CARTHA

Ø **worth sharing, march 2015**

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Ø   **worth sharing**

Editorial
CARTHA

The number of existing outlets of architectural production has never been as big as it is nowadays. At a mouse-click's distance, one can reach an immense, apparently never ending, ever actualizing stream of architecture related images and factual information. The volume of work being shared is positively overwhelming. So overwhelming that one almost drowns in this frenetic stream, without having the chance to reach for a subject and deepen its analysis. The great majority of these publishing entities rely on newness to grasp their audiences, there is no time to go beyond the thin cosmetic veneer that images offer. The other publishing entities, who actually allow themselves the luxury of time to observe, absorb, process and react to architectural production, rely on "experts" to do so.

CARTHA is born as a naive, experimental alternative to this scenario. It is a space which does not rely only on researcher and "qualified people" to desiccate the architectural production, it is a platform to watch how Architecture is being digested, used, and perceived. A medium that will go beyond "slick imagery" and provide us with time to see the fast motion environment in which we evolve. There are obvious limitations to this format, we are well aware of it, but we think that the risk is minimum in comparison to the potential collective gain this experiment can generate.

CARTHA is independent, not bounded by geographical or ideological borders. It wishes to generate synergies with parallel initiatives, cooperation with others approaching this subject in similar manners.

The current issue "worth sharing" is the number Ø. It aspires to dig into the various relations we engage in, as builders, with our environment. Being at the core of systems of coordination and dependencies, we are necessarily sharing practices, spaces, knowledge, and information. Contributors reflected on this according to their interpretations and experiences of what sharing is and how it relates to contemporary architecture and social environments; critical views on what surrounds us, whether buildings, places, tools, or remaining products of our society.

Working together as a cycle, the next three issues will attempt to further develop our insight on how we perceive relations within architecture's spectrum. Thus, the ways in which architects relate to architects, to workers and to users will be themed under the light of today's reality. These are not quiet or usual topics, and there are many reasons behind it. Within this year's timeframe, we aim at attaining a committed, but surely partial, overview of architecture's reality.

With Issue Ø we inaugurate CARTHA and we do it with you.

Diogo Seixas Lopes

Interview Francisco Moura Veiga | Photography Francisco Nogueira

There is no sign on the door of the building, actually there is no clue at all to the reality that lies inside. The office occupies what previously was an auto-workshop in one of Lisbon's historical neighborhoods. The triangular floorplan sets up a two storey room that went through minor interventions, remaining in a typological ambiguity that lends some sort of palpable meaning to the work environment. At one of the edges of the triangle, cornered by two wooden walls, stands a single cubicle, once the mechanic's office, now the small work room Diogo shares with his wife, Patricia. A wooden desk, smoothed by time and work, stood between Diogo and me. He calmly sat back, smoking at a steady rhythm, invitingly answering the questions posed to him. This was not the first time we met, I attended a lecture he gave to a group of swiss students on a study trip to Lisbon. The topic he chose to address was not the obvious choice; hidden historical streets in Lisbon. In the course of his lecture, he drew our attention to the fact that this decayed streets that lay behind and under avenues are, at least, as deserving of a visit as the rest of the city's monuments. The uncommon way he presented Lisbon to the students matches his approach to Architecture. Diogo studied architecture at the FA-UTL in Lisbon at a time when Porto was at its prime. He focussed on acquiring a strong theoretical base before jumping into practical work. He co-authored a book on urban realities[1] shortly after his studies. He was co-editor of Prototypo, a magazine he co-founded, he is now co-editor of the Portuguese Architectural Guild magazine (J-A) and co-curator of the next Lisbon's Architecture Trienal. He works with his wife in Barbas Lopes Arquitectos. He shares his work and the results of his work. Diogo is worth sharing.

Were theoretical production and theoretical contemplation a part of your academic work or did that emerge later?

The first sign that theoretical production was something that interested me happened during school, because of this professor who asked his students to give presentations about several projects. Flagship projects, in some sense. At that time, access to information was very limited. We were handed several projects under the spectrum of Deconstructivism. I gave a presentation about the Jewish Museum by Daniel Libeskind. This happened during my second year in school, round 1990, and back then I had little knowledge about the theoretical production of architecture, let alone this specific practice, so it was a kind of a revelation to me because it was something totally unlike everything I had been exposed to until that time. Even if we do not consider it a theoretical production, we could certainly call it an experimental activity. Eventually, this got me to Berlin and New York doing internships for Libeskind and Asymptote. Because of this, I had access to the work of other architects hinged between theory and practice. So, I developed some interest for that hinge that allowed projects to be vehicles for different subjects besides space, tectonics, or function. This relation between theory and practice would later coalesce with the editorial project of *Prototypo*.[2]

And how did that move to the editorial world happen?

Prototypo was produced with two other colleagues, one of them the graphic designer of the journal. At some point, we thought that it would be more productive if we created our own project. The first steps date back to 1998, a moment of a certain optimism in Portugal. This made it easier to raise funds to finance the journal as a completely independent venture. The magazine had a structure, an editorial concept, that was a success in terms of its scale of operation. Every issue presented a monograph from a foreign architect set side by side with that of a Portuguese architect. A "face-off." There was some criticality in staging contrasts between the work of Portuguese and foreign architects. We tried to play with the interests of different markets, different

audiences. Prototypo had from the start a mechanism of self-destruction. It was set to end when it reached the ninth issue. P.R.O.T.O.T.Y.P.O.: 9 letters, 9 issues. Along the way we organized a big seminar in 2001, "Performing the City." It was truly a strong event because we had a lot of people coming over to participate as speakers. Not just architects but also researchers, theoreticians, critics. The outcome of those days of discussion was very intense. Our stance towards Prototypo was always about the export of contents and the import of knowledge coming from external agents. When it reached the ninth issue we claimed the right, if not the privilege, to terminate its editorial and critical project the way we wanted to. Afterwards, I made an altogether different kind of move and went abroad. Back then, I was teaching in Lisbon and had been advised to pursue a PhD.

