplay between the perceiver and the perceived. Our perception of time and its relationship with spatial experience holds significant importance in architecture, as it shapes how we inhabit and comprehend spaces, or, in other words: « [...] we do not live in physical settings like being on a stage; the space creates a continuum with our mental space and our very sense of self. As I occupy a space, the space occupies me forming a chiasmatic singularity» (Pallasmaa 2011, 595).

[2] Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, asserting the inherent limits in measuring a particle's position and momentum simultaneously, parallels architectural theory by suggesting that perception of space is subject to variability and interpretation, underscoring the fluid nature of experiencing architectural forms. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qt-uncertainty/

[3] The concept of body-as-subject in phenomenology, notably discussed by Merleau-Ponty, emphasises the body's central role in experiencing the world. This approach views the body not just as an object in space but as an integral aspect of consciousness and perception (Merleau-Ponty 2002).

Drawing a parallel to the realm of art, particularly in the analysis of Cubist paintings, this principle illuminates the nuanced portrayal of experience within the canvas. Cubism, much like the uncertainty principle, challenges traditional perspectives, suggesting that a singular viewpoint does not suffice to encapsulate the entirety of an object or event. It echoes Paul Laporte's assertion that «the object of the painting is no longer an infinitesimal point in time manifest in an infinite space, but an event in

time manifest in a finite space» (Vargish & Mook 2000, 86). This shift in perspective, akin to the quantum leap in understanding through Heisenberg's lens, underscores a profound revaluation of how events and objects are experienced. By dissecting and reassembling multiple viewpoints within a finite space, Cubism transcends the mere representation of objects, instead capturing the essence of experience as it unfolds over time. This conceptual overlap between quantum mechanics and Cubist methodology underscores a deeper, interconnected understanding of reality, where the limitations of precision and perspective open new avenues for interpreting the complexity of time and space.

These scholars collectively provide a nuanced lens through which to view the relationship between space and time, advocating for the same holistic approach we use for our phenomenological investigation.

### Duration: bodily experience of space and time

The discipline of architecture transcends the mere assembly of structural components like walls, roofs, and floors; instead, it embodies a living entity wherein human engagement cultivates an exceptional dimension. Our spatial accommodation, or the point of arrival begins with the body, your body, my body, according to Tschumi (1994, 111). As this investigation is undertaken through the phenomenological lens, this paragraph examines the notion of bodily experience entrenched within architectural spaces. Central to this exploration is how individuals discern, traverse, and establish emotional bonds with the constructed *milieu*. The investigation herein scrutinises the intricate interplay between the tangible characteristics, spatial configurations, and sensorial facets inherent in architectural design. This academic endeavour seeks to unravel the profound implications of how architecture's physical attributes, spatial arrangements, and sensory constituents intricately interface with the human physique, shaping our cognitive and emotive encounters within these crafted spaces.

According to Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa (2011), architecture frames structures, reorients, scales, refocuses and even slows down our embodied experience of the world. The action of simple spatial orientations, as mentioned earlier give us the ability to grasp the physical world, as ourselves are in conjunction with the flesh of the world Pallasmaa (2011). In the following quote, the phenomenological approach expresses the importance of understanding the movement through architecture, and the reciprocal nature of the body in space:

> I confront the city with my body, my legs measure the length of the arcade and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously projects my body onto the facade of the cathedral, where it roams over the mouldings and contours sensing the size of recesses and projections, my body weight meets the mass of the cathedral door, and my hand grasps the door pull as I enter the dark void behind. I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me. (Pallasmaa in Soltani & Kirci 2019, 2)

Based on Pallasmaa's previous statement, the body gains a sense of weight and perception from itself and has a binary connection with space. This

relationship, along with our senses of experience, provides a basis for Bruno Zevi's (1993) argument that the experience of architectural space transcends the objective idea of thinking in four dimensions, as the body experiences the intangible dimensions of space and time. These genuine architectural experiences cannot be reduced to a single entity or a series of visual impressions. When encountering a building, its meaning is derived from the intangible experience of approaching, confronting, and engaging with the space concerning one's body (Holl 2007). (CD) Referring to the

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
In my opinion, this is an oversimplification. Our experience, too, mainly relies on something else, that is, our preconceptions and typifications. Partly, it depends on what we know (or think we know) about things and places; partly, it depends on the expectations from previous experiences and cultural background.

AUROSA ALISON
Totally agree!

JAMES ACOTT-DAVIES, MICKEAL MILOCCO BORLINI
Our preconceptions, typical expectations, and previous encounters do largely shape our experiences. It is essential to acknowledge that gaining perspective often comes at the expense of physical engagement, as György Kepes has noted. Furthermore, modernism's focus on space has led to a distant, two-dimensional worldview. To address this issue, Pallasmaa's suggestion – that genuine and meaningful architectural experiences do not arise from simply viewing a door but from how it facilitates interaction between inside and outside – reminds us that architecture brings us back to a pure encounter with the world. Therefore, as suggested, the true meaning is derived from the intangible experience of approaching, facing, and engaging with the space about one's body.
As much of our knowledge is shaped by past experiences, the concept that authentic architectural experiences originate from physical engagement reminds us that phenomenology is particularly well-suited to understanding everyday existence. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the context in examining places and their relationships with other elements rather than isolating them from their surroundings. In doing so, it strives to unify the relationship between the body and the environment.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree in general: what I meant is that you cannot consider physical experience universal or, to be more precise, more than personal. And this means that we architects can just hope for experiences, and design on the basis of this hope. But nothing more than that.

introduction, where Steven Holl (2007) suggested that vocabulary has the risk of jettisoning true spatial meaning, as words themself are inherently abstract and are used as association to describe objects and emotions can be related to Henri Bergson's idea that measuring experience (time) through clocks or chromometers objectives experience into a linear idea. Bergson's concept of duration (*durée réelle*) can help us understand time and experience in space. For the Author, the concept of duration, a continuous and intuitive experience of time that intertwines past, present, and future, allows a rethinking of measurable space in terms of becoming and duration. Duration (*durée)* is a multiplicity of succession, heterogeneity, and qualitative differentiations; it is continuous and virtual. Duration is divisible, but division transforms it: a mode of hesitation, bifurcation, unfolding, or emergence; thus, space should not be treated invariably, but through the lived experience of time, it is oriented towards emergence and eruption, movement, and action (Grosz 2001). From this, we can understand the importance of a lived understanding of the meaning of architecture. The idea of duration as a qualitative understanding of time (lived experience) suggests that space and the body should not be treated as static or measured by quantitative means. In the act of spatialising, we unfold architectural space through motion, and through this experience, we collect memory.

The meaning of architecture emerges through the sequence of space, event, and movement. From the points of entry to arrival, the spatial sequence of events creates a narrative where the transition or sequences of spaces become more important than a singular facet of experience (Tschumi 1994).

### Art and Architecture. Divergency of convergence

Bruno Zevi argued that the distinction that separates art and architecture (sculpture and painting) is the experience of depth. Sculpture creates surfaces standing in space, while architecture is the art of surfaces around space. However, while this distinction between architecture and art presents itself as an obvious distinction, the reduction of the experience of architectural space to the dimension of depth does not account for the corporal's autonomous nature.

Mitchell W. Schwarzer (1991, 54-55) argues that while human traits such as height or length can be understood independently, the dimension of depth relies on bodily movement through space for its comprehension. Unlike height or length, the perception of depth emerges only through the body's locomotion within specific spaces, leading to a genuine spatial awareness. The author mentions Schmarsow (Schwarzer 1991), who, in line with optical theories emphasising spatial understanding's reliance on movement, suggested that moving through space in the third dimension is what allows us to experience our immediate extension. Schwarzer also refers to Hermann Lotze (1991, 51), who conceptualised space as the kinetic expansion of bodily impulses while moving. For instance, navigating through building results in a continuous flow of visual impressions, generating a constantly evolving understanding of spatial relationships in mind.

Our perception of depth in space relies on bodily movement through particularised spaces, unlike the independent comprehension of

height or length, which highlights twofold optical and movement in tandem for shaping our spatial understanding. Both Schmarsow and Lotze envision space as an extension of bodily movements, exemplifying how navigating through environments continuously shapes our evolving perception of spatial relationships.

This idea of the body as the kinetic extension to space brings back the importance of the role of the body as a central coordinate, where architectural space is given meaning through the actions and gestures of the occupant – existentially speaking, «[…] it fuses three kinds of space, tactile, mobile and visual; thus, incorporating all the human senses exposed to simultaneous and successive experiences in space and time» (Van de Ven 1987, 90).

Psychologist James J. Gibson (1978) acknowledged that the body and vision work together to experience architecture. However, according to Pallasmaa (2011, 590) the true meaning of experiences cannot be solely described by these five sense modalities; architectural spaces surpass the standard five senses, incorporating various sensations: perceptions of gravity, the interplay between horizontal and vertical elements, notions of movement and balance, along with a sense of centre and equilibrium, and feelings of tension, ease, and time's flow. These sensations evoke mental imagery linked to bodily perceptions, engaging bodily awareness, memory, and imagination. Profound architectural design profoundly influences our comprehensive understanding of existence. Architecture is not confined to an abstract sphere; it is an integral part of our daily reality, primarily evaluated through our core awareness of being.



Thus, it solidifies our artistic/phenomenological approach that architectural experience/meaning cannot be deduced to categorisation or measurability. The essence of being-in-the-world comes from the lived experience of the corporeal, but «the art of architecture is fundamentally not about creating objects of visual beauty, but about the mystery of human existence and how to understand our very being in the world» (Pallasmaa 2011, 597).

## The kinetic vision of space

While it has been argued in the previous section that the true experience of space is predominantly encountered through the body, we suggested that vision must be treated equally to the discussion of the meaning in architecture. In this section, to help the understanding of these matters, we interpret and report some concepts discusses by Cornelius Van De Ven in his book *Space in architecture: the evolution of a new idea in the theory and history of the modern movements* (1987).

According to Van De Ven (1987), Hildebrand, an art theorist, significantly impacted the theoretical exploration of spatial concepts in art through his book *Problem of Form* published in 1983. His theory primarily focused on the spatial relationship between the viewer and the artwork as an artistic encounter; in his writings, Hildebrand introduced the correlation between space and form, proposing that form delineates and establishes the intrinsic essence or reality of objects. He distinguished two modes of perception: one involving static vision, where the eyes and body remain immobile, and the other, kinetic vision or vision-in-motion,

where the viewer's eyes converge and adjust while the body moves, enabling different perspectives or closer proximity to the object (Van de Ven 1987, 84). Hildebrand's exploration emphasised the significance of dynamic visual engagement in perceiving and understanding art within space.

According to the same author, perceiving architectural space occurs while navigating it, giving a sequential sense of its three-dimensional form. He refers to Hildebrand's idea that our understanding of objects' physical forms stems from touch – either by hand or visually. Artists, therefore, should intentionally replicate these touch-based and visual perceptions when shaping art, aiming to present a unified distant impression alongside a sequence of closer ones. Ultimately, the goal for artists is to convey a comprehensive concept of space (Van de Ven 1987).

Summarising, Hildebrand's notion of kinetic vision significantly impacted 19th Century concepts of space, highlighting space as foundational to all artistic expression and introducing time as a crucial element in shaping visual perception. The author also differentiated between actual form (*daseinsform*), representing physical reality, and perceptual form (*wirkungsform)*, influenced by variables like light, surroundings, and the viewer's perspective (Van de Ven 1987, 87). While *daseinsform* pertains to physical reality, typically of scientific interest, the arts focus on *perceptual form*, aiming to represent and evoke the concept of space.

> The task at hand involves visualising natural space in three dimensions – a void partly occupied by objects and air. This dynamic emptiness, not externally confined, relates to an object's shape delineating both its volume and the enclosed air volume. Essentially, an object's boundary demarcates the surrounding air body. (Forty 2001, 260)

Finally, Hildebrand's ideas suggest that space was animated from within, marking a departure from Semper's notions of volumetric space (Forty 2001). Additionally, Hildebrand's concept of vision-in-motion provides a perspective on understanding space and time within architectural settings. As a result, it is proposed that the diverse perspectives within a spatial experience play a crucial role in presenting a comprehensive understanding of space and the entirety of the experience it encompasses.

### Cubists multiple horizons and unfolding's

As this investigation is predominantly an artistic investigation into the meaning of architecture, it is essential to investigate the experience of space and time in a qualitative (phenomenological, artistic) sense, as the problem with thinking of the experience of space and time in mathematical terms dismisses the intangibility of the corporeal experience; going against the grain of the existential nature of being. Juhani Pallasmaa (2011) suggests that our reality extends beyond the material world to mental realms, where experiences and time merge. Navigating built environments creates a flow of images in our minds, shaping how we perceive space, influenced by past and present encounters (Schwarzer 1991). This is where understanding space through Cubism can benefit us in understanding the quintessence of experience, as: «Cubism does not want a banal description of the psychological meaning of bodies and events from a specific external standpoint, rather it

wants life itself!» (Mertins 2011, 33); thus, directing our understanding of the meaning in architecture through the kinetic images of the Cubists emphasises the importance of our lived perception of space.

When we walk around architecture, the invariant structure of our experience creates a narrative of our experience. For example, James J. Gibson's (1978) theory of ecological perception emphasises the concept of invariants, where visual stimuli change dynamically due to movements in the environment or the observer's position. Within architecture, as one moves, various aspects of the building become apparent through a sequence of unfolding images. The adumbrations of our experience of the spaces in architecture synthesise and pertain to our total knowledge of the experience of architecture. As time passes, an observer stores perceptual information about an object in their memory, creating an archive of knowledge. This prior knowledge becomes the foundation for the observer's conceptual understanding of the object. Parallel to a Cubist painting, this understanding involves both past and present memories, experienced through the body's movement, resulting in a layered and transparent sense of time (Pedragosa 2014). These past and present moments of the experience of the object are what phenomenologist Edmund Husserl calls *retentions* and *protentions*.

While Husserl explains this through the analogy of a cube, the thinking of the determinate aspects of the object is relative to the viewing of architecture. By understanding the determinate aspects experience of architecture (*retentions* and *protentions*) as a Freudian series of segments [4], where Tschumi states: «architecture, when equated with language, can only be read as a series of fragments that make up an architectural reality» (1995, 95).



As we can only experience a single facet of an object/experience at any given moment if we consider the factors contributing to an architectural experience, the complete collection of specific elements within architectural space defines the overall intended experience through the *objects* horizons [5], [FIG. 1]. This suggests that the various horizons within modernist architectural space encompass the entirety of experiences.

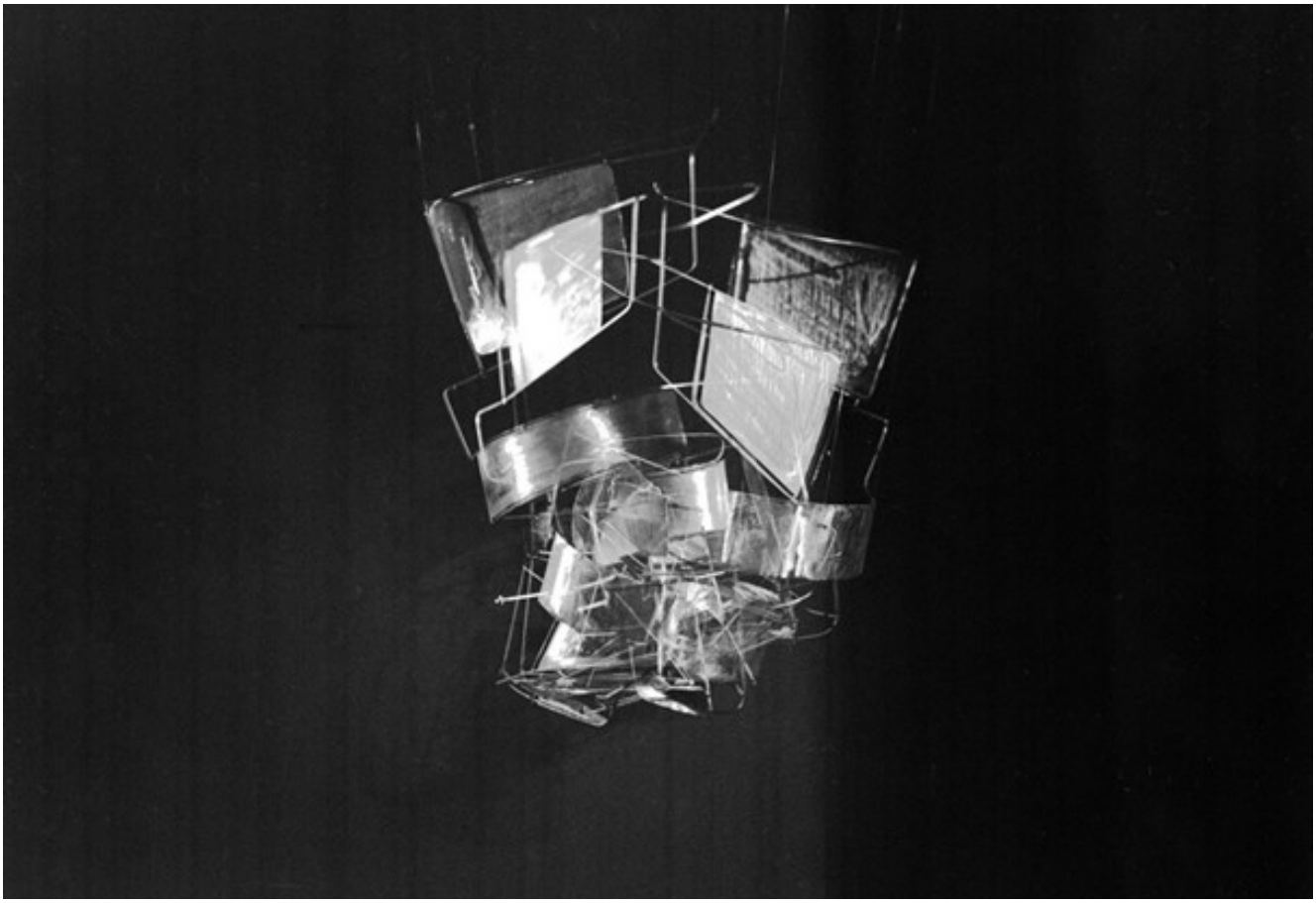
However, this becomes problematic as:

> all spatial-temporal Objects have nested horizons, each objects horizons opening out on to many other objects' intertwined horizons. The infinite reach or extent of all nested object horizons is the world horizon. Like the horizon between sea and sky viewed from the beach, it is not itself an object, but rather what makes the appearance of objects possible. (Macdonald 2005, 262)

According to Macdonald (2005), all objects hold horizons, and spatial-temporal entities contain interlinked nested horizons—culminating in a world horizon that facilitates the manifestation of their appearance. In describing the spatiotemporal experiences of horizons, we need to think of something other than the perception and experience of space objectively, as perception is not a momentary act but a spatiotemporal act (Pedregosa 2014).

[4] Freud's concept of fragments suggests not the breaking of an image or totality but a complex, multiplicative process, indicative of the deeper workings of the unconscious mind. Freud also introduces the idea that dreams are fragmented expressions of unconscious processes, offering insight into the psyche's underlying mechanisms (see S. Freud, 1900 *The Interpretation of Dreams*. https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Freud/Dreams/dreams.pdf).

[5] In Cubism and architecture, horizon metaphorically signifies the expansion of perspective and understanding beyond traditional boundaries. It embodies the Cubist endeavour to depict multiple viewpoints simultaneously and the architectural pursuit of integrating time and space, thus transcending conventional perception.



[FIG. 1] Author (James Acott-Davies), *Duration* (2023). Multiple exposure of Sculpture, 5X4 camera



These momentary (spatiotemporal) fragments can be referred to as «beginnings without ends» (Tschumi 1994, 95). Moreover, he proposes a division among fragments of reality, virtuality, memory, and fantasy, indicating that these divisions exist solely as transitions from one fragment to another; they are traces, they are in-between (Tschumi 1994). These traces, or palimpsest of the in-between, are presented to the viewer of a cubist painting, where the superimposed fragments on the canvas inform one another, and the retentions of the past are faint but still visible through the juxtaposition of traced events. The experience of lived time can be further made apparent through Moholy-Nagy's (1947, 12) words:

> Vison in motion
> vision in motion
> is simultaneous grasp. Simultaneous grasp is creative performative – seeing, feeling and thinking in relationship and not as a series of isolated phenomena. It instantaneously integrates and transmutes single elements into a coherent whole. This is valid for physical vision as well as for abstract.
> vision in motion
> is a synonym for simultaneity and space-time; a means to comprehend the new dimension.
> vision in motion
> is seeing while moving.



[FIG. 2] Georges Braque, *The Portuguese (The Emigrant)*, 1911. Wikiart

Vision in motion can be interpreted for the horizons of experience in a cubist painting, for example Georges Braque, *The Portuguese (The Emigrant)*, 1911 [FIG.2]. The fragments and lines on a cubist canvas we consider are not to be the object itself, but the nested horizons exemplify the act of perception not being static in space or time. Therefore, the multiple horizons of Cubism and our experience in architecture are the act of the kinetic experience or vision in motion; it is a means of comprehending the lived sense of time.

In summary, the past and present sequences are depicted in a typical Cubist image that reminds us of the temporality of experience and depicts the impossibility of being in multiple positions at any given moment. The multiple horizons, or in other words, *frames*, derive significance from juxtaposition – establishing memory of the preceding frame and the cumulative events of space. The cubist painting as a transformational device (repetition, distortion) presents the viewer with an aggregate of horizons at a single glance in a «painting that is no longer an infinitesimal point in time manifest in an infinite space, but an event in time manifest in a finite point» (Vargish & Mook 1999, 86). We can assert that the experience of space unfolds through the duration when the body extends into space and tries to make space palpable (Lippert 2019): *spatium non fugit*? Cubism is a documentation of the artist's experience of the object in space and time, and the folds of matter and time can be compared to modern architecture's experience.

Therefore, like the cubists, which broke away from a linear perspective, and architecture being the demarcation of finite arrangements of space, as the viewer is actively experiencing the building, buildings in spacetime can only be comprehended by an observer moving.

We can find similarities with some Futurism work, as, for example, the work Development of a Bottle in Space by Boccioni [FIG.3] allowed him to explore the idea of a disembodied intelligence in an ideal space to grasp the object through a conceptual journey of seeing the sculpture at a single instance, a kind of spatial thinking. The encounter provides an enriched experience, pregnant with past and future becoming reciprocal between viewer and object (Krauss 1996). This notion of a disembodied intelligence reflects the experience of modernist architecture, an acceleration of time from the duration of multiple spatial experiences, which leads to an enriched understanding of the viewer's relative position to the object (Krauss 1996); an intersection of visual access to the interior and exterior form; exemplified architecturally in Van Der Rohe Barcelona Pavilion [FIG.4].



[FIG. 3] U. Boccioni. Development of a Bottle in Space, 1913. Wikimedia



[FIG. 4] M.Van De Rohe. *Barcelon Pavilion*, 1929. Wikimedia

## *Spatium fugit*: an alternative approach to viewing space

We believe that modern art, such as sculptural artist Anthony Caro and his work Emma Dipper, [FIG.5] (1969), is analogous to the viewing of architecture, where it encourages us to rely on our memory of what we have seen from other viewpoints beforehand; aiding an understanding of the whole.

While Caro's work is not architectural in the sense of a place of dwelling, instead, his works are allegorical to the modernist aesthetic. Caro's sculptures' arrangement of voids questions the limit of the start and end of the interior and exterior spaces of the sculpture; the loosely defined interior volumes of the work rely on an engagement of Space, Event and Movement. By reflecting on the movement of the observer in relation to space and event, understanding the cumulative sequences of multiple spaces allows us to assert that their *frames* derive significance from the juxtaposition of past and present experiences – thus, arriving at an understanding of the meaning of architecture.

To summarise the journey in this essay, the proposed alternative approach to viewing space advocates an artistic and phenomenological reflection, transcending conventional architectural considerations to embrace the lived experience within transgressing through spaces. Rather than reducing space to measurable dimensions and a singular event, this



[FIG. 5] Anthoney Caro. Emma Dipper, 1977. Wikiart



approach underscores spatial encounter's subjective and qualitative aspects. (CD) Juhani Pallasmaa champions this perspective, contending that

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
To me, this approach to architecture and meaning seems to confine the interpretation within a solipsistic realm, just as people wouldn't derive meanings from other phenomena and transfer them onto buildings and architecture. But they (and we) do it, indeed. We continuously (mis)understand things exactly for that reason. This is perfectly right for private homes and user perspective but quite problematic for public buildings and designer perspective.

JAMES ACOTT-DAVIES, MICKEAL MILOCCO BORLINI
You're drawing attention to the potential pitfalls of overly subjective interpretations of architectural forms. Our personal experiences and cultural perspectives play a significant role in how we attribute meaning to spaces, and this is an intrinsic part of our engagement with our built environments.
By their very nature, public buildings are designed to communicate on a broader, more universally accessible level. However, these public spaces – such as shopping centres and airports – often fall under what Marc Augé describes as "non-places" or, as Rem Koolhaas might argue, "junk space": they tend to be generic, fragmented, and largely devoid of architectural integrity or more profound purpose, serving primarily as vessels for consumerism.
In this context, seeking meaning within these "non-places" becomes even more crucial. By reflecting on our individualised, mobile experiences within such spaces, we can reclaim or reinterpret their significance, ensuring they serve more than just a functional or consumer-driven role.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
I would agree at a moral level. But discussing meaning, the "public" buildings you're referring to – airports and shopping centres are – not public at all: they are just "open to public", which is completely different. Hence, I feel architects should just admit that their meaning is precisely the consumer-driven dimension, and it is absolutely «designed to communicate on a broader, more universally accessible level»: that is why you go in commercial centre in Dubai as well as in Milan or New York.
But about public buildings, can they be designed on purpose «to communicate»? That was the main question of this issue and, looking at all contributions, it seems quite difficult to say they can. So why architects (or rather, scholars of architecture) continue to believe that changing space design will change society as a whole, just mistaking desires for meanings?

architecture encompasses more than visual aesthetics, emphasising the depth of lived experiences within architectural spaces akin to Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1969).

The transition from traditional to modern and supermodern spaces has reshaped the boundaries of conventional spaces. Modernity and supermodernity have shifted from static, compartmentalised spaces towards dynamic, fluid, and technologically driven environments. Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity (2000) encapsulates this evolution, signifying the fluidity and constant flux of contemporary spaces that challenge the fixed boundaries of traditional spaces, ushering in a globalised and interconnected spatial experience.

The architecture of the globalised world will continue to accelerate an excess of (new) non-places [6]. As mentioned, space is inherently more abstract, so understanding how to transform space's intangibility into something more perceptible is more critical than ever. If space is the protagonist of architecture, the meaning comes from, as discussed, the bodily engagement with its horizons, as, in the words of Tschumi (1994, 85): «neither the pleasure of space nor the pleasure of geometry is (on its own) the pleasure of architecture». Thus, the lived and kinaesthetic experience of space and movements is interpreted as an aesthetic idea, where architectural fragments collide and merge in delight – making the meaning of architecture palpable.

[6] Non-places, contrary to being obsolete, have adapted to technological progress and shifting social interactions, blending with digital and virtual environments. This evolution underscores the fluidity of contemporary identity and connectivity, reflecting the ongoing transformation of society's spatial and social landscapes.



Finally, the concept of place, and its meaning in architecture, is not necessarily becoming antiquated; rather, it is evolving and becoming more complex in the contemporary context due to numerous factors such as globalisation, technological advancements, and shifting cultural dynamics. While traditional notions of place as static, bounded, and stable entities still hold significance in many contexts, they are increasingly challenged by the fluidity and interconnectedness characteristic of the modern world.

As societies become increasingly interconnected through trade, migration, and communication technologies, traditional boundaries between places are blurred, leading to the emergence of transnational spaces and hybrid identities. As sociologist David Harvey notes, globalisation disrupts the fixity of place by facilitating the flow of capital, goods, and ideas across geographical borders, thereby transforming the economic, social, and cultural landscapes of localities (Harvey 1989). As Manuel Castells argues, the rise of digital communication networks has engendered a new form of *space of flows*, characterised by the instantaneous exchange of information and the formation of virtual communities that transcend traditional spatial boundaries (Castells 1996). As societies become more diverse and inclusive, traditional understandings of place as homogeneous and bounded entities give way to more fluid and heterogeneous conceptions that accommodate multiple perspectives and experiences (Massey 1994). In summary, while the concept of place is not becoming obsolete, it is undergoing significant transformation in response to the forces of globalisation, technological innovation, and cultural change. Traditional understandings of place as static and bounded entities are being challenged by the fluidity, interconnectedness, and diversity characteristic of the contemporary world.

These are the reasons why space is escaping us: *spatium fugit*.

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# Architettura dello stomaco.
## Processi endogeni di assimilazione delle forme


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As we run to keep pace with time, technological innovations, and the paradigm shift in the conception of embodied theory, the fluidization of all human issues has led to a way of conceiving anthropic space entirely different from what we are accustomed to. Transdisciplinarity, arising from these shifts in values, not only necessitates cooperation but also converges towards a unified consciousness in search of new systems of communication of meanings. The role of form in architecture today is probably to create connections with the city, thus transfiguring itself in meaning and disengaging from typological issues and classifications. The direct relationship between form and meaning has become uncertain, and the immediate visual-tactile connection to architectural themes has broken down. The immanence of form has mostly given way to a contaminated image, cultivated by a pluralism of influences balancing between reality and dream, between interior and exterior, between private and public. Architecture turns, overturns its hidden interior, and unfolds provocatively towards urbanity in continuous pursuit of the new collective.





– ENVIRONMENT
– BIGNESS
– FOLD
– MULTIPLICITY

## Al di là del principio stilistico

Ridurre la questione fenomenologica del significato in architettura ad una lettura esclusivamente interpretabile attraverso una deduzione stilistica sminuirebbe irrimediabilmente la semiologia dell'architettura. Tale assunto, derivante da un dibattito acceso e continuativo sin dagli anni '70, mette in guardia sul pericolo intrinseco di una trasposizione lineare del linguaggio in architettura e dunque su una decifrazione semplicistica del rapporto tra forma e significato.

> Secondo questo approccio, l'unica "lettura" possibile dell'ambiente costruito sarebbe la decodificazione degli stili, cioè codici che disciplinano gli aspetti visivo-formali degli edifici. Dimenticando che una "lettura" così intesa è forzosamente parziale, perché gli edifici non sono solo fenomeni visivi, ma piuttosto come diceva M. Mauss, dei "phénoménes sociaux totaux". (Maldonado 1977, 9)

Una traduzione stilistica, o prettamente stilistica, comporterebbe quindi un'analisi semantica superficiale legata prevalentemente a questioni visive, non interrogandosi sui significati plurimi che l'architettura in quanto tale detiene. D'altro canto, anche valutare la genesi architettonica come derivante esclusivamente da criteri funzionali (funzionalismo ingenuo) metterebbe immediatamente in crisi il suo significato, in quanto la funzione non è obbligatoriamente qualcosa di stabile e duraturo, ma può variare nel corso del tempo. Come esplicita Aldo Rossi, infatti:



> occorre dire subito che questo non significa respingere il concetto di funzione nel suo senso più proprio; quello algebrico che implica che i valori sono conoscibili uno in funzione dell'altro e che tra le funzioni e la forma cerca di stabilire dei legami più complessi che non siano quelli lineari di causa ed effetto che sono smentiti dalla realtà. (Rossi 1966, 34)

Tale ulteriore approccio non indugia unicamente sull'uso di una singola chiave di lettura, ma cerca piuttosto di associare al significato una molteplicità di valori che l'architettura, in quanto arte, è in grado di proporre.

Legare una tipologia a uno stile specifico, ad oggi, risulta chiaramente una prassi obsoleta in quanto l'oggetto architettonico sottoposto a repentine trasformazioni funzionali necessita di un diverso grado di adattabilità rispecchiabile nella ricerca di nuove categorie di relazioni. «Come una sostanza che avrebbe potuto condensarsi in qualunque altra forma, il *junkspace* è il dominio di un ordine finto, simulato, un regno del morphing» (Koolhaas 2001, 67). La pretesa di poter associare un uso a una determinata forma è ad oggi una prassi in declino poiché i multi-programmi condensano insieme una grande varietà di eventi, tali da non permettere una forma convincente, unitaria, conclusa e risoluta. La natura aleatoria dell'aspetto formale è determinata proprio dall'elevato grado di trasformabilità delle funzioni che si moltiplicano e accavallano, con cicli di vita sempre più accelerati.

La logica che regola lo spazio è diventata quindi quella dei sottoinsiemi, ovvero frammenti disarmonici alla ricerca di un tutto che li accolga rendendoli attivi. L'entropia diventa la norma e l'identificazione

della forma esteriorizzata in base al contenuto significante non è più applicabile; come introduce Rem Koolhaas (2001), infatti, in alcuni casi *la bigness* azzera la questione del controllo formale a favore di un accorpamento simultaneo di frattaglie. L'idea di variabilità endogena pone evidentemente un interrogativo: se cambiano le parti interne a favore di una continua trasformazione, come potrebbe il contenitore assumere una caratterizzazione specifica?

### Contenitori silenti atmotopi

La rifunzionalizzazione e le continue mutazioni e permutazioni rendono quindi impossibile l'identificazione del significato esclusivamente dalle caratteristiche formali così come percepite dall'esterno dell'oggetto architettonico. L'informe e il deforme, nel senso di non consono a una forma riconoscibile o riconosciuta da un prontuario, sono qualità implicitamente legate al concetto di indeterminatezza, comportando il crollo dei punti fermi, tanto che non siamo più in grado di comprendere se all'interno di quello che identifichiamo come teatro vi sia effettivamente tale funzione o si celi un supermercato (vedasi il Teatro Italia a Venezia).

Secondo l'analisi lucida dello stato in essere della città contemporanea esplicitata da Koolhaas, la *bigness* è anche *big-mess*, dove l'unica forma di controllo possibile sembra essere quella di isolare il contenuto per impedire che si disperda racchiudendolo in una bolla. Tale atteggiamento rende inevitabilmente imperscrutabile il significato dell'oggetto architettonico in quanto la forma appare neutra, *non interagente* e non caratterizzata se non per la valenza di contenitore impermeabile. La percezione di architetture silenti e anonime ci porta a isolare i *contesti* in compartimenti stagni verso un abbandono del dialogo con quello che definiamo spazio pubblico il quale, deprivato della componente scenica fondamentale per la sua definizione ontologica, viene declassato a semplice *esterno*.

Per il concorso del Tokyo International Forum (1989) Andrea Branzi presenta il progetto conturbante di un *contenitore* esteticamente muto che, silenzioso perfino nella scelta cromatica di un grigio neutro, annulla qualsiasi dialettica con il contesto urbano alienandosi e alimentando quasi in segreto un processo endogeno di moltiplicazione di spazi. Unico contatto con il mondo esterno rimane una grande parabola sulla copertura destinata all'ascolto ma non alla trasmissione di dati.

> Il progetto propone per il centro di Tokyo un edificio, grigio, chiuso, inespressivo, sovrastato da una grande parabola a forma di orecchio, come centro di ascolto dentro a uno spazio pieno di informazioni e flussi di reti. (Branzi 2006, 110)

L'anno successivo Branzi, con il team composto da Clino Castelli, Isao Hosoe e ZPZ Partners, presenta il metaprogetto Tokyo City X (1990) commissionato da Mitsubishi. L'idea del Tokyo International Forum viene in questo caso portata agli estremi concependo un unico enorme edificio di 800.000 mq nella baia di Tokyo, che nella sua concettualizzazione finale abbandona qualsiasi tentativo formale lasciando che siano le dinamiche interne a definirne i contorni monolitici, dando luogo a un *environment* permeato da una sensazione di *silenzio* o, meglio, di

volontà inespressiva. L'interno, al contrario, appare come un sistema dinamico continuo, un'urbanità in fermento colonizzabile da qualsiasi tipologia architettonica, in grado di riprodurre scenari sempre diversi, a volte allusivi e carichi di memorie quasi a compensare la mancanza dialettica del contenitore.

In tali progetti risiedeva già il germe di una nuova interpretazione del rapporto tra *bigness* e spazio urbano dove l'architettura diventa stomaco e interiora che non influenzano direttamente l'aspetto esteriore da un punto di vista estetico ma agiscono come apparati collegati ad una capacità tecnica di funzionamento. Siamo quindi in grado di percepire la componente spaziale esclusivamente vivendola dall'interno, venendone digeriti esplorandone gli aspetti funzionali consci di una mutevolezza in divenire.

Il vivere dall'interno per funzionare necessita però di accorgimenti tecnici essenziali alla sopravvivenza. L'*air conditioning* diventa esigenza imprescindibile, non è trattabile o definibile come lusso ma priorità esistenziale. Per divenire ospitale tale universo endogeno deve essere ambientalmente controllato attraverso un meccanismo che generi un'atmosfera, paragonabile al sistema che permette agli astronauti di mantenersi in vita all'interno delle stazioni orbitanti. Nell'assunto di Koolhaas riconosciamo quindi un processo di *insularizzazione* dell'artefatto architettonico quale creazione di un contenitore *atmotopo* (Sloterdijk 2015) a protezione di un mondo a sé stante dissociato da un esterno "altro". L'architettura tende a isolarsi creando un bordo, che non è più una forma ma una soglia tra mondi eterogenei, entro il quale vigono regole spaziali e climatologiche specifiche. La generazione di enclave indipendenti e autonome all'interno del tessuto urbano genera di fatto un insieme di mondi paralleli non comunicanti, tra i quali manca o viene reso inevitabilmente inefficace il connettivo legante dello spazio pubblico.



L'apporto dimensionale è tale da non rendere più percepibile l'edificio come singolo, ma come prodotto di accorpamenti e sottoinsiemi. La sconnessione con la città è però totale in quanto l'oggetto architettonico è in grado di fornire tutte le necessità per sopravvivere, aria compresa. Lo spazio circoscritto si scinde in quanto esso stesso diventa contesto portando la città al suo interno e dando luogo al paradosso della privatizzazione dello spazio pubblico. Destituendo lo spazio pubblico del suo significato di accoglienza (aperto a tutti senza distinzioni) l'esterno assume inevitabilmente un'accezione estraniante, divenendo territorio inospitale, attraverso il quale si è costretti a transitare per spostarsi da una bolla all'altra. La città che ne consegue è una sorta di costellazione di stazioni orbitanti concluse in sé stesse, in grado di mantenere i propri abitanti in una condizione di stallo atmosferico limitandone la sfera relazionale al proprio interno. Il bordo contenitore ha la sola volontà attrattiva coercitiva, rappresenta una soglia da attraversare per sentirsi al sicuro e non un filtro legato al contesto nel quale è possibile sostare.

## Trasfigurazione liminale dell'informe

Questa inclinazione dell'architettura appartiene sicuramente al contemporaneo ma non è una soluzione definitiva e rappresenta esclusivamente una fase evolutiva di un processo trasformativo. L'assunto di Koolhaas

disegna un sistema o, meglio, una condizione, non propone una soluzione della questione ma la descrizione di uno status in divenire orientato verso un nuovo "*significato*" dell'oggetto architettonico. La "*bigness*" non si limita a produrre difformità rispetto a un contesto ma identifica uno specifico modello di oggetto architettonico, la cui dimensione sfonda gli usuali confini di grandezza ai quali siamo abituati per manifestarsi quale massa informe rendendo sfuggevole anche il suo stesso *significato*. Non solamente, oggi la grande dimensione è sintomo di dispersione della forma, la sullivaniana «form ever follows function» (Sullivan 1896, 408) si dissolve anche nella dimensione più contenuta dove molto spesso vige il principio della sovrapposizione.

Dando per assodato che l'architettura della contemporaneità appare quale assieme di interiora non esposte, qualora però la funzione venisse caricata di significato, la spinta verso l'esterno diverrebbe estetizzante. (CD) L'informe, in questo caso, instaurerebbe con il contesto un nuovo rapporto proponendosi come membrana permeabile in cerca di relazioni. Possiamo quindi formulare l'ipotesi dell'esistenza di un nuovo modello di espressione del significato che riguarda la relazione osmotica della forma stessa con il contesto.

Tenendo saldo l'assunto che in architettura la non-estetica o neo-estetica contemporanea si basa sull'informe e il deforme come presupposti fondativi del rapporto visuale con il contesto e quindi del sistema percettivo diffuso, ne consegue un adattamento psichico all'inusuale tale da non generare un senso di straniamento quanto invece suscitare curiosità. (AA) La concezione stessa di "contesto" ha oramai subito una rivoluzione ontologica, secondo la quale adeguarvisi seguendo stilemi anacronistici per questioni di omogeneità non è più

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
Ho l'impressione che questa sia una estremizzazione propria del mondo architettonico: così come si tende a far coincidere l'architettura di inizio Novecento con il Moderno, che ebbe un peso specifico relativo se considerato "in purezza", allo stesso modo mi pare che qui si tenda ad assolutizzare una dimensione architettonica che è propria di certe parti di Tokyo e Kyoto (ad esempio la sua super-stazione), o di alcuni pezzi di metropoli americana: ma che assume dimensione urbana solo a Singapore, a Hong Kong e in Medio Oriente, e comunque limitata a certi pezzi di città – quelli ricchi. Mi pare esista una enorme parte di architettura della contemporaneità che, pur non potendo "vantare" univocità tra forma e uso, non propugni nemmeno l'assenza totale di significati formali. Peraltro anche le proposte di Brandi hanno una precisa logica formale, pur non classica.

(AA) AUROSA ALISON
Forse sarebbe il caso di aggiungere dei riferimenti per la neo-estetica e non-estetica.

strettamente necessario. (CD) Non si tratta più di fare riferimento alla contestualizzazione come fase anticipatoria del processo di progettazione architettonica, ma risulta indiscutibilmente più coerente parlare di programmazione di un "environment", nell'accezione elaborata negli anni Sessanta ovvero di operazione artistica volta a generare uno spazio in grado di coinvolgere lo spettatore, di renderlo compartecipante attivo nella realizzazione dell'insieme.