Why and how did people alert you?

I was advised by people outside the architectural circles who had experience from other academic areas. Sooner or later you would not be able to teach without a PhD, at least in Portugal. I started to think about this prospect as a "five-year plan." I chose to do it at ETH Zurich where I already had a small network of contacts via Prototypo. During the same period, I established my own architectural practice with my partner and wife Patrícia Barbas: Barbas Lopes Arquitectos.[3] It is my main activity ever since, even if it happens alongside other projects.

What about teaching?

Teaching also, yes. But all of that revolves around my position as a practicing architect, which I consider to strengthen its theoretical dimension. Nevertheless, I see my resolution to pursue a PhD at ETH Zurich, doing research about Aldo Rossi[4], as a major turning point.

Let me go back to when you were saying that your main occupation is to be an architect, which means building. Built work requires other faculties, even if those faculties are a little latent. You have criticism, theory, you also teach. I would like to quote you: "References al-

1 Lopes, Diogo Seixas / Cera, Nuno, Cimêncio, Lisbon: FENDA, 2002

2 prototypo.com

3 barbaslopes.com

4 March 2015, Park Books will publish „Melancholy and Architecture: On Aldo Rossi" by Diogo Seixas Lopes

low us to make choices that are meaningful and, by being meaningful, they are precise". You said that about the Polytechnical Theatre, by Barbas Lopes Arquitectos. My question is a little obvious but I really want you to be clear about it. Do you feel that theory influences your work and do you feel an improvement in your other project faculties regarding your effective work?

I do. Specially due to these last years of research work in an academic context. I found references on a formal level, but I also became aware of procedures to interpret and transform them. For example, the process of choosing sources. A memory, or an idea, can lead the way of a project. I think there must be an organic process of interaction between all these things. In this sense, to study the legacy of Aldo Rossi was an important contribution to this perception.

I would like to ask you about two moments that I think are important in your biography. The first moment is the J-A[5], alongside André Tavares. The second would be the Lisbon Triennial, also alongside André. Is J-A's editorial concept, somehow, going to be extended to the Triennial?

They are different realities in different times. Both came about after several collaborations with André, such as a seminar we organized at the Canadian Centre for Architecture while we were both doing research there. At that seminar, we presented projects that employed strategies to bring Portuguese architecture closer to an international debate. Provokingly, we finished our presentation with a summit organized in a remote corner of the country revolving around "powerpoint fights" between a group of colleagues. At the time, we wanted to debunk the proverbial sterility of these meetings, using nonsense.

That led to another thing...

Later that led to CPAM [Concentration of Portuguese Architects in Mação], with a more institutional concept. We hosted these gatherings because the local professional scene lacked a display of critical mass. So, we orchestrated our own.

And what did those gatherings create?

These gatherings created moments for architects to come together, specially from younger generations. Thereafter, this led to a series of other initiatives that further highlighted the work of these generations and their new modes of practice. Directing J-A has been a useful manner to chart that activity. It has also been a pretext to engage in teamwork creating a staff of writers, photographers, and graphic designers. Since this series of the periodical started, two years ago, we walked this path together developing skills on how to report about architecture. One of our first instincts was to get back to the ethics and aesthetics of a newspaper, because this also had to do with the financial terms of the project and the fact it had less money. So we decided to make the whole magazine in black and white, with the look and structure of a newspaper. Meaning flawless and factual writing, no footnotes, no ambiguity towards academic production. The first editorial set the tone: "Topics are out. Bring on reality." This happened during times of great hardships in Portugal, also for architects. The first issues express this in terms of the editorials and the topics we chose to discuss.

Getting back to a point that is very close to you and that results from my analysis of your work. You gave an interview to Público, in January 15 2014, which I shall quote: "We must end our misunderstandings and this turning our back on each other, so that we can better address this crisis that is affecting our occupation". I don't want to talk about the crisis, I would like to focus on "end our misunderstandings and this turning our back on each other"; Is joint authorship something you are aware of as a natural result of different situations in your life?

I am obviously aware of that pattern since it has been happening for a while. I managed to reinforce these collaborative processes through the architectural practice in partnership with my wife. We have established this joint venture under the name of our studio, as it happens so often these days. Part of this work of shared authorships responds to a critical field of interests that became progressively wider. This allows me to work

within an interdisciplinary scope of subjects, favoring multinuclear interactions instead of mononuclear ones. Like a molecule with different cells moving in all sorts of directions. In our office, we value the individual skills of the collaborators and a sense of diversity that comes from that. It is about appreciating this diversity, but a diversity that is disciplined by work. Furthermore, we do not condone a total separation between life and work. In a way, we live this all the time and it would probably be the same if we were operating in a different field such as politics or the arts. Working under these guidelines is all about creating a core, resulting from a fusion between all these things and how they ultimately can converge to architecture and to architectural projects.

Curated hermit

Roland Reemaa

Saint Onuphrius from Egypt – one of the most famous hermits who lived in the Egyptian deserts in 4th or 5th century, who's severe lifestyle became a cult and an inspiration for several monasteries.

What we share shapes our society and changes our personal habits within these relationships. With the increasing number of people living alone in cities it can be asked how this solitude shapes our personal identity. If there exists an urban hermit, a lone dweller, then what could be the role of sharing his personal life to others? In order to approach the idea of sharing, let us first explore the very opposite of the seemingly public medium of our social affairs in the embodiment of a hermit – a person who lives in seclusion from society.