Se pensiamo ad esempio alla *Kunsthau* di Graz, realizzata nel 2003 dagli architetti Peter Cook e Colin Fournier, l'oggetto architettonico, pur

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
In che senso non è più strettamente "necessario"? L'adeguamento al contesto può essere inteso in tanti sensi, ad esempio norme locali possono permettere o vietare certe cose, come accaduto a Gehry, stakeholder o filiere di produzione locali possono spostare il progetto verso certe direzioni, e così via. Proprio che a Graz abbiano consentito un edificio come la Kunsthau, che nessuna soprintendenza italiana avrebbe lasciato costruire, è prova dell'importanza del contesto.
Che l'architettura sia invece mimetica, peraltro, non è "strettamente necessario" da molti secoli.

JACOPO BONAT, MATTEO ZAMBON
Grazie del commento. Proviamo a far capire cosa volessimo esprimere. Non parliamo di condizionamenti del progetto da parte di influenze esterne (normative etc.) ma poniamo l'attenzione dal punto di vista del progettista. Non prendiamo mai ad esempio Gehry perché lo riteniamo puramente formalista (in grado di proporre lo stesso oggetto architettonico a Bilbao e Los Angeles senza preoccuparsi dell'inserimento contestuale, con un esterno completamente svincolato dagli interni ma anche dalla città stessa) mentre poniamo l'accento su progettisti che volutamente ricercano un innovativo dialogo con la città attraverso edifici che denunziano la loro volontà partecipativa e di coinvolgimento, per i quali la deformità o l'esposizione dell'interiore non sono solo un mezzo di espressione formale ma piuttosto un tentativo di dialogo per attrarre attenzione, sono interfacce. Come afferma Lyotard nella sua rielaborazione del sublime kantiano, il bello appartiene al formale, alla progettazione della forma, il sublime non si ferma invece al semplice aspetto formale ma ha contenuti che vanno oltre la mera ricerca estetizzante.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Capisco, anche se mi sembra che, necessariamente, quella relazione dialogica sia molto nella narrativa. È facile vedere adesso il formalismo di Gehry, meno lo era agli inizi, perché quella differenza e quello stacco avevano un senso o meglio, lo assumevano nella narrazione.

dovendosi confrontare con un contesto fortemente e storicamente formalizzato (la Graz ottocentesca), si dissocia completamente dalle limitrofie, mantenendo come unica costante l'altezza massima dei tetti circostanti. Il "Friendly Alien", oltre a proporsi come un contenitore d'arte ricettivo, mostra caratteristiche di unicità quale elemento attrattivo all'interno del tessuto urbano esternandole tramite la membrana superficiale in ghisa e vetro che lo riveste. Il materiale costruttivo che ricopre e dà forma al museo d'arte diviene una sorta di epidermide sensibile, un'interfaccia comunicativa che, grazie alla propria natura riflessiva e meteoropatica, assorbe le variazioni climatiche restituendole sottoforma di atmosfera (nel significato di «Condizione, modo d'essere di un determinato ambiente, in relazione ai sentimenti o alle reazioni che può suscitare, ai rapporti umani, o sociali, o culturali che vi si stabiliscono tra individuo e individuo» cit. Treccani), rendendosi così, parte attiva della morfologia urbana.

> …l'idea che la superficie diventi tramite, anche di effetti, emozioni e sentimenti. Così facendo, intendo iniziare a pensare concretamente alla superficie come luogo di trasmissione, equivalente a uno schermo. (Bruno 2016, 22)

Con queste parole Giuliana Bruno esprime la sua intenzione di trasporre la superficie da elemento di mediazione materico ad elemento osmotico vivo e in grado di interagire. Il nuovo modello al quale stiamo approdando, infatti, definisce la superfice come un elemento di trasmissione che connette differenti componenti, una sorta di filtro che traspone in maniera tangibile la natura dello spazio interno ed esterno. Tale nuovo approccio interpretativo dell'oggetto architettonico, non più riconducibile a insula, si basa sull'implementazione della valenza del proprio *ambitum*, ovvero quello spazio mediale che separava il privato dal pubblico, o l'interno dall'esterno, quindi sull'approfondimento progettuale della propria condizione limite.

Emerge quindi la vera natura dello spazio limite, ovvero quella di elemento di mediazione, di medium. Questa nuova membrana osmotica racchiude in sé tutte le caratteristiche di attrazione e di liminalità tra un interno, figlio dell'atmotopo e dunque prevalentemente spinto verso una privatizzazione, ed un esterno attivo e ricettivo al mutamento. Tale medium si carica di valori di condivisione che hanno natura prettamente pubblica ed urbana.

Il *Roy and Diana Vagelos Education Center* dello studio newyorkese Diller Scofidio + Renfro, può essere assunto quale esempio di tentativo di integrazione tra sfera privata ed esterno urbano. Proprio Elizabeth Diller, *lead architect*, spiega l'ideazione dell'environnement che caratterizza l'edificio ed in particolare la teoria denominata "Study Cascade". La porzione a sud del complesso è infatti caratterizzata da una concatenazione verticale di spazi che si aprono su Haven Ave e integrano al proprio interno attività specifiche del campus medico e spazi per lo studio personale e collettivo, al fine di creare situazioni, collaborazioni e relazioni. Questa natura dinamica e aperta alla contaminazione dei volumi che si affacciano sulla strada deriva proprio dalla volontà di cogliere ciò che di positivo offre la città, nell'ottica della condivisione pubblica, e di trasferirlo all'interno dell'edificio. L'effetto scenico risultante è un chiaro invito

alla partecipazione e al coinvolgimento anche dello spettatore involontario che vi si imbatte casualmente. La struttura stessa appare permeabile lasciando trasparire chiaramente le funzionalità interne, non solo giocando sulla smaterializzazione di quella che doveva essere la facciata, ma facendo soprattutto percepire chiaramente l'insieme come un percorso da intraprendere. Infatti, ulteriore elemento che amplifica le interazioni fra esterno ed interno trasformando la superficie di divisione in un vero e proprio campo di sperimentazione, è l'attacco a terra della "Study Cascade", ideato come crocevia di spazi relazionali fondati sulla conoscenza e sulla sua trasmissione a un pubblico vasto. La superficie abbandona la propria veste di mero involucro per divenire, in questo caso, vero e proprio spazio di connettività, trasformando l'architettura in piani di immagini in movimento in grado di relazionarsi e farsi coinvolgere dalla città e dalla massa pubblica che la abita. Questa diviene soluzione aperta, non più insularizzante, che sfrutta il risultato formale per riallacciarsi a quello che definiamo contesto inteso nel suo significato più ampio, ovvero, di ambiente socioculturale. Le viscere risultano esposte a vista ed è il bordo a mutare di consistenza, non con velleità estetiche ma diventando esso stesso "*significato*".

Un'ideale rappresentazione di tale concettualizzazione è attribuibile a *The Valley* degli MVRDV, un complesso edilizio che incorpora contemporaneamente gli aspetti del vivere privato con l'esperienza totalizzante dello spazio pubblico effettivo. Nominato, nel 2021, come il miglior nuovo grattacielo al mondo, l'edificio, localizzato nel quartiere Zuidas di Amsterdam, è stato concepito con una volontà di totale permeabilità, dal sentiero pedonale a zig-zag che ne percorre l'esterno fino alla galleria dei negozi e all'atrio centrale al suo interno. La singola valle, composta da pendii progettati, diviene essa stessa paesaggio scosceso concretamente e spontaneamente abitato, dove la superficie osmotica definisce e mette in relazione gli spazi interni con gli esterni divenendo elemento di congiunzione. Lo strato superficiale diventa parte attiva del "contesto" urbano limitrofo, amplificando la propria funzione, da elemento unicamente estetico ad apparato attivo in grado di partecipare al programma pubblico esteso. Lo spazio riservato degli appartamenti è direttamente rivolto verso questo nuovo margine collettivo, e chi vi abita è consciamente partecipe al doppio gioco dove chi guarda diventa elemento attivo e non solo spettatore in quanto è esso stesso, al contempo, guardato. Anche se non direttamente obbligati ad un rapporto di contatto diretto, gli abitanti degli appartamenti diventano ospiti compartecipi della grande macchina architettonica. Si attiva in questo modo una transizione relazionale continua dove, lo spazio di transizione si implementa e diventa di volta in volta, parco, mercato, selva, auditorium, palestra, una moltitudine di condizioni sociali amplificate che non smentisce in alcun modo il tappeto della premessa urbana. Il nuovo modello diviene dunque insularizzante in quanto non fa del proprio ambitum un limite, ma uno strato abitabile, divenendo così medium, un inspessimento della superfice che garantisce un'esteriorizzazione, non una formalizzazione, delle funzioni e dunque una continuità diretta tra dentro e fuori.

Questa sorta di superficie spessa è densamente materica, ovvero intrinsecamente contraddistinta da una porosità intesa nella sua

accezione di generatrice di continui ambiti di relazioni e contatti. Una condizione superficiale aptica, quasi spinosa, formata da anfratti, grovigli e tensioni che ne aumentano a dismisura la capacità ricettiva. Il bordo si comporta come una sorta di paramento ruvido che attraverso il proprio attrito cattura su di sé i depositi del tempo derivanti dalle due sfere con le quali è in contatto diretto, da un lato il prevalentemente pubblico dall'altro il prevalentemente privato. La doppia faccia della superficie liminale diviene un ricettacolo di relazioni, residuati funzionali, particelle di proprietà, frammenti di forme, che, appartenendo a due distinte nature sembrano incompatibili e difficilmente collegabili. L'istinto incostante e volubile della superficie completa l'evoluzione del bordo abitabile, il quale, distorcendosi, piegandosi e tendendosi in un escheriana "relativity" rende impossibile comprendere quale faccia stiamo abitando o osservando. La superficie profonda diviene quell'elemento in grado di ribaltare completamente la questione dell'insularizzazione e della *bigness*, a favore di una capacità insularizzante, che, a discapito di un formalismo estetizzante muta la propria natura e diviene spazio pubblico effettivo. L'enclave atmosferica, che dapprima accoglieva in sé stessa tutte le relazioni sociali in un vero e proprio contesto interiore, adesso si apre ad un volontario coinvolgimento verso l'esterno, mostrandosi deliberatamente permeabile e colonizzabile. Il silenzio manifesto del "grande grigio" diviene ora fragore relazionale, interazione acustica e visiva. La qualità ambientale dello spazio architettonico fuoriesce dai limiti consoni dell'edificio, in quanto è esso stesso proiettato verso l'urbanità.

Il progetto non realizzato per il *Forum for music, dance and visual culture* di Gent, 2003-2004, proposto da Toyo Ito & Associates e Andrea Branzi, ne è la dimostrazione. Il riverbero musicale in questo caso non si ferma, non trova l'opposizione di un perimetro invalicabile, ma si diffonde volontariamente al tessuto urbano. Come una spugna, lo spazio diviene penetrabile e attraversabile in ogni direzione, non vi è una porta d'accesso ma gli ambienti esterni ed interni vivono in una perpetua osmosi. La frizione generata dalla tipologia scompare, come la stessa idea di soglia, dissolvendosi nella tessitura spaziale dell'architettura dove persino le stanze perdono la loro configurazione canonica, trasmutando in celle acustiche. Il precetto diviene quello di superare la funzione, trasformando l'architettura in una cassa armonica spaziale dove i differenti programmi risultano variamente distribuiti e sovrapposti nelle "cavità", al fine di ottenere una qualità ambientale totale, continua e diffusa. L'architettura così concepita diviene un sistema connettivo. I confini vengono meno ed è la massa, intesa come generatrice di confusione, rumore e sentimenti intrecciati in una vivida relazionalità ad essere protagonista. Le interiora divengono parte di un nuovo apparato, una mutazione del proprio essere, un organo inedito che predilige la contaminazione alla cesura. Lo stomaco è capovolto, non più celato al suo interno ma parte del nuovo contesto (urbano) amplificato.

### Mutevolezza come paradigma riconciliante

Il ruolo della forma oggi è quello di offrire *connessione* con la città e tale connessione genera automaticamente *significato*. L'architettura si

svuota di nozioni come massa, volume, dentro e fuori, per dare invece luogo al "pluri-adattabile" quale meccanismo in grado di generare relazioni. Come nelle architetture di Cedric Price, l'idea di oggetto architettonico formalista viene meno a favore di una sorta di architettura ambientale, un nuovo *environment* fisico e sociale. Archetipo di tale pensiero architettonico non ortodosso è sicuramente il *Fun Palace*, costruzione in grado di essere al contempo un meccanismo di interazione sociale e di adattamento alle variazioni temporali ed epocali del luogo in cui si trova. L'architettura spogliatasi della componente estetizzante, si esibisce come apparato meccanico, prettamente tecnico e strutturale. Le viscere in questo caso si manifestano attraverso una trasformabilità palesata, immediatamente riconoscibile e non mediata da un'estetica ammiccante ma volutamente grezza in quanto composta da tralicci e carriponte che non smentiscono la loro natura. Il *significato* viene qui esplicitato attraverso scenari dinamici, dove gli eventi e le funzioni sono costantemente mescolati al fine di garantire quel valore di trasformabilità che è proprio della città. Lo spazio pubblico è qui rappresentato dall'evento e, anche se interiorizzato dall'architettura, rimane visivamente esposto in quanto l'edificio non è pudico ma si spoglia e denuda. L'architettura conscia delle potenzialità derivanti dal fattore collettivo si apre senza timore di mostrare le proprie interiora a favore di un coinvolgimento totalizzante.

La variabilità diventa materia progettante capace di trasformare lo spazio in un luogo di ritrovo, dove vedere un film o dove avere un incontro di lavoro. Il *Fun Palace* è un "edificio" totalmente svincolato e altamente adattabile, dove l'ambiente cambia istantaneamente ruotando o traslando, coinvolgendo in maniera sferica chi lo abita. Il contesto stesso inoltre si distorce, modificandosi, a favore di una partecipazione psico fisica integrale, interpretando di volta in volta condizioni di vita e situazioni sociali nuove. Tale architettura è in grado di dissimulare la propria immagine perdendo la veste monolitica ed istituzionale di oggetto singolo, smaterializzandosi, duplicandosi e triplicandosi nel multiplo e molteplice rendendo il proprio significato plurimo.

La logica prettamente funzionalistica, generatrice del tipo e della tipologia, da sempre si è basata su programmi chiari e definiti, abbinando ad ogni fenomeno un univoco manufatto architettonico sicuramente pertinente ma concluso in sé, cioè, ragionando esclusivamente come espressione del suo contenuto elevandolo ad immanenza escludendo perciò possibilità di mutazioni e trasformazioni nel tempo. La sperimentazione contemporanea su nuove convenzioni, basate sulla variabilità, sta mettendo in crisi tale assunto generando nuovi scenari non genericamente abbinabili o formalmente descrivibili. *L'inatteso diviene il nuovo metro di paragone con cui confrontarsi* [FIGG. 1, 2]. Il binomio forma-funzione divenuto poi forma-funzione-significato si è atomizzato, si è fluidificato in un corso intangibile di mescolanze dove i nuovi assunti percettivi introducono la prassi dell'indefinibile e non è quindi più possibile associare un costrutto definitivo o un nome univoco trascurando la variabile della trasformabilità. L'*Any* introdotto da Cynthia Davidson (1996), diventa il nuovo campo di sperimentazione del significato in architettura, ogni lemma, ogni parola diventa possibilità di introdurre nuove questioni anche non prettamente "architettoniche" in architettura. Aumenta a dismisura la capacità di assimilazione



Jacopo Bonat e Matteo Zambon,
Estroflessione 1, 2





di nuovi processi e nuove possibilità legate alla mutevolezza, dal cambio di paradigma nella visione delle questioni corporali, alla possibile trasposizione *gender fluid*, sino alla totale inconsistenza del virtuale che consente di comporsi in maniera di volta in volta personalizzabile. (CD) Tali accezioni non possono di conseguenza che aprire anche a nuove possibilità nella relazione tra corpo ed edificio. (AA) La modificazione corporale implica anche una variazione nella scala dei significati, un modo di percepire la forma svincolata per esempio da classificazioni di carattere tipologico di genere. L'architettura cambia la sua immanenza diventando sostanza insidiosa trascendente, si invischia della totalità dei precetti altrui, accogliendo oltre che il multi-programma anche la multidisciplinarità come nutriente fondamentale.

La relazione diretta tra la forma ed il significato è diventata incerta, il chiaro ed immediato rapporto visivo materico delle questioni architettoniche si è scomposto. La purezza della forma per lo più ha lasciato il passo ad un'immagine contaminata, coltivata da un pluralismo di influenze in bilico tra la realtà e sogno. (FD) La vera latenza però rimane. Come una gemma dormiente, che trascende la relazione forma-significato-funzione, l'aspetto emozionale e sensazionale, scaturito dalle nuove interazioni con la dimensione pubblica, resta uno degli scopi ultimi dell'architettura.

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
Mi pare che proprio lì però sorga il vero nodo problematico. Che gli architetti intravedano questa possibilità – che negli ultimi cinquant'anni ha dato vita a tanti edifici più o meno felici – non implica direttamente che questi significati vengano colti né, tantomeno, che sia sensata. Nel volerli proporre, anzi, si formula inevitabilmente un modello di architettura identico, ontologicamente, a quello che vorrebbe sostituire.

(AA) AUROSA ALISON
Avrei insistito sulla modificazione corporale, magari inserire riferimenti sul genere fluido.

(FD) FEDERICO RUDARI
Mi chiedo invece se questa relazione sia mai stata certa, o semplicemente teorizzata all'interno di una specifica corrente architettonica. Penso ad esempio ad architetture coloniali come l'Opéra di Hanoi, basata sul Palais Garnier di Parigi, e costruita a pochi anni di distanza dalla pubblicazione del saggio di Sullivan. Si potrebbe discutere che ideologia e potere sono altrettanto assimilabili all'idea di funzione, ma originariamente questa associazione si riferiva all'uso e non (forse addirittura contrariamente) all'estetica.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Certa di sicuro no, concordo. Ma il tema si poteva porre in termini di certezza, proprio perché non vi erano margini di incertezza così totalmente sfrangiati. C'erano posizioni alternative, e qui ideologia e potere sono centrali – pensiamo all'architettura sacra – non però la dimensione individuale della contemporaneità.

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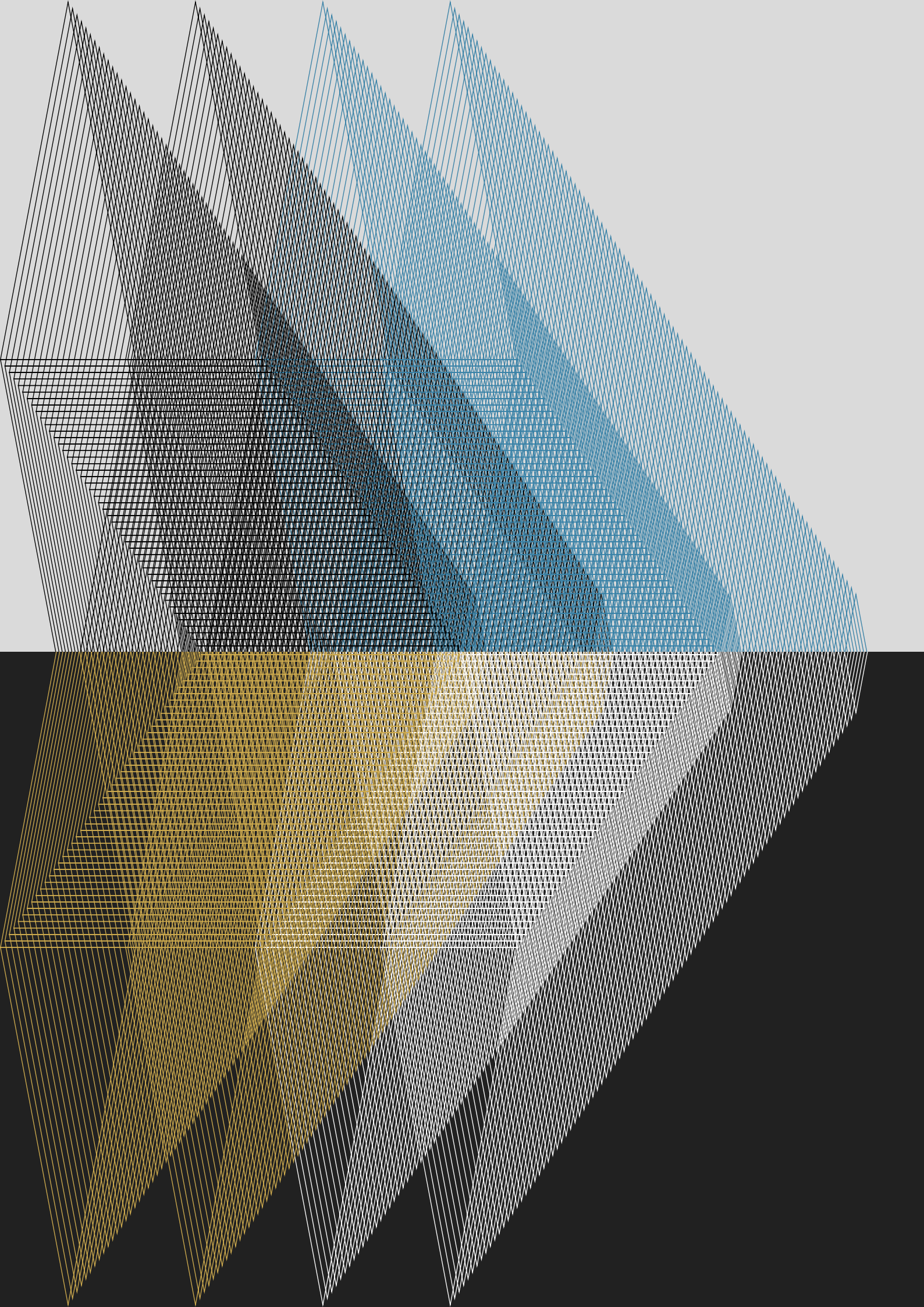
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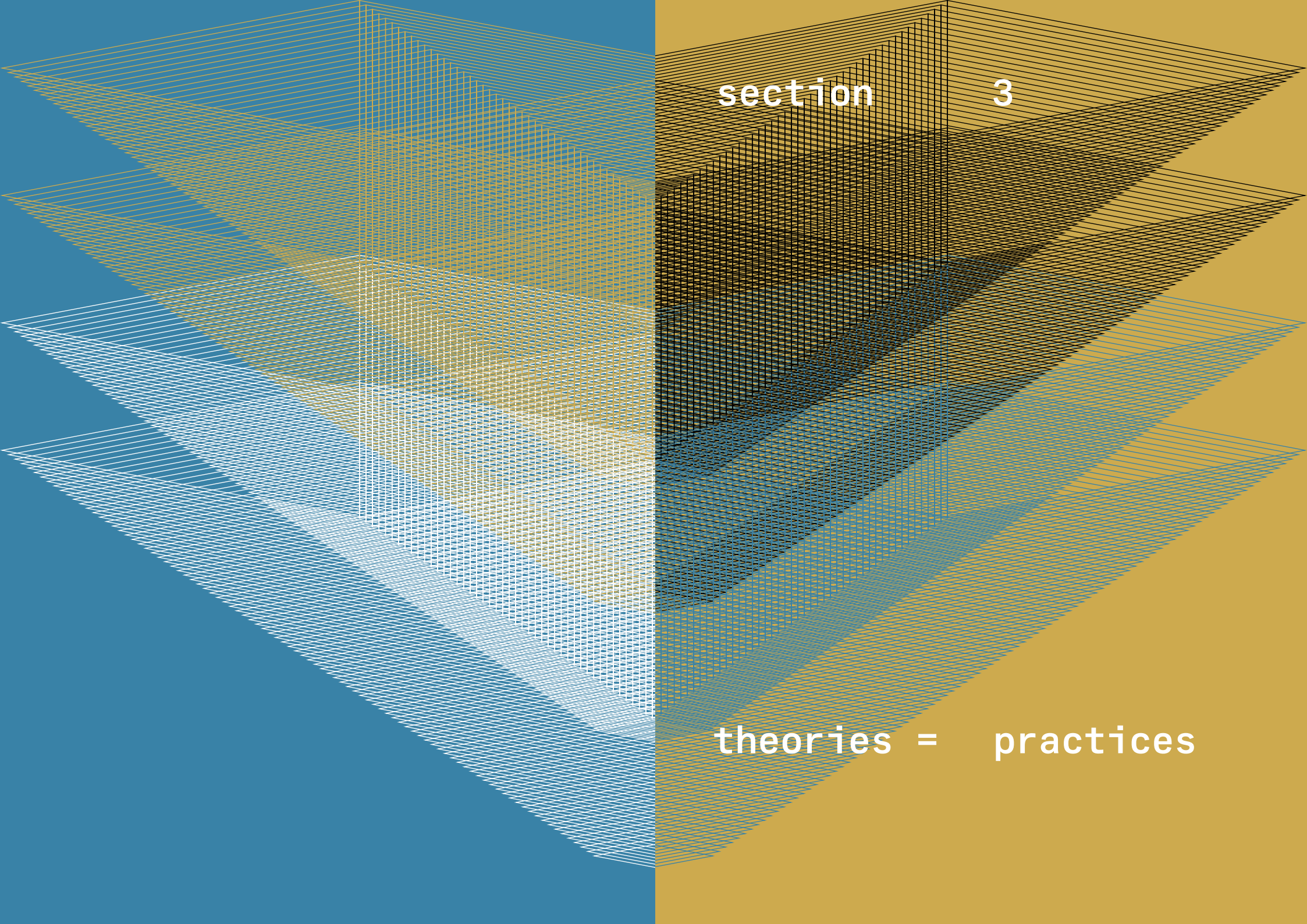






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section 3
theories = practices

# From SimCity to Smart City. Modelling and Government in the Epistemology of Architectural Power

Carlo Comanducci

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The article discusses simulation as a particular logic of neoliberal governance, by exploring the connections between modelling and government in city simulation games and smart city projects. Rather than being a simple visual representation of cityscapes, city building video games like SimCity should be understood as a pedagogical and programmatic formulation of the "smart" paradigm of city planning, in which a data-driven managerial epistemology, imposed on all kinds of city services and experiences, is increasingly used to validate and enforce a biopolitical government of life. Both representations and constructions of the city in city building games and discourses around smart cities take place in a zone of indistinction between the design of urban spaces and the government of the community and follow a logic of simulation by which actual city practices and dynamics are supposed to function according to the models that make them liable to control. Simulation in city builders and smart city planning, then, names the operation in which the very relation between architectural forms, their meaning, and their uses becomes operative and is turned into an instrument of government.



— BIOPOLITICS
— CITY-BUILDING VIDEOGAMES
— PERFORMATIVITY
— SIMULATION
— SMART CITIES.

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## Architecture as Somatechnics

Looking back at the project of a structuralist semiology of architecture, approached from different angles in the volume curated by Charles Jencks and George Baird on which this issue is casting a retrospective look, we are invited to the difficult task of considering the socio-political, technical, and epistemological transformations that have traversed the past fifty years and how they have impacted ideas and practices of architecture. Where Martin Pawley (1992) proposed to put functionalism to the test of time, pointing out the brief life of any organisational schema that could grant the unity of design and use which defines the functionalist ethos, the same applies to the systems and categories through which architecture itself, its meaning and power, has been built and interpreted.

A recapitulation of these changes is of course impossible here but, roughly, I think we can individuate the field where they have taken, and are still taking, place by drawing three sets of interconnected tensions. In epistemology, the tensions between the emergence of feminist, postcolonial, and queer deconstruction and the rise of a new biopolitical essentialism and identitarianism. In politics and society, the tensions between radical forms of democracy and autonomy, on the one hand, and intensified forms of capitalist precarisation and the neoliberal paradigm of government, on the other. In the domain of technics and the body, the tensions between the competing ideas and practices of community, politics, and ethics that belong to political ecology (Robbins 2012) and those that follow what the collective Tiqqun (2020) called the *cybernetic hypothesis* (that is, the applications of the digital revolution in management, communication, and logistics to a further extension and centralisation of power).



In all these fields, architecture is interpellated as a practice that manifests and intervenes in the relation between structures and forms of life. Specific configurations of architectural and urban space, like the nuclear family apartment or the commuter town, shape how bodies appear and disappear, how they thrive, survive, or die, and how they belong, or not, together. Single structures and infrastructural nodes, like the central mall *Les Halles* or the peripheral large-scale market of *Rungis* in Paris (TenHoor 2007), the *megabassin* in Sainte-Soline (Cuvelier 2023), or the roundabouts (see Bonin and Liochon 2021), act as instruments of governance and are taken as sites of resistance. *Construction* as such is understood as the material and discursive medium where the Western split between *nature* and *culture* is reaffirmed or suspended (see Descola 2013), where the fluid components of the post-Fordist class structure are rearranged (it is the case, for instance, of the formation of the white middle-class suburb, or of Airbnb gentrification), and where the strange hybrids between exploitation and ecology that characterise "sustainable" capitalism are put forth. Architectural practice is confronted at the same time with an intensified locality and globality. It has rediscovered its cultural and environmental contingency but also faces its progressive "dematerialisation" in its increasing convergence with logistics (see Quet 2022) and in its interdependency with information technology and the digital media landscape.

In these respects, contemporary capitalist architecture presents itself first of all as a *somatechnics*, a practice investing «the inextricability of *soma* and *techné*, of the body (as a culturally intelligible construct) and

the techniques (devices and hard technologies) in and through which corporealities are formed and transformed» (Sullivan 2014, 187). Coherently with these evolutions, the theory of architecture tends to shift from the interpretation of buildings understood as works on the model of art history, towards a combined analysis of the constructedness of bodies and the embodied use of space.

Paul Beatriz Preciado's study of Playboy architecture (2019) is, I think, paradigmatic of these new forms of architecture and ways of thinking about them. By presenting Hugh Hefner's project of an integrated architectural and media environment radiating outward from his hypermediated bed in the Playboy Mansion, through the magazine, the clubs, and the television productions, Preciado has found a way to address the "becoming-image" of architecture as well as its power as an instrument for the staging and shaping of the gendered, racialised, and sexualised body. «If you want to change a man, change his apartment. If you want to modify gender, transform architecture. If you want to modify subjectivity act upon interior space» (Preciado 2019, 84): thus, Preciado synthesises the particular complex of architecture, media, and the body that Hefner's project put in place. From this perspective, architecture appears not as the art of constructing buildings, but as a complete biopolitical technique of the body, which transforms lives performatively by ways of reorganising space.

> Well before the poststructural and linguistic turns in the interpretation of gender identity, *Playboy* defined and understood masculinity not as biological or psychological but rather as determined by architecture and spatial segregation. What Playboy put forward was not so much what we could call with Judith Butler a «performative theory of gender» but rather a pop theory of gender and sexual identity as determined by the theater (the spatial and visual relationships) where gender and sexual identity are performed. This performative theory of space is in a sense a result of the incubator model according to which architecture is a biopolitical, surrogated womb where the process of becoming male or female is fully achieved. (Preciado 2019, 33)

Preciado's analysis of Hefner's pornotopia stresses its performativity, and may suggest to see architecture as a medium which has a series of effects regardless of its content (see McLuhan 1994) and, conversely, to understand the media as an extension of an architectural principle to the organisation of bodily, perceptual, ideological, and experiential space. (CD)

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
While loving Preciado's book, I think we should remember that the "apartment for playboy" was like a description of an ideal paradise, remote from any realistic application. The readers should have dreamt about it: playboys were for adults what superheroes were for kids, their house being like the Batcave. And even if Preciado's text is so famous, it is quite strange to me to consider that it is paradigmatic of these new forms of architecture: as Norberg-Schultz has highlighted, these have always been the forms of architecture, changing according to time and place and the relative society.

CARLO COMANDUCCI
What I found paradigmatic about Hefner's mansion in Preciado's reading is how the boundaries between architecture, audio-visual media, and body performativity are blurred. Hefner did live in a model house fashioned after his ideal of a wholly porno-graphic life, where all is excitable, all is visual, and every experience is recorded and sold.
In this sense, Hefner is perhaps closer to a Sadean monk (adding technology and spectacle) than to a Bruce Wayne figure, but the comparison is interesting...

This biopolitical intensification and expansion of architecture was anticipated in the *Meaning in Architecture* volume in Pawley's contribution on the Memory House (1992, 147-180). Pawley envisaged a self-contained, private environment that would track, record, and preserve all moments and aspects of ordinary domestic life in order to protect this experience, that the author saw as the only remaining form of independence and self-realisation in post-war Western capitalist society, from the alienating pressures of the public. As Baird perceptively noted in a marginal comment to Pawley's article, however, this tentative recovery of alienated experience through a continuous archive may act, and indeed has acted in the meantime, as a Trojan horse that extended the grasp of both State power and corporate power over precisely that libertarian private sphere that Pawley wanted to preserve. The portable memory device that Pawley also imagined, with considerable foresight if misplaced optimism, has found today its form in the hyperconnected smartphone, which functions indeed as a mostly disciplinary device of self-expression and in ways that are largely integrated with capitalist production and aligned with neoliberal consensus. A thoroughly traced and tracked life is not a fuller life, but a fully «simulated [life, that is only] less painful» (see Pawley 1992, 177) to live in the measure that it offers less resistance to its discipline. Both Pawley's memorious technologies and Hefner's pleasure media-house operate by elaborating a model of living in artificially controlled material and perceptual environments that work at once as experimental simulations and incubators for new forms of (the government of) life.

The same situations that prove the cosmological dimension of architecture also prove its somatechnic power. Writing about a technique of religious and cultural cleansing conducted by Salesian missionaries among the Bororo, where they forcibly restructured a village into a different configuration in order to disrupt the social organisation that they sustained, Lévi-Strauss noted that the configuration of human dwellings expresses and supports a whole structure and perception of the world and is thus inseparable from the life and form of social relations themselves (see Choay 1992, 33). A similar rupturing of the physical and social structure of space characterises the Israeli strategy in the occupied territories at least since the 1990s (Baylouny 2009, Handel 2014, Bromley 2021, Miaari & Milosav 2023).

This capacity to operate on political life through a management of space and how bodies are distributed in it, individuates in turn a zone of

indifference between the dimension of meaning and language and the operations of government. Thus, understood as performative biopolitical and thanatopolitical technique, architectural power has not only a systemic dimension in the contemporary neoliberal management of social life, but a central place in the archaeology and the epistemology of government in general (see Ingraham 2023, 19-20).

Coherently with this, the question of meaning in architecture shifts from topical theories of representation to a general theory of performativity and performative power. Where structuralist approaches to signification in architecture focussed on the relation between signifier and signified and, more interestingly, *langue* and *parole* (that is, architectural and social forms and their contingent uses), a post-structuralist approach to architecture takes place instead at the level of the specific, «operative» (Agamben 2017, 650, 744), power that structures themselves have to produce (and destroy), discipline and punish, the gestures and the lives that they are organising. Model cities, and models of behaviour and interaction, as we will see, in this sense never simply describe, but operate and decide upon the use of space and over the use of bodies.

It is to this conception of the disciplinary, biopolitical, power of architecture and its relation to a general theory of performativity and operativity that I want to contribute. In the three short sections or scenes that will follow, which will connect some of Deleuze's and Baudrillard's reflections on simulation in epistemology, the modelling of city life in videogame city simulations, and data-driven management in the smart city imaginary, I will briefly explore simulation, not as the matter of an accurate or inaccurate representation or reproduction of city life, but as an operative relation that is established between modelling and government that I think is fundamental to contemporary capitalist architecture and urban planning. Videogame city simulations and smart cities are obviously very different, but share a common principle: the SimCity gameplay is built around *smartness* (efficient management that deals not only with city spaces, but with city life itself, including aspects of its politics), while, on the other hand, smart cities pursue in more practical and serious ways the very modelling of the city offered by city simulation games as a divertissement.

## Certified Copies

In an essay on Plato, Gilles Deleuze (1983) pointed out how the world of the Greek philosopher was not divided simply in originals and their copies, but in true (*eikones*) and false (*simulacra*) copies of ideas (also see Smith 2006). What is at stake in simulation is not the resemblance or dissemblance of a representation to an original object, then, but the conformity or lack of conformity of a real object to a model of what this object is supposed be and of how it is supposed to work. In this sense, simulation names the correspondence of identity and design: it is not the matter of the image that falsifies the real thing, as it has often been interpreted, but of the seal that authenticates an object, or a person, within a given system of understanding and signification. Reading Deleuze suggests to understand simulation not as a relation of semblance and succession, but as a power of certification.

Resemblance is not, for Deleuze, the relation between the copy and the original, but, more fundamentally, the relation between the thing and the idea, and there are false copies and true copies only because the object as such is always already a certified copy of the idea. The same, Deleuze suggests, is true for human beings: «God made man in His own image and to resemble Him» he continues, «but through sin, man has lost the resemblance while retaining the image» (Deleuze 1983, 48). From this theological standpoint, people are infamous and faulty copies of a "divine" model of the human: original sin is a sort of counterfeiting and a wayward deviation from a design that is presented at once as nature and as law.

Foucauldian discipline – the power-knowledge that judges and regulates bodies and performances against a naturalised and normative order of things – can be seen in this sense as a secularised version of providential economy (see Tzonis 1972, 20). Then, a similar sorting of the submerged and the saved takes place through a series of techniques and apparatuses that decide upon the precarity, the vulnerability, and the disposability of lives against the standard of State-sanctioned hegemonic norms.

From this perspective, simulation is not the breaking of the seal of authenticity, resulting in a chaotic profusion of semblances and a loss of reality and referentiality (see. Baudrillard 1994, 2), but the force of the seal itself, by which a certain identity, finality, and function is imposed on people, and a consensual mode of understanding of the world is established as a binding measure of human lives. In this "operative" ontological paradigm, as Giorgio Agamben puts it, being «is what it has to be and has to be what it is» (Agamben 1997, 650). Following on this principle of correspondence, the operation that distinguishes the real thing from the simulacrum is not of the order of representation, but rather of that of commandment. In this sense, the regime of modern simulacra does not simply consist in the proliferation of *fakes* that could be judged in relation to an objective *reality*, but rather in the intensification and autonomation of the processes by which operative knowledge about lives and senses of reality is produced. The power of simulation is thus, on the one hand, to construe the real in a certain way, and, on the other, to produce real effects from this very modelling and categorisation – «only what is effective, and as such governable and efficacious, is real» (Agamben 2017, 650). (CD)

In the opening passage of Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, the French philosopher famously inverted the relation between the simulacrum and the object: in simulation, a map no longer is an abstraction of the territory, but is understood a program that engenders it (1994, 2).





(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I always wonder, reading Agamben, how this asymmetry between the producer of the effects and the affected entity can be accepted: let's say that something is real only if its effective, but effective on what? On "reality"? In this case, "reality" too should be effective to be real, therefore starting a incomplete, circular reference that in my opinion can find a solution only in the systems theory approach. And this, I think, strongly affect the simulative approach to architecture and its relation with "the real", being precisely at the centre of the meaning issue.

CARLO COMANDUCCI
The way I see it, the core of the argument is first to be understood through the idea of performativity and in particular, taking Judith Butler as a well-known reference, of "performative power" (Butler 1993, 170 and following).
If we take one paradigmatic case Butler (1990) discussed in Gender Trouble, the link between efficacy and "realness" seems clear to me: only a successful, reiterated, performance of gender norms can produce the sense of this gender being a (pre-discursive) reality.
On his part, Agamben seems to me to stress how, in the kind of modernity he wants to analyse, every action and every aspect of life is reduced within the paradigm of operativity, meaning in the end that only the governable tends to be attributed the status of reality.
Thus, Agamben thinks the "ungovernanable" in a way that is somewhat close to Butler's understanding of "trouble", also as an epistemological category.
The point, for me, is to avoid referring to an impossibly prediscursive "reality," and rather to study and question the authorities, the powers, and the processes that name it. In my view, this does not produce a circular argument, but is merely a way of stressing the increasing impact that offices, models (including simulations), norms, and spectacles have under late capitalist biopower.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Thanks, now I got it.



The simulacrum «comes first» and «commands», as it were, not images that copy the original objects, but real objects themselves. In simulation, a virtual idea or design, scripted in all its parts and reduced to its functions within a system of management, does not simply substitute the "real" object, but invokes it, interprets it, materialises the rules and the categories that explain it, and thus exerts a formative power on it (see Certomà 2015). Gender assignation can be taken as a contemporary paradigm of this precession of simulacra, where a prescriptive form of life and of the body anticipates, regulates, and disciplines the formation of bodies themselves and the very unfolding of the possibilities of living.

Thus understood, simulation is one of the fundamental operations of architecture and urban planning as well. Architectural somatechnics operates on bodies and people through the various categories of the population, and through ideals like the «urban bachelor» for Hefner, the «commuter» and the user of services, or «the terrorist» or «the criminal» in the case of law enforcement. These abstractions, structured by the interests of capitalist economy and neoliberal governance, and often informed by colonial, racist, and heterosexist assumptions, in turn precede and materially shape people's lives themselves. In this way, simulation and modelling provide an interface for the exercise of government, structuring the "reality" of lives and gestures by the terms through which they become available for its action, treating bodies as passive objects of enforcement and reactive

sites of managerial direction. In various contexts, techniques of simulation serve to certify and naturalise the inscription of social, political, and ecological practices within an instrumental and economic cosmology from which popular and democratic agency, and with it the full presence of human beings, tends to be completely banished (see Bookchin 1974, 123) [FIG. 1].

A significant part of Haskell Wexler's docudrama-form critical response to Marshall McLuhan's media theory *Medium Cool* (USA 1969) is dedicated to the organised re-enactment and simulation of an anti-war protest in the Emergency Operation Headquarters of the Illinois Army National Guard, set up for the purpose of studying and developing techniques of crowd control in response to Black Liberation movements and the opposition to the Vietnam war. In the scenes, soldiers dress up as "hippies" and play out with their comrades the whole course of a demonstration that is eventually repressed with tear gas and bayonets. Here, simulation entails a way of producing a particular know-how and perfecting techniques of repression, and even allows to take a grotesque enjoyment in their staging [FIG. 2].