The very word we use here hermit, from Latin *ĕrēmīta*, meaning 'of the desert' originates from Christian hermits who lived in the Egyptian deserts. It is important to note that the content of the word has various nuances and forms of practices for different cultures and beliefs worldwide. While some forms became institutionalised, such as the desert communities became the models for Christian monasticism, others remained solely dependent on individuals. Although mostly carried by religious reasons, the underlying idea during the period of seclusion is to renounce from one's daily habits and personal volition in search for a higher consciousness.

Most of Asian Buddhism follows the idea that a person should at least once be apart from his contemporary earthly way of living. In some branches of Tibetan Buddhism it is required of monks to do solo retreat for three years and three months. They live in caves and forests for deep contemplation. The monks in search for solitude would not necessarily avoid villages that come to their way. Instead, they would unconditionally help the inhabitants, if only for a fee of a piece of bread to eat. The hermit steps under the service of other living beings with the absence of ego. While committing solely to others, the person no longer is in the centre of his actions himself, therefore entirely sharing himself with the world. This very absence of ego can be seen as absolute sharing. A hermit in order to fully depart from his self could act as a scarecrow on the fields. To abandon one's personal identity within the society by living in an absolute absence of self, leads ultimately as far as identifying a hermit to the forces of nature – like a wind that someone felt and then is already gone.

Funnily enough, and as a contradiction, hermits who could not hide their traces were immediately wanted as great teachers. Hermits were even followed and looked up for. The paradox lies in the fact that after returning from seclusion, sharing these experiences as great stories would only promote the hermit's new identity as a survivor and therefore reinforce his/her ego. We might as well say that hermits we know today by name, as poets or writers, are actually failed ones. We can read their curated stories and imagine them without experiencing them in reality. Although this is the beauty of literature, we could also ask if we were supposed to read them. The question lies in the beginning – if

1 Alari Allik – Eraklusest. Radio show on ERR Radio. Translated from Estonian by author. http://vikerraadio.err.ee/helid?main_id=1937381

2 Euromonitor International. One person households: Opportunities for consumer goods companies. http://blog.euromonitor.com/2007/09/one-person-households-opportunities-for-consumer-goods-companies.html

the act of sharing itself was appropriate by the hermit.[1]

Social changes such as the rise of the solo dweller, the surge in social networks, peer-to-peer logistics, combined with an ageing population common in Western countries, change the way people interact with each other. There is less dependency on communities people reside with, while at the same time highly individualised control over daily habits is increasing, communication being one of them. Events are organised casually, food is delivered, news is read and friends are made without leaving personal territories. Although living densely side-by-side, stitched to urban fabrics of services and infrastructure, there is no urgent need for sharing heated bathrooms or kitchens anymore. The number of one-person households has been on the increase worldwide.[2] Living alone is common and it can be wondered if a modern dweller is turning into an urban hermit. Although solitude is the common ground, it is important to differ how they share themselves with others. Unlike a hermit who aims to lose its ego, a solo dweller finds advantage in solitude in order to customize everything for the ego. Solitude here does not immediately mean loneliness, since great cities are vibrant with intriguing individuals to meet. A hermit can offer help in a village while a solo dweller catches up with friends downtown, but the underlying difference is how the decisions are taken – the first being accidental and the latter organised.

The possibility to switch on and off, to busy and to offline or even to invisible only reinforces one's ego and increases the highly individually curated self where unwanted topics can be simply avoided. Modern social media has offered us the best means to curate our self-image. The actions taken are increasingly in the centre of personal commitment. Our personal knowledge, visual perception, valuable information and quite often not that valuable information are continuously shared through a neatly personalised filter. In a similar but extreme manner it can be thought that the very act of sharing has also become the means to represent a personal image and not the actual content of the shared information. Sharing becomes the victim of objectification. While it still remains the medium that binds the society, it is less accidental and more personalised.

Furthermore gratitude or feedback is expected from the contributor's followers, regardless if the real content was even received. The anxious state of waiting for people to like or to respond only raises self-awareness and personal identity.

It can be therefore critically considered what is shared around us. Was this story just worth sharing? It might be that the increasing amount of urban solo dwellers that live their seemingly customised dream lives, appear to be more like curated hermits that only want to tell their stories. The underlying questions still remain if we were supposed to read them at all. Although these stories can be imagined, talked about and gossiped about, it should be considered if this was actually for sharing or was it for self promotion.

Roland Reemaa (1987) is an architect, graduated from Delft University of Technology. He has worked at Salto Architects and is currently working in Domain, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. He has participated in several workshops along with Anne Holtrop, Juhani Pallasmaa and Kersten Geers. Together with Laura Linsi he tutored an illustration workshop in Slovenia at European Architecture Student Assembly.

Sharing: a reflection on contemporary dwelling

Rubén Valdez

"Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then we can build" [1].

Martin Heidegger in: *Bauen, Wohnen, Denken* 1951.

1,2,3,7 Heidegger, Martin. Poetry, Language, Thought. Harper and Row. New York 1971 (pp. 145, 147, 158)

Based on etymology, Heidegger states that build *"Bauen"*, relates to the Old English and Old High German word for building, *"buan"*, which means "to dwell", to remain or stay in a place. Bauen, according to Heidegger it relates as well to nearness and neighborliness and implies to spare and preserve [2]. For Heidegger dwelling is the basic character of being, we unconsciously dwell, but only when we're conscious about it we can build, "build out of dwelling and think for the sake of dwelling" [3].

4 St. John, Peter. The feeling of things: towards an architecture of emotion Shaping Earth. Wolver Hampton, UK: MS Associates and the University of Wolver Hampton, 2000 (p.78)

Although Heidegger etymologies apply almost exclusively in German language, the reflections coming out of them are somehow of universal value, influencing many architects who focused mostly on cultural, historical and emotional values to create architecture which is "richly associative" [4] to the everyday life and the way we inhabit space. There is no question about the fact that we all have different ways of dwelling and different conceptions of home that may vary depending on each of our cultural and social backgrounds and there is no question that a proper understanding of dwelling may lead to a proper understanding of building; However it is of utmost importance to keep in mind that dwelling is a concept in constant change and that even if certain cul-

5 Sheller, Mimi and Urry, John.The new mobilities paradigm. Environment and Planning, vol. 38, 2006 (pp. 207 – 226)

tural, historical and emotional values remain, the dynamics of society change at a faster rate than architecture does and usually architecture is a consequence of these changes.

As Sheller and Urry affirm in their influential paper *The new mobilities paradigm* [5], probably one of the most important changes in societies in the last decades has been the fact that a constant movement within different entities (cities, countries or even continents) has become not only more affordable and frequent but in some cases even necessary. Work, studies, pleasure or forced displacement has driven people to name home several places at the same time, appropriating and dwelling different spaces in very short periods of time. Having this in mind, the concept of dwelling becomes more complex; how could we define dwelling in a present where a significant percentage of the population lives in a constant travel? Where more and more individuals dwell simultaneously multiple locations, making it difficult to define the concept of home.

If we define home as the place we appropriate and dwell regularly, then home is the apartment we share 10 days a month, our parents' house, that charming place we found in *Airbnb*; Home is Europe, is America, is the intercontinental flight between them; Home is the airports and train stations we know by memory, they become our home for the couple of hours we inhabit them every week (if only all of them had free access wireless).

Linda Voorwinde. A glimpse of a world that exists beyond the boundaries of everyday life. 2013

Internet devices help in keeping us connected to our multiple homes, becoming a key instrument to a simultaneous dwelling. We exist, relate and work through them, they link us with all of our different locations, creating a single one that gives us the comfort none of them can give separately. We continue to develop our lives through a long distance dwelling, we leave, stay in contact and come back trying to re-appropriate places that aren't necessarily the same each time we visit them. Our territory is a broad multiplicity of places where we develop our life simultaneously; we dwell in movement appropriating and re-appropriating a space that is no longer only ours.

Dwelling several places in short periods of time makes it unaffordable for each of us to cherish and protect all of them, a new way of dwelling has come, less focused on the house and more in the territory, a territory we all share and inhabit constantly despite the distance. Having this in mind we have to question the strategies that are based in a permanent or at least a long-term single dwelling for a sedentary life, we need to redefine these strategies either with architecture or with new ways of exchange and appropriation. Sharing comes to mind.

Different strategies have already taken place, whether *Airbnb* or *Kraftwerk 1*[6] in Zürich, they have provided a revolutionary basis to re-think the concept of dwelling and the economic exchanges around it involving completely new ways of appropriation of space. As much as this kind of strategies are mostly of an economic and social nature, it is our responsibility as architects to reflect about this new paradigm and understand it in a much deeper way in order to "build out of dwelling and think for the sake of dwelling"[3]. Society changes at a faster rate than architecture does and the way we dwell is no exception, there is no valid reason to ignore the human and emotional values that compose architecture, but one thing is for sure, the Black forest farmhouse[7] needs to fit the contemporary dweller.

Rubén Valdez (Zacatecas, Mexico, 1986) studied architecture at the Accademia di architettura di Mendrisio and currently studies contemporary art at ECAL (ècole cantonal d'art de Lausanne). After doing an internship at Miller & Maranta Architekten in Basel and Estudio Toga in Mexico, he worked independently in Guadalajara, México, on several single housing projects. He has been participant of different architecture and art exhibitions such as „Monumental Masonry" at the Sir John Soane's museum (London), „Vertige des correspondances" curated by Julien Fronsacq at ELAC (Lausanne) and the upcoming „Life is a Bed of Roses" curated by Stephanie Moisdon at Fondation Ricard (Paris). As part of his master thesis, he is currently undertaking a research about the parallelisms between the bullfighting ring "La Petatera" in the mexican Pacific Coast and the work of Joseph Beuys on humans and their relationship to nature.

6 *Kraftwerk 1* is a housing cooperative in Zürich, that operates under a share scheme, "buying" shares of the appartment one will inhabit together with other flatmates and selling them once one leaves. The housing scheme is composed of apartments that range from 1 room to 13.5 rooms, making sharing a key part of the project. kraftwerk1.ch

7 Heidegger uses the black forest farmhouse as an example of timeless architecture conceived independently from architectural concepts that is in "simple oneness with nature"

Towards the Edge of Knowledge; Lessons learned from sharing what (we didn't know) we know
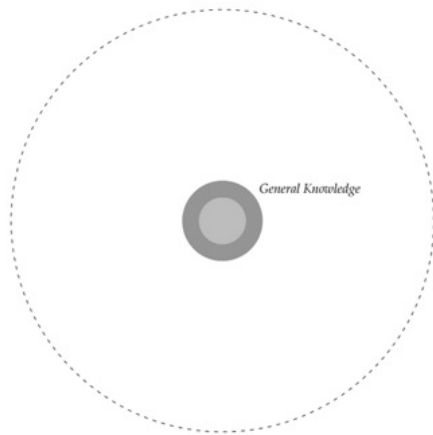
Vera Sacchetti, Juan Palencia

Fig. 1
General knowledge, as seen within the sphere of knowledge. Adapted from Matt Might, presented at TEOK #2.1 by Stefano Orani