Sierra Pettengill's more recent *Riotsville* (USA 2022), made with footage shot by the US Army, similarly focuses on a simulated city in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, one of the constructed environments set up for the training of police officers after the Watts uprising of 1965. The same kind of project is still being pursued today in the US, in the wake of the protests against the police killing of George Floyd, with the contested project of building a police training compound in the Weelaunee Forest near



[FIG. 1] *Medium Cool* (Haskell Wexler, dir., USA 1969). Digital still.





[FIG. 2] *Riotsville* (Sierra Pettengill, dir., USA 2022). Digital still.



Atlanta, Georgia, dubbed «Cop City» (CrimeThinc 2022, Akbar 2023). In these cop cities, performances of riots are turned into training "sandboxes" and into spectacles that the cadres of law enforcement direct and enjoy as spectators. In this context, the "playful" appropriation of the gestures of protest by police officers inscribes these gestures in a situation and a program that is eventually aimed at their suppression: it is in this form, here, as it loses the liberating potentiality of staging and becomes completely instrumental, that the simulacrum really substitutes for the original.

The hollow facades of life-size model towns like these, show all too apparently the logic of simulation as an operative governmental interface: cop cities treat urban space as a strategic composition of crowd behaviours, levels of engagement, and lines of sight, that can be dealt with through the disciplined use of force. All other elements of dynamics of the city that may be relevant to the politics of life are, by this very gesture of simulation, not so much negated than subordinated to the force that this model can exert: in dealing with protesters during a demonstration, indeed, the police first of all performatively shifts the level of the confrontation from the political to the military. Simulations in general structurally exclude many factors, and whatever they include, they include instrumentally: they are not a *description* or a *map* of the city, but a model and a series of operations that are conceived for its management and government. From Haussman to Le Corbusier, to redlining and the fragmentation of space in the occupied West Bank, we have a long history of the intersection of modern techniques of policing with the sphere of urban planning and architecture (see Lorinc 2022).

These model cities for law enforcement are, of course, an exceedingly simplified case of city simulation, but a clear and paradigmatic one

all the more. A similar logic of reduction and efficient modelling can be found at work in all the other, more complex and nuanced, structures, infrastructures, and environments that constitute the city: from housing to commuting, education, pollution, access to clean water, distribution of workplaces and so on. Whenever a top-down management or a centralised somatechnics of life is imposed upon and against more autonomous, democratic, and grassroots forms of dwelling in and transforming the city, it has to recur not only to precise maps of the city but to dynamic and workable models of urban life itself.

This imperative, I think, finds two complementary faces in the imaginaries of city building video games and those of the smart city. Bringing together the digitally simulated city and the ICT managed city, then, I want to show that their common operative logic is a central element in the epistemology of architectural power and a founding principle in the systems of governance that characterise the neoliberal city. Classic city builder games like *SimCity* (Maxis, 1989-2015) or *Cities: Skylines* (Paradox Interactive, 2015-2023) literalise this principle by offering us the imaginary power to shape urban space and urban life through a panoptical interface that we can manipulate almost without friction. By making the forces that shape city life visible exclusively in terms of their management, as an articulation of needs and services, of biometrics and ergonomic technological solutions, city simulation games not only materialise and popularise some of the principles of contemporary technocracy and capitalist urban planning, but in a sense anticipate the idea smart city – a city that is, indeed, at once conceived and ruled as a live complex of information – precisely as a simulacrum.



## Managing Happiness

When talking about city-building simulations, the authors of «SimCity and Black Box Simulations» suggest to make a distinction between the level of variables that the players manipulate and the level of «baseline assumptions» that structure the simulation and that, all while constantly interacting with them, the players cannot modify (Anonymous, 2017). The radius of effect of a school building in Simcity4, for example, is part of the level of variables – as the players can adjust it, up to a point, by the allocation of funds. The correspondences that the game establishes between the education level of the citizens and types of job demands, instead, is hard coded and the players cannot change it. At the level of its baseline assumptions, the game is significantly biased (see Friedman 1999), from its problematic race blindness, to the ways in which the gameplay systematically forces cities into constant expansion. What matters to me here is how Simcity and similar games propose a managerial model of the city that is, so to speak, less traditionally *economic* than biopolitical: production, for instance, is almost completely absent as a concern of the games in the series, and jobs themselves are treated as a *service* that must be provided in order to have thriving residential and commercial areas, and as a factor that produces certain kinds of "pawns" (the units of population in simulation games) by assigning them to different socio-economic classes. SimCity games frame every aspect of life as a tension between life needs, services, and budget, and favour a logistic rather than a social organisation of space. Coherently, the greatest emphasis in a game

like SimCity4 is put on the management of traffic, but SimCity pawns only ever commute to and from work and never visit each other: the simulation squarely puts commuting over community.

The particular way of framing simulation that a game like SimCity mobilises depends on the articulation between the realism of the graphics, that produces an impression of fidelity to the real and provides visual pleasure of a spectatorial kind, with a fundamentally ideological set of baseline assumptions that produces a specific "literacy" about city life. Quite clearly, city-building games are not simulations of actual systems, as may be used in experimental science, or, as we have seen, in law enforcement, but rather didactic representations of theoretical systems: as we play, we are not learning much about how cities actually work, but we are rather learning the language of urban planning; we are not really invited to question how or whether the simulated city represents a real one, but only rehearsing and naturalising a particular discourse about city management. As in Deleuze, the most important question of resemblance here is not that between buildings and their digital image, but that of the relation that virtual and real cities have to the models through which they are understood and governed.

Yet, the modelling of social dynamics that is the real object of the game remains largely inaccessible to the players. This becomes potentially problematic when simulations are taken uncritically as educational tools. If some scholars take the simulation of the city in games like SimCity at face value (see Jackson 2008, see Lukosch et al. 2017), other scholars, like Julian Bleeker (2004) and the authors of the article on Black Box Simulations, instead, are more critical. Bleeker stressed how SimCity, notably by avoiding questions of race, puts forward a neutralised ideal of the city that fits with neoliberal ideology, and the authors of Black Box use the case of Magnasanti – a SimCity3000 city built for maximum efficiency by Vincent Oscala – as a way to expose within the game itself the implications of the game's baseline assumptions. According to the authors, Oscala's work makes evident how SimCity3000's simulation model is based on three fundamentally neoliberal, biopolitical and necropolitical, principles: growth, the partition of the city in isolated and self-sufficient enclaves, and the maintenance of only the barest levels of satisfaction and life expectancy for the inhabitants [FIG. 3].

Backed with enough police stations, and libraries, this dystopian city constitutes a perfectly stable, perfectly immobile confinement system, which was able to run without disturbances for 50000 game-years before Oscala pulled the plug on it. Through Magnasanti, what we see is how, beyond the benign interface and pleasing graphics of the Maxis series, lies in fact something close to the most violent implementations of neoliberal governance and the capitalist rationalisation and precarisation of life. Magnasanti is the threshold on which the model of SimCity becomes visible as such - where the visual representation of the city, that is, begins to resemble the structure of the program itself.

One of the most interesting aspects of the modelling simulation of the city in video games are the ways in which they attempt to integrate politics. I do not have the space to go into details here, but very consistently throughout the city simulation genre, protests, political activities, and city activities in their complex, are not seen as independent forces that shapes the city, but only appear as a response to other game dynamics that are regularly economic or administrative in nature. Problems of the city as they are reflected

on the population usually take the form of dissatisfaction, of needs not met, which may then lead to demonstrations if the dissatisfaction reaches critical levels, or, when coupled with low income, to crime. In the city builder genre as a whole, politics is never the expression of an agency, but only a symptom of bad management.

Even when games implement a political model in the simulation, they reduce political practice to the matter of the pawn's allegiance to a set of factions. It is the case of the *Tropico* series (PopTop Software 2001-2019), which puts the player in the role of the dictator ruling over a "banana republic" and is much more straightforward (and, yes, funny) in its representation of capitalist and authoritarian violence. The game defines a set of needs, likes and dislikes for the factions (ecologists are unhappy when certain industries are built, militarists are happy when there are many military buildings, which makes intellectuals unhappy, and so on) and this set of needs influences, among other things, each faction's relation to the player's avatar, which will in turn determine the results of periodical elections that decide (in case no fraud is committed) whether the player may go on playing the scenario. The model is much more articulate than SimCity's, but the taxonomic and instrumental framework by which pawn *happiness* is categorised, calculated, and managed remains the same, and remains fundamentally incompatible with a proper, political and philosophical, understanding of the intimate relation between politics and the city.

When Agamben (1999, 78) describes the fundamental belonging of human beings in language as a dwelling, he is using an implicit politico-architectural metaphor to name the openness and the inseparability of language and the human. Such metaphor is already at work in our very category of «politics» (from the ancient Greek *polis*) naming at once a structure of urban space and an idea of community. Politics, for Agamben, rests in the very openness and potentiality of dwelling, in the fact that the gestures to which human lives are consigned are not reduced to the expression of a pre-existing and separate being and, we can add, that the common use of spaces cannot be reduced to the enforcement of a plan or the realisation of a divine or natural design. Working in this direction, Camillo Boano (2017) has traced some of the possible connections between Agamben's philosophy of inoperativity and the politics of architecture. As Rancière has also argued, from a different but compatible standpoint (1999, 68), the perfect correspondence between nature and law that characterises the Platonic ideal of the city constitutes the paradigm of an identitarian negation of politics. In his view, politics is the manifestation of an experience, a voice, and an agency that are incommensurable with a given «distribution of the sensible» (Rancière 2013, 7) – that are, that is, *unmapped* and in conflict with the very principles by which a given model of reality is constructed and enforced. In this sense, we can argue that both Agamben's and Rancière's conceptions of politics entail a suspension of the operative power of architecture to construct and simulate "the city".

This conception of politics as potential dwelling and as emergence of dissensus defines very precisely the limit of simulation games and of the logic of simulation in general. Politics cannot truly enter the simulation because it is a force that invests the very baseline assumptions through which a situation, real or imaginary, is understood, and violates the principle of correspondence that is precisely what guarantees the conformity of what is

being simulated to its design. However precise the modelling and the feedback mechanisms that are put in place in order to trace and make manageable social and political practice, between simulation and politics, between design and use, there can only be a tension.

It is precisely this tension, structurally impossible in city simulations conceived like SimCity, that the *smart* model of urban planning sets itself to manage and, ideally, smooth out or erase.

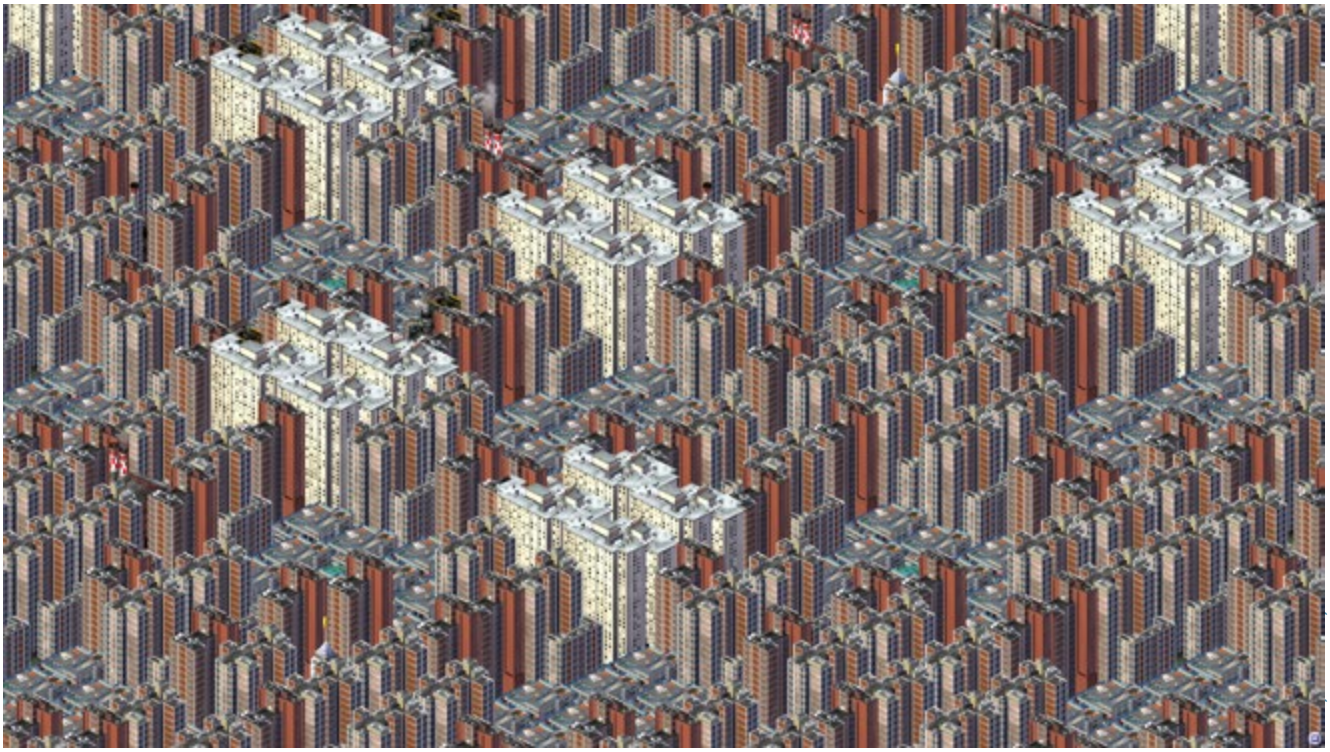
## Smart Cities

The simulated city of city builders video games can be taken as one of the seminal models of the "smart city", both in the more direct sense that these games propagandise the same kind of "intelligent planning", over politics, as the driving factor of city formation and organisation, and because both simulated and smart cities are conceived as a network of calculable needs and infrastructures. The SimCity model, as we may call it, a decade before the idea of smart city began to acquire the present currency, stressed very precisely the "smartness" of governance (the efficiency of its operations and the supposed "neutrality" of its logic) and promoted and naturalised its language [FIG. 4].

Despite many interventions that stress the elusiveness of the term (Joss 2019, xvi), under the label "smart cities" we can easily find a coherent understanding and theory of the relation between the city and its government. The smart city is a conceptual construct and a series of practices



[FIG. 3] TheMurderousCricket, *Saving Magnasanti*. https://community.simtropolis.com/journals/journal/5969-saving-magnasanti/






[FIG. 4] Smart Cities Infrastructure IoT. *Les Smartgrids* (2018). https://les-smartgrids.fr/smart-city-iot-choix-reseau-1-2/



situated at the convergence point of cybernetics and systems theory, the digital revolution, law enforcement, architecture, and urban planning. The concept integrates the extension of digital monitoring and remote control into a city-wide «internet of buildings» (Doherty, 2023) with a reinterpretation of city life itself on the model of new media social and communicational networks. If the smartness of smart cities often stands as short for digitally interconnected and efficiently managed, however, it also becomes a euphemism for panoptically controlled, centrally administered, and intensively policed urban spaces and, as such, it belongs to the longer history of the production and naturalisation of social inequalities through the management of city spaces – see, for example, June Manning Thomas's recent work on structural racism and city planning in the US (2023). One of the first implementations of smart technologies can indeed be considered the combination of biometric systems for the management of the population with new mass media surveillance technologies – for example, through the establishment of CCTV surveillance networks (see Donovan 2015; Amnesty International 2023).

It is important, I believe, not to separate the securitarian dimension of city smartness from all the others in which this paradigm is meant to answer specific problems like traffic or energy conservation. Smartness entails not only planning for profitable optimisation in the context of privatisation, or the efficient management of shrinking resources in the context of austerity and scarcity, but the architectural and technocratic management of matters that have immediate political innervations, and includes, through ICT-powered techniques of surveillance, segregation, and counterinsurgency, the management of political unrest and political life as such.

In this sense, smart city discourse may in fact be seen to repropose for

the 21st Century the ideas that ergonomics and the science of work proposed at the beginning of the 20th (see Rabinbach 1990, 287-288) which aimed at the solution of social issues through technical means. With smartness, we have an ergonomic imaginary applied not just to the organisation of production, but, like in SimCity's happiness management, to the solution of the logistics and the efficiency of life itself. As even March and Ribera-Fumaz, defending the democratic possibilities of the smart city, acknowledge: «proponents of smart cities forward an epistemological perspective that frames urban problems as engineering and technical challenges» (March & Ribera-Fumaz 2019, 229).

Alberto Vanolo (2017), from a critical and more theoretical position, has outlined four imaginaries of the smart city: smart cities built from scratch, as programmed environments; smart cities as dystopian securitarian cities; smart cities as the realisation of neoliberal digital participation, where pro-active citizens become citizen-sensors; and smart cities as part of resilience management in the context of ecological crisis. I think that SimCity in particular, and the city builder genre more broadly, integrate all these aspects and, as such, can be seen to have had a formative influence on smart city imaginaries, both in a genealogical and in an archaeological sense.

Smart projects regularly involve improving energy efficiency and mobility solutions through the use of ICT, but also the formation of «big data platforms to create database of large-scale, real-time data» about city life (Haarstad & Wathne 2019, 107). This third point is what is closest with the logic of governance in simulation games, which makes it the matter of establishing a feedback system network, on the lines of Wiener's cybernetic theory (1989, 24-26), in order to create an effective interface for control. The two city imaginaries – the sim and the smart – meet in the managerial interface that both, in their different way, establish. The smart city and the simulated city rest on a comprehensive, real-time, and reactive map of city dynamics: one, by constructing a representation of the city out of the very principles of urban planning, thereby consensually confirming them; the other, by going through considerable efforts to deploy networks of data collection devices and feedback sensors in order to produce an operational and workable simulation of real cities that would make them more *programmable*.

Smart cities and city simulation games address how digital technologies fit in the convergence of architecture and biopolitical government that, I think, is characteristic of the field of tensions in which contemporary architectural theories and practices are situated. Simulated and smart cities alike reinforce the neoliberal model of city politics, where discriminations and structural violence are made to disappear, by «cosmesis» (from the etymological root of *cosmos* and *order*) or police; where extensive and exceptional powers are held by unquestionable economic forces and actors and overseers who are placed significantly beyond democratic accountability; and where more and more aspects of city life are reduced within a calculable economy of commodities and needs.

Even a brief glance at the logic of simulation in city simulation games and smart city discourses, such as the one I propose in this article, suggests, I think, to shift our attention toward the performative dimension of meaning in architecture, where signification is less a matter of encoding and decoding specific meanings and more a matter of understanding the power of the fact

of language (of structures, forms, and models) as such. In contemporary discourses and imaginaries of urban planning, in particular, modelling becomes a prime instrument of government and government is exerted more and more through direct techniques of power-knowledge rather than through political means articulated on the model of dialogue and persuasion. (CD) City simulation games and smart city plans meet precisely where this force of modelling and interpretation impacts bodies directly: where economic management and architectural planning not only share a problematic proximity to corporate and State power, as they obviously did before, but become direct instruments and media that shape how lives are lived and understood.

In relation to politics specifically, then, as we have seen, city simulation games and smart cities work together at reducing the gap that exists between real cities and their model, closing the potentiality of the relation between words and things into a factual and consensual order, as suggested by Agamben and Rancière, respectively. With a sleight of hand, politics proper, as a disagreement on the base principles that regulate the understanding and the formation of the social-architectural, cosmological, space itself, is erased from the scene of the *polis*. SimCity simulations and the smart city, in this sense, are developments and intensification of the inurbane cities Bookchin described (1974), and occupy the same zone of indifference between the management of systems and the government of the community that defines the contemporary neoliberal order.



(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
However, it seems to me that two different scales are here compared, the architectural and the urban ones. I'm not saying that the meaning of architecture is a matter of encoding and decoding, I agree with you, but at the same time, at the architectural scale, the same logic that influence urban planning concretise into a building and its features, and this level enriches or, probably, masks the meaning dimension you're highlighting.

CARLO COMANDUCCI
This is a fair criticism, I think. In the situations I was considering, I did see a characteristic tendency to conflate architecture and urban planning, as well as both with a broader field of disciplinary techniques. I believe it is interesting to note and theorise this convergence, but I agree that one should also pay attention to the ways in which these various levels diverge and are articulated.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Looking at the intermediate dimension – the masterplans scale – your point is very clear indeed.

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# Iconomania e iconomana.
## Contributi filosofici alla veicolazione delle immagini nel paesaggio


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This article sets out to examine the contemporary landscape through the dichotomy of iconomania and iconomana, accompanied by an introductory visual lexicon that includes the definitions of the five keywords forming the substrate of the entire work.

Iconomania and iconomana, along with the ways in which these trends induce alterations in the visibility and enunciation curves, resulting in qualitative variations in the landscape, serve as the lens through which to interpret the territory and its milieu from a macro perspective. Alongside this macro perspective, a micro scale is introduced, allowing for the analysis of specific spaces in the city of Venice by juxtaposing Guy Debord's theories on spectacle with Emanuele Severino's theoretical reflections on technology and architecture.





— MUTATION THRESHOLDS
— ICONOMANIA
— ICONOMANA
— VISIBILITY CURVES
— ENUNCIATION CURVES

Philosophy Kitchen. Rivista di filosofia contemporanea
#21, II/2024, 155 — 169

## Ouverture

La circolazione di immagini ha subito un'immensa trasformazione con la comparsa di dispositivi tecnologici ad alta portabilità e con lo sviluppo di tecnologie che offrono la possibilità di fruire immagini digitali, veicolate su grandi schermi, ad alta nitidezza, anche alla luce del giorno. Si tratta di uno scenario ben descritto da alcuni autori attraverso proposte teoriche che continuano ad avere una certa utilità per leggere anche le ultimissime evoluzioni tecnologiche, coinvolgenti non solo il singolo ma l'intera comunità, negli spazi dedicati alla convivialità e al flusso. Tra questi concetti teorici ne ricordiamo alcuni, utili a collocare il presente contributo in una linea di pensiero che ha le radici più profonde nella seconda metà del secolo scorso: la produzione dello spazio urbano come complesso stratificato di processi sociotecnici (Foucault 1975); l'estensione dell'uso di reti telematiche (*mediascapes-ideoscapes*) per la veicolazione di movimenti ideologici, simboli, significati, tendenze immaginali (Appadurai 2001; Albarea & Orsenigo 2019; Orsenigo 2023); l'automatizzazione generalizzata della produzione e la possibilità di stimolare le facoltà cognitive ad ogni ora del giorno, nel privato (attraverso i dispositivi personali) e nel pubblico (attraverso superfici schermiche e altoparlanti) (Stiegler 2019); la necessità di sviluppare una pedagogia dell'immaginazione, un set di pratiche per salvaguardare la capacità umana di traduzione di input alfabetici in immagini, coltivando l'esperienza della generazione visuale in uno spazio mentale privato, in assenza di input visuali già dati all'esterno (Calvino 1988; Diotto 2022); l'uso dello spazio urbano nelle modalità tipiche della *surmodernité*, nello specifico della teoria dei non-luoghi (Augé 1992).

Come detto in precedenza, in questa linea di pensiero si colloca il presente studio, che nel primo paragrafo fornisce un lessico minimo che fa da "tessuto" per i paragrafi successivi; il secondo paragrafo tratta della pressione tecnologica sullo stile di attrezzamento visuale degli spazi; il terzo paragrafo, indaga quanto detto nei precedenti ma concentrandosi sulla città di Venezia; in conclusione, una riflessione sulla necessità di "frequentare" un'etica dei paesaggi ibridi, segnati dalla presenza sempre più costante di schermi e dunque di stimolazioni cognitive ed emotive.

## Lessico visuale

Riteniamo opportuno muovere da alcune indicazioni, attraverso la definizione delle parole-chiave, utili ad una maggiore comprensione delle sezioni che costituiscono il saggio. In questo senso, abbiamo nominato il paragrafo *Lessico visuale*, intendendo con questa formula sette parole significative che nondimeno stringono un raccordo tra urbanistica e filosofia della tecnica.

ICONOMANIA: questo termine, che appartiene alla filosofia della tecnica di Günther Anders, da un lato spiega la tendenza delle società contemporanee a trasformare gli oggetti, i fenomeni e gli eventi della vita reale in contenuti visuali; dall'altro lato, pone l'accento sulla condizioni di incontrollabilità della diffusione delle immagini, garantita sia dal continuo progredire in termini di potenza macchinale, sia dall'avere a portata di mano dei dispositive personali che rendono

elementare la messa in circolazione delle immagini stesse.

ICONOMANA: con questo termine, intendiamo una doppia accezione: a) la pervasività e la portabilità delle superfici schermiche su cui vengono messe in circolazione le immagini; b) la capacità delle immagini, in termini di "cattura" dell'attenzione, di impegnare il soggetto in esperienze visuo-aptiche, massificate ma fruite solisticamente.

SOGLIE DI MUTAZIONE: in *Tools of Conviviality*, Ivan Illich (1973) ipotizza due soglie di mutazione, che definiscono il rapporto tra soggetto e strumento tecnico/tecnologico. L'attraversamento della prima soglia di mutazione muove l'uomo verso lo strumento, in un rapporto di amplificazione in cui l'uomo è ancora detentore di un sapere tecnico e la macchina si limita ad estendere le possibilità dell'operatività dell'uomo; l'attraversamento della seconda soglia, invece, abilita la macchina alla presa di decisione; in questo senso, la macchina, attrezzata e superiore all'uomo in materia di processualità e velocità di calcolo, lo sostituisce in una serie di campi in cui viene richiesta una superiore bontà di funzionamento.

CURVE DI VISIBILITÀ: con questo termine si intendono le modalità in cui vengono portati alla luce alcuni contenuti visuali, sia in termini strutturali che funzionali. Il risultato è sempre il rendere visibile la struttura che sostiene la circolazione e ciò che effettivamente circola.

CURVE DI ENUNCIAZIONE: il risultato fruibile dell'operatività delle curve di visibilità porta alla luce una serie di enunciati, le cui modalità lessico-sintattiche rappresentano specifiche misture di sapere-potere. Tali misture vengono influenzate sia dagli obiettivi che dalla filosofia che sta alla base di chi gestisce le curve; questi ultimi possono essere apparati istituzionali, piattaforme digitali, agenzie pubblicitarie, organizzazioni, e così via.

## Iconomania e iconomana

L'apporto della filosofia della tecnica di Günther Anders alla lettura delle trasformazioni urbanistiche di questo decennio, si riflette prima di tutto nella capacità dello stesso Anders di definire i significati delle relazioni tra natura naturale e natura tecnica. In questo senso, sulla scia de *La questione della tecnica* di Martin Heidegger (1953/2017), Anders identifica i nuovi scenari urbani come scenari tecnici e tecnologici in cui la natura naturale svolgerebbe il ruolo di enclave. [FIG. 1]

La configurazione degli spazi e la strutturazione del tempo sono questioni strettamente influenzate dall'evoluzione tecnologica della quarta rivoluzione industriale. Da *frame* a *frame*, l'uomo di oggi vive questo andamento cominciato con la fine delle grandi narrazioni; nella vita degli uomini, la caduta dei grandi ideali storici e simbolici ha segnato irrimediabilmente parole e concetti chiave come direzione, traiettoria, durata, intensità e chiarezza. La scarsità di orbite narrative solide non garantisce la stratificazione simbolica e, in questo senso, la Fondazione emozionale e sentimentale entra in una nuova fase omeoretica.

Simboli e immagini, oggi, raramente vengono decisi e veicolati da una catena di azioni pianificate; attualmente, è difficile farsi un'idea del tessuto storico-culturale di una popolazione osservandone il

centro città: Alexander Platz a Berlino si comunica visualmente in una maniera simile a Piazza San Marco a Venezia. (CD)

La cultura visuale, la sua disposizione nel paesaggio e la fruizione sia massificata che solistica, sono operazioni che spettano perlopiù a moda e pubblicità. Lo stile in cui tali contenuti vengono veicolati segue la teoria dei flussi di Arjun Appadurai (2001), che identifica nei seguenti cinque flussi automatizzati i canali in cui tali contenuti "viaggiano" e, continuamente, subiscono alterazioni. Il primo flusso riguarda i movimenti

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS:
A me sembra in realtà che sia sovrastimato l'impatto dei media nell'urbanità rispetto al tema, specifico, della riconoscibilità dei luoghi. Nel senso che la sensibilità rispetto alle differenze ha maglie molto più larghe, ed è per questo che l'East Montage a Dalian viene, da moltissimi, vista "come" Venezia, cosa che ci pare inconcepibile solo perché non ammettiamo che, a un non esperto, la musica barocca, i quadri di paesaggi ottocenteschi, o le città medievali, sembrano sostanzialmente tutti molto simili tra loro. Le differenze sono cioè percettibili solo nel confronto tra una cosa che si conosce bene, magari la propria città, e l'alterità. Attribuire a uno sguardo esterno la medesima capacità introspettiva è però impossibile, e ce ne accorgiamo con l'intenzionalità da turisti. I cinque flussi descritti cioè non sono automaticamente prevaricanti perché veicolano immagini, ma quando i loro referenti – turisti, multinazionali ecc. – siano eccezionali o extra-ordinari, superando la miopia assimilante dello sguardo esterno.



[FIG. 1] Ozgu Ozden, senza titolo, Unsplash






[FIG. 2] Denys Nevozhai, senza titolo, Unsplash

di persone (*ethnoscapes*) costituito da turisti, immigrati, rifugiati e profughi. Il secondo riguarda la produzione e la distribuzione a carico delle compagnie nazionali e multinazionali (*technoscapes*). Il terzo, i flussi di moneta e il mondo finanziario (*finanscapes*). Il quarto i prodotti dei media comprese le reti telematiche (*mediascapes*). Il quinto e ultimo riguarda il flusso dei movimenti ideologici, dei simboli, e dei significati (*ideoscapes*). [FIG. 2]

A proposito delle direzioni non isomorfiche, Appadurai evidenzia come vi sia una multicentralità dei flussi; essi tendono ad incrociarsi moltiplicando i centri e le periferie e generando nuove zone intermedie tra di essi. Questi flussi contribuiscono alla propagazione della disintermediazione del settore turistico, educativo, terapeutico, istituzionale, fino talvolta alle pratiche amministrative. Non si parla più di operazioni condotte in termini statici ma, in ogni campo, in termini processuali.

Adornare un paesaggio, oggi, significa inoltre seguire la logica del Sì impersonale heideggeriano (1927); le immagini e la loro disposizione, veicolata sia su superfici schermiche sia su pannelli pubblicitari, subendo l'influsso del quarto flusso automatizzato, porta a visione ciò che *si* deve notare, nella maniera che *si* deve mostrare. Lo stile è ancora una volta regolato dai trend nelle quantità e nelle qualità in cui viene messo in circolazione lungo le "maglie" delle piattaforme che costituiscono il *mediascapes*.

Per ritornare a Anders, i fenomeni delineati qui in precedenza contribuirebbero a continue variazioni della personalità dei soggetti fruitori, prima a causa della struttura stessa del mezzo veicolante e della sua insita potenzialità, poi della iconomania di cui gli apparecchi stessi soffrono (Anders 1956) e che oggi coinvolge anche ampi spazi e pareti dei paesaggi; questi apparecchi attraverso le loro superfici schermiche e queste zone di città costituite da pareti dedicate (concesse) alla trasmissione di materiale

pubblicitario, trasformano qualitativamente il tessuto storico-culturale e diventano a tutti gli effetti delle tecniche di coinvolgimento visuo-aptico. In questo senso Anders può parlare di continue variazioni di personalità, poiché, il coinvolgimento sensoriale, determina la formazione di specifici e talora inediti set comportamentali. Da qui, il passaggio da iconomania a iconomana.

La distribuzione del materiale visuale tra le pareti che adornano i paesaggi di città segue una logica simile a quella delle *filter bubble* che caratterizzano l'esperienza e la fruizione nelle bacheche virtuali. (FR) Si tratta di filtri che personalizzano la trasmissione dei contenuti a seconda degli interessi

(FR) FEDERICO RUDARI
Trovo che nelle dinamiche relazionali che caratterizzano le bacheche virtuali ci sia uno stato di sfocatura intenzionale che determina una sostanziale differenza rispetto all'esperienza delle pareti dei paesaggi cittadini. Se pensiamo alle strutture e architettura dei social media, il consumatore è anche il prodotto, il posizionamento perde di valore diacronico (il prima e il dopo rispetto al momento di consumo, vedi il concetto di présentisme in François Hartog), così come privato e pubblico si scambiano e confondono, solo per fare alcuni esempi. Per questo motivo credo che nella distribuzione di tali materiali visuali cambiando il mezzo cambia strutturalmente anche la sua logica.






[FIG. 3] Silvia Micheli, senza titolo, Gizmo

(analizzati dagli algoritmi); tuttavia, gli algoritmi seguono a loro volta una linea di tendenza generalizzata e, per questo, ad emergere come prodotto visuale non sarà tanto ciò che viene preferito dal singolo ma ciò che viene preferito in termini di prossimità statistica alla media. E' per questo che in un luogo come Piazza San Marco a Venezia si possono incontrare dei riferimenti visuali molto simili a quelli di molte altre piazze europee; non solo, la trasmissione dei contenuti visuali non ha sempre come unico fine la moda e la pubblicità; sempre nel caso della città di Venezia vengono utilizzati i pannelli pubblicitari per ricoprire le facciate delle chiese durante il periodo della manutenzione; in questo senso, la pubblicità funziona con una doppia tecnica: da un lato, il mettere in mostra ciò che *si* deve notare, dall'altro l'oscuramento di ciò che non è utile vedere, ossia l'impalcatura. Moda e pubblicità, in questo esempio, agiscono alterando le curve di visibilità e le curve di enunciazione (Deleuze 1987) di un lato luogo del paesaggio, in questo caso di città. Agire in termini di alterazione della visibilità significa portare ad un livello di luce diverso la zona coinvolta nei lavori di restauro; la facciata verrà oscurata per un certo tempo e al suo posto i cittadini e i passanti si abitueranno ad un'altra visuale; per quanto riguarda i viaggiatori, ricorderanno e fotograferanno il luogo per come si mostra nelle sue sembianze momentanee, facendo circolare nei canali costituenti la *mediascapes* un paesaggio nella sua sostanza, per così dire, secondaria. [FIG. 3]

Tuttavia, è indispensabile rilevare che, una volta concessa la disponibilità di una certa parete di città ad una agenzia pubblicitaria o più generalmente ad un apparato istituzionale, essa è obbligata a segnalare (nella parte bassa del contenuto visuale) che la stessa pubblicità è impegnata nel sostentamento economico del restauro.



[FIG. 4] Aleks Marinkovic, senza titolo, Unsplash



Questo, però, non cambia il risultato in termini di percezione e di ecologia visuale. Anche se la pubblicità stessa risulta utile e talora fondamentale per il mantenimento di un edificio storico, più o meno rilevante nel contesto della città, comunque non rende immune l'alterazione contenutistica dei messaggi visuali e degli enunciati insiti in essi. Con questa ultima affermazione sosteniamo che la scelta di posizionare o non posizionare una nuova configurazione visuale (nel caso delle chiese, tendenzialmente nella facciata), unita alla scelta di cosa e in che modo testimoniare il contenuto, avvia la trasmissione di una catena significante irrimediabilmente differente rispetto alle catene significanti precedenti. Non stiamo immaginando una regressione, non si tratta, in questa sede, di stabilire se moda e pubblicità aggravano la condizione ecologico-visuale e morale della popolazione in cui i contenuti visuali vengono alterati (La Cecla 1993). Si tratta di constatazioni enucleate dall'osservazione e strutturale e funzionale di alcuni luoghi. [1]

[1] Si fa riferimento a una lunga lista di città, dove negli ultimi decenni si rilevano intensi cambiamenti urbanistici e socio-culturali; tra queste: Venezia, Marrakech, Lagos, Nairobi, Istanbul, Tel Aviv, Bukhara, Samarcanda, Bangkok, Phnom Phen, Kuala Lumpur.

Nondimeno, ci teniamo a precisare che l'utilizzo di muri, schermi, pannelli pubblicitari, scocche di mezzi pubblici e, più generalmente, ogni tipo di supporto utilizzato come dispositivo di circolazione pubblicitaria nel momento stesso in cui concentra le sue forze per diffondere un contenuto di tendenza, contemporaneamente innesta una certa variazione storico-culturale. In altre parole, il fenomeno di cui sopra, riteniamo debba essere colto come fenomeno non neutrale e trasformativo della cultura stessa (Severino 2021). Per quanto esso sia generalizzabile in quanto fruibile in molte località del mondo, distribuite in tutti i continenti, non significa che non abbia in sé un quantitativo simbolico reagente al simbolico collettivo già in circolazione. Gli sviluppi per il singolo e per la collettività, in termini morali e di ecologia visuale, invece, sono un discorso differente che deve essere affrontato in un'altra sede – ci limiteremo ad accennare alcune caratteristiche di questo secondo discorso nel successivo paragrafo, quando prenderemo in esame la gestione di alcuni spazi nella città di Venezia.



Considerato lo scenario contemporaneo precedentemente delineato, Anders può indicare come conseguenza una mutazione antropologica in dieci punti (1956). Tra questi, il punto nove risulta particolarmente centrale nella nostra discussione. Esso recita: se l'originale si conforma alla riproduzione, allora l'avvenimento è per diventare matrice della riproduzione. In questo senso, la catena di operazioni di ornamento tecnico/tecnologico di un paesaggio altera qualitativamente le possibilità schiuse dal luogo stesso; non solo, provoca delle variazioni in termini di sensazione/percezione dei soggetti coinvolti nel paesaggio. Ad essere fruite sono perlopiù delle rappresentazioni bidimensionali, distribuite nello spazio tridimensionale; in una certa misura, tali rappresentazioni influenzano la percezione avviando molteplici transfugazioni prospettiche: non più, solamente, relazioni con corpi e avvenimenti tridimensionali, ma anche e allo stesso tempo con corpi e avvenimenti appiattiti, purtuttavia circondanti il soggetto-fruitore. [FIG. 4]

La nascita, la morte e la scomparsa di specifiche rappresentazioni, pur configurandosi come occupanti degli spazi solidi di un paesaggio, non sono soggette alle decisioni del paesaggio stesso. Esse, nei loro tre tempi, vengono regolate dalle strutture di circolazione della

*mediascapes*. In una certa misura, allo spazio reale costituito da erba e cemento, si sovrappone lo spazio regolato da un invisibile elettronico e semi-automatizzato.

Quale fenomeno rileva Anders, come conseguenza dell'esposizione quotidiana alla moltitudine di immagini nel proprio domicilio e nel paesaggio pubblico? Per il filosofo è un sentimento, che chiama *familiarizzazione del mondo* (Anders 2007, 113). La connessione implicita tra paesaggi, attraverso le reti elettroniche, facilita la stabilizzazione del set di immagini e delle possibilità immaginali. I soggetti fruitori si ritroverebbero nella condizione di confidenza verso gli altri, i luoghi e le situazioni; condizione schiusa dal senso di familiarità delle immagini e veicolate nei propri dispositivi, sia di stazionamento come la televisione che altamente portabili come gli smartphone, e dispiegate nel paesaggio.

Un'azione visiva familiare, del tipo appena delineato, riteniamo possa venire identificata come tecnica di semplificazione delle versioni del mondo (la prossimità alla media di cui parlavamo in precedenza), che agiscono in un dato scenario storico-culturale; non solo, potrebbe persino agire come tecnica di semplificazione del quotidiano personale: una limitazione dell'operatività di *tyche* su *automaton*.

Dispiegare il già-conosciuto, ossia il già-visto nei suoi vari formati circolanti, ancora una volta, ci appare come lo scenario contemporaneo della gestione delle curve di visibilità e delle curve di enunciazione.

### Guardare Venezia con Debord e Severino

Evidentemente, Venezia non è l'unica città dove negli ultimi anni si assiste ad una evoluzione dell'operatività del binomio iconomania/iconomana. Tuttavia, questo paragrafo vuole essere un tentativo di lettura di alcuni spazi della città lagunare, facendo reagire le tesi sullo spettacolo di Guy Debord (1967) con le riflessioni teoriche su tecnica e architettura di Emanuele Severino (2021).

Venezia, trovandosi sull'acqua ed essendo collegata alla terraferma da un unico ponte (il *Ponte della Libertà*), non ha possibilità in termini di estensione. Lo sviluppo della città è sempre uno sviluppo nelle posizioni occupate da elementi che già esistono. Nondimeno, i circuiti di passeggio non possono subire drastiche variazioni: anche essi rimangono tendenzialmente fissi. Sì, storicamente è possibile rintracciare delle variazioni qualitative del paesaggio che sono andate ad assommarsi ai percorsi già esistenti, tuttavia, ancora una volta, non si tratta di operazioni estensive; a tal proposito possiamo citare due esempi: il primo, del XIX secolo, con l'interramento di molti rii da parte degli austriaci, per facilitare il trasferimento delle merci che giungevano attraverso le navi; il secondo, più recente, riguarda la costruzione del ponte di Calatrava, che collega Piazzale Roma con la Stazione dei treni.