Inception

Ten minutes into Stefano Orani's lecture, the room was silent. It was late April 2014, and around twelve people were sitting in a white living room, some on the couch, others on the floor. A side table had snacks and drinks at hand. Stefano stood in front of a projection of a spectacular image, a chronological diagram of the universe's expansion since the Big Bang. A physical cosmologist, Stefano was one of the first guests of TEOK, an informal lecture series founded in Basel in early 2014, and he was sharing what he knew and loved about the first instants of the life of the universe. Guests were silent, absorbed by this larger-than-life topic that expanded way beyond what our brains are used to think about in daily life's many menial tasks. The solemnity of the topic was, however, quickly interrupted by questions and doubts, in an approach that helped understand its complexity, bringing it closer to the minds and hearts of all those attending. By the end of the lecture, laughter filled the room – the sunset light was still strong, and a series of equations projected onto the wall lingered on as guests and speaker continued conversation.

A project originally born out of a few drunken nights and whatsapp conversations, TEOK (an acronym for The Edge of Knowledge) is an informal lecture series where uncommon, unexpected topics are presented in someone's living room. Lecturers are encouraged to talk about things they love and know about, but that are not centrally connected to their daytime occupation. Their short presentations are interspersed with snacks and drinks, to encourage informality and stimulate conversation, and topics have ranged from food to the cosmos, internet memes and personal obsessions. The events always take place on Tuesday nights, and surprisingly to us at first, leave everyone energized and full of ideas.

The series' inception was sparked by curiosity. As expats living and working in Basel, the TEOK co-founders were genuinely puzzled by the amount of interesting people to be found in the city, not to mention its cultural capital and international aspect. In effect, Basel is, upon careful observation, one of the most international cities any of us has lived in to date; and not only that, but also filled to the brink with early and mid-career professionals with different life and cultural experiences, most of whom are significantly competent and have come here to work, live and achieve something. This makes for an extremely singular combination, and we were fundamentally curious about what moves and intrigues these people other than their day job. The foundation of TEOK hinges on the belief that all of us, in this city, know more about something than anyone else around them; should they share their knowledge, the lives of those who surround them will become better. The event series advocates the dissemination of knowledge in its most pure incarnation, and no topic is consi-
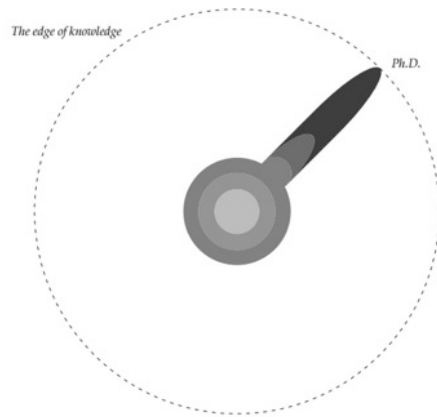
12

Fig. 2
Reaching the edge of knowledge in any given field, marked by an exponential departure from the sphere of general knowledge. Adapted from Matt Might, presented at TEOK #2.1 by Stefano Orani
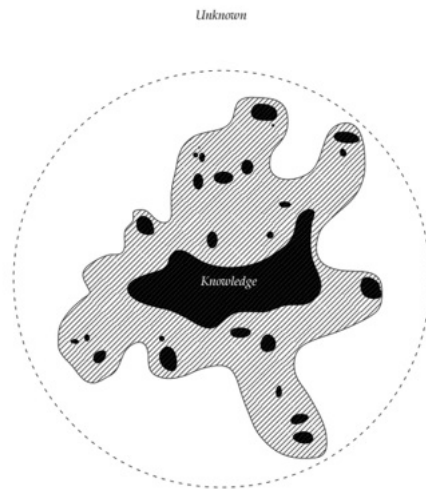

Fig. 3
A redefinition of the sphere of knowledge: white marks the unknown, and black marks the known aspects within the sphere of knowledge. Adapted from the diagram presented at TEOK #6.1 by Tobias Eglauer

dered unfit for a TEOK lecture. Sharing is caring – and TEOK is the living proof of this assertion.

Growth

Throughout the next nine months, TEOK grew in scope and complexity. Our speakers proposed new, interactive lecture formats, doing away with the projector at times and delving into more experimental territory. The curation process behind the event showed us that, at times, speakers don't think that what they are interested in would be interesting for a wider audience – it is our challenge to change their perspective, too, and make them see their own interests from an outsider's point of view. Topics and ideas discussed in the lectures soon became more interactive and participatory. Jasmin Albash gave us a singing lesson, introducing TEOK guests to the Complete Vocal Technique and showing that everyone can sing even if they don't really think that way. David Gregori y Ribes and Brigitte Clements brought unexpected food pairings, proposing combinations that challenged our notion of taste and enhanced our experience of coffee. But the complexity and interaction was not restrained to the mere formal aspect of the lectures; speakers like Tobias Eglauer challenged the core definition of The Edge of Knowledge (fig. 1 and 2), proposing a redefinition of knowledge (fig. 3) from a clear-cut term to an ambiguous denomination full of grey areas (fig. 4). Through his lecture, we understood that knowledge is also incremental and questionable, and through unexpected interpretations there can be new ways of looking at the world around us.

Similarly, lecturers such as Matylda Krzykowski raised the ante, proposing different ways to look at the world from the point of view of an object or typology (fig. 5). Matylda chose the sausage as a typological starting point, and took TEOK guests on a fascinating tour that connected the plate to contemporary sculpture and minimalist art. Simultaneously, Mariana Santana also used her core training as an architect to take TEOK guests on a journey through François Schuiten and Benoît Peeters' *Les Cités Obscures* comic series. Her lecture was a typological delight, analyzing architectural influences and echoes in a singular

parallel world. With these experiences, we understood that the creative audience that comprises most of the community around TEOK brings a fundamentally different outlook into the unexpected topics they choose to share their views on (fig. 6). This is a way of seeing that is fundamentally architectural and artistic, and ultimately changes the perspective of all those attending the event.

We didn't realize this would happen before we started, but slowly, TEOK grew from a mere friend's meet-up to something very different. As the events continued throughout the year of 2014, the community around TEOK grew and expanded exponentially. Drawing initially from the interests and intellectual pursuits of those nearer to us, we ended up getting in touch with several fascinating individuals and institutions, all of which merely confirmed the suspicion that gave rise to TEOK in the first place; we find that what we are actually doing is a survey of the cultural outputs of the contemporary, creating a window into the fantastic, rich ensemble of people that live and work in this city.

Expansion

At 7:40 PM on early December 2014, the large Depot Basel gallery space was empty. There were benches and chairs scattered around, some blankets on the wooden floor, and an unflinching beam of light projected onto a white painted glass, where the word TEOK floated in mid-air. A long side table harboured a myriad vessels with small amounts of food inside. The fridge was full of beer. But there was nobody there. Yet.

Depot Basel was the first local institution to invite TEOK to partner in one of their specific programs. Before, the event always depended on the generosity of its hosts, members of the TEOK community that offered their living rooms to host the event, determining the intimate scale and scope of each session and the reduced number of guests that could be present. At the end of the year, Depot Basel's invitation came just at the right moment – our 10th edition and one-year anniversary – giving us the opportunity to reflect, for the first time, about the nature and potential impact of TEOK. It also gave us the opportunity to inhabit a larger space and open up the event to all the city: projecting the lectures
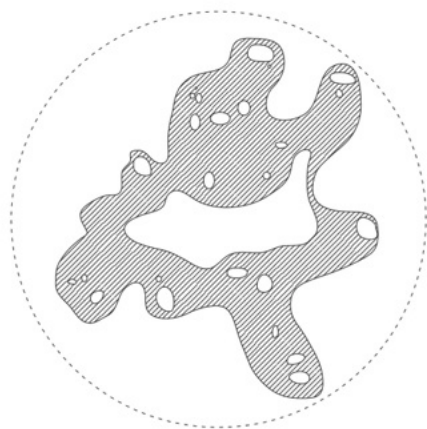
Fig. 4
A redefinition of the sphere of knowledge: the grey areas mark those aspects within the sphere of knowledge which we believe we know or know only fragments of. Adapted from the diagram presented at TEOK #6.1 by Tobias Eglauer

SCIENCE	TRANSGENDER
PHILOSOPHY	JUNK
ART	ROUNDABOUTS
HISTORY	RUNNING
RELIGION	FOOD
TECHNOLOGY	MEMES

Fig. 5
Knowledge then vs. Knowledge now: Themes discussed in TEOK events, while mirroring the contemporary, can be linked back to established theoretical fields

Fig. 6
The many links between themes presented at TEOK events help create a rhizomatic snapshot of contemporary knowledge production

onto one of the Depot Basel windows, we created a moving display that could be seen by anyone crossing the surroundings. The structure of the evening was, in this occasion, more ambitious and somewhat more formalized. Adhering to Depot Basel's DISPLAY program, the 10th edition of TEOK was structured around that concept in collaboration with Depot Basel, with lectures delving more or less literally into the topic – ranging from a taxonomy of museum displays to Spanish roundabout "art". The next days, many encounters around the city referenced the evening, still: people were intrigued, stimulated and curious, had thought about the presentations on their way home, debated them with their partners and friends, taking TEOK outside the time and place of the event, into their brains, their lives, their conversations. The impact continued beyond the physical reality of the event: it had stayed with those who had witnessed it, not just a visual impression, but sparking intangible consequences in thoughts and ideas.

This immaterial impact, intangible and immeasurable, is for us the most rewarding aspect of TEOK. The repeated observation that the events stay in the minds and hearts of people has made us wonder if in contemporary society, where the Taylorist conception of work and production is currently falling into decline and constantly being questioned, there can be new models to inspire and encourage work and production – in our particular case, the production of knowledge. And if TEOK is not just an opportunity to disseminate, but to generate knowledge itself, capturing the essence of the contemporary.

As we question what will be the future impact and reach of this initiative, TEOK has started to expand and evolve, in a rhizomatic manner that starts to escape our control. The original concept of an intimate event is still maintained and continued in Basel. Simultaneously, TEOK has forged partnerships and collaborations, such as the one we initiated with Depot Basel, and generated offshoots in different cities – until now, Madrid and Santiago. The event series gains a standing in other contexts, reinforcing existing networks and uncovering new possibilities of collaboration, creating new modes of inspiration and spreading what we've come to believe is a good virus.

TEOK was conceived in Basel in 2014 by Marta Colón, Juan Palencia and Vera Sacchetti. See what we're up to at teok.info, follow us on social media, subscribe to our mailing list and come to one of our events!

Juan Palencia (1981) is an architect and designer, co-curator of the TEOK informal lecture series and an avid social media user with a fine eye for internet imagery. Following his training at ETSAM Madrid, Juan developed projects with award winning studios, among them Langarita-Navarro Arquitectos, Estudio Luis Úrculo and HHF Architects, while simultaneously conducting an independent architecture and design activity. Juan is currently based in Basel, Switzerland, where he is an architect at Burkhardt+Partner.