Considerata tale configurazione della città, chiusa entro le sue caratteristiche più o meno uniche al mondo, negli ultimi decenni le scelte di promozione e cura hanno perseguito una filosofia di implementazione a macchia di leopardo; in altre parole, Venezia si ritrova ad essere una città conosciuta e vissuta soprattutto in quelli che sono i tragitti turistici. Esiste una significativa differenza, in termini qualitativi, del modo in cui si presenta la città in questi tragitti rispetto a quelle che oggi sono le zone

periferiche, ma che fino a tre decenni fa venivano considerate le zone in cui la tradizione si esprimeva ancora in maniera vitale. [FIG. 5]

I percorsi turistici, che oggi *sono* la città, sono essenzialmente tre: dalla Stazione S. Lucia al sestiere di Cannaregio, dalla Stazione S. Lucia a Rialto, da Rialto a Piazza San Marco. In questi percorsi, la strutturazione dello spazio persegue le logiche che abbiamo illustrato nel capitolo precedente. Il fenomeno binomiale iconomania/iconomana, in questo momento, a Venezia, si esprime soprattutto attraverso tre pratiche: a) il coinvolgimento visuale dato dai pannelli pubblicitari e dalle superfici schermiche; b) il coinvolgimento visuo-aptico dei dispositivi personali; c) l'apertura degli antichi edifici e ville come sedi collaterali della Biennale di Arte e Architettura: i piani vengono utilizzati per le mostre, ottenendo ad ogni stanza un intreccio tra antico (dei muri) e contemporaneo (fotografie, superfici schermiche, proiezioni). Non solo, per quanto riguarda il punto c), ogni stanza è talvolta suddivisa in tre esposizioni differenti, una per parete:

> Là dove il mondo reale si cambia in semplici immagini, le semplici immagini divengono degli esseri reali, e le motivazioni efficienti di un comportamento ipnotico. Lo spettacolo, come tendenza a *far vedere* per il tramite di diverse mediazioni specializzate il mondo che non è più direttamente coglibile, trova naturalmente nella vista il senso umano privilegiato che in altre epoche fu il tatto; il senso più astratto, e più mistificabile, corrisponde all'astrazione generalizzata della società attuale. Ma lo spettacolo non è identificabile al semplice sguardo, sia pure combinato con l'ascolto. È ciò che sfugge all'attività degli uomini, alla riconsiderazione e alla correzione della loro opera. È il contrario del dialogo. Ovunque vi è rappresentazione indipendente, lo spettacolo si ricostituisce. (Debord 1967/2004, 58)



In effetti, con Debord, possiamo parlare di spettacolo integrato perché i soggetti fruitori stessi, trovandosi di fronte o circondati dalle immagini, hanno la possibilità di sentirsi chiamati (coinvolti) nell'estendere a loro volta le immagini stesse verso altre terminazioni capillari della 'maglia' di circolazione. In altre parole, immersi nell'esperienza, registrano e veicolano a loro volta un contenuto che già in partenza è stato registrato e veicolato. Il soggetto ha la possibilità di duplicare il già duplicato che si trova appresso; ed è la possibilità stessa della duplicazione che si configura come chiamata, che è determinante nella scelta tra la contemplazione e la transfugazione verso la registrazione.

Lo spettacolo integrato, come risultato di questa messa in circolazione che può essere garantita da ogni nodo singolare della maglia (da ogni soggetto che ne ha la possibilità tecnica/tecnologica), sintonizza la percezione del mondo reale su di una frequenza il cui contenuto è perlopiù *mediato*. La traduzione di un fenomeno reale in virtuale, da materialità tridimensionale a bidimensionale, porta in scena ciò che non è presente, eppure c'è: una catena di assenze che, tanto quanto le presenze, costituiscono e segnano il tessuto socio-culturale di un paesaggio. Anche la traduzione di un fenomeno reale tridimensionale in fenomeno virtuale tridimensionale, come nel caso di Oculus, è pur sempre un'esperienza di assenze sostanzialmente differente dalla stessa esperienza nel mondo reale: attraverso Oculus, la visita della Basilica di San Marco non prevede le ore di coda all'ingresso, i sistemi di sicurezza, il pagamento del ticket di

ingresso, gli inciampi a causa di alcuni dissesti del pavimento, la scarsa illuminazione di alcuni antri che non garantisce la piena fruizione delle opere; non solo: attraverso Oculus, che garantisce una esperienza che è stata privata preventivamente di tutti gli stimoli irrilevanti, non corriamo il rischio di essere sporcati dai piccioni (rischio reale a Venezia) e, qualora venisse programmata una esperienza nel medesimo luogo e che prevede la presenza di piccioni a loro volta programmati per sporcare le persone in coda, il residuo non avrebbe odore.

Tornando al fenomeno della fruizione dei contenuti mediati dispiegati nel paesaggio, in *Warped Space*, Anthony Vidler (2002) dimostra come l'interesse contemporaneo nel campo dell'arte e architettura sia completamente assorbito dal tema dell'*informe*. Data la capacità dell'apparato tecnico e tecnologico e considerata la mutazione dell'ambiente di natura naturale ora enclave dell'ambiente tecnico, la propensione odierna è quella di uno spazio che deve essere «fluido, scorrevole, sottile e ibrido, [in accordo con la] tendenza globale, sostenuta dall'imponente apparato tecnico dei media, del virtuale, del cinema, dell'arte in genere» (Severino 2021, 22-23).

La tecnica, con Severino, consente di portare le cose a *divenir altro*. Le apparecchiature garantiscono questa mutazione e la quantità di variazioni di ogni cosa dipende sempre dal livello dell'apparato tecnologico. Nonostante questo programma, nella società dello spettacolo integrato, ogni variazione dell'oggetto (del prodotto, dell'esperienza pubblicizzata) viene cerimoniosamente presentata come la singolarità decisiva (Debord 2004, 84). Questa qualità viene mantenuta fintantoché l'oggetto compare nelle forme e nei supporti che ne garantiscono il dispiegamento nel paesaggio, nei luoghi della vita sociale. Nel momento in cui esso viene portato a domicilio, progressivamente è destinato ad entrare nelle dinamiche dell'abituazione. [FIG. 6]

Inserite nella logica del divenir altro, le cose, inoltre, cambiano facilmente di posizione e di funzione; vengono "catturate", nella loro forma commerciale, in ambienti in cui sono desiderate e sfruttate, fino appunto all'asetticità; tuttavia, per il tempo in cui hanno stazionato a domicilio (o in ambienti pubblici), ne influenzano la scansione temporale dettata dalle logiche preventive che soggiacciono al loro utilizzo, e la strutturazione dello spazio alterandone la disposizione. Un classico esempio lo ritroviamo ne *L'uomo è antiquato* di Günther Anders (1956-2007), in cui l'autore descrive gli anni in cui il televisore è entrato nelle case, alterandone non solo le abitudini ma anche la posizione di stazionamento, le traiettorie degli sguardi tra familiari, e le relazioni interpersonali. Infatti, il tavolo non è più centro gravitazionale della vita familiare, geometria che garantiva una serie di modi di guardarsi e parlarsi; oggi, è cambiata la dinamica di stazionamento: la famiglia si ritrova di fronte al televisore o fruisce solisticamente, in camere diverse, lo stesso contenuto.

In una certa misura, possiamo affermare che la città e la casa hanno due facce: una materiale, reale, rappresentata dalla struttura e dall'aspetto della città stessa; l'altra mentale, incarnata nelle rappresentazioni artistiche, letterarie e teoriche della città; ciononostante è importante sottolineare che la faccia materiale è figlia di quella mentale,

> giacché la configurazione di un edificio dipende non solo da ciò che l'architetto o l'urbanista ha volute costruire – per esempio un tempio o un mercato o una

> macchina per abitare -, ma, anche, e soprattutto, da ciò che egli ritiene che siano e di quali valori ritiene che siano espressione un tempio, un mercato, una macchina abitativa. (Severino 2021, 150-151)

In accordo con Debord, e ritornando alla città di Venezia, il fenomeno della circolazione di materiale visuale non coinvolge solamente i prodotti; nella tesi 168, Debord (1967/2004) parla di un sottoprodotto della circolazione delle merci, il turismo, che si riduce in alcune città nell'*andare* e *vedere* il modo in cui i prodotti vengono presentati nella loro organizzazione economica materiale. Anche per questo sottoprodotto il movimento oscilla dalla città alla casa (all'albergo), dalla frequentazione dei posti in cui sono dispiegate o stoccate le cose, fino al momento del rientro nei luoghi in cui *si* deve alloggiare (di nuovo, per queste città a misura di soggetto-passeggero, la tendenza è il perseguimento del Sì impersonale heideggeriano).

Nei *Commentari* del febbraio-aprile 1988, al capitolo II, Debord afferma che «lo spettacolo ha continuato a consolidarsi ovunque, cioè ad estendersi alle estremità da tutti i lati, e al tempo stesso ad accrescere la sua densità al centro» (Debord 2004, 190); se utilizziamo questo passaggio per leggere i tre percorsi della città di Venezia citati in precedenza, rileviamo ancora una volta l'esistenza di tragitti nei quali la varietà di stimoli e di prodotti che si incontrano, reali e virtuali, sembra indicare ai soggetti di passaggio di trovarsi in zone ad alto grado di libertà, familiarità, agiatezza, confidenza. Non solo: l'impressione è quella di essere nel fulcro dell'intera città. In effetti, il modo in cui sono adornati i tragitti, e le offerte dispiegate, risponde coerentemente all'immaginario della città sviluppato e circolante nelle piattaforme della *mediascapes*. Tuttavia, questa concentrazione di merce e uomini lungo questi percorsi – come linee di forza – sottraggono alle altre zone la possibilità di essere frequentate e conosciute; riducono, in sostanza, la possibilità di svilupparsi un'idea della città nella sua complessità.

Questo fenomeno di densificazione oggettuale ed esperienziale, dà vita ad un ibrido filosofico-urbanistico descritto nel capitolo XXIX dei Commentari debordiani:

> Una legge generale del funzionamento dello spettacolo integrato, almeno per coloro che ne gestiscono la direzione, è che, in questo ambito, tutto ciò che si può fare deve essere fatto. In altre parole ogni nuovo strumento deve essere utilizzato, a qualsiasi costo. L'attrezzatura nuova diventa ovunque il fine e il motore del sistema; e sarà l'unico a poter modificare in modo considerevole il suo andamento, ogni volta che il suo uso si sarà imposto senza altre riflessioni. (Debord 1967/2004, 241-242)

## Note conclusive

Nelle sezioni precedenti abbiamo proposto la lettura della distribuzione delle immagini e delle superfici veicolanti il visuale nello spazio, attraverso l'iconomania e l'operatività dell'iconomana. Nelle note conclusive cercheremo di sviluppare una riflessione che vuole essere un contributo all'etica della distribuzione di contenuti visuali nello spazio urbano.

Mediare nello spazio significa far giungere, laddove di per sé non giunge, il fantasma, la rappresentazione, di un prodotto, di un evento o di un fenomeno. Facente parte delle pareti, questo fantasma si trova integrato agli edifici; altresì, potremmo dire che si trova in stato di erogazione nel paesaggio.

Nel momento in cui sovrapponiamo al paesaggio la dimensione mediale, fino al punto di integrazione, dobbiamo interrogarci della necessità di costruzione di una cura mediale, ossia una cura del paesaggio attrezzato. Negli ultimi decenni, la cura del paesaggio è ancora di più una cura nel senso ambientale, nelle sue componenti strutturali e funzionali, ecosistemiche. Tuttavia, oggi, gli artefatti dispiegati nelle città non provocano più curiosità e sorpresa: sono entrati nella condizione di familiarità e, proprio per questa condizione, riteniamo utile avviare la riflessione teorica sulle pratiche della gestione di questo secondo paesaggio.

Evidentemente, il primo livello di cura mediale deve agire avendo come fuoco dell'attenzione la sostenibilità energetica. Nel 2019 alla Biennale d'Arte di Venezia, il padiglione dell'Irlanda ha suscitato un certo interesse nei visitatori mettendo in scena la situazione, dello stato di allora, dei server presenti nel territorio irlandese. La scena era costituita da un grande server, ricco di fenditure provocate dal fuoco che più volte ne ha bruciato e compromesso la struttura; sia all'esterno che all'interno un numero sproporzionato di ventilatori, che avevano il compito di mantenere ad una temperatura ideale i macchinari all'interno, indispensabili per garantire la veicolazione dei dati. Il senso dell'opera voleva considerare





[FIG. 5] Birger Strahl, senza titolo, Unsplash



[FIG. 6] Thanongsak Kongtong, senza titolo, Unsplash



[FIG. 7] Davide Ragusa, senza titolo, Unsplash



l'inquinamento provocato dai dati stessi, che necessitano di sistemi di ventilazione sempre più potenti e innovativi, rendendo prima di tutto insostenibile la gestione delle strutture fisiche dei server, fino alla compromissione del territorio circostante. La necessità di aumentare la potenza e l'efficacia della ventilazione è data nondimeno dalla sostanza più visuale che alfabetica dei contenuti mediali, una sostanza che richiede una mole di 'peso' elettronico decisamente superiore soprattutto se pensata moltiplicata per tutti i dispositivi attivi presenti nelle famiglie.

Il secondo livello, invece, deve agire tenendo presente una certa *capacità di scelta*: ci si riferisce alla necessità odierna di saper scegliere quando e perché è o non è necessaria l'implementazione di un apparato mediale in uno spazio specifico.

Con una attenzione ad entrambi i livelli, l'adornamento e l'equipaggiamento di un ambiente avrebbe come conseguenza la realizzazione di un paesaggio rispondente, vivo e rivolto alle necessità multistratiche, ossia di tutto l'ecosistema. Se la logica attuale persegue la possibilità – attrezzo perché posso –, la logica della capacità di scelta si configura sia a livello biologico che sociale, per garantire degli spazi facilitanti la convivialità delle specie.

Se il primo livello che abbiamo identificato si pone in accordo con il classico concetto di sostenibilità, discusso nei tavoli della comunità scientifica e nondimeno nell'Enciclica *Laudato si'* di Papa Francesco, il secondo livello chiama in causa l'educazione alle scelte e la capacità di immaginare un tempo futuro credibile e alternativo. Si tratta di sviluppare un percorso che non abbia come fattore determinante la presenza delle apparecchiature necessariamente più innovative. In questo senso, l'apparecchiatura ultima in termini di novità offerta dal mercato, non è detto diventi l'apparato tecnologico migliore e rispondente nella maniera più efficace alle necessità di uno spazio; la novità informa solamente della condizione di possibilità di erogazione di una data società in un dato momento storico. Oggi, invece, la novità tecnologica si dispiega negli spazi avviando l'operatività del Sì impersonale heideggeriano, forgiando la familiarizzazione del mondo; l'alternativa al sì, capace di sedimentarsi tra le pratiche e i set comportamentali, passa irrimediabilmente per la configurazione del secondo paesaggio (mediale) non ricco in termini di innovazione ma vivo, rispondente, relazionale. [FIG. 7] Una sostenibilità relazionale, con al centro una domanda: questo equipaggiamento è necessario? Se sì, per quale ragione lo è in questo paesaggio?

Intendiamo questa domanda avendo ben presente la riflessione in merito alla collaborazione e al rispetto tra specie; la lezione contemporanea della bioispirazione e della biomimetica invita a pensare gli ambienti, gli oggetti e i comportamenti stessi come favorenti o compromettenti la vita sociale della nostra e delle altre specie. Una prospettiva di allargamento del proprio ambiente, riteniamo debba necessariamente prendere in considerazione chi altro, in quel medesimo ambiente, vive e ha instaurato una certa modalità di costruzione delle proprie zone di vita. Per questo, una attenzione distribuita alle modalità utilizzate dalle altre specie non solo informa del territorio in cui entrambi viviamo, ma può fornire indicazioni cruciali alle scienze umane fino all'urbanistica e all'architettura. In questo senso, la risposta alla domanda "questo equipaggiamento è necessario?" raccoglie in sé il senso della cura ecosistemica. Per questo, in

alcuni paesaggi, la risposta alla domanda potrebbe essere "no". Tuttavia, siamo consapevoli che una tale condizione prevederebbe una mistura differente da quella attuale di politica ed economia: la seconda, di tanto in tanto, al servizio della prima. (CD)



(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS:
Benché convinto di molte delle tesi del testo, non credo che il termine "necessità" sia quello corretto, a meno di non voler rimanere in un discorso utopico. In senso sistemico, è evidente che le immagini sono necessarie, il punto è "a chi" – al mercato, certamente, ma anche agli edifici restaurati, ad esempio. Inoltre, l'ipotizzata opposizione tra politica e economia richiederebbe che la prima sia estranea e superiore alla seconda, condizione impossibile non solo dal neoliberismo imperante, ma anche nei totalitarismi o nelle monarchie assolute. In ultimo, i valori di sostenibilità, scelta, democrazia, non sono valori altrettanto globalizzanti e retorici delle immagini? Porterebbero nuovi significati – forse – ma sarebbero questi più affini al "tessuto storico-culturale di un luogo"?

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È una domanda difficile da esaurire, anche se rendere più vivibile un paesaggio, a misura di uomo o ancor meglio di cittadino, forse offrirebbe qualche propulsione in più nella costruzione di spazi dedicati alla convivialità. Lo sappiamo: un tessuto storico-culturale non è qualcosa, ma è un processo. In quanto processo è costitutivamente sottoposto alle influenze di chi ci vive (ovviamente, nel bene e nel male). Ma una città come Venezia è anzitutto sottoposta alle influenze di chi ci passa e in particolare turisti e... immagini. Questo, ma evidentemente non solo questo, contribuisce tuttora alla vertiginosa diminuzione dei residenti, che sfiora ormai quota quarantottomila.
Non possiamo che ringraziarla ancora per averci offerto questi ulteriori spunti; ne faremo tesoro per un futuro lavoro.

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# La teoria architettonica dell'empatia. Dall'estetica dell'*Einfühlung* alla neuroestetica dei neuroni specchio

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There is no doubt that the discovery of the *mirror neuron system* – which took place in the last decade of the twentieth century by a group of Italian neuroscientists at the University of Parma – has fueled a renewed interest in those issues concerning the empathic relationship between man and architecture, which are typical of late-nineteenth-century experimental Aesthetics. Thanks to the use of modern neuroimaging techniques, recent experiments conducted in the Neuroaesthetics' laboratories are, in fact, now confirming many of the brilliant insights made by a large group of Nineteenth-Century Central European philosophers and art historians who championed the *theory of Einfühlung*. This school of Experimental Aesthetics accommodates within itself the first instances of human neurophysiology, which gradually led to the diffusion of the new concept of *organic space* and which resulted, in some cases, in real experimental laboratories of sensory architecture or, we might say, *Proto-neuroarchitecture*. Therefore, a careful textual and comparative analysis between the cornerstones of the Aesthetics of *Einfühlung* and the most recent neuroscientific approaches – aided by a focal rereading of some futuristic case studies – can certainly provide new elements of knowledge capable of reopening territories of research that have remained unexplored: this is what we will attempt to demonstrate.



— ESTETICA SPERIMENTALE
— PSICOLOGIA DELL'ARCHITETTURA
— NEUROARCHITETTURA
— AUGUST ENDELL
— RICHARD NEUTRA

## Introduzione

A partire dall'ultimo decennio del XX secolo la pubblicazione di un numero crescente di studi nell'ambito delle neuroscienze è riuscita a fornire una spiegazione neurobiologica dell'apprezzamento delle opere d'arte, chiarendo quali fossero le aree del nostro cervello coinvolte e i relativi processi psicofisiologici implicati. Fa da sfondo la scoperta del *sistema di neuroni specchio* nelle aree motorie e premotorie, linguistiche e prelinguistiche del cervello umano: il nostro sistema conoscitivo di base che ci permette di comprendere non soltanto il linguaggio del corpo, ma anche il significato dell'architettura, empatizzando.

Occorre però sottolineare che, seppure questa stagione della ricerca scientifica stia raccogliendo nel terzo millennio i suoi frutti più maturi, i semi della conoscenza furono gettati nell'ultimo quarto del XIX secolo, quando nell'Europa mitteleuropea cominciò a diffondersi la *teoria dell'Einfühlung*; il termine tedesco indicava lo strumento psicofisiologico connaturato all'uomo che gli consentiva di comprendere e apprezzare l'arte e l'architettura attraverso un processo di immedesimazione nelle sue forme e come proiezione dei propri contenuti emotivi. Tale corrente dell'estetica sperimentale tardo-ottocentesca accoglieva in sé le prime istanze di psicofisica e di neurofisiologia umana e contribuì alla diffusione del nuovo concetto di *spazio organico* che si tradusse, in alcuni casi, in veri e propri laboratori sperimentali di architettura sensoriale o, potremmo dire, Proto-neuroarchitettura.



Le verifiche condotte in tempi recenti sfruttando le più aggiornate tecniche di *neuroimaging* sembrano confermare molte delle intuizioni maturate in seno alla scuola dell'*Einfühlung* sulla base di semplici osservazioni empiriche. L'analisi comparativa tra i capisaldi dell'estetica sperimentale di stampo tardo-ottocentesco e i più recenti contributi provenienti dalla neuroestetica ci permetterà di rintracciare molti elementi di continuità tra le due correnti di pensiero che, per quanto distanti nel tempo e negli approcci metodologici, condividono temi, obiettivi e risultati. Pertanto, un'attenta riconsiderazione della teoria estetica dell'*Einfühlung*, nelle sue interpretazioni critiche e nelle sue applicazioni pratiche, ci consentirà di individuare, tra le sperimentazioni del passato, alcuni episodi a dir poco avveniristici che potrebbero fornire nuovi elementi di conoscenza in grado di riaprire territori di ricerca rimasti inesplorati: è quello che tenteremo di dimostrare.

## Empatia e Neuroni specchio nei processi di simulazione incarnata dell'arte e dell'architettura

A partire dall'ultimo decennio del Novecento un numero crescente di studiosi si sono impegnati a fornire una spiegazione neurobiologica dell'ultrasecolare concetto di bellezza, contaminato da nozioni relativamente più recenti come quelle di comfort e di benessere legate visceralmente all'apprezzamento degli ambienti in cui viviamo. Il fermento culturale che ha animato il dibattito scientifico in quest'ultimo scorcio del secondo millennio ha portato per via diretta alla nascita e all'affermazione della neuroestetica come branca della neuroscienza (Zeki & Lamb 1994) e, in concomitanza, al graduale riemergere lungo l'orizzonte del panorama scientifico

internazionale dell'estetica sperimentale di stampo tardo-ottocentesco (Mallgrave & Ikonomou 1994).

Molto del rinnovato interesse per le questioni che riguardano la dialettica tra il corpo umano e lo spazio percepito si deve alla rivoluzionaria scoperta del *sistema di neuroni specchio* nel cervello dell'uomo, grazie alla quale, negli anni Novanta del Novecento, un gruppo di neuroscienziati italiani dell'Università di Parma, coordinati dal professor Giacomo Rizzolatti, sono finalmente riusciti a fornire una definizione neuroscientifica del concetto di empatia (Fadiga *et al.* 1995). È stato infatti dimostrato che la capacità empatica – che ci consente di "vestire" i panni dell'altro immedesimandoci – dipenda essenzialmente dal lavoro svolto dai *neuroni specchio* che, da un punto di vista operativo, rispondono in maniera automatica agli stimoli visivi sviluppando processi di *simulazione incarnata*: autorappresentazione mentale istantanea dei gesti compiuti dal nostro interlocutore. Per la neuroscienza, infatti, maturare l'intenzione di fare qualcosa oppure cogliere le intenzioni altrui attraverso la simulazione interna del gesto sono processi neurobiologici equivalenti, in quanto si basano sull'attivazione simultanea delle medesime aree del cervello – premotorie e prelinguistiche – che mette in uno stato di *consonanza intenzionale* chi compie un movimento e chi semplicemente lo osserva: è questa l'empatia (Gallese 2007, 2013); si tratta, in sostanza, di una forma di comunicazione che potremmo definire mimica o proto-verbale.

D'altra parte, com'è stato notato, il linguaggio verbale nasceva a partire dalle danze rituali che i nostri antenati cominciarono a praticare attorno al fuoco circa quattrocentomila anni fa (Wrangham & Cormody 2010). Gradualmente si cominciò ad attribuire un significato a quei movimenti che venivano ripetuti ricorsivamente e che esprimevano dei sentimenti precisi: ad esempio la rabbia o il dolore per la perdita di una persona cara oppure la gioia e l'euforia per un lauto raccolto o per un ricco bottino di caccia (Ruzzon 2022). Queste coreografie – configurazioni spaziali del corpo umano cui veniva associato un significato – rappresentavano a tutti gli effetti i grafemi primordiali di una comunicazione corporea, acquisendo col tempo i caratteri di un codice espressivo proto-linguistico, mentre l'apparato vocale si sarebbe sviluppato completamente soltanto trecentomila anni più tardi (Esling *et al.* 2015). Proprio come la danza anche l'architettura è un linguaggio, che attraverso le sue forme veicola informazioni e genera nuovi significati per l'umanità; a differenza però del linguaggio verbale, che assume connotazioni differenti in relazione al contesto geografico di riferimento, il linguaggio architettonico possiede un raggio d'azione potenzialmente molto più amplio e potrebbe ambire a diventare universale: una sorta di esperanto.

La ricerca portata avanti in tempi recenti dal neuroscienziato italiano Vittorio Gallese in collaborazione con lo storico dell'arte David Freedberg – culminata nel 2007 con la pubblicazione dell'articolo intitolato *Motion, emotion and empathy in aesthetic experience* – ha confermato come lo stesso processo di *simulazione incarnata* del movimento che interviene nel dialogo tra gli esseri umani, regoli anche la relazione dialettica tra l'uomo e gli oggetti artistici: quando ad esempio empatizziamo con gli stati patemici assunti dai personaggi raffigurati su tela, oppure quando simuliamo internamente la manualità dell'artista che ha realizzato l'opera o, infine, quando ci immedesimiamo nelle «forme

architettoniche, come nel caso di una colonna tortile romanica» (Gallese & Freedberg 2007, 197) che ci coinvolge psicofisiologicamente nella sinuosità dei suoi intrecci. Il lavoro dei due studiosi ha confermato come questa capacità proiettiva sia inscritta all'interno del nostro patrimonio genetico e che non interessi solamente i rapporti interpersonali: istintivamente tendiamo a cercare anche nei nostri ambienti di vita quegli oggetti che in qualche modo ci rassomigliano e che ci ricordano chi siamo; seppure inanimati, questi oggetti sembrano sempre volerci dire qualcosa, esercitando la loro influenza diretta sulla nostra psiche; in realtà, se l'architettura ci parla è perché siamo noi che glielo permettiamo, caricandola di tutti quei significati che animano la nostra esistenza e che ci ostiniamo a ricercare all'esterno del nostro corpo (de Botton 2006). Passeggiando nei pressi della *Sede degli Uffici Nazionali Olandesi* – meglio nota come *Casa Danzante* – progettata da Frank Gehry e Vlado Milunić tra il 1992 e il 1996, migliaia di visitatori che quotidianamente affollano il centro storico di Praga non potranno fare a meno di associare le forme dinamiche dell'edificio alla celebre coppia di ballerini Ginger Rogers e Fred Astaire uniti in un passo di danza: da un lato Ginger, in acciaio e vetro, che si adagia dolcemente al corpo del suo *porteur*, dall'altro Fred, in cemento armato, che sorregge la sua dama per un fianco, accompagnandola nel movimento. (CD)

Sulla scia delle recenti acquisizioni in ambito neuroscientifico, intonare gli edifici al nostro stato d'animo è diventato oramai un criterio di progettazione piuttosto diffuso che si sta cristallizzando in forme esperienziali più intime e cerebrali che coinvolgono il corpo umano in maniera multisensoriale all'interno di ambienti idiosincratici, progettati allo scopo di restituire comfort, felicità e benessere. Pensiamo per esempio alla *E-motive House*, progettata nel 2003 dallo studio olandese ONL di Kas Oosterhuis: qui la casa si presenta come un organismo vivente costituito da bande emotive che possono essere programmate, e di conseguenza cambiare forma, in funzione di alcune variabili esterne, come ad esempio i cambiamenti atmosferici (Oostherhuis 2007); oppure pensiamo ai tanti e bei progetti di rigenerazione urbana elaborati nell'ultimo ventennio da un altro artista olandese, Dan Roosegaarde: microarchitetture interattive che possono cambiare forma e colore a contatto con l'essere umano, reagendo a variazioni di luce, suono, calore, pressione e innescando processi di *simulazione incarnata* (Garramone 2014). Questi "olandesi volanti", così definiti dallo storico dell'architettura Kari Jormakka – assieme anche a Koolhaas, NOX, UN Studio, Crouwel, Hertzberger, ai quali abbiamo





(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
Mi pare un automatismo azzardato. "Fred & Ginger" era un nickname dato da Gehry all'inizio e di cui poi, come altre cose, si pentì: "danzante" segue questo spunto, ma è un tipico cliché che segue l'edificio, non lo precede. Se facessimo cioè un sondaggio tra persone che non siano state informate di dover pensare ai due ballerini, le associazioni sarebbero magari ben diverse. In altre parole, non c'è alcuna possibilità che le persone "non possano fare a meno di associare quelle forme" a due ballerini. I processi di significazione possono diventare prevalenti, ma non essere naturalizzati.

SIMONE POLICARPO
Questo esempio non convinceva neanche me, ma non sono riuscito a trovarne uno più calzante. Se Lei ha suggerimenti sarei lieto di accoglierli

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Ciò che intendo è che a mio parere è ontologicamente impossibile trovare un esempio di significato che "non si possa fare a meno di associare".

SIMONE POLICARPO
Chiaro.

aggiunto Roosegaarde – sembrano essere, nel terzo millennio, i principali interpreti dell'architettura del movimento e dell'agitazione che declina, in senso pratico, le nuove acquisizioni scientifiche sulle possibilità cognitive della mente che vanno in direzione di un tipo di progettazione artistica sempre più empatica, interattiva e multisensoriale (2002).

È all'interno di questo quadro scientifico che trova spazio la *teoria architettonica dell'empatia*, che è diventata un *leitmotiv* per molte delle più recenti pubblicazioni di estetica sperimentale che prendono le mosse dagli studi pionieristici di alcuni grandi architetti e storici del nostro secolo quali Harry Francis Mallgrave e Juhani Pallasmaa. Per Mallgrave l'architettura non è un'astrazione concettuale partorita dalla creatività dell'artista, ma piuttosto una pratica incarnata che prende forma attraverso le nostre rielaborazioni cerebrali: «siamo esseri incarnati – asserisce lo storico dell'architettura statunitense –, in cui menti, corpi, ambiente e cultura sono connessi tra loro a livelli diversi» (Mallgrave 2015, 10). D'altra parte, superata definitivamente la dicotomia cartesiana – ancora piuttosto in voga negli anni Ottanta del Novecento (Ceruti & Damiano 2013) – che separava la *res cogitans* (la mente) dalla *res extensa* (il corpo), le moderne teorie neurobiologiche protendono verso una visione olistica del concetto di mente; la mente non è nel cranio: trattasi bensì di un paradigma dinamico che coniuga cervello, corpo e ambiente assieme, eccedendo i contorni del nostro corpo (Varela 1991, 2001). Fa da eco l'interpretazione di Pallasmaa, secondo il quale «Gli edifici mediano fra il mondo e la nostra coscienza attraverso l'internalizzazione del mondo e l'esternalizzazione delle mente [pertanto] il significato artistico esiste solo a livello poetico nel nostro incontro diretto con l'opera, ed è esistenziale piuttosto che ideale, emozionale piuttosto che intellettuale» (Pallasmaa 2021, 59-60). In una precedente pubblicazione, l'architetto finlandese auspicava alla costituzione di un regime iconico «incarnato» che consentisse all'individuo di abitare e costruire i propri spazi vitali in maniera creativa, grazie a un tipo di progettazione in grado di coinvolgere la dimensione affettiva, preconscia, inconscia, archetipica, cinestetica e fantastica dell'uomo (Pallasmaa 2014).

L'insieme di questi studi mira a una decodificazione attualizzata dei diversi significati che il linguaggio architettonico può assumere per l'umanità e, al contempo, cerca di allungare lo sguardo, oltre il nostro tempo, verso le nuove frontiere dell'*environmental design*, della Neuroarchitettura e del design terapeutico, che preannunciano un'imminente rivoluzione culturale di grossa portata, capace di modificare abitudini, comportamenti e stili di vita e di migliorare esponenzialmente la nostra relazione con gli oggetti del mondo. Oggi, infatti, si sa con certezza che le emozioni sono reazioni psicosomatiche immediate che il nostro corpo manifesta a seguito di eventi perturbanti (Fisher 2003) e che la *simulazione incarnata* di tali

eventi – tra cui l'arte e l'architettura – rappresenta il meccanismo di base che ci mette in connessione con l'esterno e ci permette di comprenderne e apprezzarne la bellezza, immedesimandoci.

Occorre però sottolineare che, sebbene questa stagione del pensiero stia raccogliendo soltanto in tempi recenti i suoi frutti più maturi, i semi della conoscenza furono gettati nell'ultimo quarto del XIX secolo, quando le emergenti discipline ottocentesche della psicofisica e della neurofisiologia cominciarono a contaminare dapprima la filosofia estetica e successivamente le teorie del progetto, influenzando notevolmente l'evoluzione del linguaggio architettonico contemporaneo. Era il 1873 quando lo storico dell'arte Robert Vischer, all'interno del saggio *Sul sentimento ottico della forma*, utilizzava per la prima volta il termine tedesco *Einfühlung* – poi tradotto nel 1909 con l'inglese *empathy* (Titchener) – spalancando così le porte a quella fortunata e complessa scuola di ambito mitteleuropeo che avrebbe radunato studiosi del calibro di Conrad Fiedler, Heinrich Wölfflin, Adolf Göller, Theodor Lipps, Camillo Sitte, Adolf von Hildebrand, August Schmarsow, Wilhelm Worringer (Maglio & Mangone 2017). Alcune delle fortunate intuizioni che costellano l'universo teorico dell'*Einfühlung* gettarono le basi per la costituzione di nuove discipline – la fenomenologia, la psicologia ambientale e l'*environmental design*, sino alla neuroestetica e alla Neuroarchitettura – e definirono le traiettorie per l'apertura di nuovi filoni di ricerca che, ad oggi, stanno catalizzando l'interesse della comunità scientifica internazionale.

Pertanto, ripartire dalla rilettura di questi testi e degli episodi progettuali ad essi correlati, ci permetterà di rintracciare, in un passato di illustri precedenti, non soltanto quei principi teorici che hanno orientato l'affermarsi del linguaggio architettonico contemporaneo, ma anche quelle soluzioni progettuali avveniristiche che, ad oggi, non hanno ancora perso la loro attualità e potrebbero fornire delle risposte tuttora valide agli odierni problemi dell'abitare.



## Forma, tempo e spazio: l'influenza della teoria dell'Einfühlung sul linguaggio architettonico contemporaneo

In primo luogo, bisogna sottolineare che l'usitato termine empatia non nasce nell'ambito della psicologia come qualche neofita potrebbe pensare, ma appare per la prima volta in un saggio di estetica intitolato *Über das optische Formgefühl* (*Sul sentimento ottico della forma*) pubblicato nel 1873 dallo storico dell'arte tedesco Robert Vischer. Con il termine *Einfühlung* Vischer definiva quello strumento fisiologico connaturato all'uomo che gli consentiva di comprendere e apprezzare il bello artistico attraverso un processo di immedesimazione nelle forme dell'oggetto. Sul finire dell'Ottocento, grazie al contributo di Theodor Lipps, la descrizione dell'oggetto della visione passava gradualmente da un ambito strettamente logico a uno prettamente psicologico: egli introdusse il concetto di *appercezione* che definiva come il «godimento di un'autoesplicazione [*Selbstbetätigung*] oggettivata, godimento di sé obiettivato [*obiektivirter Selbstgenuss*]» (Lipps 1903, 102). A questo punto la definizione del concetto di empatia era completa: non soltanto un'immedesimazione nelle forme dell'oggetto attraverso la proiezione delle proprie strutture fisiche, ma anche un *transfert* di contenuti emotivi che venivano a configurarsi come

il nuovo contenuto dell'opera d'arte; pertanto, l'apprezzamento estetico dipendeva essenzialmente dal riconoscimento di sé stessi nell'oggetto della visione e l'essere umano psicofisico diventava, al tempo medesimo, soggetto e oggetto della contemplazione artistica. Niente di diverso, se ci pensiamo, rispetto all'odierna definizione di empatia così com'è stata formulata da Freedberg e Gallese in riferimento alle opere d'arte: forme cinetiche esteriori in grado di rivelare le emozioni interiori di un individuo o di una comunità. Fu poi di Wilhelm Worringer, nel 1907, l'intuizione di contrapporre al termine empatia il suo opposto, l'astrazione, che possiamo definire come «una contro-empatia, un'empatia negativa, potremmo anche dire un'empatia astratta, una immedesimazione in forme inorganiche» (Nigro Covre 1975, XIV).

Per Renato De Fusco (1964) *astrazione* ed *empatia* sono le esigenze psicologiche fondamentali dell'uomo che spiegherebbero le ambizioni formali dell'architettura contemporanea. Nello specifico, l'empatia si accompagna alla compiacenza per la massa e alla predilezione per gli elementi fitomorfi tipici dell'Art Nouveau francese e belga, mentre l'astrazione prende le mosse dal rifiuto per la realtà organica e coltiva il desiderio di trovare rifugio in scenari alieni dominati da quella stessa linea rigorosa che, a partire dalla Secessione viennese, informerà tutto il Movimento Moderno (De Fusco 1964).

Com'è noto l'Art Nouveau fu il primo stile della modernità, in quanto gli si riconosce il merito di aver superato definitivamente l'eclettismo storicistico basato sulla corretta declinazione delle regole accademiche classiche: gli ordini architettonici, per esempio, ma anche concetti annosi come quelli di carattere, decoro e *convenance* divennero oramai obsoleti. Finalmente si decise di far entrare il tempo nello spazio e le forme dell'architettura divennero a un tratto dinamiche, mutevoli, imprevedibili, sorprendenti. D'altronde lo scriveva Henry Van de Velde nella sua celebre *Kunstgewerbliche Laienpredigten* del 1902 che «la linea è una forza», ma ancora prima dell'architetto belga era stato Theodor Lipps nella sua *Raumästhetik und geometrisch-optische Täuschungen* del 1897 a inaugurare una teoria delle arti e dello spazio che partiva proprio dall'analisi meccanica del suo elemento fondativo: la linea (Maglio & Mangone 2017). Per il filosofo dell'*Einfühlung* le declinazioni formali delle linee di un edificio non erano soltanto metafora di una scrittura portatrice di significati, ma, più concretamente, i vettori forza che scuotono l'apparato sensorio e invitano lo spettatore a un coinvolgimento motorio (Lipps 1897). Bisogna altresì sottolineare che, soltanto due anni prima di Lipps, il noto matematico Henri Poincaré, all'interno del suo articolo *Analysis situs*, spiegava che lo spazio non era misurabile in unità quantitative, ma, piuttosto, in potenzialità di azione.

La nuova concezione di *spazio organico* – inteso come organismo dinamico e interattivo animato da forze invisibili – influenzò notevolmente il linguaggio architettonico contemporaneo che, a cavallo tra Ottocento e Novecento, si tradusse, in molti casi, in forme esperienziali sensuali e avvolgenti, dotate di caratteri e accenti differenti in funzione delle variabili culturali espresse dalle singole identità nazionali (Maglio & Mangone 2017). Se un cambiamento così profondo c'è stato il merito non è soltanto delle conquiste tecnologiche – che sicuramente hanno costituito un trampolino di lancio per liberarsi dai rigidi schematismi compositivi del passato ed esplorare

il virtuosismo delle forme –, ma è anche e soprattutto grazie alla diffusione delle nuove teorie della percezione che avevano cominciato a contaminare l'estetica tradizionale con la nuova idea di bellezza soggettiva, legata alla natura squisitamente corporale dell'esperienza artistica (Porfyriou 2010). A partire dal Primo dopoguerra, fatta eccezione per pochi e isolati cenni di critica (Croce 1933, 1935; De Fusco 1964; Mangone & Maglio 2017), la discussione estetica relativa al ruolo dell'empatia in arte e architettura cederà il posto a questioni di carattere prettamente economico e funzionale ritenute più urgenti, mentre il termine *Einfühlung* verrà gradualmente assorbito da altri settori disciplinari, quali la psicologia di Sigmund Freud (Rotella 2018) e la fenomenologia di Edmund Husserl e Edith Stein (1916). Una seria riconsiderazione critica del corpus teorico che i filosofi e storici dell'*Einfühlung* ci hanno lasciato in eredità è avvenuta soltanto a partire dagli anni Novanta del XX secolo, in concomitanza con l'acquisizione di nuovi dati in ambito neuroscientifico che hanno confermato il ruolo fondamentale svolto dal *sistema di neuroni specchio*, e di conseguenza dall'empatia, nei processi di *simulazione incarnata* dell'arte e dell'architettura. I neuroscienziati di tutto il mondo hanno infatti riconosciuto l'importante debito culturale maturato nei confronti dei loro antesignani dell'*Einfühlung* che, in tempi non sospetti, avevano anticipato molte delle questioni che costituiscono gli attuali interessi di ricerca della neuroestetica (Gallese & Freedberg 2007) e dell'estetica sperimentale (Mallgrave & Ikonomou 1994).

Pensiamo ad esempio a una delle domande fondamentali che attanaglia molti architetti moderni: curvilineo o rettangolare? Qual è la forma della felicità? Nel già citato saggio del 1873, Robert Vischer postulava il *principio della somiglianza*, asserendo che:



> Proviamo piacere per tutte le forme regolari in quanto i nostri organi e le loro stesse forme funzionali sono regolari. Le forme irregolari ci infastidiscono, per usare un'espressione particolarmente indovinata di Wundt come "un'aspettativa perturbata". L' occhio sente con dolore la mancanza di leggi, di quelle leggi secondo le quali esso stesso è strutturato e si muove. (Pinotti 2003, 53-54)

Lo storico dell'arte tedesco suggeriva inoltre che tutto ciò che è rotondo – un piatto, un cerchio, una palla – ha per contro un effetto immediatamente e decisamente benefico, in quanto è conforme alla rotondità dei nostri occhi (Pinotti 2003). A distanza di centocinquant'anni i neuroscienziati di tutto il mondo stanno portando attenzione sul modo in cui il cervello umano codifica le curve e gli angoli retti negli scenari architettonici e, attraverso l'analisi delle risposte cerebrali, alcuni esperimenti stanno dimostrando come la preferenza per le linee curve sia radicata nel nostro patrimonio genetico (Ruzzon 2022).

Lungi dal ridurre la questione al binomio curvilineo-rettangolare, Vischer e i suoi seguaci consideravano gratificanti per l'occhio umano altre proprietà dello spazio, come ad esempio il vuoto, inteso come spazio pieno di vita, e la simmetria, intesa come corrispondenza formale armonica tra il nostro corpo e la realtà che lo contiene (Maglio & Mangone 2017). Uno studio condotto nel 2010 da Elizabeth Spelke ha dimostrato come la preferenza per la simmetria sia statisticamente maggiore negli adulti e nettamente inferiori nei bambini al di sotto dei quattro anni; tale ricerca ci suggerisce come vi sia una stretta interdipendenza tra il corpo umano – che

assume nel tempo la posizione eretta – e la realtà che lo ospita, e che il *principio della somiglianza* formulato da Vischer oltre un secolo e mezzo fa possa essere ritenuto ad oggi ancora valido.

Affermare però che curvilineo sia meglio di rettangolare è evidentemente una menzogna che tradirebbe le ragioni storico-culturali che hanno portato all'affermazione del Movimento Moderno. (CD) Per risolvere il dilemma possiamo richiamare in causa la lezione di Renato De Fusco (1964), il quale ci suggerisce come non sempre lo slancio panteistico a ricongiungersi con la realtà organica abbia funto da volano per l'affermazione di un nuovo stile, ma che, in molti casi, le linee rigorose e gli spazi geometrici siano riusciti meglio a interpretare lo *spirito del tempo* [*Zeitgeist*]. Anche il concetto di *Ermüdung*, teorizzato da Adolf Göller nel suo *Zur Aesthetik der Architektur* del 1887, può aiutarci a giustificare i continui, talvolta repentini, cambi di registro che hanno caratterizzato l'architettura contemporanea. L'*Ermüdung* esprimeva la noia per quelle proposte stilistiche che, fatto il loro corso, avevano smesso di sorprendere e stimolare il nostro apparato sensorio; per ovviare a questo problema Göller suggeriva all'architetto nuovi modi per comporre la facciata: se Antoni Gaudì e Victor Horta, rispettivamente in Spagna e in Belgio, affronteranno il nuovo tema in una maniera plastica marcata, in Austria Joseph Maria Olbrich e Otto Wagner punteranno invece sull'innovativa figura bidimensionale (Maglio & Mangone 2017). D'altra parte, le aspettative riposte dalla platea di fruitori nei confronti dell'architettura sembrerebbero essere il nodo centrale della questione. È stato recentemente dimostrato infatti che la scoperta di somiglianze, nonché la risoluzione di enigmi, all'interno di una scena visiva, produca un'attivazione del sistema limbico che, attraverso i

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
Ad essere sincero, l'affermazione del Movimento Moderno mi pare l'ultimo dei problemi. Il primo dei quali, invece, mi pare sia che i richiamati esperimenti non possono confrontare esperienze analoghe e compiute. Che un neonato preferisca le forme curve a quelle dritte non implica affatto che ci sia una adesione verso forme "architettoniche" - che sono un tipo di curve specifico, in cui si abita, con cui si interagisce così via e - curve o dritte: ma solo che preferisce, tra le due forme specifiche tra cui poteva scegliere, quella curva.
Ma ancor di più, l'idea che si possano naturalizzare le preferenze, astraendole da fattori culturali, mi sembra fortunatamente superata da diverso tempo.

SIMONE POLICARPO
Assolutamente d'accordo! Questo è il motivo per il quale mi rifaccio moltissimo alla teoria critica di Heinrich Wölfflin, secondo il quale, come riporto a conclusione del paragrafo, le forme di uno stile crescono assieme al "sentimento popolare", a dimostrazione del fatto che le preferenze di gusto, com'è scontato che sia, non dipendono esclusivamente da fattori neurobiologici, ma sono certamente influenzati da quelli culturali.

neurotrasmettitori, invia un segnale alle aree della ricompensa, generando felicità e benessere (Ramachandran 1999). Ciò equivale a dire che non esiste una formula specifica per ottenere la bellezza, ma che la giusta miscela dipende sostanzialmente dalle aspettative emotive prodotte da precedenti esperienze incarnate (Ruzzon 2022). In un articolo del 2020, intitolato *La rappresentazione delle emozioni*, con un'espressione tanto sintetica quanto efficace, Stefano Calabrese asserisce che: «nel nostro sistema di attese, la conferma mette in circolo dopamina e la dopamina ci avvolge con il tepore neurochimico: ecco la bellezza» (97).

Un fattore critico dell'apprensione spaziale è certamente la distorsione topologica che si verifica quando osserviamo gli oggetti in spazi lontani ed extra-personali (Ruzzon 2022): che uno stesso oggetto artistico possa apparire diversamente in base alla vicinanza e alla lontananza dell'osservatore lo affermava già Adolf von Hildebrand nel suo *Das Problem der Form in* der *bildenden Kunst* del 1893. Nel 2017, applicando la lezione di Hildebrand all'architettura Art Nouveau, Fabio Mangone e Andrea Maglio hanno coniato la definizione di *possibilità percettive multiple* che adotta il binomio vicinanza-lontananza come paradigma esperienziale che offre molteplici possibilità di contemplazione e di comprensione di uno stesso edificio.

Anche la sinestesia multisensoriale, oggetto di recenti indagini in ambito neuroscientifico, aveva già trovato spazio tra le pagine degli scritti di filosofia estetica di fine Ottocento, cosicché August Endell, facendo un'analogia tra la contemplazione dell'architettura e l'ascolto musicale, asseriva che le linee architettoniche potevano suscitare effetti musicali sul nostro percetto (Frisch 2005), mentre per Robert Vischer «stimoli uditivi possono condurre a stimoli visivi, stimoli formali possono indurre stimoli motori o rappresentazione di stimoli motori, e così via» (Pinotti 2003, 62).



I problemi sinora affrontati ci conducono per via diretta a una delle questioni più annose della storia dell'architettura: lo stile. In una pubblicazione del 2022 Davide Ruzzon definisce gli stili come «una prigione costruita con sbarre dorate» (228), in aperta polemica con la tendenza diffusa tra molti architetti moderni a reiterare il proprio codice linguistico senza effettuare uno sforzo di immedesimazione che permetta di comprendere nel profondo l'identità culturale del contesto geografico di riferimento, provando magari a dialogare con gli idiomi locali. D'altronde, nella sua ben nota *Psicologia dell'architettura* [*Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur*] del 1886, Heinrich Wölfflin scriveva:

> che le forme proprie di uno stile non vengano prodotte da una persona singola, a suo piacimento, ma crescano dal sentimento popolare, e che il singolo possa essere creativo solo se è immerso in questo fattore complessivo in modo da rappresentare questo carattere popolare e della sua epoca completamente, sono cose troppo note per doverne parlare ancora. (Scarpa 1985, 86).

Si può ben intuire allora il perché Wölfflin abbia preferito fondare una *storia dell'arte senza nomi*, all'interno della quale ogni nuovo stile si configura come un «nuovo contenuto del mondo» (1941, 190): per lo storico dell'arte svizzero gli stili si ripetono in maniera ricorsiva – e qui riecheggia la celebre lezione di Giambattista Vico sui «corsi e ricorsi storici» – dove e quando trovano un contesto favorevole per riemergere, un terreno fertile per seminare le proprie istanze.

## August Endell e Richard Neutra: due casi ante litteram di Neuroarchitettura

Per quanto Renato De Fusco abbia avuto l'intuizione di spiegare le declinazioni linguistiche dell'architettura contemporanea ricorrendo al paradigma astrazione-empatia – esigenze psichiche e categorie estetiche fondamentali –, vige purtroppo una sostanziale scarsità di fonti che attestino la corrispondenza diretta tra le teorie estetiche tardo-ottocentesche e la prassi progettuale. Un caso eccezionale è certamente quello di August Endell, considerato dalla storiografia come uno dei massimi esponenti dello Jugendstil in Germania. Potrebbe dunque sorprendere il fatto che egli in realtà non si sia formato come architetto, ma studiò filosofia sistematica presso la Ludwig-Maximilians Universität di Monaco dal 1892 al 1896, sotto la guida, tra gli altri, del professor Theodor Lipps, in quegli anni il più assertivo promotore della *teoria dell'Einfühlung* (Mims 2013). Nel 1896 Endell pubblicava per la prima volta la sua *teoria degli effetti emotivi* [*Gefühlslehre*] prodotti dall'architettura, o *teoria del sentimento* [*Gefühlstheorie*], in un saggio intitolato *Um die Schönheit*, una rassegna della mostra di arte contemporanea tenutasi quello stesso anno al *Glaspalast* di Monaco (Çelik 2010). Come declinazione pragmatica *della teoria dell'Einfühlung* del suo maestro Lipps, la proposta dell'architetto e filosofo tedesco era saldamente ancorata all'architettura: egli mirava a dimostrare come attraverso la composizione formale si potesse far provare all'osservatore una vasta gamma di sentimenti come «semplice, intimo, caldo», «serio, profondo, sublime» o «orgoglioso, severo, violento e feroce» (Endell 1898, 120). Soltanto un anno dopo Endell avrebbe dato alla luce l'*Atelier Elvira*: il suo progetto d'esordio, nonché testamento dell'improvvisa conversione da filosofo ad architetto; si trattava di un'eccentrica creazione sita a *Von-der-Tann-Straße 15*, nel centro storico di Monaco, che ospitava uno studio di fotografia con alloggi annessi per le due proprietarie Anita Augspurg e Sophia Goudstikker. Le critiche non tardarono ad arrivare e, in alcuni casi, furono feroci: l'edificio venne apostrofato come «ambasciata cinese» e «polpo rococò» (Scheffler 1946, 24). A destare scalpore nell'opinione pubblica fu in particolar modo il grosso ornamento asimmetrico in facciata, costituito da piani interconnessi e colori sgargianti (verde e turchese), che trasgrediva in maniera audace le regole accademiche classiche basate sui concetti di ordine e di simmetria cui l'occhio umano era da tempo immemore abituato [FIG. 1]. In un saggio del 1898 Endell difendeva strenuamente le sue posizioni teoriche, spiegando che si trattava di strutture formali che: «niente erano e niente significavano e che esercitavano un effetto diretto sull'osservatore senza alcuna mediazione intellettuale, proprio come le note musicali» (Çelik 2010, 56). Risulta evidente da queste dichiarazioni l'intenzione del filosofo-architetto di utilizzare la facciata del *fotoatelier* come banco di prova per sperimentare la sua *teoria degli effetti emotivi* prodotti dall'architettura. A sostegno del suo ambizioso progetto epistemologico, nel 1898, Endell pubblicava sulla rivista *Dekorative Kunst* una curiosa illustrazione composta da una serie di finestre dotate di forme e partizioni differenti [FIG. 2], al fine di dimostrare come, per ognuna di esse, la risposta emotiva del corpo umano cambiasse in funzione di due fattori: la *tensione* e il *tempo della percezione*, che dipendevano sostanzialmente dalle infinite variazioni possibili nella composizione

formale delle facciate (Endell 1898). Da quel momento in poi la ricerca progettuale del tedesco sarà sempre tesa tra la scrittura di una teoria della forma e la sua applicazione fattuale, tra il testo di teoria dell'architettura e l'architettura come testo capace di suscitare una reazione immediata sulla psicofisiologia di chi osserva (Mims 2013). La *teoria del sentimento* si cristallizzerà infatti in altri progetti emblematici: uno fra tutti il *Buntes Theater (Überbrettl)* del 1901 [FIGG. 3, 4, 5, 6]. Per il teatro del varietà, costruito a Berlino sulla *Köpenicker Straße*, Endell progetterà ogni singolo dettaglio – dalle decorazioni ai fregi sulle porte, dai complementi d'arredo ai motivi sui tappeti – al fine di ricreare uno spazio totale capace di elettrizzare i sensi dello spettatore grazie ai motivi puntinistici di superficie che riecheggiavano l'opera dei pittori belgi (Çelik 2010). Un critico definì le forme del teatro «pugnalanti e pungenti», mentre Karl Scheffler descrisse la risposta dell'osservatore agli effetti provocati dalle forme progettate da Endell come «acrobazie mentali» che davano «contrazione e prurito» ai nervi (1902, 705).

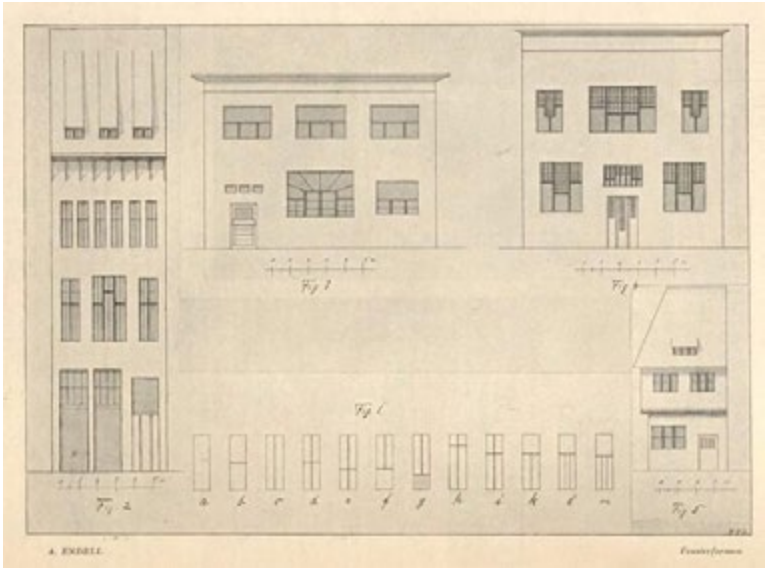
È molto probabile che il lavoro dell'architetto e filosofo tedesco abbia subito l'influenza delle nuove epistemologie ottocentesche che trovarono larga diffusione negli studi di psicofisica condotti da Hermann von Helmholtz e Gustav Fechner (Çelik 2010); nella seconda metà del XIX secolo, la psicofisica accertava che l'individuo non era un ricevitore passivo di stimoli, bensì un organismo dinamico che attivamente costruisce la realtà attorno a sé (Porfyriou 2010). Sull'onda delle nuove acquisizioni scientifiche nasceva l'estetica sperimentale che sanciva l'allontanamento definitivo dalla metafisica del bello e del sublime di stampo hegeliano che Fechner, nel suo *Vorschule der Ästhetik* del 1876, aveva definito «estetica dall'alto» [*Ästhetik von oben*], per spostarsi in direzione di un'«estetica dal basso» [*Ästhetik von unten*] che si fondava sui mattoni dell'esperienza vissuta [*Erlebnis*] (Fechner 2013). È probabile, inoltre, che il lavoro di Endell possa aver subito anche il fascino degli studi del neurologo francese Duchenne, che nel 1862 pubblicò *Mécanisme de la physionomie humaine*, il primo manuale di neurofisiologia sull'emozione della storia. Duchenne concentrava la sua attenzione sui cambiamenti dell'espressione del viso e dei movimenti del corpo di pazienti sottoposti a stimoli elettrici; parimenti, l'architettura del patognomico di Endell si basava sull'idea che le forme suscitassero una reazione muscolare immediata simile a quella provocata da una scossa elettrica (Çelik 2010).

Sulla scia delle più recenti scoperte in ambito neuroscientifico, il lavoro di Endell, sottovalutato per buona parte del Novecento, suscita oggi un rinnovato interesse che gli sta restituendo la meritata considerazione critica: la prima monografia, in lingua tedesca, verrà finalmente pubblicata da Nicola Bröcker, Gisela Moeller e Christiane Salge nel 2012, con il titolo *August Endell 1871-1925. Architekt und Formkünstler*. A valle di un'attenta rilettura possiamo quindi azzardare a dire che le avanguardistiche creazioni del filosofo-architetto, seppure in seno allo Jugendstil, accolgono in sé un eccezionale coacervo di influenze filosofiche e neurofisiologiche che le rendono a tutti gli effetti un caso *ante litteram* di Neuroarchitettura: molto probabilmente il primo della storia!

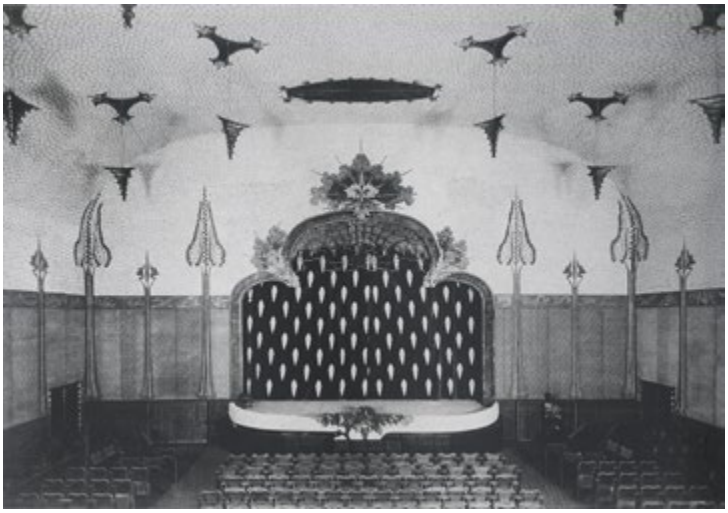
Com'è noto l'Art Nouveau fu un movimento culturale tanto esplosivo quanto breve: le ultime propaggini si arrestarono alla vigilia del primo conflitto mondiale e le linee concavo-convesse, a colpo di frusta, così come




[FIG. 1] August Endell, *Atelier Elvira*, Monaco (1897). Restauro colorimetrico di Christoph Sauter [Archivio privato Karrasch/Sauter].



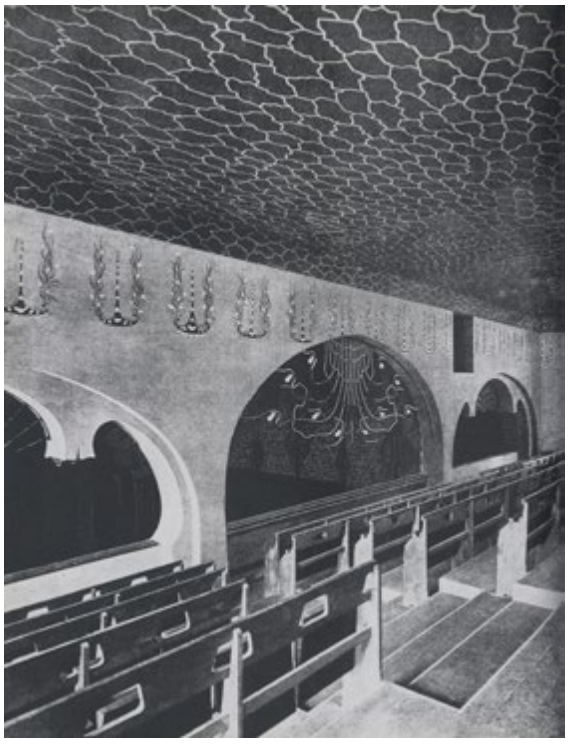
[FIG. 2] August Endell, *Fensterformen*, Monaco (1898) [Endell, A. (1898). Formenschönheit und dekorative Kunst. *Dekorative Kunst*, 2, 120].



**[FIG. 3]** August Endell, *Buntes Theater (Überbrettl)*, Berlino (1901). Vista della parete del palcoscenico con il sipario chiuso [Bröcker, N. *et al.* (2012). *August Endell 1871-1925. Architekt und Formkünstler*. Petersberg: Imhof Verlag, 186].



**[FIG. 4]** August Endell, *Buntes Theater (Überbrettl)*, Berlino (1901). Vista sulla scala del foyer del primo livello [Bröcker, N. *et al.* (2012). *August Endell 1871-1925. Architekt und Formkünstler*. Petersberg: Imhof Verlag, 70].



**[FIG. 5]** August Endell, *Buntes Theater (Überbrettl)*, Berlino (1901). Dettaglio dell'auditorium del secondo livello [Bröcker, N. *et al.* (2012). *August Endell 1871-1925. Architekt und Formkünstler*. Petersberg: Imhof Verlag, 188].



**[FIG. 6]** August Endell, *Buntes Theater (Überbrettl)*, Berlino (1901). Buffet nel ristorante del teatro [Bröcker, N. *et al.* (2012). *August Endell 1871-1925. Architekt und Formkünstler*. Petersberg: Imhof Verlag, 193].

le forme vegetali e arabescate, cedettero presto il posto ai volumi geometrici scanditi da angoli retti e dominati da quella stessa linea rigorosa che caratterizzerà l'architettura funzionalista fino al Secondo dopoguerra e che, certamente, avrebbe celebrato il trionfo dell'astrazione. Per Carlo Olmo: «L'architettura funzionalista non suscitava emozioni, era fredda, asettica, certamente non empatica» (2023, 27).

A partire dal Secondo dopoguerra però – quando il Movimento Moderno si era definitivamente metamorfizzato in International Style – qualcosa cominciò a cambiare e una certa attenzione per la componente psichica dell'uomo gradualmente cominciò a informare il progetto dello spazio. In quegli stessi anni, negli Stati Uniti, nasceva la psicologia dell'architettura come branca della psicologia ambientale, la cui comparsa viene convenzionalmente fatta coincidere con la prima collaborazione documentata tra l'architetto Ewing Miller e lo psicologo Lawrence Wheeler avvenuta nel 1958 (De Marco 2016). Seguendo invece la narrazione degli storici dell'architettura bisognerebbe tornare indietro di qualche anno e riconsiderare il contributo, affatto marginale, di alcuni maestri dell'International Style molto vicini a Freud: primo fra tutti Richard Neutra. Occorre infatti ricordare che Neutra, californiano d'adozione, ma viennese di nascita, fu amico intimo di Ernst Freud, figlio di Sigmund, assieme al quale frequentò i corsi di Architettura presso l'Università tecnica di Vienna, dove fu allievo di Adolf Loos (Hines 1999); da aspirante architetto, il giovane Richard, aveva letto le opere maggiori del fondatore della moderna psicoanalisi e, durante gli anni universitari, ebbe il privilegio di discuterne a più riprese con l'autore in persona, essendo diventato nel frattempo un frequentatore assiduo della casa dei Freud (Hines 1999).

Nel 1940 Neutra scriveva *Empathy-infeeling*, un manoscritto – rimasto inedito fino al 2004 (Lavin) – che attestava la lucida consapevolezza del teorico e architetto austriaco rispetto a quei temi cari al suo mentore Sigmund Freud, a sua volta appassionato seguace del filosofo dell'*Einfühlung* Theodor Lipps (Rotella 2018):

> L'empatia è in genere un potenziale costitutivo sviluppato concretamente dall' esercizio e da condizionamenti accidentali o intenzionali. Empatia è infatti una funzione fisiologica di vasta portata (con molte implicazioni neuro-cerebrali) come se l'uno fosse l'altro individuo. Tuttavia, è solo per frazioni di tempo. In altre frazioni di tempo c'era un'oscillazione tra l'essere l'altro stimolato dall'uno e di nuovo l'uno stimolato dall'altro. (Lavin 2004, 33-34)

Nel 1954 l'architetto di origine austriaca pubblicava la sua opera più nota, *Survival through design*, all'interno della quale la parola inglese *empathy* compare un numero considerevole di volte. *Progettare per sopravvivere* – ma sarebbe più corretto *Sopravvivere attraverso il design* – è un manuale d'istruzioni che spiega ai colleghi progettisti in che modo realizzare degli ambienti terapeutici capaci di stimolare positivamente il corpo, la mente e lo spirito. Anche sotto l'aspetto della relazione architetto-committente, in Neutra si riscontra un elemento di sensibilità e una capacità d'ascolto non comune che lo pone agli antipodi dall'approccio dogmatico di Le Corbusier (Leuschel 2010); come un vero analista, l'architetto viennese somministrava ai suoi clienti lunghi questionari conoscitivi che gli consentivano di indagare gli aspetti più intimi e riservati delle loro vite

private – paure e desideri, anche quelli inconsci – per poi procedere col suggerire, in seconda battuta, la terapia più corretta da seguire attraverso il design: le lunghe e durature corrispondenze che intrattenne con molti dei suoi clienti prima e dopo la consegna delle chiavi ne sono una testimonianza (Lavin 2004).

Per gli storici dell'architettura, quindi, Neutra fu il primo a inserire la psicologia tra gli strumenti del progetto, inaugurando così la lunga stagione del design terapeutico e dell'*environmental design*. Il progetto dello spazio divenne design ambientale allorquando si comprese che esso non era puro e austero come lo volevo i promotori del Movimento Moderno, bensì dinamico e interattivo, ricettacolo delle energie psicofisiche che l'uomo proietta sulla scena visiva e che l'architettura restituisce in termini di esperienza (Lavin 2004). In questo senso l'opera di Neutra è paradigmatica e può essere letta come il primo manifesto internazionale di Neuroarchitettura e, al contempo, come il primo caso di psicologia applicata all'architettura, o potremmo dire Psicoarchitettura; anche se, bisogna dirlo, lo stesso architetto battezzò il movimento da lui fondato con il nome di Biorealismo (Neutra 1956).

Non c'è dubbio che la ricerca progettuale condotta da Richard Neutra troverà la sua più compiuta realizzazione nelle circa duecentocinquanta ville di lusso realizzate, per la stragrande maggioranza, nel deserto californiano; rifugi fisici quanto psicologici, le case progettate da Neutra offrivano ai loro proprietari un rimedio utile per curare l'ansia e la depressione, uno strumento d'eccezione per ristabilire il proprio equilibrio psicofisico al termine di una lunga e stressante giornata di lavoro: celebre per sfarzo ed eleganza la *Kauffman desert house* costruita a Palm Springs nel 1946 [FIG. 7], meno nota, ma altrettanto suggestiva per la sua drammaticità, la *Moore house*, costruita a Ojai nel 1952 [FIG. 8, 9]. Poco studiata è invece *Casa Bucerius* – uno dei dieci progetti europei di Neutra – realizzata nel 1966 a Brione sopra Minusio, in Svizzera [FIG. 10]. Nella sua monografia del 1982 – pubblicata in Italia soltanto diciassette anni più tardi – Thomas Hines dedica all'edificio non più di poche righe, mentre Sylvia Lavin, autrice del più completo ritratto monografico del Neutra "psicologo", neppure la cita (2004): fatto strano se si pensa che stiamo parlando di una delle più colossali ville dell'architettura moderna – paragonabile a *Ville Savoye* o alla stessa *Kauffman desert house* per dimensioni e sfarzo – che lo stesso architetto considerava il suo canto del cigno (Leuschel 2010). Lirica e potente, la sontuosa villa costruita per il danaroso fondatore del settimanale *Die Zeit* Gerd Bucerius si affaccia sul suggestivo panorama dominato dal Lago Maggiore e incorniciato dalle Alpi svizzere, di cui diventa frammento; non solo il paesaggio, ma anche il cospicuo budget accordato da Gerd Bucerius, diedero all'architetto viennese la possibilità di condensare all'interno della sua opera-testamento tutte le innovazioni sperimentate in circa cinquant'anni di attività professionale.

È in particolare a partire dal Secondo dopoguerra che il linguaggio architettonico di Neutra subirà una metamorfosi significativa, arricchendosi di nuovi accorgimenti tecnici e soluzioni stilistiche tesi a rafforzare, empaticamente, la relazione tra l'uomo e l'ambiente di contenimento (Lavin 2004). Pensiamo ad esempio alle alte pareti vetrate capaci di smorzare la tensione tra interno ed esterno grazie al fine gioco di trasparenze, ulteriormente aumentato dalla smaterializzazione del pavimento che,



[FIG. 7] Richard Neutra, *Kaufmann Desert House,* Palm Springs, California (1946) [Julius Shulman photography archive, 1935-2009, Los Angeles].



[FIG. 8] Richard Neutra, *Moore house,* Ojai, California (1952) [Julius Shulman photography archive, 1935-2009, Los Angeles].





[FIG. 9] Richard Neutra, *Moore house,* Ojai, California (1952) [Julius Shulman photography archive, 1935-2009, Los Angeles].

[FIG. 10] Richard Neutra, *Casa Bucerius,* Brione sopra Minusio, Svizzera (1965) [Charles E. Youg Research Library, Los Angeles].



nella maggior parte dei casi, travalica magmaticamente i limiti dell'involucro edilizio. Pensiamo, di conseguenza, alla rinuncia definitiva delle ostative ringhiere e dei parapetti che avrebbero limitato la vista della pienezza di un panorama all'orizzonte: al loro posto, specchi d'acqua riflettenti disposti lungo il perimetro dell'abitazione che incorniciano pezzi di paesaggio, moltiplicando le possibilità percettive. Pensiamo ancora all'adozione delle caratteristiche *spider legs*: le travi aggettanti che si piegano ad angolo retto per ricongiungersi con il suolo, come a voler rafforzare l'idea di uno spazio domestico che da un lato offre un rifugio definito e temporaneo per i suoi abitanti, dall'altro eccede i contorni dell'edificio per ricongiungersi con il tutto e con l'eterno. Pensiamo infine ad alcuni dettagli tecnici di raffinata accuratezza che hanno contribuito a orientare l'interpretazione dell'opera di Neutra in chiave ambientale: i radiatori nascosti nei mobili oppure gli interruttori collocati contro ogni convenzione a 65 cm da terra in modo da poter essere raggiunti dal braccio senza il benché minimo sforzo, ma soprattutto il pavimento radiante che viene prolungato oltre il perimetro della villa per restituire, anche da un punto di vista termico, una sensazione di continuità con l'esterno (Lavin 2004; Leuschel 2010).

In conclusione, potremmo azzardare a dire che, superate le istanze astrattive del Movimento Moderno, è proprio con Neutra che riemerge la teoria dell'empatia in architettura, perché se è vero che il disegno geometrico delle superfici è declinazione elegante di quella *forma che segue la funzione* promossa dai suoi colleghi dell' International Style, al contempo l'articolazione degli spazi e i nuovi accorgimenti tecnici si caricano delle suggestioni provenienti dalla psicoanalisi e, grazie agli artifici dell'empatia, realizzano quello che Wölfflin avrebbe chiamato un «nuovo contenuto del mondo» (1941, 190). CD

CD CARLO DEREGIBUS
premesso che l'opera di Neutra è eccezionale per tanti versi, a me pare che la tesi sull'empatia mal si sposi con quella neuroestetica, che cerca una scientificità nelle preferenze e nelle adesioni. Al contrario, un approccio psicologista va nella direzione di scoprire preferenze personali rispetto alle quali l'architetto può agire per adesione, oppure no, scardinando anche magari richieste e preferenze. Ed è sempre da tenere a mente che i clienti andavano da Neutra per avere una "sua" casa – lo dico rispetto al tema dello stile: quindi in ogni caso la risignificazione del questionario in forme avveniva nello spettro delle forme possibili per Neutra, non "tra tutte le forme possibili". E chissà quanti clienti magari non avranno amato le sue case alla fine – ci sono vari libri e aneddoti sull'argomento – e quanti tra che non l'hanno avuta continueranno a sognarla, ispirati dalla mitografia (risignificante) successiva. E questo, a corollario, dice anche che già solo il termine "neuroarchitettura" è, inevitabilmente, un non-sense.

SIMONE POLICARPO
Penso che un approccio esclusivamente psicologista non sia esaustivo per comprendere la complessità del fenomeno indagato e che le neuroscienze (da cui la neuroestetica e la neuroarchitettura) possano arricchire gli studi sull'empatia in architettura e ispirare i futuri processi di rigenerazione urbana: è quello che sosteneva anche Richard Neutra nel suo ben noto "Survival through design", ove cita, a più riprese, le coeve acquisizioni in ambito neuroscientifico che declinò all'interno dei suoi progetti di concerto con le nuove epistemologie psicoanalitiche. Neutra, quindi, è un esempio emblematico di dialogo tra le due discipline (primo caso nella storia dell'architettura) e, a mio modesto avviso, il suo insegnamento non ha perso la sua attualità e, azzarderei a dire, la sua futuribilità.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Eh ma il punto è proprio che io condivido perfettamente l'approccio di Neutra – contestualizzandolo. Ma ho una allergia a termini puramente commerciali come "neuroarchitettura" (o "bioarchitettura): esiste l'approccio neuroscientifico all'architettura, non la neuroarchitettura.



## Conclusioni

La diffusione della teoria dell'*Einfühlung* a cavallo tra Ottocento e Novecento influenzò il linguaggio architettonico contemporaneo a partire dall'opera degli architetti dell'Art Nouveau, nelle sue mutevoli declinazioni nazionali. In Germania, il caso di August Endell rappresenta senza dubbio il collegamento più diretto tra la teoria estetica tardo-ottocentesca e la sua applicazione pratica; l'idea che la composizione formale potesse sollecitare in maniera predeterminata l'apparato sensorio e le strutture nervose del corpo umano portò alla creazione di pionieristiche sperimentazioni architettoniche che, ad una buona rilettura, possono essere considerate un caso *ante litteram* di Neuroarchitettura, oltreché un caso conclamato di architettura empatica.

Seppure a cavallo tra le due guerre ci furono altri esperimenti tesi a esplorare la dialettica tra il corpo umano e lo spazio, non emergono riferimenti espliciti all'utilizzo consapevole delle teorie dell'empatia in architettura.

Soltanto nel Secondo dopoguerra – quando la psicoanalisi freudiana si era affermata a livello intercontinentale – anche il concetto di *empathy*, di eredità lippsiana, riemerse all'interno dell'opera di teorici e architetti. È questo il caso di Richard Neutra che fece da ponte tra la Vienna di Freud e la California del Sud, portando con sé quei principi filosofici, estetici, psicoanalitici di una cultura mitteleuropea che lo aveva formato e che egli traferì nei suoi progetti innovativi, precursori di un design terapeutico e ambientale. A Neutra andrebbe riconosciuto il merito di aver offerto un contributo significativo alla nascita della psicologia dell'architettura prima ancora della collaborazione tra l'architetto Miller e lo psicologo Wheeler

avvenuta soltanto quattro anni dopo la pubblicazione della sua opera-manifesto *Survival through design*.

Per quanto concerne la storia della Neuroarchitettura – che si ritiene convenzionalmente un'invenzione del terzo millennio – anch'essa andrebbe revisionata se si vuole considerare il contributo affatto marginale di alcuni architetti che ne furono precursori, come Richard Neutra e prima ancora August Endell.

Questa carrellata di esempi che costella l'universo teorico dell'*Einfühlung* rappresenta solo una piccola quota di quelle scoperte tardo-ottocentesche che avevano anticipato molte delle questioni che ad oggi suscitano un vivo interesse in ambito neuroscientifico e che stanno trovando conferma grazie agli esperimenti di laboratorio condotti sfruttando le più moderne tecniche di *neuroimaging*.

Pertanto, un'indagine sistematica sulle tracce di un concetto migrante come quello di empatia – che ha ispirato processi, modelli, soluzioni da fine Ottocento a oggi – può senza dubbio aiutarci a costruire un ponte tra passato e presente che ci consenta di riconnettere territori della conoscenza rimasti inesplorati e, al contempo, di allungare lo sguardo verso i nuovi orizzonti dell'*environmental design* e del design terapeutico impegnati nella progettazione di una realtà a misura d'uomo che soddisfi le sue principali necessità psicofisiologiche e che funga da "specchio" della società, dei suoi desideri e delle sue ambizioni.





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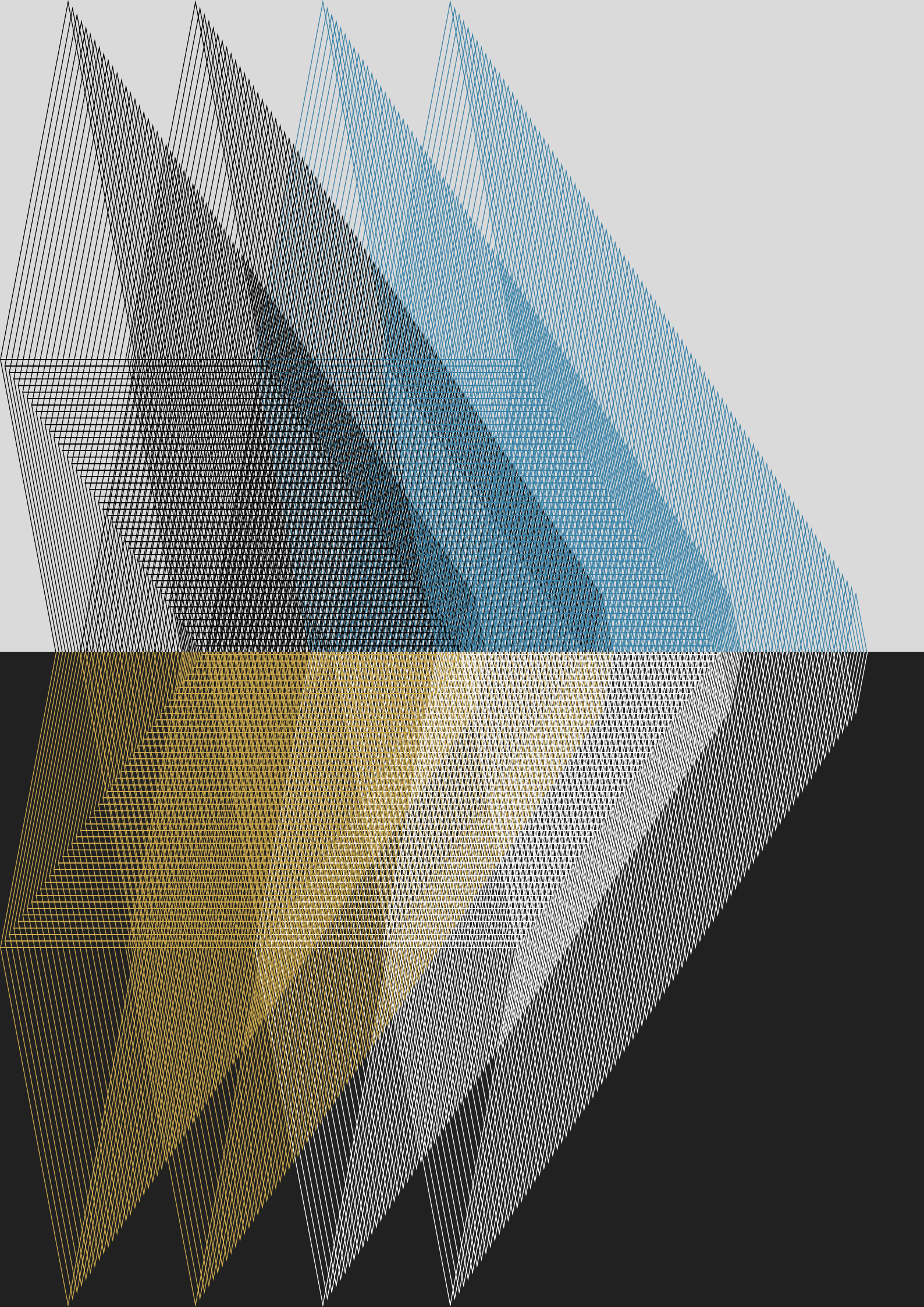
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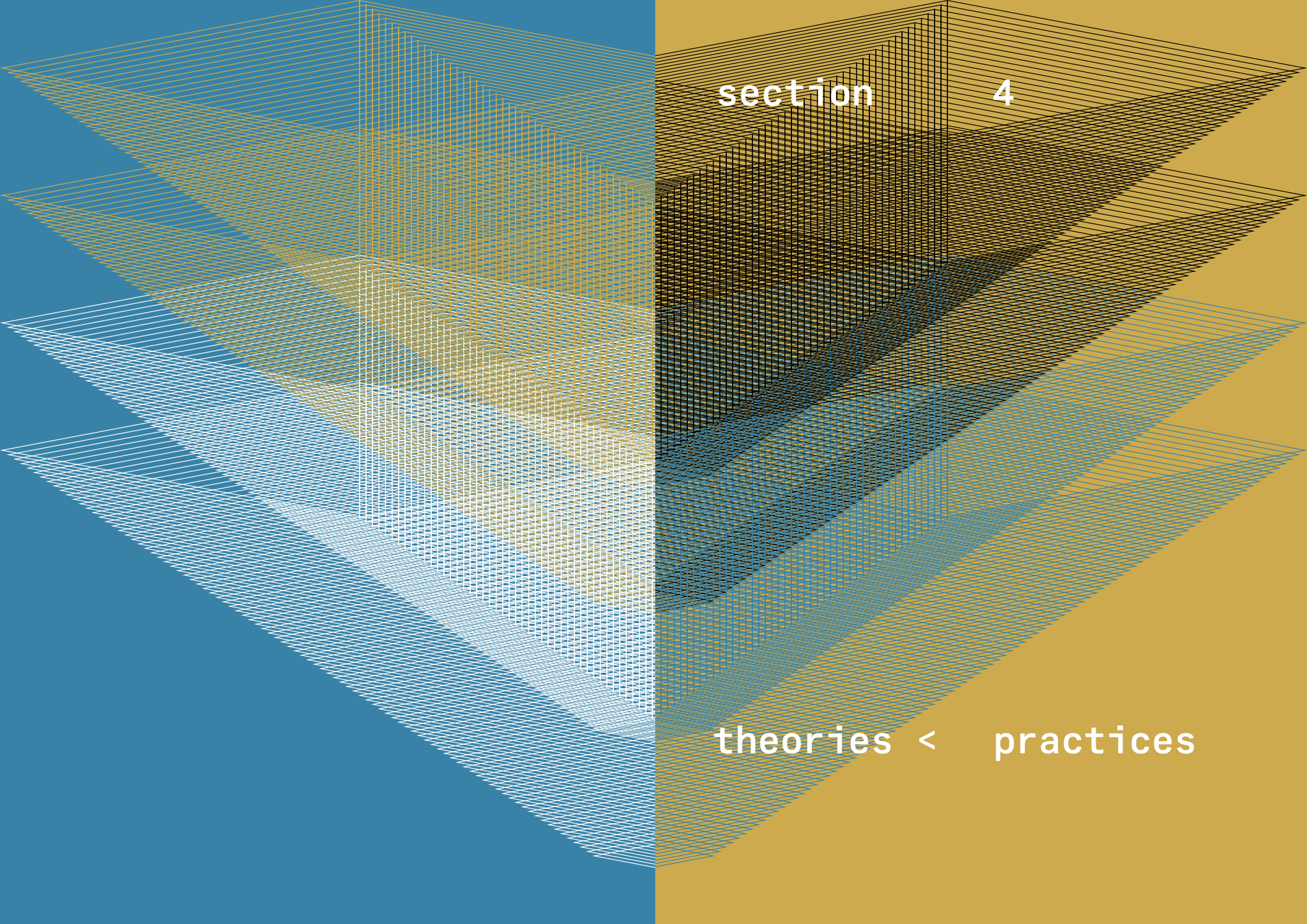
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section 4
theories < practices

# Il potenziale formativo del premio. La costruzione dell'architettura alpina contemporanea

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In recent decades, the architecture award has gained more and more space within the panorama of cultural events dedicated to architecture. Alongside the potential for criticism, cultural promotion and professional legitimation, this type of event combines the ability to produce certain forms that transcend those of the constructed work and are instead characterized by the meanings conveyed by the award itself. Through the analysis of two international awards in the Alpine territory, *Neues Bauen in den Alpen* and *Constructive Alps*, held between the beginning of the 1990s and the present day, the essay aims to explore the formative potential of the award and, particularly, to understand how different meanings transmitted by the two awards correspond to different cultural products and forms.