Vera Sacchetti (1983) is a design writer and critic. She is co-curator of TEOK Basel, managing editor at the Barragan Foundation and co-founder of editorial consultancy Superscript. Originally trained as a communication designer, Vera attended SVA's MFA in Design Criticism as a Fulbright scholar. She was formerly curatorial assistant for the BIO 50 design biennial in Ljubljana, web editor at Domus, co-editor of „The Advocracy Reader" for the 1st Istanbul Design Biennial, and served as head of international communications at EXD'11/LISBOA. With Superscript, she headed the „Towards a New Avant-Garde" event series at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale. Her writing has appeared in Domus, Disegno, Change Observer, The New City Reader and Frame, among others.

Fig. 1-6
Images courtesy of our lecturers Stefano Orani (TEOK #2.1), Chrissie Muhr (TEOK #9.1), Giulia Mela (TEOK #3.1) and Matylda Krzykowski (TEOK #8.2)

Living traces

A foreword to Guido Guidi's *Veneto* series by Ganko

"Le temps qui passe (mon Histoire) dépose des résidus qui s'empilent : des photos, des dessins, des corps de sty-los-feutres depuis longtemps desséchés, des chemises, des verres perdus et des verres consignés, des emballages de cigares, des boîtes, des gommes, des cartes postales, des livres, de la poussière et des bibelots : c'est ce que j'appelle ma fortune."

Georges Perec

1 Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings, New York, 1986.

2 Rem Koolhaas, The Generic City, in S,M,L,XL, 1995.

3 Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism".

4 Rye Dag Holmboe, "Gabriel Orozco: Cosmetic Matter and Other Leftovers," in The White Review, Online Issue, march 2011.

"To live is to leave traces."[1]; thus reads one of Walter Benjamin's most notorious aphorisms. The statement is not so obvious as to present no difficulties. Above all – and contrary to what one might expect – it is not about melancholy; not only at least.

We live in a time dominated by the categories of abstraction and indifference; a time of definitive erasure of specificity and ultimate interchangeability: the era of the *generic*. „Liberated from the straitjacket of identity"[2], everything is reduced to communication flow; rootlessly free to move from anywhere to anywhere; encountering no resistance, leaving no traces. Through the ubiquity of simulacra and the mass-mediatic conflation of time's three horizons into an indissoluble 'now', we live in a condition of "eternal present"[3] where the possibility to address any sort of permanence seems to be precluded *a-priori*. The question is, in a world pervaded by distrust for the past and disillusion toward the future, how to turn our postmodern nihilism into simultaneously critical and operative tools. Is there any way to exploit our cynicism in order to readdress a proactive and authentic notion of life? Is there any way to use our disillusion? Certainly, since Benjamin's times, to leave traces may have become increasingly difficult. *Traces are something ephemeral, a locus of ambivalence suspended in the unstable space between construction and dispersal, presence and absence.*[4] Nevertheless, altough mostly unintentionally, we still do leave traces in our wake. Beyond the decay to which they bear witness, the mutability to which they testify, traces are also insistence, peristence, survival. No matter how fragile and trigfling it might be; a trace is always an index of life.

The pictures that inspire this words share a sense of precariousness that is far remote from the mythic aura of timelessness that has enveloped today's world. In all its inertia, the reality they portray is nevertheless provisional; still vulnerable to the vicissitudes of time.

With humbleness and discretion, these pictures pay homage to places that hold a strong value for their author, therefore distancing themselves also from the local indifference so typical of the *globalism* of our times. These picture 'are' the places he lives and, we can guess, he loves. Surely places he deeply experienced: his native region Emilia Romagna and its neighboring region Veneto. Perhaps this autobiographism should discourage their intake as models for a reflection of a

general nature but it is exactly the inactuality of these images that constitutes a reason of compelling interest; being the outmoded insistence of their author on the definition of boundaries – the preliminary limitation of the field of investigation to the the *well-known* and the ordinary, the necessity of a solid anchorage to reality – not a contentive work ultimately driven by the fear of chaos, but the act that makes its full exploitation and enjoyment ultimately possible.

With scientific accuracy these pictures follow life and its unfolding, accompanying the patient accumulation of its traces, their vanishing as well as their survival, in order to restitute us the sedimented history of a place. Combining the apparent detachment of an archive with the impossibility to establish an emotional distance from the object of their attentions, they subtly unveil a strong meditative charge. In these images the border between intuition and knowledge, analysis and affection, distance and intimacy continuously blur. With generosity, these pictures do not judge the life they record; they are not the medium conveying their author's opinions, but simply the medium that allows us to share his experiences. Each picture is not only the record of a fleeting impression over the artist's eye, but a thoughtful contribution to the understanding of a context that is plural from the very beginning; a background from which the photographer – as anybody else – can emerge only momentarily, before seamlessly blending into it and ultimately – as dictates the destiny we all share – vanishing. Each of these images is the act of partecipation to a collective project. „I do photographs to see better, with more clarity. Maybe then, the others will also see better."[5]

Albeit their acute awareness of life's temporal essence can certainly induce a sense of melancholic acceptance, these pictures are pervaded by a force that suggests a less nostalgic and more proactive understanding. After all, nostalgia is nothing but memory projected into the future; life seen through the eyes of those who will come. Like Benjamin's *Angel of History*, despite looking back, these images are moving forward. Even accepting a certain degree of disenchantment as a constituent part, if these pictures are anyway nostalgic it is not because they recall some idealised past

– rather the opposite given their often marginal subjects – but because of the light they shed on the future. Collecting the signs of past and present these photographs activate our reasoning in the incessant search for answering the perplexity aroused by an increasingly precarious reality. Each image is not only an act of archeological documentation, prompted by the necessity to preserve memory, but an invitation to actively engage in the eternal process of accumulation of traces that is life. Deeply aware of their own impermanence, this images stand for a perpetually open, yet to be determined – and defended – future. In the moment they expose us to the impersonal and anonymous spectacles of history – the more silent and unpretentious as well as the more traumatic and monumental – they remind us of our collective responsability toward the future we share, the traces we leave.