— AWARDS
— BAUKULTUR
— CULTURE
— ARCHITECTURE
— FORM

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## Premi di architettura come strumento di critica, promozione culturale e legittimazione professionale

Il mondo dell'architettura, come quello delle arti e delle scienze, è stato testimone negli ultimi decenni della nascita di un numero sempre più considerevole di premi. Secondo James English (2008) la proliferazione di queste manifestazioni è uno dei sintomi più lampanti del dilagare senza controllo della società dei consumi, una società dove la realizzazione professionale può arrivare soltanto attraverso la celebrità e il successo, e dove quindi il valore della cultura è inteso esclusivamente come buona riuscita commerciale (Aureli 2016). I premi infatti garantiscono riconoscimento e fama, oltre che gratificazioni economiche. Attraverso la pubblicazione – per cui si intende, come Hélène Lipstadt (1989), ogni sorta di raffigurazione dell'opera architettonica che circolando al di fuori del processo costruttivo come "bene culturale" assume carattere pubblico – i premi assicurano una legittimazione professionale di carattere culturale che, nel caso dell'architettura, trascende quella giuridico-amministrativa necessaria allo svolgimento dell'attività professionale. Tuttavia, i premi in quanto manifestazioni di carattere culturale consentono non solo ai partecipanti, ma anche agli organizzatori, i giudici, i promotori e gli sponsor, di ottenere successo e celebrità. Gli ultimi possono infatti convertire il capitale economico e/o il potere politico a loro disposizione in capitale culturale (English 2008), mentre giudici e organizzatori hanno la possibilità di costruire determinati campi, che possono essere intesi nei termini di Pierre Bourdieu come spazi generatori di «schemi di percezione e di valutazione, tradizioni, tecniche, gerarchie di "legittimità", regole del gioco, problematiche, istituzioni» (Boschetti 2022, 12). O ancora, tradotto in termini architettonici, hanno la possibilità di istituire determinati movimenti o gruppi (Macarthur 2005). Gruppi che necessitano di movimento continuo, di «essere costantemente creati o ri-creati» (Latour 2022, 51) e che quindi risultano essere oggetto di una definizione performativa (Latour 2022). Per consentire questo movimento perpetuo i premi di architettura, categorizzati secondo differenti geografie, morfo-tipologie, materiali, funzioni, si appoggiano su un numero sempre maggiore di forme di riconoscimento: dalle menzioni d'onore alle *nomination*, dalle liste di finalisti ai premi del pubblico, con lo scopo di accrescere esponenzialmente il numero di attori e di celebrità (Braudy 1986) e di conseguenza di associazioni all'interno del gruppo definito dal premio stesso.

Tra i differenti ruoli svolti dal premio di architettura – si è già osservato come promuova e costruisca cultura architettonica, legittimi i professionisti partecipanti e promuova commercialmente sponsor e organizzatori – si può annoverare anche quello di strumento di critica architettonica. La critica, in quanto giudizio professionale e attività che «arrischia delle opinioni» (Zevi 1995, 120) basandosi sull'esecuzione dell'opera da un punto di vista interpretativo e valutativo (Pareyson 1988, 269) è insita nel processo del premio che prevede la selezione di alcune opere da una totalità di candidature. La selezione promuove un'immagine, un tipo, ovvero un canone (English 2008) frutto delle scelte della giuria. CD La figura del critico di architettura viene quindi ricoperta dal giudice che in base alla tipologia di premio può basare le sue valutazioni su criteri di carattere esclusivamente soggettivo o appoggiandosi a standard di carattere prescrittivo

CD CARLO DEREGIBUS
Mi pare ottimista la visione del potere critico delle giurie: spesso i premi, in particolare quando sovra-locali, rispondono a logiche diverse – il politicamente corretto alternarsi di correnti e provenienze, ad esempio. Il valore non si crea cioè nel premio ma nella corrispondenza tra la candidatura e le caratteristiche attese, frutto anche di fattori estranei alla giuria: cioè ciò che di solito gli architetti tendono a trascurare – elementi di mercato, politici, ecc.

MATTEO TEMPESTINI
Sicuramente il potere critico non risiede esclusivamente nelle mani della giuria. Questa viene scelta dal promotore del premio, che effettua quindi in principio un'azione critica di selezione dei giudici. A sua volta ci sono fattori economici e politici che influenzano, come giustamente suggerisci, le decisioni della giuria e dei promotori del premio, su cui un peso sostanziale viene esercitato dagli sponsor del premio. Questo passaggio effettivamente semplifica troppo queste variabili, esplicitando soltanto l'output finale del processo critico che è quello della giuria. Nelle tipologie di premi dedicati a specifici materiali e promosse da sponsor privati, di cui non si parla specificatamente in questo saggio, questo processo viene esplicitamente a galla. In questi casi l'abilità del progettista è proprio quella di trovare la perfetta corrispondenza tra candidatura e caratteristiche attese, anche forzando all'estremo determinate peculiarità del progetto. Nei casi analizzati, la forzatura è verso la rispondenza o a un'ideale architettura alpina, oppure verso un'ideale di sostenibilità architettonica; in entrambi i casi le basi di queste caratteristiche attese vengono gettate nelle prime edizioni del premio che hanno una forza "formativa" maggiore.



e oggettivo. La prima tipologia è di tipo puramente culturale e affida l'intero processo valutativo all'esperienza professionale e personale del singolo giudice, mentre la seconda è di tipo scientifico-culturale e alla suddetta esperienza affianca alcuni *benchmark* che l'opera deve rispettare per poter godere del diritto di eleggibilità. Esempio quest'ultimo dei premi di architettura sostenibile, che richiedono alle opere candidate di rispettare dei criteri legati, ad esempio, alle prestazioni energetiche o alla provenienza dei materiali. I due premi trattati in questo saggio appartengono rispettivamente alla prima e alla seconda categoria appena citate.

## Il premio di architettura come produttore di forme

Il lavoro intellettuale che si svolge durante il premio è quindi a tutti gli effetti una forma di produzione all'interno dell'industria culturale (Aureli 2016), che prevede in primo luogo la candidatura dell'opera da parte del progettista, per cui quest'ultimo produrrà particolare materiale in modo

da intercettare l'interesse della giuria, in seguito l'analisi della giuria e l'elaborazione di una graduatoria, e infine la ri-produzione delle opere meritevoli all'interno di un catalogo fisico o digitale, in una mostra o durante un evento di premiazione. Il vero e proprio prodotto del premio è questa riproduzione, ossia un canone, o un precedente così come inteso da Peter Collins (1971), ovvero un *Form-Giver*: riferimento formale che grazie alla pubblicazione andrà a influire sulle future opere che parteciperanno alla manifestazione. È infatti, secondo Luigi Pareyson, «caratteristica di ogni riuscita la capacità di farsi criterio di valutazioni e apprezzamenti e di diventare stimolo e norma di nuove operazioni» (1988, 139). Il prodotto è quindi a tutti gli effetti una forma, compiuta ed esemplare, e in quanto tale capace di formare altri prodotti tesi a emularla ed eguagliarne le caratteristiche positive (Pareyson 1988, 139). Prendendo in considerazione altresì che la pubblicazione dell'opera, ovvero la sua ri-produzione, non possiede le caratteristiche dell'opera originale ma se ne distacca tramite un'interpretazione fornita dai giudici e dai curatori della pubblicazione stessa, si può individuare quindi la capacità formativa del premio.

Per prodotto del premio non si intende quindi l'opera di architettura in sé, che esiste già come prodotto ben prima dello svolgimento del premio e continuerà ad esistere in quanto tale anche dopo, quanto piuttosto la sua rappresentazione e pubblicazione, la sua narrazione (Colomina 1988), quindi la sua ri-produzione. (CD) Il prodotto del premio è prima di tutto di tipo culturale ed è una forma che risulta essere interessante perché può potenzialmente possedere significati completamente diversi rispetto all'architettura costruita.

In generale, pensando di suddividere il processo produttivo dell'architettura in più sotto-processi non necessariamente conseguenti cronologicamente, le pubblicazioni come cataloghi di premi, esiti di concorsi, esposizioni o numeri di rivista sono sotto-processi che si possono definire

(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
Tuttavia, se anche pensassimo che ogni progetto sia una riuscita – cosa che non è, altrimenti cadrebbe la teoria estetica pareysoniana – la candidatura è già una rielaborazione che tenta di esaltare gli elementi che si immaginano più candidabili. Saltando la relazione progetto-edificio e partendo da questo, esso diventa nuovo prodotto anticipatamente causato dal premio, poi, in base al risultato, il premio lo può ri-produrre nuovamente. E la riuscita può avvenire (o no) in qualsiasi di queste produzioni, in modo indipendente.

MATTEO TEMPESTINI
Non è però l'edificio a essere un prodotto anticipatamente causato dal premio, ma la riproduzione dell'edificio che ne fa il progettista per andare incontro alle caratteristiche attese dal premio stesso (vedi commento precedente)

CARLO DEREGIBUS
Esatto: l'edificio diventa un "nuovo prodotto" causato dal premio, rispetto al prodotto del progetto. Il che, fenomenologicamente, è perfettamente spiegabile in termini di modi d'essere potenziali dell'edificio.

di tipo critico-culturale. Il premio è soltanto uno degli anelli terminali di una catena di produzione dell'opera che si estende a partire dalla stesura del progetto da parte del professionista fino alla sua produzione sui media. Risulta quindi fondamentale il passaggio che avviene tra il completamento dell'opera e il suo inoltro nei canali mediatici da parte del progettista. È proprio in questo momento che l'opera viene prodotta culturalmente ed è proprio questo prodotto che influenzerà la fortuna, o la sfortuna, critica dell'opera.

Il premio di architettura è produttore di forme in quanto capace di validare immagini e immaginari dipendenti dal suo significato e quindi creare le condizioni di esistenza di determinati raggruppamenti. Il premio, ancor più di altri media come riviste di settore o esposizioni, riesce a oltrepassare il potenziale formativo dell'opera introducendo nel processo un passaggio critico, ovvero di lettura e quindi di interpretazione e valutazione dell'architettura, che mentre negli altri media può rimanere sottotraccia o non essere denunciato, nel premio trova ineluttabile esternalizzazione nel giudizio finale. Un passaggio critico – in tutti i sensi – in cui l'opera di architettura viene consapevolmente spogliata di ogni significato antecedente alla sua pubblicazione e tramite quest'ultima rivestita di nuovi significati, dipendenti dal tipo di messaggio o dalla pluralità di messaggi che il premio ha lo scopo di veicolare. La capacità di produzione di forme dei premi di architettura risiede quindi nell'enorme potenziale di promozione e diffusione di determinate forme e di conseguenza di immagini, che variano a seconda della giustapposizione di differenti lenti interpretative e letture a loro volta dipendenti dalla volontà di veicolare differenti significati, si potrebbe dire dipendenti dalle linee editoriali scelte dai promotori e dagli organizzatori del premio.

È proprio il caso dei due premi che verranno analizzati in questo saggio, entrambi svolti in territorio alpino in due periodi differenti e consequenziali. Il primo premio preso in analisi, *Neues Bauen in den Alpen*, nasce con il preciso scopo di promuovere un determinato gruppo di progettisti, partendo dal presupposto che «un progetto o un'opera architettonica guadagnano in "visibilità" quando portano i segni riconoscibili di un genere o di un movimento, che suggeriscono l'appartenenza a una tendenza, una famiglia» (Reichlin 1995). Il premio contribuirà in maniera sostanziale alla costruzione della cultura architettonica alpina contemporanea che, come si vedrà in seguito, verrà riconosciuta per sineddoche, con la produzione architettonica di una specifica regione. La seconda manifestazione invece, *Constructive Alps*, nasce su basi politiche come prodotto della Convenzione delle Alpi e con l'obiettivo di sensibilizzare amministrazioni e progettisti sulla necessità di un progetto di architettura sostenibile rientrando, se categorizzato secondo il processo di giudizio, nella categoria dei premi scientifico-culturali. Il fatto che entrambe le manifestazioni insistano sulla stessa area geografica e che veicolino messaggi sostanzialmente differenti, per certi aspetti antitetici, risulta di notevole interesse per lo studio del nesso tra significato e forma come parte di un sistema di comunicazione ed è facilmente generalizzabile al panorama architettonico internazionale contemporaneo.

## *Neues Bauen in den Alpen.* La costruzione dell'architettura alpina contemporanea

Il premio *Neues Bauen in den Alpen* nasce nel 1992 su iniziativa dell'associazione "Sesto Cultura / Sexten Kultur" con sede a Sesto Pusteria, in Alto Adige. La mente dietro all'organizzazione del premio, che «giocherà un ruolo rilevante nella definizione di nuove immagini e valori per l'architettura del territorio alpino contemporaneo» (De Rossi & Dini 2012), è Christoph Mayr Fingerle, architetto e intellettuale bolzanese, attivo fin dai primi anni Ottanta nella diffusione di una rinnovata cultura architettonica in Alto Adige. *Neues Bauen in den Alpen* nasce in primo luogo come piattaforma in cui far convergere i migliori progetti di architettura prodotti in territorio alpino. Territorio che, a partire dalla fine degli anni Ottanta, subisce un profondo cambiamento di visione sia a livello socioculturale che politico. È infatti nel 1989 che si gettano le prime basi per quella che poi diverrà la Convenzione delle Alpi, stipulata due anni più tardi a Salisburgo (Mathieu 2000). Quest'ultima è il primo strumento di carattere politico che interessa tutti gli stati alpini e nasce dopo anni di studi e ricerche, come quelle del geografo tedesco Werner Bätzing (2005), che si interessano alle Alpi come territorio unico, nonostante le differenze culturali e politiche dei singoli Stati. Alla scala architettonica è *Neues Bauen in den Alpen* a sobbarcarsi l'impegno di costruire una cultura alpina dai caratteri di unitarietà. Fin dalla prima edizione il premio ottiene un notevole successo di pubblico che andrà aumentando per tutte e quattro le edizioni, l'ultima nel 2006. Il processo di costruzione culturale portato avanti dalla manifestazione è reso evidente fin dall'inizio e in particolare esplicitato nel 1995 dal membro della giuria e accademico svizzero Bruno Reichlin, nel suo saggio pubblicato sul catalogo della seconda edizione. È lo stesso Reichlin a definire l'architettura alpina null'altro che «un'ipotesi di lavoro della critica architettonica e un incentivo culturale al progetto» (Reichlin 1995, 86).

Ma, una volta costruita la famiglia dell'architettura alpina, per fornirle ancor più riconoscibilità, si rendeva necessario costruire culturalmente l'immagine e la forma di quest'ultima. A partire dagli anni Novanta, con le prime edizioni di *Neues Bauen in den Alpen*, l'immagine dell'architettura alpina supera la sua fase postmoderna (Borasi & Mayr Fingerle 2013), caratterizzata dalla ripresa di stili, elementi e forme edilizie stereotipate. La corrente contemporanea dell'architettura alpina, almeno per come viene costruita dalla giuria del premio composta tra gli altri dal critico austriaco Friedrich Achleitner e lo stesso Bruno Reichlin, è rappresentata da architetture autonome rispetto al contesto, volumi puri in diretto contrasto con l'ambiente circostante. Il lussureggiante paesaggio montano viene quindi preso d'assalto dall'arida architettura (Buchanan 1991) alpina contemporanea che si può identificare per tutta la durata del premio con la quota parte dell'architettura della regione svizzera dei Grigioni. Alcuni membri del *milieu* dell'architettura alpina contemporanea, istituita dal premio *Neues Bauen in den Alpen*, risultano quindi essere favoriti rispetto ad altri. È importante sottolineare come, rispetto ad altre regioni alpine e a prescindere dagli aspetti formali della produzione architettonica regionale, i Grigioni avevano sviluppato fin dagli anni Ottanta un'importante politica di concorsi di architettura, in particolare sotto la guida

dell'architetto cantonale Erich Bandi (Steinmann 1996), fatto che ha contribuito alla grande mole di interessanti progetti realizzati. Tra il 1992 e il 2006 vengono premiate e nominate da *Neues Bauen in den Alpen* 25 architetture grigionesi, circa il 30% sul totale, per una regione che occupa neanche il 3% del territorio alpino. Sono presenti nell'albo d'oro della manifestazione progettisti del calibro di Gion A. Caminada con il suo lavoro nel villaggio di Vrin, il duo composto da Valentin Bearth e Andreas Deplazes o ancora Valerio Olgiati, ma il protagonista assoluto è l'architetto Peter Zumthor, che vince per due volte il premio: nella prima edizione con la *Cappella Sogn Benedetg* a Sumvitg del 1988 e successivamente, nella terza edizione del 1999, con le celebri Terme di Vals [FIG. 1] ultimate nel 1996.

La prima è una piccola architettura sacra che domina dall'alto la frazione rurale di Sogn Benedetg nella Surselva grigionese con il suo volume pseudo-cilindrico (che in pianta è in realtà una mezza lemniscata) dall'aspetto monolitico dato dal rivestimento continuo in scandole di larice. La seconda, opera che ha eletto Zumthor a star del panorama architettonico internazionale, è ancora una volta un volume monolitico, stavolta realizzato con il cosiddetto "muro composito di Vals", per metà incastonato nel terreno come una formazione geologica, completamente alieno rispetto al contesto di alberghi e residence costruiti negli anni Sessanta in cui è calato. Entrambi gli edifici sono rappresentativi di quella ricerca dell'architettura svizzera che a partire dalla metà degli anni Ottanta concepisce gli edifici come corpi geometrici semplici e chiari, dove «la semplicità conferisce una grande importanza alla forma, ai materiali, al colore [...] progetti che si caratterizzano per la ricerca di forme forti» (Steinmann 1991, 7).



[FIG. 1] Peter Zumthor, Terme di Vals (1996). Foto dell'autore



Questa tendenza al riduzionismo formale dell'architettura svizzera alla fine del XX secolo si deve a diverse motivazioni di carattere storico e culturale. In primo luogo, al contrario di numerosi altri paesi europei, la Svizzera non ha vissuto la disillusione dal progetto del Moderno, qui giunto soltanto nella seconda metà del XX secolo (Buchanan 1991). Architettura moderna che anzi viene vista, nei suoi caratteri riduzionisti, come antitesi rispetto a politiche culturali e turistiche di tipo marcatamente post-moderno (Buchanan 1991), che fanno leva su pittoresco, folklore e tradizioni spesso inventate, che spesso sfociano nel cosiddetto kitsch alpino (Achleitner 2000). In secondo luogo, la ricerca dei giovani progettisti grigionesi che, influenzati dagli insegnamenti sull'architettura analogica (Šik 1987) di Fabio Reinhart e Miroslav Šik negli anni Ottanta (Steinmann & Daghini 2000) – a loro volta allievi di Aldo Rossi, che lascerà un'importante traccia durante la sua esperienza all'ETH di Zurigo negli anni Settanta (Meili 1996) – hanno analizzato l'architettura anonima e vernacolare locale ritrovando in essa un'essenzialità e un'astrazione del linguaggio a cui ispirarsi per dar forma ai propri progetti. L'autonomia dell'intervento architettonico promossa da Rossi, che rispecchia le due categorizzazioni dell'architettura della città rossiana ovvero «la verifica analitica dei modi di costituzione della forma urbana attraverso l'architettura, [e] il concetto di "individualità del fatto urbano" e di "luogo"» (Aureli 2016, 106), assume tutti altri connotati se proiettata nel contesto grigionese, fatto di piccoli villaggi e insediamenti sparsi. I giovani progettisti dei Grigioni intraprendono quindi un percorso per certi aspetti simile a quello intrapreso mezzo secolo prima da Giuseppe Pagano alla scoperta dell'architettura rurale italiana che confluirà poi nella famosa esposizione alla sesta Triennale di Milano del 1936 (Pagano & Daniel 1936) e che li porterà a elaborare un proprio modo di fare architettura. Il minimalismo e l'astrazione formale, l'onestà nell'utilizzo del materiale vengono considerati linguaggi dal carattere storico, una poetica dell'ordinario che caratterizzerà gran parte della produzione architettonica grigionese negli anni a venire. A partire dalla fine degli anni Novanta questa poetica verrà estremizzata da personaggi come Valerio Olgiati e la sua architettura non referenziale (Olgiati 2019), di cui il massiccio e astratto volume in calcestruzzo armato della *Scuola a Paspels* [FIG. 2] realizzata nel 1998, e riconosciuta nell'edizione del 1999 del premio *Neues Bauen in den Alpen*, è un esempio paradigmatico e ben rappresenta la forma dell'architettura alpina contemporanea tra gli anni Novanta e il primo decennio degli anni Duemila. Soltanto l'avvento di un'altra manifestazione culturale farà scadere il prodotto grigionese, andando a ripetere il processo di produzione di una forma dell'architettura alpina che si indentificherà ancora una volta con l'architettura di una specifica regione, appena a Nord-Est dei Grigioni.



### *Constructive Alps*. La forma della sostenibilità architettonica nelle Alpi

Nel 2010, a quattro anni dall'ultima edizione di *Neues Bauen in den Alpen*, l'Istituto di Architettura e Pianificazione dell'Università del Liechtenstein, insieme alla CIPRA, (Commissione Internazionale per la Protezione delle Alpi), bandisce un premio di architettura riguardante tutto il territorio inscritto all'interno del perimetro della Convenzione delle Alpi.



[FIG. 2] Valerio Olgiati, Scuola a Paspels (1998). Foto dell'autore



Il premio viene promosso e finanziato dal principato del Liechtenstein, che dà il nome alla prima edizione del premio – *Konstruktiv 2010: Der Liechtenstein-Preis… für nachhaltiges Bauen in den Alpen* (*Il premio del Liechtenstein per le costruzioni sostenibili sulle Alpi*) – e che dalle edizioni successive, quando entrerà nell'organizzazione la Confederazione Svizzera con la figura dell'Ufficio federale dello sviluppo territoriale – si chiamerà più semplicemente *Constructive Alps*. Il titolo della prima edizione dà un'idea della caratterizzazione del premio, concepito con l'obiettivo di riconoscere i progetti di architettura sostenibili in territorio alpino. *Constructive Alps* è uno strumento sì culturale, ma in prima istanza di carattere politico, primo vero progetto in campo architettonico della Convenzione delle Alpi e della CIPRA, al contrario di *Neues Bauen in den Alpen* organizzato da un'associazione culturale locale. Questo permette al nuovo premio di avere basi economiche e politiche più solide che ne hanno garantito lo svolgimento ogni due anni fino al 2022, con la sesta edizione. Inoltre il processo di valutazione, a differenza di quello del premio organizzato da "Sesto Cultura", di carattere completamente soggettivo, presenta dei caratteri di oggettività. È infatti presente un processo di prevalutazione dei progetti pervenuti tramite una griglia che analizza differenti aspetti di sostenibilità dell'architettura. Ogni opera ottiene così un punteggio che viene fornito ai giudici durante le riunioni di giuria e che quindi serve da base per il processo valutativo successivo, maggiormente soggettivo. Infine, dopo aver scremato i progetti pervenuti (che si aggirano intorno alle 200 unità per ogni edizione del premio) fino a un numero di circa trenta finalisti, viene richiesto ai progettisti di fornire alcune relazioni e schede di dettaglio riguardanti gli aspetti prestazionali, energetici, di impatto sociale, ed economici delle architetture. Sulla base di

questi materiali e sull'esperienza dei giudici che visitano personalmente le architetture finaliste, si decidono quindi i progetti vincitori e meritevoli di menzione. Questo approccio, di tipo tecnico e incentrato su cosiddetti *benchmark* è tipico, secondo Oliveira e Sexton (2016) della valutazione della sostenibilità del progetto architettonico. È interessante anche notare come dallo studio appena citato emerga la problematica di affiancare questo tipo di valutazione, scientifica e oggettiva, alla valutazione estetica, e di carattere maggiormente soggettivo, dell'architettura. È necessario, quindi, come in *Constructive Alps*, affiancare ai *benchmark* l'esperienza professionale del singolo giudice – in questo caso la giuria è formata da accademici, progettisti e politici – in modo da ovviare a quella che secondo Marco Biraghi (2021, 53) è la «natura esclusivamente prescrittiva» della sostenibilità nel progetto di architettura contemporaneo. Il processo di valutazione è quindi molto più articolato di quello del premio precedentemente analizzato, e si caratterizza per la messa in campo di parametri di valutazione non soltanto soggettivo-culturali ma anche scientifici.

Il premio, dunque, non nasce con lo scopo di raggruppare dei progettisti sotto una famiglia o un movimento, quanto piuttosto di sensibilizzare le amministrazioni e i progettisti alpini sulla necessità di un progetto di architettura sostenibile sia dal punto di vista ambientale che sociale, economico e culturale. A partire da questi presupposti le forme prodotte da *Constructive Alps* differiscono in maniera sostanziale da quelle del suo predecessore. Seppur l'architettura grigionese non riuscirà mai a trovare molto spazio all'interno della manifestazione, anche nel caso di *Constructive Alps* è possibile riconoscere una formatività del premio di architettura, che si identifica con l'architettura di una regione in particolare: il *Land* austriaco del Vorarlberg. Nelle sei edizioni del premio fino a oggi andate in scena vengono premiati, nominati o menzionati 40 progetti del Vorarlberg, circa il 25% del totale, numeri paragonabili al monopolio grigionese durante il premio istituito da "Sesto Cultura". Resta da indagare quale risulta essere la forma prodotta dal premio *Constructive Alps* e i motivi per questa nuova identificazione del progetto di architettura alpino.

L'architettura della seconda metà del XX secolo nel Vorarlberg nasce su presupposti simili a quella grigionese. I progettisti si formano al di fuori dei confini regionali, e in particolar modo a Vienna, dove dal 1954 Roland Rainer insegna e dirige la scuola di architettura. Il lavoro di Rainer come docente e come progettista si basa sullo studio dell'architettura anonima e sulla tradizione abitativa delle regioni austriache della Stiria e della Carinzia. Studi che si sono intrecciati con la consapevolezza ambientale maturata dai progettisti regionali a partire dalla prima crisi energetica del 1973 e che ha portato alla formazione di una forte coscienza e consapevolezza ambientale. Fu così che a partire dagli anni Ottanta i progettisti della cosiddetta *Vorarlberger Bauschule* ideano un'architettura dal carattere olistico (Ritsch 2003) che riesce a fondere insieme forti caratteri di novità e di sostenibilità con aspetti legati alla tradizione, anche grazie all'utilizzo di materiali ecocompatibili – spesso quasi esclusivamente legno reperibile localmente – e un mix di artigianato e parti prefabbricate a livello industriale (Kapfinger 1993). La produzione architettonica del Vorarlberg troverà fama internazionale più tardi di quella grigionese, soltanto con l'avvento della consapevolezza della crisi ambientale, economica e sociale in

atto a partire dal secondo decennio degli anni Duemila. In particolare, il massivo utilizzo del legno da costruzione fa la fortuna dell'architettura del Vorarlberg a partire dalla rinnovata scoperta dei possibili usi e dei vantaggi dell'utilizzo di questo materiale. Tornando a *Constructive Alps*, infatti, il legno diventa il materiale da costruzione esclusivo delle architetture premiate, praticamente onnipresente nell'albo d'oro del premio.

Testimone del cambio di paradigma e della traslazione della forma dell'architettura alpina contemporanea è anche la pubblicistica di settore, che negli ultimi anni pubblica numerose architetture del Vorarlberg e in particolare monografie dell'architetto che più di tutti rappresenta sui media la produzione architettonica regionale, ovvero Bernardo Bader, primo progettista a intercettare l'interesse della pubblicistica internazionale dopo l'*exploit* del duo Baumschlager & Eberle alla fine degli anni Novanta. Insieme ad altri progettisti regionali come Fink & Thurnher o Bruno Spagolla – vincitore dell'edizione del 2017 con il progetto per la Scuola a Brand [FIG. 3] – Bernardo Bader è più volte presente nell'albo d'oro di *Constructive Alps* e vincitore con il progetto per la ristrutturazione della *Gasthof Krone* a Hittisau (2007-2010) e della *Pfarrhaus* a Krumbach (2013) [FIGG. 4, 5].

Proprio quest'ultimo progetto, caratterizzato dall'esclusivo utilizzo di legno locale, situato nel centro del piccolo villaggio, la cui forma dai richiami tradizionali è composta da un volume parallelepipedo sormontato da un tetto a padiglione e contrastata solo dalle enormi aperture, funge da cartina di tornasole di come sia cambiata la forma dell'architettura alpina. Bader realizza ancora a Krumbach, sua città natale, la piccola *Cappella Salgenreute* [FIGG. 6, 7] nel 2016. Sotto alcuni aspetti, come il rivestimento in scandole di larice o la presenza a vista degli elementi strutturali lignei all'interno, la Cappella austriaca è paragonabile a quella progettata da Zumthor nel 1988, che infatti viene considerata un suo diretto riferimento (Sauter 2022). Allo stesso tempo però il rapporto con il contesto delle due architetture sacre è differente, se non diametralmente opposto. Mentre la Cappella a Sogn Benedetg di Zumthor è un monolite chiuso sia verso l'interno che verso l'esterno, se non per una finestra a nastro che corre appena sotto la copertura lungo tutto l'edificio e che permette però, dall'interno, di osservare soltanto la volta celeste [FIGG. 8-9], l'opera di Bader si caratterizza per l'apertura verso il paesaggio e per la forte attenzione nei confronti della percezione della natura circostante, che scaturisce nell'abside a sezione trapezoidale, che anche grazie allo scostamento dell'icona sacra su di un lato, permette una visione assiale del bosco retrostante la Cappella.

Le due opere appena citate rispecchiano le due produzioni architettoniche regionali, che a partire da un interesse storico comune verso l'architettura rurale e anonima sviluppano due poetiche sostanzialmente differenti: quella dei Grigioni si discosta dal contesto e si focalizza esclusivamente sull'oggetto, incentrandosi sull'autonomia dell'artefatto architettonico e sulla valenza tattile e percettiva del materiale; quella del Vorarlberg, seppur mantenendo dei caratteri di semplicità ed essenzialità formale, è profondamente calata nel proprio contesto di riferimento e fa affidamento sulla valenza sociale, ambientale e culturale dei materiali utilizzati.





[FIG. 3] Bruno Spagolla, Scuola a Brand (2015). Foto dell'autore



[FIG. 4] Bernardo Bader con Hermann Kaufmann & Bechter Zaffignani, Pfarrhaus Krumbach (2013). Foto dell'autore



[FIG. 5] Bernardo Bader con Hermann Kaufmann & Bechter Zaffignani, Pfarrhaus Krumbach (2013). Foto dell'autore





[FIGG. 6, 7] Bernardo Bader, Cappella Salgenreute (2016). Foto dell'autore







[FIGG. 8, 9] Peter Zumthor, Cappella Sogn Benedetg (1988). Foto dell'autore

## Significati e forme dell'architettura alpina contemporanea

Si è visto come le due più importanti manifestazioni culturali in territorio alpino abbiano caratterizzato, tramite la produzione di differenti forme, l'immagine della produzione architettonica alpina negli ultimi trent'anni. Il primo periodo, indicativamente il quindicennio tra gli anni Novanta e il primo lustro degli anni Duemila dominato dall'astrazione e il riduzionismo dell'architettura grigionese promossa dal premio *Neues Bauen in den Alpen* e il secondo, fino ai giorni nostri, in cui il premio *Constructive Alps* favorisce l'architettura del Vorarlberg, più contestuale e dominata dall'utilizzo del legno come materiale da costruzione, caratterizzando il cambio di paradigma verso la sostenibilità. L'architettura alpina contemporanea risulta essere quindi suscettibile di diverse caratterizzazioni, (CD) che variano a seconda dei differenti messaggi e significati veicolati dai due premi presi in esame. Ma il significato trasmesso dal premio non sempre trova riscontro nelle architetture costruite. Entrambe le regioni del Vorarlberg e dei Grigioni hanno mantenuto, durante i periodi di svolgimento di *Neues Bauen in den Alpen* e *Constructive Alps*, un alto tasso di realizzazioni la cui qualità è stata garantita dall'adozione sistematica dei concorsi di architettura. Non bisogna cadere in tentazione e identificare l'architettura alpina con un determinato prodotto escludendo altre forme di produzione esterne al processo di produzione culturale proprio dei due premi presi in esame, ricordando che le forme prodotte dai due premi derivano direttamente dai significati promossi da questi ultimi, che sono soltanto un anello della catena di produzione culturale di un'opera. Se, ad esempio, riducendo la scala di osservazione ci si concentra su premi e mostre svolte a scala regionale nel Vorarlberg e nei Grigioni a partire dal 1992 fino ai giorni nostri si troveranno forme ancor differenti rispetto a quelle brevemente analizzate in questo saggio, che rispecchiano differenti narrazioni e significati. Una molteplicità di significati che risulta essere funzionale alla promozione di prodotti e produttori in determinate aree e periodi storici.

In quanto strumento formativo all'interno dell'industria culturale il premio ha infine una potenzialità di tipo commerciale ed economica. Di conseguenza difficilmente i suoi significati vengono lasciati al caso, anzi, soprattutto alla più ridotta scala regionale, si sviluppano dei veri e propri processi di pianificazione e progettazione volti a garantire successo e fortuna professionale di determinati attori-produttori. Caso emblematico – per rimanere in ambito alpino ma la questione è generalizzabile ad altri territori, scale, attori, prodotti, forme e produttori – è la parabola professionale di Peter Zumthor: in un primo momento attivo in ambito politico e sociale nell'associazione culturale grigionese del "Bündner Heimatschutz", contribuirà a istituire il premio regionale *Gute Bauten Graubünden* (Ragettli 2005); in seguito

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Provocatoriamente: la categorizzazione di Architettura Alpina Contemporanea non rischia di essere problematica o inattuale? In fondo, pur riunendo una vasta area geografica transnazionale, in effetti nell'accezione rientrano anche architetture in aree montane non alpine e, soprattutto, i temi sottolineati – in particolare il rapporto tra localismo tecnologico e globalismo morfologico – non sono parte di una più ampia architettura contemporanea tout court?

MATTEO TEMPESTINI
Sicuramente è una categorizzazione che riflette, in piccolo, caratteristiche della produzione architettonica contemporanea. Risulta però interessante proprio la costruzione culturale sottesa alla categorizzazione, veicolata attraverso differenti manifestazioni, come i premi. Allo stesso tempo, differenziandosi da premio a premio questa categorizzazione è "sempre inattuale" perché modificabile in base agli obiettivi e finalità promozionali delle manifestazioni che la costruiscono.

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Certo. Lo dico, provocatoriamente, perché è chiaro che definire l'architettura alpina tale ovviamente impatta con una serie di immaginari – avversati dagli architetti – ponendosi in diretta competizione. E questo può essere una mossa efficace, come dimostrano i premi, oppure relativamente, perché sposta l'attenzione dalla parola "architettura" alla caratterizzazione "alpina", immediatamente alimentando il discorso su autenticità e territorialità che sono troppo facilmente preda di stilizzazioni di imbarazzante miseria.

principale figura dell'architettura grigionese in ambito internazionale, a seguito delle numerose vittorie prima del premio regionale da lui stesso istituito e poi di *Neues Bauen in den Alpen*. Quest'ultimo gli aprirà la strada a numerosissimi altri riconoscimenti fino al più prestigioso, l'assegnazione del premio Pritzker nel 2009 e l'ingresso di diritto nell'olimpo delle archistar globali. Come anticipato, un momento chiave del processo di produzione culturale dell'architettura è quando l'opera appena completata viene immessa nel mercato culturale. Il progettista abile e astuto – come è stato Peter Zumthor, attivo fin dai primi anni della sua carriera nella ricerca del miglior modo di rappresentare le sue opere sui media, tra cui i premi di architettura che lo hanno visto protagonista – sfrutta questo momento per ri-produrre la sua opera secondo particolari canoni e garantirne così fama e celebrità.

Produzione di forme e identificazione con specificità regionali che quindi non solo è presente su cataloghi e pubblicazioni ma che può comportare la celebrità, o l'oblio, della produzione architettonica di determinate regioni e di determinati attori con evidenti ricadute non solo economiche ma anche sociali e culturali. Se le Terme di Vals, anche grazie al suddetto lavoro culturale di Zumthor – senza nulla togliere alle indubbie e conclamate qualità spaziali e architettoniche dell'opera – sono ancora dopo quasi trent'anni una meta prediletta dagli architetti di tutto il mondo, tanto che nel piccolo villaggio svizzero è nata una serie di attività dedicate al soddisfacimento di ogni perversione di questa classe di professionisti come stanze d'albergo appositamente progettate da archistar internazionali, è il Vorarlberg che negli ultimi anni ha attirato un gran numero di visitatori interessati al carattere olistico dell'architettura regionale, con conseguente indotto economico, soprattutto nel comparto turistico (Fiel 2014). Un rapporto tra significato e forma, una capacità formativa dei premi, e in generale di tutte le manifestazioni che producono cultura, che quindi non si esaurisce nella teoria e nell'accademia ma che colpisce anche politiche, economie, culture e società.

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# The Meaning of Dissent. Everyday Oppositional Practices in Brussels

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The aim of the article is to trace the effects of architectural projects which are prompted by a strong drive to change or criticise the institutional system they face. It does so, by observing the process that different architectural projects underwent and proposes a reflection on the meaning of "dissent" which is exercised by two observed architectural practices. These, are defined as *oppositional* since they strongly claim to be dissenting to the given institutional system yet find a way to negotiate their positions. Focus of the research are the effects of their actions and narrations. Thus, it outlines how such strong transformative will is carried out in the realisation of their projects and looks at how the meaning of the critical power is translated into the daily action of the analysed practices.

The proposed reflection is built on the results of a compared ethnographical study of two architectural practices based in Bruxelles: BC and Traumnovelle. The research relies on STS ethnographic methods of inquiry and applies them to the study of architectural practices in order to traces the complex net of relations and actions the observed architects have enacted to make their projects happen.

I would like to thank Albena Yaneva for the precious comments given on the paper and the two anonymous reviewers for their feedback. This article and the whole research would have not been possible without the kindness and the openness of the observed practices: thanks particularly to Laurens Bekemans and Ken De Cooman from BC architects, studies and materials; and to Johnny Leya, Léone Drapeaud and Manuel León Fanjul from Traumnovelle.

— DISSENT
— ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICES
— INSTITUTIONS
— ETHNOGRAPHY

## Introduction

The aim of the paper is to explore and identify spaces of dissent exercised through the architectural project by architectural practices which have a strong drive of changing the institutional system they act across. The research positions itself within the broader debate around the politics of architecture, artefacts or spatial interventions and investigates ways the architectural project can have a transformative power to enact its critical potential. Architecture is embedded in its reality, and therefore, it cannot be considered outside questions of power and politics: instead, it is part of the dynamic institutional system the observed practices belong to and interfere with. The paper enquires how selected architectural practices, which define themselves as dissenting with respect to their institutional system, manage to translate their critical stands into actions and with which material or immaterial effects. In this sense, it looks for the meaning of dissent in architecture once it is translated into projects.

The architectural project is intrinsically embedded within the political, economic and social context in which it is designed and realised. It is shaped by its context just as much as it influences its surrounding. Thus, the dissent exercised by architectural practices, happens in the middle of things, is never given *a priori*. Nor does the research, which is thus grounded in practice.

The paper is structured as follows. The first paragraph will introduce the reader to what has been defined as the practice turn in architecture (Doucet 2015). It proposes to study architecture in action by investigating oppositional practices that claim to be critical towards their institutional system and manage, or not, to realised their projects. Thereafter, an exploration of the three terms – dissent, institution and practice – will be presented to shape the theoretical framework the research supplies. Building on Italian philosopher Esposito, each practice is depicted as a singular *praxis instituens* that, in the process of institutionalisation of its dissent, challenges the institutional asset encountered. Therefore, in this study, the notion of *dissent* is thoroughly connected with the process of *institutionalisation* of two observed *practices*: BC and Traumnovelle, two architectural collectives based in Brussels, Belgium. The ways the meaning of dissent is traceable in different architectural projects will be discussed throughout a descriptive method of writing, informed by the ethnographic method of enquiry. Its meaning is findable in the effects of their actions. A conclusive paragraph will discuss the experience itself and later place its findings into the broader web of meaning in architecture that the thematic call of the journal addresses.

## A critical ethnography

The research is positioned at the crossing of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and feminist theories connecting feminist material tradition of critical thinking with more than human ontologies and ecological practices. This affects the methodology of inquiry and its ontology: they mutually create a relation with each other and ask for the research to be radicalised in practice. Indeed, the research is framed through ethnographic methods of studying: knowledge production and the search for

problems are always practical and never universal (Stengers 2013). Reality itself does not precede practice, and neither does knowledge: both are intertwined in a net of things, where no ontological definition or status is pregiven. Actors, agencies, objects, practices, tools, materials, researchers always exist within the relations they hold with one another. An STS informed ethnography abandons indeed any sort of binomial oppositional thinking, drifting away the active-knowing subject that unmasks the dynamics of the passive-staying object [1].

This epistemological shift touches architectural theory discourses. As Belgian architectural scholar Isabelle Doucet (2015) points out, a practice turn in architecture has affected architectural theory, growingly interested in the everyday and spatial tactics, recognised as the *locus* where critical engagement happens. This attention belongs to the more general realisation of architecture being a social practice with outcomes of this production, which have a socio-cultural nature.

Together with that, recent studies of architectural practices [2] have contributed to expanding the focus of architectural theory from «static object» to a «moving *project*» (Latour & Yaneva 2017, 103). Notably, British scholar Albena Yaneva firmly applies STS in her architectural research work by following practices and proposing a knowledge built from within (see Yaneva 2012, 2017). Yaneva engages with feminist scholar Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledge, where the researcher him/herself is relationally immersed in the observed network. She claims to be in the belly of the monster, quoting Haraway (1991) directly, yet she does not accept the possibility of any drive of change suggested by the researchers. Doing so, they would put themselves above the observed, and this is, according to her position, impossible. Therefore, she refuses any critical engagement with the practices observed.

Contrary to Yaneva, feminist thinking brings into a relational ontology power structures and fields of forces; they strive to remain attuned to specific historical and political positions while looking for another order of signification (Haraway 1991). A critical ethnography of architecture with a feminist posture recognises the impossibility of seeing things from the outside and acknowledges the ever-relational chain of events and engages critically with them. It situates itself in the belly of the monster and, at the same time, recognises the field of forces and the power dynamics which have made and constructed *that monster*.

[1] On the role of an STS position which turns into a epistemological move see Dutch ethnographer Anne Marie Mol (2002) building on Latour's 'We have never been modern' (1993).

[2] See Cuff (1992), Callon (1996), Yaneva (2009) and Lefebvre (2018).

## Institutions - Dissent – Practices

How do the observed practices enact dissent? With a pragmatic take, the research positions itself *in media res* and observes practices which define themselves as dissenting towards the institutional system they encounter. In this case, it is the exercise of a critique negotiated that is, itself, immanent to the institutions. As French sociologist Luc Boltanski (2011) suggests, the question of critique is always intertwined with the institutions it enters with. Institutions and critique are bonded together, and somehow, there is a semantic slippage in the use of the term "dissent" as an expanded definition of the term "critique", which is, anyhow, exercised by

the observed practices. Institutions, dissent, practices: the terms are thus relational with each other since the processes of institutionalisation of the practices are seen as processes of *deformation* of the given institutional order. The starting thesis is then that, by looking at dissenting practices, the paper looks at how this architectural project of deformation happens and has effects. The three terms will be presented singularly discussing how they relate one to the other: this operation will work both as a statement of the meaning given to the three specific terms as their conceptual expansion.

The research embraces a definition of institutions in endless motion and never static; they are artefacts and are not naturally given. Serbian philosopher Petar Bojanić, (2022), particularly, gives relevance to the artificial and architectural aspect of institutions: people craft them through joint, engaged acts and factors that «are able to endure standing together» (Bojanic 2022, 21). Institutions do not precede the social construction of reality; they are part of it. Thus, there is no transcendent or pre-ordered dimension, yet the group's cooperation and engagement are both simultaneous and precedent to it. Institutions and institutional facts exist solely by human agreement (Searle, 2006), but, at the same time, they precede the individuals and individual stands. Accepting institutions as continuously transformable and reconfigurable means seeing their dynamic dimension as vital. Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito (2020, 2021, 2023) has dedicated part of his most recent research to investigating the logic of institutions, which is traceable in what he calls *praxis instituens* [3]. Esposito traces this mutual and affirmative transformation in the Latin locution *vitam instituere*: «humans' lives are both the subject and object of an institutive practice that directs their behaviour, enduring an ordered coexistence» (Esposito 2023, 59). He draws a genealogy of the term and emphasises its ambiguity through time as «the potential vital dimension of institutions» (Esposito 2023, 4). This "institutionalising thought" is adopted as a political praxis and encompasses both order and conflict; in these terms «the whole politics [is seen as] an institutionalisation of the social» (Esposito 2020, 107) and is not messianic or eschatological. To him, the priority is to give back to the 'Institutions' operative and bustling attitude, and he does so by bringing back attention to the juridical Latin understanding of the term, stressing the dynamic swerve that the verb *instituere* has compared with the noun *institutio*: according to the roman juridical production, indeed, the verb does not concern only the establishment of certain situations but also their artificial production according to contingencies and necessities (Esposito, 2021). Esposito, drawing consistently on the work of French philosophers Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Lefort (1924-2010), with his passage to a *praxis*, emphasises the «semantic transit […] from the name 'institution' to the verb 'to institute'». This dynamic and vital tension, given by the verb, is crucial to understanding a relational dimension installed between what is outside the institutions and makes of itself an institutional practice and the inside of institutions. In the process of institutionalisation of the first one, both entities find themselves modified. This *praxis instituens* concerns thus the individual aspect, but above all, the social and political of this dialectical dimension affect both what is institutionalised and what institutionalises.

[3] all the direct quotes from Esposito in the text have been translated by the author from Italian. Same applies for the ones taken from Armando and Durbiano 2023 that will later be presented.

In this relational transformation, how do the observed practices exercise their dissent? Placed in this institutional logic, dissent is seen as the process of deformation of the previous institutional setting, being one of the drivers of the *praxis instituens*. (CD) Tracing back to the *institutio vitae* and analysing Spinoza's work, Esposito (2023) makes us notice that individual's rights coincide with the power they are capable of. Consequently, institutions are not detached from the lives of citizens nor from the social, but are at one with it. Dissent is, in these terms, the singular potential entering in relation to an institutional setting. Institutions do not exclude a conflictual dynamic but are instead its object and its place. Dissent holds a critical potential and transformative power and embeds the institutional conflictual dimension. The term is relational yet conflictual from its very etymology, which derives from the Latin *dissentire* - literally "feeling differently" (Cortelazzo & Zolli 1992); therefore, a dissenting practice establishes itself starting from a comparison, which, in the given case, is the institutional system it hankers to change. Dissent is thus defined as this hanker to change in relation to the institutions, but there is what has previously been described as a semantic slippage from the critique term 'critique' to the term "dissent". Dissent is the critique of the institutions established in their relations. In the conclusion of his exploration "On critique", Boltanski defines the *power* of critique as «its capacity to engage with reality in order to alter its contours» (Boltanski 2011, 150). Institutions are nothing but arrangements, and their bond with the critique invigorates them and makes them engage with reality. If they kept on being the same, holding a conservative attitude, they would not hold that vital urge; vice versa, critique finds a way to foster and affirm itself through the tension exercised at the encounter with institutional instances. To Boltanski, a founding figure of the 'pragmatic sociology of critique', this is typified by «the relationship between practical collectives and institutions, between critical forces and forces of confirmation» (Boltanski 2011, 158). This tension becomes then observable and traceable in the effects of the practical collectives. These collectives, which, in practice, exercise their dissent towards the institutions and negotiate the hanker to change them from their specific position, are the objects of the presented study.

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Indeed, if the meaning of dissent is exquisitely a "deformation", the consequence should be that any practice is, inevitably, a dissent, precisely because the institution is ontologically moving and instable. Therefore, a practice which is not deformative, at least in a minimum way, is ontologically impossible. In this sense, the "intention" to change (i.e., the critique) is ontologically irrelevant, as changes happens in any case, also due to undesired and unwanted consequences of actions – it is the boomerang effect.
Hence, here the main topics should be how much does a practice deform a system, and, possibly, how much does it deform it toward the direction of the critique. And this would require both framing precisely which is/are institution(s), and measuring somehow the deformations which, I fear, would require an historical perspective.

Architectural practices do not exceed this relation; they are embedded within this institutional logic. The architectural project fully enters into this dynamism: defined as a *praxis instituens*, there is not an institutionalising subject that pre-exists to it. As Italian architectural scholars Armando and Durbiano conclude in their recent publication, the architectural project, on the one hand, cannot exist without an institutional order that establishes it and, on the other, it functions as institutional support: «the power of the project is an instituting power, but, at the same time, the institution is the political transcendent of the project» (Armando & Durbiano 2023, 129). With this position, the thesis herewith presented shares a first ontological definition of the architectural project considered to be «a practice continually solicited by the social and technical phenomena that invest its specific world» (Armando & Durbiano, 2023, 11). Differently, the paper discusses how the architectural practices aim and manage to modify their political transcendent. In other words, how does the architectural project exercise the power of critique? The practices observed are considered oppositional since they do not require frontal or disruptive conflict, but they exercise the 'power of critique' in an ordinary and everyday manner. Through their tactics, they fool the given order of things and are exempla of hands-on knowledge (De Certeau 1980). The programmatic intent of these practices is to interfere with the institutional dimension by deforming it.

## BC and Traumnovelle



The oppositional practices object of the study, share a strong transformative will to change the institutional system they are intertwined with. Acknowledging the pragmatic position taken, the objective of the two ethnographical enquiries has thus been to trace the effects observed. Defining the architectural project as the practice that carries it out implies that the types of spatial interventions enacted by the presented practices vary one from the other.

The two presented architectural practices are both located in Brussels, and generally are two ordinary architectural firms of small-mid size in the traditional sense of the term: a professional studio designing buildings and other artefacts. Moreover, the institutional system they are embedded in is roughly comparable: the administrative structure of Belgium, where four distinct planning systems coexist.

At the same time, regardless of being both architectural practices in the extended meaning of the term, their way of being a *praxis instituens* is robustly different as their critique of institutions touches other spheres: BC architects, studies and materials aims at transforming the building sector in the Benelux by nudging as much as possible the introduction of geo-based materials; Traumnovelle aims at changing the dynamics of space through a critical attitude and promotes lectures, exhibition, installations and discussion to achieve this. In both cases, it is not so much the ordinary architectural firm that can be considered as the primary driver of change within the practice, but rather the other activities carried out. Their strong drive to change the institutions become *praxis instituens* at the moment they start looking at *how* to realise their projects and translate their dissenting wills into effects. Together they offer a spectrum of possible interventions encompassing the notion of architectural

project which span from ephemeral interventions, as exhibitions, performances, lectures or other advocacy activities, to ordinary architectural projects, carried out with a peculiar attention to the implementation of alternative materials, and all related activities that concern their adoption within the building sector. The two practices, in their exercise of critique offer a glimpse on possible architectural projects and show, therefore, how the meaning of dissent is findable in broad possibilities of effects: in each one spaces of transition could be found.

The paragraphs that follow have been informed by ethnographic observations which have been carried out for one week at each studio during July 2023. The stories are a collection of interviews, direct observations, study of the archival materials and of different publications available that concern the work of the two firms [4].

[4] The research is part of a larger ethnographical enquiry which has been carried out for my doctoral thesis "Between norms and exceptions: an ecology of oppositional practices" (June 2024).

## — BC architects, studies and materials

BC stands for Brussels Cooperation and it is an architectural practice based in Brussel, active since 2009. BC compasses three different branches, each one in charge of specific activities: an architectural firm (BC architects), a cooperative that researches, produces and develops circular geo-based, bio-sourced and urban-sourced materials (BC materials) and an educational non-profit organisation which is charge of researching and promoting their developed materials and techniques to a broader public of professionals and students (BC studies). BC is thus a hybrid practice: their work encompasses different activities according to the different aims of the three different entities. The whole practice aims at achieving a radical change in the construction sector in the Benelux by replacing petrol-chemical sources and drastically reducing the carbon footprint of the whole building sector in the area. They carry out different activities since they are fully aware that this systematic change may happen to tackle the same issue from different angles. The architectural branch of the office accepts and works on all kinds of commissions – both public and private – and does not limit its interventions to fully circular projects, yet they strive to use as many materials as possible which are local, geo-based or generally have a low carbon footprint. BC Materials is divided into five main activities, which, all together, contribute to the overall aim of expanding the field of knowledge about geo-sourced materials and its production. These vary from the organisation of workshops – open to students or professionals – that help sensitise and spread the technical or general knowledge about geo-based materials, bespoke production, research in BC laboratories and development of the materials both in the warehouse as outsourced, and design and prefabrication of specific design objects, usually commissioned. One of the declared intentions of these activities is to broaden the market to grow the local capacity of people (both architects and contractors) working with earth-building materials. BC Studies is the not-for profit branch of the organisation which function as a satellite of the other two and works mainly in the education field and awareness campaign activities.

Interviews and direct observations of the practice have given the possibility to observe from within how the broader aim of changing the building sector in the Benelux is carried out in daily activities divide upon the different branches of the studio. The ethnographic inquiry made it possible

to encounter different ways of negotiating dissent exercised by people working at BC, varying according to the contingencies given by the projects.

One of the threats concerning the use of geo-based materials is that the costs of production may be exceeding the average costs of ordinary materials, making the production of such architecture exclusive and accessible to few. Private commissions, if they exceed an average budget, might indeed threaten to make BC architecture elitist and not affordable. Therefore, the non-written internal deal is that the private project should allow some experimental innovations which would give BC the possibility to use the singular and extraordinary cases as a test bench for ongoing researchers within the Materials and Studies branches.

For instance, the project called "Woodstock" in the Ardennes, has a private client and an undisclosed budget. The project is being built since the end of 2022 and the construction site, at the time of the observation, was still ongoing and expected to be ended in 2025. The building is going to be self-sufficient and mostly geo based or natural materials coming from the area will be used. The building is made by three stone towers [FIG. 1] that are surrounded by a grid of 21x21 wooden beams 40 meters long. The structure has been realised by one of the few construction companies experimenting with hand laid stones techniques, unusual in Belgium. As shown in [FIG. 2] hemp blocks function as insulations for the inner structures.

Non-written rules apply also to public commissions but with different criteria: in those cases, compromises concerning tender procedures or budget happen regularly. These projects are less a field of experimentation but should function as showcases of other ways of doing architecture to the general public. This means that the project may be considered as an exemplum for the innovative use of materials, or for the involvement of stakeholders committed to the implementation of local resources. The project Havenlaan is part of the urban development project of the former port of





[FIG. 1] Saskia Gribling (2023). BC: Woodstock, two stone towers in the making.



[FIG. 2] Saskia Gribling (2023). BC: Woodstock, a detail of the hemp insulated wall.

Brussels; it is commissioned by the Urban Development Corporation (saumsi. Brussels) of the Brussels-Capital Region and would host a new centre for vulnerable drug users. It is a complex project close to the future headquarters of the Port of Brussels. In a consortium with Bogdan Van Broeck, BC Architects and Studies has won the public procurement process and is in charge, particularly of studying the facade and its materials. The choice has been to realise it in wood, to foster a different image of a facade solution, to encourage wood used in the cladding, which, in Brussels - according to the architect interviewed - does not have such a relevant architectural example. For the project, BC designs particularly the facade and explores the kind of wood to use. The facade solution should achieve both an aesthetically interesting and technically valuable result: naturally, wood does not accomplish the fire-resistant class requested by law, and, therefore, BC also researches the types of possible treatments to give the wood. At the same time, they look for stakeholders that could provide materials coming from local sources. The deal is not always straightforward: sometimes a local wood may travel for more than 1.200 km to get treated and then come back which questions the very notion of local sources itself. BC Architects try as much as possible to "staying with the trouble" (Haraway 2016) by accepting each and every time different compromises, calculating the carbon footprint of the potential travel compared, for instance, with the one produced accepting other compromises. In the case of Havenlaan, decision was pending on the company dealing with wood coming from the Sonian Wood Forest of Brussels, Brussel Leefmilieu which was strongly promoted by Brussels-Capital Region, the client.

Other commissions BC has been working on include, among others, LOT 8, the renovation of a former depot building of the French railway company in the Parc des Ateliers in Arles, where the development of the bioregional materials has been studied together with the British studio

Assemble and local stakeholders in collaboration with Atelier LUMA. Or the project Manchester, designed for the local partner U.square Brussels, where the Research and Development (R&D) branch of BC has developed a tailor-made acoustical plaster with cork, hemp and straw, using clay as a binder, which has then been implemented in the design by BC architects. The whole office is also working on the design of their future headquarters, Stadsatelier de Ville, which will be half-shared with a construction company and general contractor, Democo. The project will occur in the Brussels Canal Zone, in the same area where BC is already based. BC highly values the importance of keeping its different "identities" and related activities close together, physically as content or knowledge-wise. Therefore, the production hall [FIG. 3], where all BC in-house production is managed should be at the same level to the R&D branch of the office. Another prerogative of the company is this crucial proximity between who makes the materials and has particular hands-on knowledge and who thinks and researches about their use and implementations. Even though there is a specialisation of the expertise, the boundaries are blurred, and the production is part of the thinking process, not its consequence. Being an expert of rammed earth and natural materials is not a prerequisite to enter in BC Architects, but everyone, after being hired, would get a training workshop in order to make them aware of what the company is doing.

Lately BC has launched a new brand called *Leem* (the Flemish word for loam), which is in charge of selling the ready to use BC materials: rammed earth, clay plasters, and compressed earth blocks, all using earth coming from urban sites in Brussels. The marketing organisation for promoting the new brand of materials, which BC has already been producing for almost seven years had high priority at the time of observation. In this way, the earth materials for construction change from being a niche market to a growing market, making the prices more affordable to a broader public. To grow its public, rise the production, letting thus decrease the production costs and generally make the leem products affordable to a broader audience is a crucial goal within the studio. Particular attentions were thus given to the promotion and narration of the kick-off event "Upscaling Earth" which has taken place end of September 2023.

The production chain of the materials is part of the design, and that is what BC also teaches in the university courses, named "The act of building". BC has been leading between 2013 and 2022 the chair "the act of building" at the faculty of Architecture of KU Leuven (Belgium) which has moved since 2022, under the Junior Professorship of Construction and Design at the faculty of Architecture at Aachen University. One of the co-founders, Laurens Bekemans, leads the educational project, together with other co-workers. Both in bachelor and master courses students are taught to think architects being change makers, and through their projects they look for possible ways to have an impact on the construction sector. Discourses around the globalisation of the market, extractivism and the climate crisis constitute the framework or references students are called to act in. In Aachen University the chair has a given room that function as headquarter for the students for the whole semesters. This [FIG. 4] recalls BC own office [FIG. 5] where among drawing, models and books there is also space for materials examples and some testing.



[FIG. 3] Saskia Gribling (2023). BC: the construction hall.



[FIG. 4] Saskia Gribling (2023). BC: the act of buiding at RWTH Aachen University.





[FIG. 5] Saskia Gribling (2023). BC: office entrance.

Along with those activities, BC explores possibilities of stabilising compressed earth blocks for production with the lowest impact possible, trains other contractors to learn how to develop or use earth materials in their projects, and participates actively in lobbying activities to get earth materials into the institutional norms and technical notes. Co-founder Ken De Cooman actively engages with a private research foundation that carries out scientific research and then publishes the technical files, to whom everyone in the construction sector in Belgium has to be conformed with.

The overall management of BC actives is scattered and variable; therefore, it needs coordination between long-term objectives and short-term actions, and compromises are part of their daily activities. Their hybridity touches both the organisation of the practice as the differentiation of activities, the different projects carried out, as an ever-expanding experimentation with materials. They see the change happen from within and exercise their dissent, engaging with a «performance in action» [5] which is constantly changing and adapting. The meaning of their dissent is thus traceable in the whole complex activities the practice carries out and has, every time a transaction into actions which is always contextual. The overall aim is clear, coherent and leads everything they do as a practice. Yet their dissent finds different declinations of its meaning according to the contingencies encountered in order to become practical.

[5] interview with Ken De Cooman held the 5th of July 2023.

## — Traumnovelle



Traumnovelle is a multi-disciplinary self-declared "militant faction" that exercises its dissent towards the institution on different scales of interventions, within a spectrum of activities spanning the curatorship of exhibitions to the realisation of buildings. Since 2014, the collective has comprised three co-founders and a variable number of architects and interns working with them. To stress the collaborative feature of what they do, everything they do falls under the signature of Traumnovelle: the articles they sign, the interviews and lectures they give in arts, academic and schools, the exhibitions they curate or the installations they built, but also, the collective mind is even expressed and stated in the architectural projects they design and build. In 2018, the collective curated, together with Roxane le Grelle, the Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture: from that renowned assignment, their reputation has been more stabilised, yet their identity is still split, between their dissenting practice, which is usually traceable in some ephemeral interventions - being instead lectures or exhibition and installations - and the ordinary architectural interventions. This gap between the dissent they exercise and the architecture they make could be considered a bicameral partition of the architectural practice. Among the three co-founders and the two regularly working employees' tasks, management and projects are split. Tasks divisions and control of the ongoing projects is strictly and well organised among all the staff, materials are accessible to everyone through the cloud. This efficacy of the working process is probably one of the factors giving the possibility to fell part of a collective militant brain, regardless the division of the single tasks. It can also be considered one of the practical effects of the dissent exercised by

the practice: experimenting with a strict yet open structure they try to escape a certain "Tyranny of Structurelessness" (Freeman, 1972) which could also cause elitism.

Among the three co-founders, Léone Drapeaud is full time project manager for Perspective.brussels – the Planning Agency that works for the region. Traumnovelle is her hobby, so she mainly joints the activities of the studio after working hours, roughly in the late afternoon. Regardless her not-formalised engagement within the office, she is recognised as one of heads of it, and decisions are not taken without her participation. During the observation period, three summer interns were employed at participating at two competitions for the European Europe: each afternoon Léone would «join the office as a consultant» [6] to give them feedback and actively participate in the brainstorming sessions [FIG. 6].

[6] interview with Léone Drapeaud held the 11th of July 2023.

For instance, between 2022 and 2023 Traumnovelle has participated in the research and development of the exhibition 'Style Congo. Heritage & Heresy' held in Brussels at CIVA (Centre for Information, Documentation and Exhibitions on the city, architecture, landscape and urban planning in the Brussels-Capital Region). The exhibition proposed a decolonial lecture of the so-called 'Style Congo' in all its manifestations (being international expositions, Art Nouveau expressions, installations, paintings or buildings) coinciding with the colonisation and exploitation of the Congo by the King of the Belgians Leopold II. Mainly, Traumnovelle has developed the research "Congolisation" to show the influence of Congo on Belgian Architecture and early modernism. Among the three co-founders Johnny Leya has been the one actively following the exhibition development, researching within the CIVA archives the Congolese presence within the Universal, International, and Colonial Exhibitions [FIG. 7] and presented with 3D reconstructed images of the pavilions. Aim of the proposed installation by Traumnovelle was to propose another reading of the archival materials, not considered as static objects, *relicts* but rather as guiding light to read the future, would tell me Johnny Leya, one of the co-founders. The exhibition is one of the proofs of a possible immaterial effect achieved by a decolonial (thus dissenting to an institutionalised way of conceiving history) project in architecture. During the exhibition time, Urban.brussels instagram account posted pictures and a description [FIG. 8] wherein they claimed the active engagement of materials and labour forces coming from the realisation of many Art Nouveau famous buildings. In particular together with LAB AN, Hotel van Eetvelde, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, would have been tour guided with the specific lenses of decolonial thinking, highlighting the active extractive role of the art and architectural movement in the colonisation of Congo.

Since 2021, Johnny led the course 'Design et Politique du multiple' at the Master in Editorial Policy held at the *École de recherché graphique* (ERG) in Brussels, where students research the "politics of artefacts", specifically referring to Winner's publication of 1980 in order to debate around whether to read or not a straightforward political intention translated into the design and built of artefacts. Both Johnny and Léon are the spokespeople of Traumnovelle, together or on their own. As public person they are often invited to give lectures or public speeches in

Architectural schools proposing to students their dissent as a posture to be other architects [7].

But «Traumnovelle does also architecture» [8]. Manuel León Fanjul, the third of the three co-founders, is in charge of carrying out the office's ordinary architectural projects. He is the know signing them, talking with the clients and constructors, going to the construction sites [FIG. 9] Visiting the site of a renovation and expansion project for a medical centre in Charleroi and looking at the foam insulation they had to dismantle, he commented with such an ironic joke about the discrepancy between the two realms, teasing about the slip between the different activities of the office. Indeed, analysing their work, it becomes clear how the activist and dissenting practice, which is embodied in the lectures given and the installations designed, is also supported by ordinary architecture. The biggest architectural assignment the office has been working on since 2018 concerns the design renovation and development process of the headquarters of A6K, a start-up incubator in Charleroi. Throughout the years, Traumnovelle has designed the project and followed its realisation, and has had the opportunity to follow a project which is still expanding and thus keeps on needing an architectural development of the spaces. In this case, the challenge of the design finds the spaces of critique and negotiation of dissent «in the poetics of space and its added values» [9], with what could be defined as a phenomenological attitude of the architects that gives meaning to the spaces through a formalistic approach.

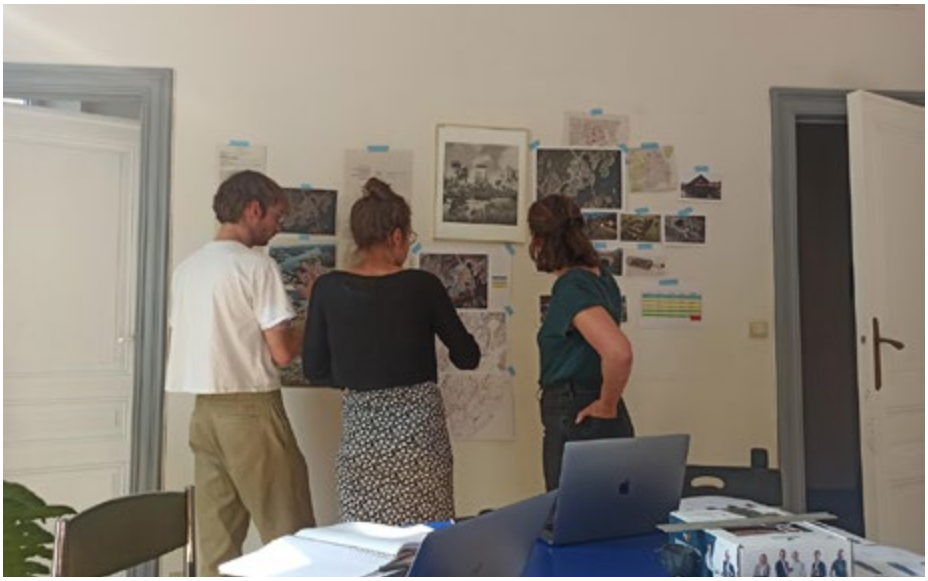
Traumnovelle is known for its dissenting posture, yet they are learning to accept institutional controversies from the building sector to foster their research activities. This is, at first, because of an economic need to survive as a young emerging architectural practice, but also a way to separate their activist actions from the compromises that need to be made once they are practising as architects. The meaning of dissent of their 'militant faction' is thus traceable in the ephemeral interventions. With what could be defined as a critical attitude, Traumnovelle aims at changing the dynamics of space rather than the space of the dynamics.

[7] see for instance 'Uselessness' (Politecnico di Torino 2020) or 'How to become an Architect' (TU Eindhoven 2023).

[8] interview with Manuel León Fanjul held the 14th of July 2023.

[9] interview with Léone Drapeaud held the 11th of July 2023.





[FIG. 6] Saskia Gribling (2023). Traumnovelle: designing for competitions.

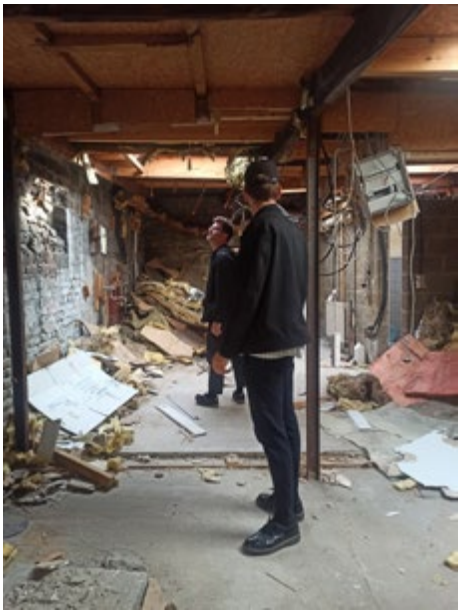


[FIG. 7] Saskia Gribling (2023). Traumnovelle: designing for competitions.




[FIG. 8] Saskia Gribling (2023). Traumnovelle: changing the dynamics within space.





[FIG. 9] Saskia Gribling (2023). Traumnovelle: visiting a construction site.

## Conclusions

The article is part of a larger research that investigates the transformative power and critical potential of the architectural project. The research is generally positioned in the broader discussion about architecture and politics and intellectuals and power. Of these discourses, the meaning of dissent, and how this latter is traceable in architectural actions is an urgent question. Having taken a pragmatist position, the research enters in conversation with scholars who previously have applied STS inspired ethnographic observations to study of everyday practices, their actions and the effects. The novelty of the approach lays down in the proposal of looking at the practices through the lenses of dissent in relation to what have been defined as processes of institutionalisation.

BC and Traumnovelle are to be considered as two particular examples of a generalisable tendency of emerging architectural practice that are oppositional towards the institutional system they face and yet fully embedded in it. (CD) In this sense, the meaning of their dissent is traceable in their actions and constant negotiations. It does not adhere to a pre given form of architecture. Their dissent is *in media res* and, therefore, could not be made universal. Nevertheless, the research suggests that by tracing the actions of architectural practices there are some recurrent patterns in their way of being *praxis instituens*. In everyday actions, the practices find a way to sneak into grey zones of institutions and negotiate their transformative power and critical potential. These grey zones could be framed as being vacancies in the institutions, or soft zones that allow the practices to interfere. These niches of interference are contingent and made by constant compromises which are fully part of the architectural competences, yet, show possibilities of transforming the discipline and its profession. It is thus by looking at the practices in their daily exercise of a immanent critique, and at the effects of their actions that the meaning of dissent could be traced.



(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
Considering my previous comment, I confess I cannot understand the meaning of dissent of those two firms. Indeed, if the meaning is the deformation of the institution, we should understand if, and how much, the institution(s) have been impacted, as I mentioned. If, on the contrary, the meaning is the affirmation of a cultural position opposing the mere technical practice – possibly defining a difference between architecture and building practice – then the meaning is not in the dissent, as the described action happen precisely inside the boundaries given by the institution.
There are no laws against hemp or wood, nor against a reflection of the Congolese influence: hence, the described dissent practices seem to be just cultural positions and self-promotional tactics, maybe with good intents and good results but from the radical dissent expressed, in different ways, by Cedric Price, Paolo Soleri or, even more, Colin Ward.

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# The Preservation of Industrial Heritage as a Form of Urban Resilience. The Case Studies of Ile-de-Nantes and Docks-de-Seine

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The paper questions the meaning of preservation of industrial remnants in former industrial cities which are characterized, especially after their deindustrialization, by urban regeneration programs. Isolated buildings as factories and abandoned infrastructure and equipment dated on the industrial era are often demolished in favor of contemporary buildings which seem to better correspond to users' needs and contemporary aesthetics. The two French case studies reported in the paper are considered as exemplary models of architectural and urban design forms in former industrial cities as they allow the dialogue between buildings, equipment, and infrastructure of different eras (industrial, contemporary). On the one hand we have the reconversion project Ile-de-Nantes, a brownfield within the former industrial city of Nantes, a city with a significant industrial heritage. On the other hand, we have the reconversion project Docks-de-Seine, a brownfield located in the city of Saint-Ouen in the outskirts of Paris. The study and comparison of the two case studies revealed the risk of gentrification in former industrial cities as their working-class identity changes due to the design of buildings by star architects, resulting in the arrival of executives and the rejection towards the cities' periphery of the modest socio-professional categories.



— INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE
— URBAN REGENERATION
— NEOLIBERAL ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICES
— VALUES AND MEANINGS IN ARCHITECTURE
— FRANCE

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## Introduction

After deindustrialization, former industrial cities are characterised by the presence on their urban fabric, remnants of their industrial past such as buildings, infrastructure and equipment reflecting industrial activities of previous decades. The question of reintegration of these elements to the urban fabric and the social-economic and environmental reactivation of the deindustrialized sites is primarily based on urban regeneration programs (D'Arienzo 2017). These programs usually involve the conservation of industrial buildings as a measure of preservation of local history and collective memory of the living and working conditions of former industrial workers (Corboz 2011). At the same time, in several cases of urban regeneration programs in deindustrialized cities, we observe conflicts of interest between the procedures of heritage making and neoliberal urban development practices in architecture and urban design, which lead to the demolition of infrastructure and equipment dated on the industrial era and the consequent construction of contemporary buildings by "starchitects", likely to better correspond to users' needs and contemporary aesthetics (Luxembourg 2014). (CD) The decision to preserve or not the places of industrial production is not neutral, according to French researcher Vincent Veschambre (2008) and it depends on the decisions, made by municipalities of deindustrialized cities and project managers of urban regeneration projects, about how architectural and urban design is supposed to face the consequences of deindustrialization, its social and economic decline (Cowie & Heathcott 2003).



(CD) CARLO DEREGIBUS
I wouldn't say that the neoliberal development is, tout court, opposite to the refurbishment of older buildings: there are plenty of cases in which the two things go together. I would say that the difference is the eventual occurrence of gentrification processes (see Guironnet & Halbert 2023).

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There are many different perceptions related to the preservation of the industrial past. Even in cases of gentrification of former industrial areas we can see that many industrial buildings were preserved and restored. It is true that gentrification is the result of different factors (economic, political, urban planning) as well as the decision of different actors and it has primarily to do with urban development policies. But we should underline that the demolition of buildings dated on the industrial era (factories and social housing) increases the possibility of gentrification as groups of people as the industrial workers have to move to other areas where the housing prices are lower. At the same time the construction of office buildings in former industrial areas leads inevitably to the displacement of people with high incomes (CEOs for example) and makes the processes of gentrification even faster.

The question of preservation of industrial heritage and its reintegration to the urban fabric is based on the principle of conservation of historical urban forms as well as a reminiscence of the social character of the architectural design of the buildings of these areas, especially of the industrial workers' houses (Choay 2010). In France, Reichen & Robert Associés proposes new forms and uses for old industrial buildings, such as industrial museums and houses, based on the principles of circular economy (recycle of buildings) and preservation of urban heritage (Reichen & Robert 1989). In Great Britain, the urban fabric of former industrial cities that were highly urbanized such as Liverpool and Manchester retained its centralities from the industrial era as a result of the strategic relay points of trade routes (Bergeron 2012). Even though the media highlight the clash between different values and meanings (on one hand, the conservation of no longer existing cities' past and, on the other, the cities' future, based on new forms of architecture and economic activities), we must underline that there is are different approaches in the content of urban regeneration/renewal programs: in fact, decision-makers (local elected officials, developers, urban planners, architects) choose either to restore and reuse old industrial buildings or to demolish them in order to transform the urban landscape (Fache 2006).

The concept of industrial heritage is changing with the emergence of Critical Heritage Studies, which consider the conservation of industrial heritage as an evolutionary process that responds to the needs of contemporary societies in terms of sustainable development, economy, or culture (Morisset 2018). This means that the appearance, since the 1980s, of preoccupations at international level about social, economic, and environmental sustainability of cities created new challenges for the preservation of industrial heritage, as industrial buildings can be restored and reused in order to have a second life, for example as housing units and cultural spaces (Guérard, S, 2004). We must also underline the fact that many reconversion projects of industrial brownfields contributed to boost social actions and environmental responsibility in architecture and urban design (Blanc 2015) such as the urban project Ile-de-Nantes, presented later in the article.

In this context, the principal hypothesis of the article is to consider that the preservation of architectural and urban design forms in former industrial areas can contribute to their urban resilience and to the conservation of essential meanings in architecture and urban design. Through a critical examination of the procedures of preservation of industrial heritage in programs of urban regeneration in deindustrialized cities, which are often characterized by neoliberal practices, the objective of the article is to question the policies and tools which seem to lead to urban resilience of deindustrialized territories. At the same time the article will investigate the ways in which a balance in city planning could be achieved between the construction of new contemporary buildings and the conservation and reuse of industrial buildings. In order to respond to the main hypothesis of the article we will use data (interviews, socio-economic elements) collected from two programs of industrial reconversion in France which highlight the context of preservation of industrial heritage and the risks of gentrification.

## Two case studies

The two case studies of the paper are considered as exemplary models of architectural and urban design forms in former industrial cities, as they allow the dialogue between buildings, equipment, and infrastructure of different eras (industrial, contemporary). On the one hand we have the reconversion project Ile-de-Nantes, a brownfield within the former industrial city of Nantes at the west of France, a city with a significant industrial heritage [FIG. 1]. The project functions as a vector for the development of new architectural forms in public buildings (e.g. the local courthouse) [FIG. 2]. On the other hand, we have the reconversion project Docks-de-Seine, a brownfield located in the city of Saint-Ouen in the north suburbs of Paris, a city characterized in the last 20 years by its urban transformations (spatial, economic, social), in which industrial activities have never ceased to exist [FIG. 3]. The project functions (as the first case study in Nantes) as a vector for the development of new architectural forms in office buildings (e.g., the buildings of Alstom) [FIG. 4].

The study and comparison of the two case studies reveal the risk of gentrification in former industrial cities and the swift to different values and meanings in architecture, now closer to a more productive dimension due to the design of public and commercial buildings by starchitects, the limited number of social housing units and the uses of the former industrial buildings. The results of this trend are the arrival of executives in deindustrialized areas and the rejection towards the cities' periphery of the modest socio-professional categories [TAB. 1, 2].



| Categories | 2009 | 2014 |
|---|---|---|
| TOTAL | 165.840 | 178.471 |
| Craftsmen, tradesmen, businessmen | 6.778 | 8.208 |
| Senior managers and professional occupations | 39.726 | 46.379 |
| Intermediate professions | 49.798 | 54.931 |
| Employees | 48.162 | 47.849 |
| Industrial workers | 21.376 | 20.457 |

[TAB. 1] Number of working positions in Nantes, INSEE and City of Nantes (2018). It is interesting to compare the numbers of senior managers and intermediate professions to the number of industrial workers, in order to understand the shift to a different economic model.

| Categories | 2009 | 2014 |
|---|---|---|
| TOTAL | 34.466 | 36.060 |
| Craftsmen, tradesmen, businessmen | 1.912 | 1.969 |
| Senior managers and professional occupations | 11.353 | 13.489 |
| Intermediate professions | 8.829 | 8.623 |
| Employees | 6.801 | 6.807 |
| Industrial workers | 5.571 | 5.115 |

[TAB. 2] Number of working positions in Saint-Ouen, INSEE and City of Saint-Ouen (2018). It is interesting to compare the numbers of senior managers and intermediate professions to the number of industrial workers, in order to understand the swift to a different economic model.



[FIG. 1] *The industrial museum of Nantes*, ©Varvara Toura, 2023. Buildings of the former industrial site of naval construction Dubigeon, located in the site of Ile-de-Nantes, are preserved, and transformed in exhibition spaces and located close to contemporary buildings.



[FIG. 2] *The local courthouse of Nantes*, ©atelier Jean Nouvel. The courthouse is designed by French star architect Jean Nouvel and it is located in the site of Ile-de-Nantes near classified urban monuments as is the Embassy of Turkey.





[FIG. 3] *The factory CPCU in Saint-Ouen*, ©Varvara Toura, 2023. The factory CPCU of the Parisian company of urban heating is located in the site of Docks-de-Seine near new residential buildings and shows the continuous presence of industrial activities in the area.






[FIG. 4] *The Alstom building in Saint-Ouen*, ©Pocelingo, https://upload.wikimedia.org/ wikipedia/commons/e/e6/Alstom_siege_social.jpg. The workplace of the French enterprise Alstom, located in the site of Docks-de-Seine near residential buildings and a pedestrian passageway, marks the new identity of the area as a business cluster.

## — The Ile-de-Nantes project: reactivate and reintegrate to the urban fabric the former industrial site

In 1987, the Bougainville was the last ship constructed in the shipyards located at the west of the industrial site of Ile-de-Nantes. After a prosperous industrial era, only brownfields remain on this site. The future of the territory was part of the debates during the municipal elections in Nantes in 1989. In his speech in March 1989, after his election, the newly city mayor and member of the French Socialist Party Jean-Marc Ayrault declared that he will give a radiant image to the 7th city of France and that the city will find its role as a big European Metropolis of tomorrow [1].

[1] French National Audiovisual Archives (INA). Accessed in November 2023 (Jean-Marc Ayrault maire de Nantes - Auran Nantes (ina.fr)).

During the 1990s, the team led by Jean-Marc Ayrault launched a period of reflections on the future of the site which embodies both the preservation of its industrial past and the solving of social problems linked to the closure of shipyards, as well as the possibility of reactivation and regeneration of the site. The idea of transformation of the entire territory, uniting its three parts in a dynamic way, emerges. The desire of the municipal team for an extension of the historic center of Nantes towards the site of Ile-de-Nantes is shown by the proposal of the city to the French government in 1996 to construct on the site the new City Courthouse. To formulate the project the Municipality launched a competition in 1998.

The Atelier de l'Ile-de-Nantes, a team of architects, urban planners and landscape architects led by the architectural studio of Alexandre Chemetoff, was the first to be selected in order to implement the strategy and political ambitions of the municipal team. The first phase of studies, which lasted ten years (2000-2010), resulted in the desire to reconsider the island as a whole and to define an urban regeneration project adapted to the new economic, environmental, and social challenges without denying the local urban history that has shaped its territory [2]. In this context several industrial buildings were preserved especially on the site of the former shipyards and were reused as museums and exposition spaces [FIG. 5].

[2] Interview in May 2019 with members of the architectural studio of Alexander Chemetoff.

In 2003, Nantes Métropole entrusted SAMOA (Society of Planning of the West Atlantic Metropolitan Area) to manage the project. It is within the framework of a public development agreement, that its mission as a project manager is established for a period of 30 years. The project of Ile-de-Nantes is based on three axes: a) to build a new metropolitan center at the heart of the historical part of the city of Nantes, b) to restore its urban heritage and to create new public spaces and c) to build a mixed-use city for all its inhabitants despite their ethnic origin [3].

[3] Interview in May 2020 with members of Nantes Metropole, urban planning department.

During the first operational phase of the project, we can see that the vision of the municipal team and the team of Atelier de l'Ile-de-Nantes was to propose an urban regeneration project whose principles would be in line with the goals of sustainable development (economic, environmental, and social challenges). However, this notion was not used in the speeches of project managers and local elected officials. The Guide Plan (Plan Guide), a design method proposed by the team of Alexander Chemetoff for the urban regeneration

project of Ile-de-Nantes, makes possible – at least according to the designers – to study the historical eras in the architectural forms and make a projection of their evolution in the future. The method of the team of Alexander Chemetoff is based on a reconfiguration of the site's public spaces, which are seen as fundamental elements of the landscape and contribute to the reintegration to the urban fabric of the former industrial buildings. The Guide Plan expresses the desire of the project management team to restore the link between the past and the future of the territory in order to offer an attractive living environment.

During the ten years of project management by the team of Alexander Chemetoff we can see his vision for the regeneration of the site through small-scale urban projects concerning the site's public spaces and buildings. These include: the Schoelcher footbridge built in 2001, a pedestrian bridge that connects the historical center of Nantes to the site, the Boulevard De Gaulle built in 2007 that connects the north and south part of the site and the Quai des Antilles built in 2007 which echoes the industrial and port memory of Ile-de-Nantes [FIG. 6]. We should note the will of the Municipality of Nantes and the team of project management to create an urban project whose design is linked to territorial experiments. In fact, the Guide Plan provides broad guidelines for the development of the urban regeneration project which allow the preservation of the industrial heritage in the redevelopment of the different site sectors.

The turning point towards more neoliberal practices in architectural and urban design forms is the construction on the site of Ile-de-Nantes in 2008 of the Beaulieu Commercial Center and Nantes School of Architecture in 2009, which will give a new vision for the resilience of the site based on cultural and commercial activities [FIG. 7, 8]. The later construction of the University hospital center of Nantes on the site of Ile-de-Nantes is based on the same principle, which underlines the importance of big infrastructure and equipment in order to achieve urban resilience. Besides this vision towards a productive dimension in architectural and urban design we must underline the risk of gentrification as we have seen previously in the Table 1 which shows a swift towards tertiary activities.



In July 2010, a new phase began for the Ile-de-Nantes project. For a period of 7 years (2010-2017), the project management will be led by the team of architects and urban planners Marcel Smets and Anne-Mie Depuydt. The liberation of the industrial spaces in the south-west of the site and the creation of the Nantes/Saint Nazaire ecocity, determine the new approach to the development of the project. The Transformations Plan (*Plan des transformations*), a new design method developed by the team Smets and Depuydt, is based on the study of the landscape relief as a strategy for the regeneration of the site. It is a transformative design process for the development of the site until 2030, which analyses the territory like a set of plaques whose architectural and urban structure is intimately linked to their geological structure and landscape [4].

The restoration of the connection between the territory and its industrial past through the redevelopment of the quays and banks, which was part of the strategy of the Chemetoff team, is pursued during the project management of Smets and Depuydt. During this phase of the project the banks of the Loire River are

[4] Interview in June 2021 with members of the architectural studio of Smets and Depuydt.



[FIG. 5] *Reconversion of industrial buildings into exhibition spaces*, ©Varvara Toura, 2023. Former office buildings and warehouses of the industrial era located in the Ile-de-Nantes site are restored and reused as museums and exhibition spaces.



[FIG. 6] *The Quai des Antilles in Nantes*, ©Varvara Toura, 2023. The redesign of the west part of the site of Ile-de-Nantes led to the creation of a cultural and tourist zone on the former shipyards which includes the reuse of elements of the industrial past.





[FIG. 7] *The School of Architecture of Nantes*, ©Lacation and Vassal.



[FIG. 8] *The surrounding public space of the School of Architecture of Nantes*, ©Varvara Toura, 2023. The construction of the city's School of Architecture on the site of Ile-de-Nantes is part of the strategy of the municipal team to attract students and thus lead to the economic development of the deindustrialized territory.



transformed into places for walking and leisure. The study of site's landscape relief is also based on other founding elements of the site's urban history, such as the railway infrastructure, which is integrated into the site's regeneration project in order to play a new role.

In this second operational period of the project, we can see the will of the management team and the Municipality of Nantes to continue the redevelopment processes begun by the previous management team. On the other hand, it should be noted the different policies for the preservation of industrial heritage during this phase of the project, which are now not based on the rehabilitation of the industrial buildings of the site but on the inscription of traces of the industrial past in a system of parks that unite the various neighbourhoods of the site. In addition, it can be noted that the Transformations Plan is an operational document that provides broad guidelines for the development of the project, as was done previously by the Guide Plan of the team Chemetoff. We can therefore see a local urban planning approach (*urbanisme à la nantaise*) that highlights territorial experiments in architectural and urban design which allows a balance in city planning through the construction of new contemporary buildings and the conservation and reuse of industrial buildings. However, it should be mentioned that the construction of big infrastructure and equipment on the site such as the University Hospital and the City Courthouse, as well as the creation of neighbourhoods that promote commercial and cultural activities, have modified the social character of the project. The swift to different values and meanings in architecture closer to a more productive dimension is evident and has as results the arrival of executives and entrepreneurs and the increase of rentals and property sale prices.

### — The Docks-de-Seine project: reshape and connect to the city an industrial site near Paris

The willing of a group of industrialists to create an outer harbour downstream in Saint-Ouen near the Paris Metropolis has contributed to the economic attractiveness of the city and its surroundings with the arrival of internationally renowned companies and many state-owned enterprises [5]. The departure of the industries gradually changed the face of the district of the Docks-de-Seine. At the beginning of 2000 (departure of Total in 2003 and Alstom in 2004), discussions began at municipal level in order to give new functions to the Docks site while preserving its industrial heritage.

[5] Interview in February 2018 with members of the direction of cultural heritage of the department of Seine-Saint-Denis.

The major challenge for the City of Saint-Ouen as well as for the present industries on the site like SYCTOM (Metropolitan Household Waste Agency), is to give this territory back to the city's citizens through an urban regeneration project of the former industrial areas [6].

This objective was interpreted by the Municipality of Saint-Ouen and the project management team as the need to link the city center of Saint-Ouen to the industrial remnants of the site in order to offer to the Docks new development perspectives. The goal of the Municipality of Saint-Ouen and the developers is to transform the industrial site into a mixed-use

[6] Interview in June 2021 with the Deputy Delegate for General Administration, City Policy, Citizenship, Participatory Democracy and Associative Life of Saint-Ouen.

sustainable neighbourhood, with the reuse of former industrial buildings and the maintenance and development of important metropolitan facilities on the site (energy pole of Saint-Ouen). In 2007, the City of Saint-Ouen commissioned to Séquano Aménagement the management of the urban regeneration project, as part of a concession for the development of the Docks until 2025. The project management team selected is led by Makan Rafatdjou (architect) and is consisted by urban planning and landscape agencies (Agence Reichen & Robert Associés, Olga Tarraso, Hélène Saudecerre, Peria & Pena, Coup d'Eclat, Beri, Ter Agency). The development of the urban regeneration project of the Docks-de-Seine began in 2007 with the creation of the ZAC of the Docks (Urban Development Zone).

The realization of the development project is the result of two factors. On the one hand, the creation of the ZAC, result of a reflection carried out by the Municipality of Saint-Ouen for the transformation of its territory. On the other hand, the announcement of Total in March 2003 of the closure of its factory at the east part of the site of the Docks, resulted in the lifting of the Seveso perimeter (industrial sector with a risk of major accidents) and in the first urban planning projects for the site's redevelopment in 2004 as part of the local PADD (Planning and Sustainable Development Framework). According to the PADD the site of the Docks will be part of an urban regeneration program that includes all city's brownfields while at the same time its urban regeneration program is in line with the Municipality's strategy to preserve and demonstrate its industrial fabric through the rehabilitation and reuse of former industrial buildings [7].



[7] Interview in April 2020 with members of Séquano Aménagement (project management team).

The purchase of 18.8 ha of the site of the Docks by the French real estate group Nexity in March 2004 (initially they belonged to the French enterprise Alstom) shows the differentiation of the project from other sustainable neighbourhoods in France, because in this case we can find a private company among the team of developers of the urban regeneration project. This vision to include private companies in the development of the site is described in the 2008 PLU (Local Urban Planning Plan) as a strategy that aims to attract private investors who in turn will contribute to new forms of architectural and urban design as well as to economic resilience.

The strategy of the Municipality to attract private companies for the funding of the project of the Docks-de-Seine led to a swift from industrial activities to tertiary ones, to the demolition of industrial buildings in order to construct new buildings in the perimeter that belongs to Nexity as well as to a change of the socio-professional status of the city's inhabitants as we have seen in previous part of the paper. The construction of office buildings on the site of the Docks [FIG. 9] is also linked to the previous construction of office buildings to the nearby Victor Hugo neighbourhood in which former industrial buildings were demolished. In the Dhalenne sector, three office buildings developed by Nexity (one of the developers of the urban regeneration project) were acquired by private investors: in July 2007 (Hines), in November 2008 (Generali & Nexity REIM) and in June 2011 (Gecina). The construction of the first two buildings, Kappa and Sigma, was launched with an already present tenant, Alstom. These buildings were built before the creation of the ZAC of the Docks in 2007.

The Dhalenne sector has a special status in the development of the urban regeneration project of the Docks, especially after Nexity acquired 18.8 hectares from the Alstom group. We must mention that the industrial zone has been located since 1917 on the grounds of a former racecourse. The real estate developer Nexity is looking to develop a policy of co-creation of the territory and collaboration in the processes of urban regeneration. Through its role as a contracting authority, it seizes to guarantee opportunities for the group's real estate development subsidiaries and companies [8].

[8] Interview in June 2020 with members of the French real estate developer Nexity.

What we should note from Nexity's speech is its ambition to be directly involved in urban regeneration projects, as is the case of the Docks-de-Seine. In this context, Nexity tries to assume the financing of the whole urban regeneration project (buildings, equipment, infrastructure) and become a contracting authority through the purchase of the industrial land. We should also mention the swift to the values and meanings in the architectural design of social housing in an industrial area as the prices of Nexity's housing are



[FIG. 9] *The building of the Region of Ile-de-France in Saint-Ouen*, ©Teachix, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/af/Conseil_R%C3%A9gional_d%27%C3%8Ele-de-France%2C_%C3%A0_Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine_1.jpg. The central building of the Region has relocated on the site of Docks-de-Seine close to the sector of the local Municipal house in order to be near the office buildings of private companies and metro stations.






[FIG. 10] *The commercial and office building La Halle Alstom in Saint-Ouen*, ©Reichen-Robert. The former industrial building of Alstom (warehouse) on the site of Docks-de-Seine is transformed to a commercial and office building in which there is the office of Saguez and Partners, an international interior design studio.



higher compared to the ones of other companies. A tripartite agreement between the Municipality of Saint-Ouen, Séquano Aménagement and Nexity was concluded in 2009, before being revised in 2012, in order to guarantee the project management of the ZAC of the Docks.

The agreement signed between the Municipality of Saint-Ouen, Séquano Aménagement and Nexity seems to have slowed down the ambitions of Nexity to develop and commercialize the Dhalenne sector and thus profoundly change its working-class character in architectural and urban design forms. However, its involvement in the urban regeneration project of the Docks, following the purchase of land by the Alstom group, attracted several investors interested in tertiary activities and led to the demolition of industrial buildings even though certain buildings such as the Hall Alstom were preserved and restored [FIG. 10]. These activities change the meaning of urban resilience in industrial areas as the social character of the Docks project (a project for all, especially low-income families, and immigrants) is confronted with a productive dimension in architectural design and with the gentrification processes already observed in Saint-Ouen and in other municipalities of the Ile-de-France region.

## Conclusions

The issue of preserving urban heritage, which is often cited by stakeholders as a good practice regarding the subject of urban regeneration of industrial brownfields, has also its contradictions according to the two parameters of preservation of industrial heritage (preservation of the built

heritage, preservation of the social fabric). It is evident from the previous analysis of the context of the two regeneration programs that the working-class character of former industrial districts no longer exists with the arrival of executives in these territories. Despite the replacement of industrial activities by tertiary ones, traces of the industrial past are still present on both sites (we can note the rehabilitation of old industrial buildings in the Ile-de-Nantes project and the continuous presence of industrial activities on the site of Docks-de-Seine). CD

Associations of former industrial workers, researchers and scholars who work on the local industrial heritage, as well as the services of cultural heritage of the two cities studied in the article, manifested against local municipalities and the teams of project management in cases of decisions to demolish industrial buildings and equipment, as they wanted to safeguard the urban fabric around factories. Furthermore, they have succeeded in integrating into the new plans of the districts' traces of their industrial past as is the case of the *Fonderies* district on the site of Ile-de-Nantes. The preservation of industrial heritage of the two sites goes beyond the rehabilitation of certain industrial buildings and also includes the creation of industrial museums, publications, and exhibitions regarding the places of industrial production and the living conditions of former industrial workers, as well as guided tours of industrial monuments. Therefore, it can be seen that the industrial heritage contributes to the urban resilience of the two cities with the preservation of architectural and urban design forms while at the same time it offers the possibility of a collaborative economy with the direct participation of local communities in the planning processes of their living environments.

CD CARLO DEREGIBUS
As a side note, I find it strange that, too often, architects seem to be great at renovating industrial sites, thus enhancing their architectural characters; however, they are not as smart in designing new industrial sites. This is particularly revealing of the meaning of the "past" we're speaking of; a romanticised meaning related to the intentionality of memory and its poetic fallacy.

VARVARA TOURA
I think that it has to do with the fact that many architects, especially those who work in the domain of conservation and restauration of historical buildings, are primarily interested in the preservation of the architectural past. They approach architecture in a romanticized way. On the other hand, the specialization that characterises modern societies lead to the perception that the design of industrial sites is more related to the work of urban planners than to those of architects. It is a pity though as the design of these type of places could potentially lead to innovations in the architectural conception as it has already happened in the past at the beginning of industrial revolution.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
So true.

## Discussion

To go further on the subject of urban regeneration of industrial brownfields and their development in a resilient way, we should underline the link between the location of brownfields (inside or on the outskirts of cities), the architectural and urban design forms of the industrial era (factories, small industrial units, social housing, administration offices) and the policies and obstacles for their reconversion. Brownfield sites on the outskirts of large cities are part of urban expansion dynamics in order to respond to the need for new housing that is less expensive to the real estate prices in central districts. Real estate prices in peripheral neighbourhoods have increased over time and have led to a change in the identity of these neighbourhoods, which are no longer working-class neighbourhoods but rather gentrified places. Brownfield sites inside cities centers are part of urban regeneration programs which include the reuse and reconversion of industrial infrastructure and the creation of public spaces on these sites.

These urban regeneration programs often include the construction of new residential buildings whose real estate prices are the same to those in other central city neighbourhoods. The socio-economic identity of central city districts has changed, as has done that of the peripheral districts, with the arrival of executives, which in turn led to the gentrification of working-class neighbourhoods and the rejection of modest socio-professional categories to the periphery of cities. At the same time many industrial buildings were demolished in order to construct new commercial and office buildings. Can we continue to talk about industrial identity and urban resilience in the context of the gentrified city? Policies such as the reuse of industrial buildings as social housing, property prices' controls and equal access to housing could reverse this trend. However, we must ask ourselves under what conditions are such policies possible while maintaining the industrial and popular character of these sites?



The local political and social context plays a major role in making decisions about the content of brownfield conversion programs. All cities do not have the means to take such operations, either because they lack funding or because they are in economic decline. Voluntarism and political stability at local level (we should mention that the reconversion programs last for several years and the continuity of local policies is a strong point for their implementation), the active associative network (both architectural associations and inhabitants and activists) and the favourable financing conditions (public-private partnership, public funds, European Union funds in the case of member countries) make these policies possible and at the same time differentiate them according to the challenges and orientations determined by the different actors. In addition, we should note that a certain number of cities, especially at European level, find the opportunity to finance such operations through the organisation of sport events (for example the Olympic Games in London in 2012 where the Olympic Village was built on an industrial brownfield on the outskirts of the city) or cultural events (such is the case of the European Capital of Culture in which the host city is often a deindustrialized one and industrial buildings are reconverted and reused for cultural activities). We could, therefore, underline the exceptional conditions and means (financing, media coverage) that lead to the realization of this type of operations.

We should also note the confrontation between the concepts and meanings of resilience in architectural and urban design which are usually based on low-cost practices such as the reuse of existing buildings and the cost of large-scale urban regeneration operations which is high as it usually involves the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of new ones. The financing of such projects requires large amounts of capital, at the risk of disadvantaging other municipal policies (health, education, housing). We can see therefore that urban resilience in former industrial cities could be achieved through a balance in city planning that involves the construction of small-scale contemporary buildings and the conservation and reuse of industrial buildings.

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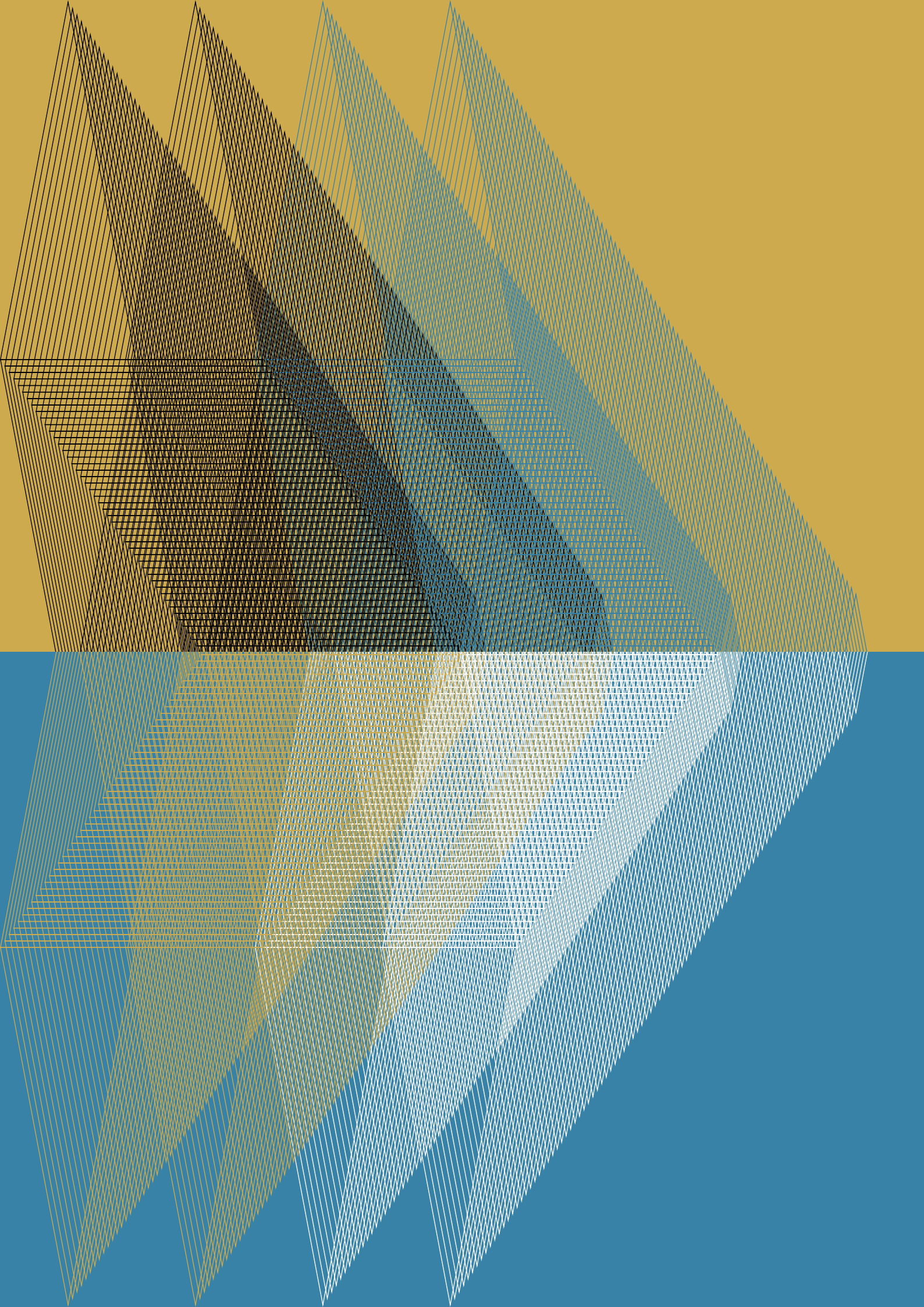
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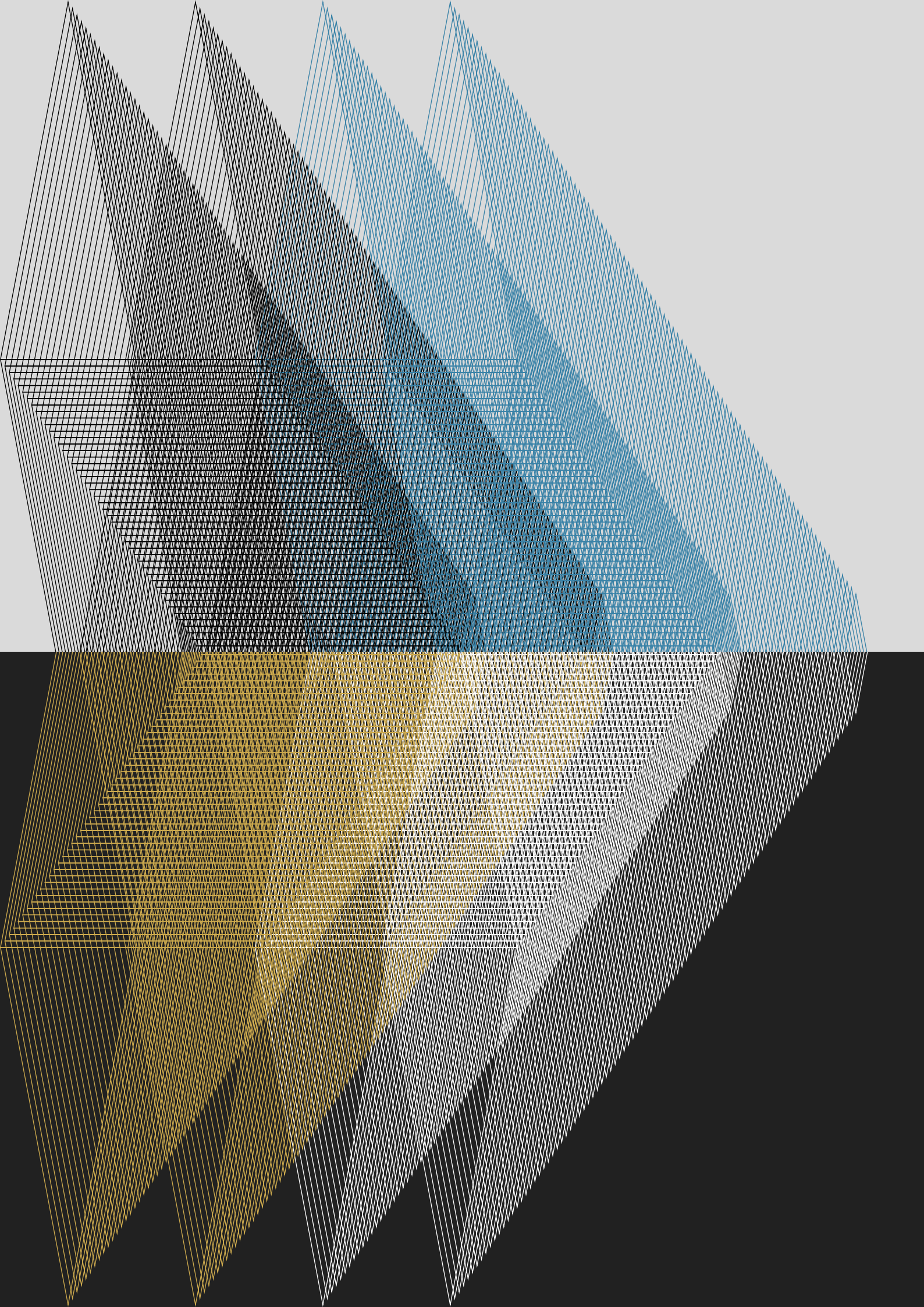
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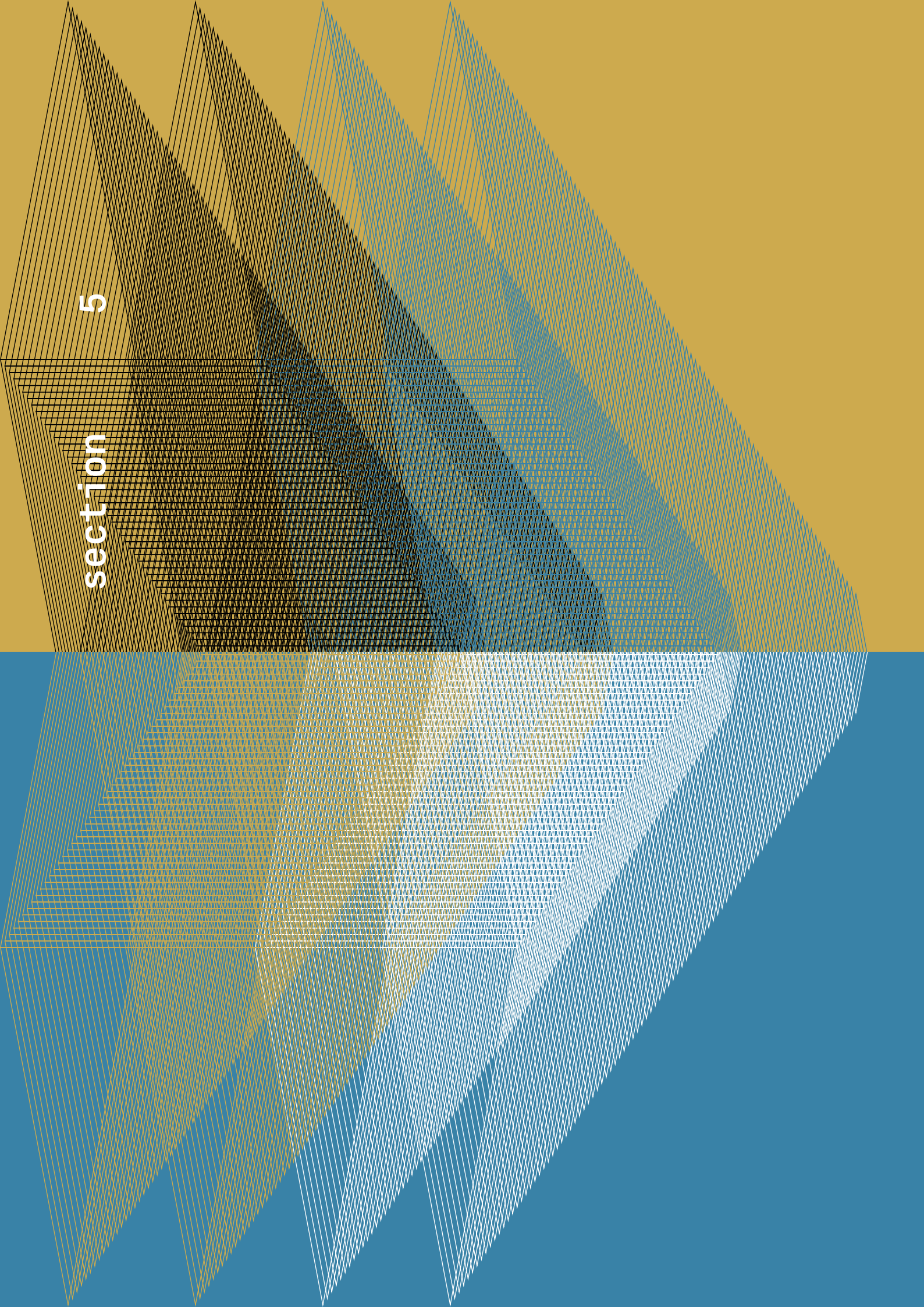
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5
Section

AFTERWORD

# The meaning of Meaning in Architecture, now

Carlo Deregibus

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A hundred thousand words, even if the questions from which the issue started stayed almost unanswered, some key points must be underlined. Despite any tentative definition, the spurious character of the ontological nature of architecture emerges as ubiquitous, and can be mapped out of the papers of the issue. Just as well, our idea that meanings far exceed forms proved true: only, this "far" was jolly underestimated. Finally, the richness and depth of architectural design result from the complex relationship between local and global trends, approaches, and imaginaries. Then, one more thing must be highlighted: the objective success of the virtual debate. Funny as it was to organise – and cumbersome to page – these comments are, to me, a hint of the deeper meaning of *Meaning in architecture, now*.



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## There and back again

A hundred thousand words later, we can finally look back at the introduction and its four main questions – about new forms of meaning, new meanings of form, resilience of meanings, and resilience of forms. On the one hand, we could safely say that they stay open. No one has tried to answer them directly, but they continuously materialise *indirectly*, especially in debates. In my opinion, this indirect persistence confirms my idea that the meaning of architecture is something to deal with, more than to define; something that was so obvious that when it was conceptualised, half a century ago, it became a problem ontologically impossible to solve; something that we continuously irritate through our design actions, but stay on a level of the architectural system we cannot master – because we are inside it.

However, some conclusions could be highlighted, or at least some relevant points.

## Four bells

### — Architecture as a threshold

The first point is the difficulty of considering *architecture* ontologically. In the original debate, architecture was also continuously mentioned but rarely defined. In the same way, in the present issue, architecture is somehow given for granted: intended as the straightforward result of the work of architects, selected following the system of journals and prizes, evoked as the ethereal dimension of some preferred works, architecture is all but defined. This is evident in the fourth section, as well as the different contributions to the interview. I would say that this is perhaps the strongest confirmation of the spurious nature of architecture: all the theories that tried in the past to give a rational, scientific base just failed in understanding the nature of artistic nature of architecture – or, we could say, the meaning of meaning in architecture. Recalling Vittorio Gregotti's "Architecture Happens," Sarah Robinson's "Architecture is a Verb" goes in the same direction, though with a slightly different sense. In the first case, architecture is the (seemingly) casual result of the system; in the second, it is the quality of the building's performativity. I would say both are right, as they look at architecture from different points of view – from outside the system of architectural actions and from inside. In the first case, with a, let's say, cosmic perspective, architecture is a happening that gets a sense only *after* the changes; and here is, in my opinion, the problem of the ethnographic approaches, which risk changing evolutions into causes – *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, as we could say. In the second, we adopt an individual point of view – the designer's or another one. Hence, here, architecture emerges in the personal experience, and the role of the intentions seems much more relevant (this could recall the *gesture* definition of Wittgenstein); not casually, all architectural narratives stress these expectations, somehow telling us what we should feel and perceive. None of these two interpretations fully define architecture; instead, architecture comes from the interaction of the two dimensions. Hence, yes, it happens, but not casually: only, we cannot grasp its causes nor take both

perspectives simultaneously. This is why meaning in architecture is so elusive, and discourses about it are so disconnected, like each one is speaking of a different thing while calling it in the same way.

## — A million and one meanings

The second interesting point is that the plurality of meaning needs to be recognised in the architectural discourses. We said that usually, two main perspectives are unconsciously adopted – the first being the cosmic one and the second the individual one. Yet, there are many more perspectives than this, and this rarely emerges in the present issue: or rather, it appears in negative, with some different perspectives that reveal the existence of this undercurrent plurality of meanings (see, for instance, the contributions of the third section). As a matter of fact, even the individuals – through their intentionalities and mainly unconsciously – attribute various, sometimes inconsistent meanings to phenomena. This assortment is raised to power in groups and communities. Moreover, everything has a recursive, distributed, more or less hidden agency: think of the sudden and explosive effect of the cancel culture, or the impact of the pandemic on design. In the same way, socio-economic issues at all scales have a role in changing our vision of the present and the future. Hence, this plurality far exceeds the denunciation by Manfredo Tafuri fifty years ago – and the following call to arms by Carlo Olmo and many others – precisely because the meaning has the same systemic scale of the society itself, which is (or appears to be) always more complex. The non-architectural meanings continuously, unpredictably irritate the system of architecture – and vice versa, albeit far less: this is why meaning emerges from the projects only after them, despite the narratives of architects. Three are the consequences. The first is that any attempt of "integral design" approaches, typical of the early 2000s, or the new efforts to set hyper-detailed norms, cannot but fail, as they miss the main point – that is, that most meanings cannot be designed at all. The second is that, conversely, any architect can find a niche for his architecture as far as he matches the corresponding system of meaning generation – the success in terms of market is, in fact, a matter of *positioning*. Lastly, this plurality is continuously increased by the fact that designers, in any case, constantly offer occasions of new meanings just by being architects – even if they choose to do nothing, as Cedric Price brilliantly demonstrated – and this, once more, highlights the unavoidable ethical side of architectural design and its *potential* role in the society.

## — Same same but different

The third is architecture's obvious – but mainly unexpressed – glocalised nature, which overpasses the global dimension typically associated – and so often blamed – with contemporary architectural design practice and collective imaginary. On the one hand, in fact, the local nature of architecture emerges in the practices described in the interviews and in the last section's articles (albeit also the second section quite clearly highlights this dimension). It is, in fact, clear that the work of architects deals with local issues, problems, values and, ultimately, meanings. On the other, the very same examples show how global the approaches to design can be,

allowing architects to act everywhere while staying faithful to their ideas or schools, inevitably leading to an analogical application of theories, approaches, preconceptions and, ultimately again, meanings. This glocalised dimension is also evident in contemporary architectural education. Indeed, there is a global market for universities, a marathon where the ranking system plays a critical role. Just as well, the market of architectural jobs is international, with younger practitioners applying for experiences and employment in more and less famous firms. At the same time, each of these firms has its own approach to design, typically recited out on their website under a pretentious page named "mission" or "vision". The curious thing is that, besides marketing claims, indeed each firm does *have* a different approach, and a (maybe slightly) different idea of what the "mission" of architecture is. Only, his true success is often linked to his ability to export his internationally, while the "local" relevance is associated with good practitioners. Just as well, each university indeed has a different approach to teaching (and learning). But its importance – and ranking – depends on its international reputation and dimension. Hence, there is a constant irritation – using system theory terms – between: the local system of rules, norms, places, and meanings; the individual approach (where "individual" here identifies the firm, whether it was an actual individual or a team: then, this too is a sub-system), made of theories, skills, workflows, and meanings; and the global influences of architectural cultural and imaginary, which is experienced in any case locally and variously. And this irritation happens everywhere and continuously, globally. This is how architecture emerges: an emergence that only a systemic approach and a purposeful use of meaning to discuss architectural design can explain.



## — Means and ends

The fourth point is the relative irrelevance of the means architects use – in the term's broadest sense. For instance, the rise of AI is mainly seen as just the last of a long series of tools; the self-promotion of architects does not take into consideration the sophisticated commercial techniques showed by many newer; the huge budget implied by most architectural examples nowadays is rarely questioned, just as it was presumed; moreover, never the workflow and the work conditions of architects have been cited. We could derive two main consequences of these "inattentions". The first is the idealisation of meanings. Indeed, meanings are automatically linked with the ideal. We struggle to understand that a normal house in a normal flat in a normal block is packed with meanings important to someone. Consequently, we omit considering the ordinary as architecture, save the case in which an architect designs it, adding some "special" meanings. Yet, architects can't decide meanings; hence, this is proof by contradiction that architecture can happen everywhere, and the definition of what is ordinary follows this attribution of meaning. Just as well, by "architect" or "designer", we typically refer to the author of the core concept behind a building, just as art descended from genial intuitions. This negates the long work behind any architectural work and underrates the roles of all other architects, mythicising a few individuals – the archistars and the wannabe ones. The second consequence is the association of

meaning with the result (or the ends) much more than the processes (or the means). On the one hand, this is obvious: just the result grants the success of the process. On the other, it could lead to a severe underestimation of many factors that strongly affect contemporary architecture and the collective architectural imaginary. Social media has changed our relationship with images; AI is revolutionising our way of producing projects; money, norms and non-architectural design issues enormously impact architecture; nevertheless, they are most often ignored in architectural discourses but in exceptional cases. Quite the opposite, what emerges from the papers – in all sections, more or less indirectly – is that meaning in architecture grows from processes exogenous or endogenous to architecture itself. Therefore, understanding the waves of meaning requires overpassing the idealistic illusions of contemporary architecture to valorise the reciprocal influence of the project and the process(es).

## Long live debate

However, there is a last point: at least for me, the more paramount. The meaning of *Meaning in Architecture*, half a century ago, was the mapping of vibrant, international debate: a lively arena. It was a geography of thought, where papers and articles were criticised and discussed, where opinions were opposed and mercilessly fought, and where ideas on architecture defined schools and buildings. The contemporary world of architecture is, in fact, quite different. We have endless books and papers on architecture, but no arena exists for discussing it. We have infinite examples of good and bad architecture, but no discussion about what good and bad are. We have universities involved in an international race toward the first positions in various rankings but with a mercurial cultural position. In the age of endless possibilities, where all styles are possible, and never-seen-before wonders are inaugurated weekly, architects and scholars act, speak, and write like monads, congratulating reciprocally for whatever design. That is why the surprising success of the internal debate is so comforting. Thanks to all the authors who produced so many reciprocal comments – and with the perpetual blame of the graphic designer who had to arrange them – many papers have lived twice, and we got something that nowadays is so very rare: the possibility of an open debate. Questioning others' writing is implicitly hampered by the peer-review structure of contemporary journals, nor may there be a sincere interest in exchanging ideas, opinions and judgements – at least compared to the run to publish. Quite the opposite, here, the debate, made virtually by using shared documents to trace the comments, is the very core of the issue, its most original feature and, ultimately, its deepest meaning. The four conclusions highlighted becomes apparent precisely in the comments, where granitic certainties prove their ontological feebleness, where the disclosure of fractures happens through a Derridian *difference*, where plurality appears by the reciprocal deviating references, and where means and ends blur in a layered mixture. We no longer have the granitic certainty of the *Great Debates*, nor the absolute mentorship of the Masters of the past. Nevertheless, we can find new places, new ways and new forms of discussing architecture and its meaning(s), and this issue is a small but lively example. Debate is dead, long live debate.

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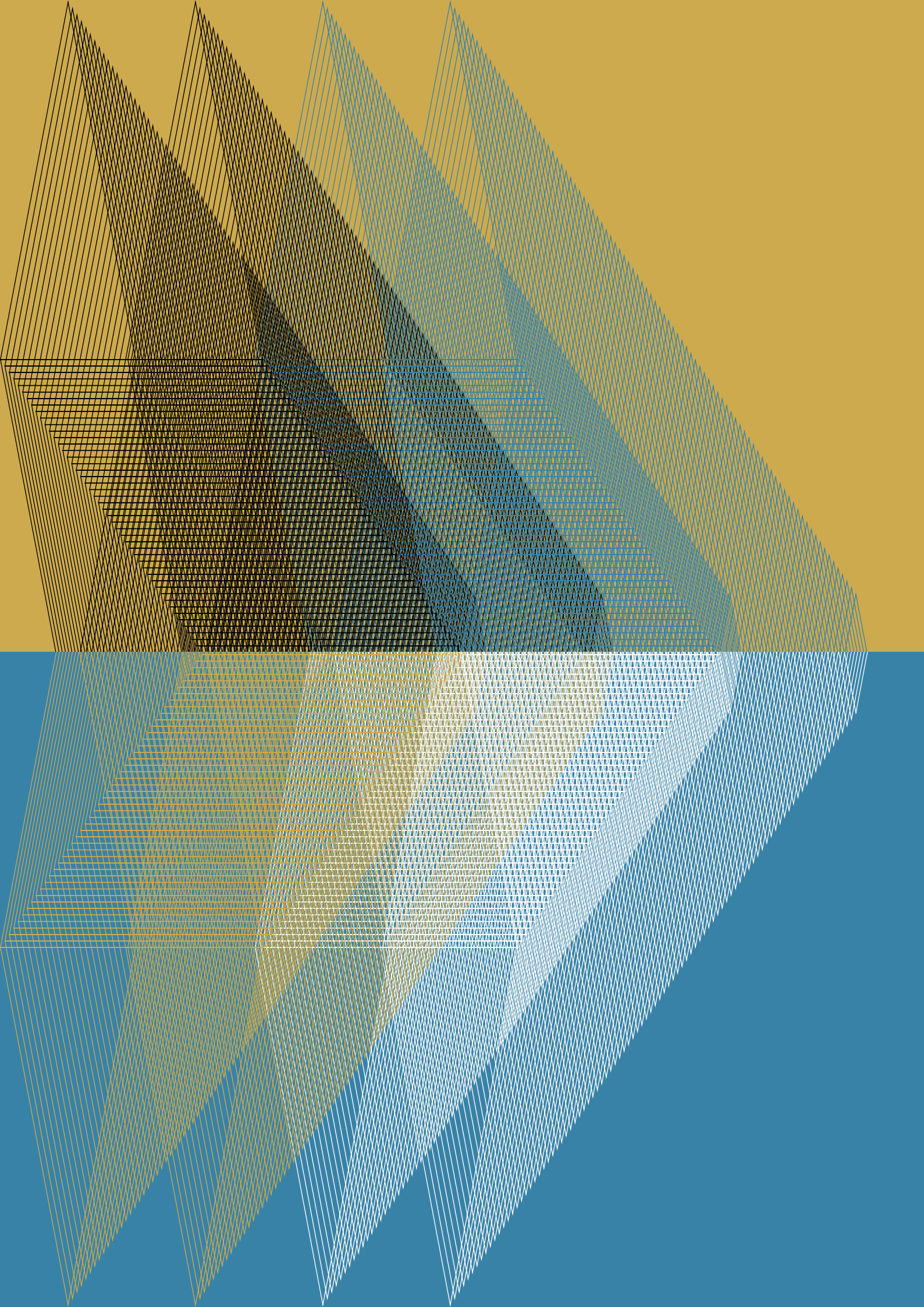
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II/2024
ISSN: 2385-1945

Philosophy Kitchen #21

# meaning in architecture, now

curated by
carlo deregibus & aurosa alison

Philosophy Kitchen. Rivista di filosofia contemporanea
#21, II/2024
Rivista scientifica semestrale, soggetta agli standard internazionali di *double blind peer review*

Università degli Studi di Torino
Via Sant'Ottavio, 20 – 10124 Torino
redazione@philosophykitchen.com
ISSN: 2385-1945

Philosophy Kitchen è presente in DOAJ, ERIHPLUS, Scopus©, MLA, WorldCat, ACNP, Google Scholar, Google Books, e Academia.edu. L'ANVUR (Agenzia Nazionale di Valutazione del Sistema Universitario) ha riconosciuto la scientificità della rivista per le Aree 8, 10, 11, 12, 14 e l'ha collocata in Classe A nei settori 10/F4, 11/C2, 11/C4.

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