Ganko produces architecture. Ganko was established in 2011 by Guido Tesio (1984) and Nicola Munaretto (1984) following previous experiences with Baukuh (Milan) and OFFICE kgdvs (Brussels). After three years spent between Milan and Beijing, in 2014 Ganko has relocated to Basel and Lausanne, Switzerland. In 2013 Ganko was invited to contribute to the book "Pure Hardcore Icons: A Manifesto for Pure Form in Architecture" edited by WAI Think Tank for Artifice Books, London. Since 2014 Ganko is guest editor for the catalogues of Beijing based art gallery Intelligentsia. Recent works by Ganko have been featured in Domusweb, StudioMagazine and SanRocco.

5 Guido Guidi, La Figura dell' Orante. Appunti per una Lezione 1, Ed. del Bradipo, Ravenna 2012 (English translation by the authors)

Guido Guidi and Pedro Alfacinha

The Guy in the Gallery
Pedro lives in the Bica neighborhood, in a flat with a view to the river. He knows where to get the best tuna steak in Lisbon and he knows where to go for a whisky sour and a game of billiard at 2 am on a Tuesday, but what he knows best is photography. After working abroad for seven years for publishing monsters Steidl and MACK, this guy decided to move back to Lisbon and open his own gallery. He wants to actively share what is being made in the portuguese photography scene and, by putting Lisbon at the centre of his operations, to draw locals attention to the work of international artists and realities. This guy sitting in his gallery goes way beyond the four white walls that circle him. His approach to his own role turns his gallery into a physical anchor for an international network of contacts and events that aim to share the work of the artists in a sustained manner.
So far, so good.

pedroalfacinha.pt

Images: Gently shared by Guido Guidi through Galeria Pedro Alfacinha

How to move from architectural cheerleading to architecture criticism

Mark Minkjan

Not worth sharing: visual snacks

The problem with most architectural media is that the largest share of their content is made up of visual snacks – those smooth renderings and glossy photographs we see flashing by in our social media feeds. Fast food is the quickest and easiest way to satisfy an appetite, while it hardly contains anything substantial. That's why you'll crave for more soon after your first snack, which again won't benefit your health. Architectural media fill a demand for luscious images, but substantial reflection on the social and public relevance of celebrated projects is sparse. This has a detrimental impact on the condition of the architectural profession and what it produces: the built world we live in. If you were to create a live feed of the latest updates from the most-visited architectural websites and blogs – which is child's play with all the great sharing tools available – what you would see is a constant flood of either fantasy renderings that can never become reality or stylized photographs of luxurious design scenery. Both of which have nothing to do with the real lives that most of us live. Call it the 99 percent, if you like.

Indeed, this is already an alarming observation, but what is worse is that this visual overload is hardly met with suspect. Architectural projects should be questioned for their actual functioning in reality, for their societal impact, their political meaning or their developers' intentions. That's just a few of the crucial criteria that are often overlooked or ignored. Instead, designs are merely consumed as visual fast food and architecture seems to have been completely de-politicized and reduced to an aesthetic undertaking for the media that cover it.

The demand for the newest, most spectacular snacks to look at is insatiable. We continually browse the optimistic imaginations of what the future could look like and aren't interested in what the visual treats say about a culture or mean for a society. What's uploaded today is out-dated tomorrow. There's an endless, vicious cycle in force: if the design is not spectacular enough, it's not published and if it's not published, it's obviously not spectacular enough. To make it even more incestuous, the main consumers of these media are architects or aspiring designers. Who are they designing for? Moreover, what are architects-in-training to expect of their future career when following the media that cover their desired profession? What are architects to expect their designs to be judged on?

The media are contributing to a dumbing down of how we see architecture. Reporting on architecture is less and less about creating better cities in an equitable way, but increasingly describes individual projects without analysing architecture as a larger social project and the separate designs as an articulation of political, economic and social choices. Most design media content only consists of aggregations of blindly republished

Rendering by Urban Future Organization (UFO) and CR-design

press releases, renderings and photos that are sent in by architecture offices, while omitting interpretation. Here, the audience is withheld guidance to understand the world in which the slick projects are constructed or to decipher what they say about the culture that brings them about. Everything has to be easily digestible and instantly satisfying, and people aren't challenged to put things in perspective. By walking down the path of today's visual culture, the media have made their content attractive to both the layman and the architect, but naturally such a crowd-pleasing attitude goes at the expense of intelligent reflection.

Worth sharing: productive criticism
So that's what I think is not worth sharing. But what is worth sharing? Clearly it's not the architectural cheerleading in a media world where the coverage has become architects' PR. Architecture does not equal fashion. It is more than just a consumer good that only enhances the appearance of its buyer. Rather, the design of space has a direct effect on the world we live in. Therefore it should not just be talked about for its shapes and materials. Architecture can create value for the entire public, but it can also be exclusive terrain for the happy few, while helping those who use it to dress up their real estate investments making a fortune, leaving the rest empty-handed. Its main objective should not be to be most fashionable. Presenting it as such in the media is anything but constructive if we want to talk about how architecture can contribute to society. Instead, it should be questioned and investigated to the fullest extent. What is worth sharing today is proper architecture criticism that puts design into context, and is not tucked away in obscure magazines or the outskirts of cyberspace.

Although having become increasingly rare in today's media landscape, there are still critics who judge architecture not by its image, but by its public meaning and urban implications. They try to reveal the cracks in the shiny surface, dig out facts about the politics and economics that determine the architectural outcome and their social effect on the city. These practices are the things that deserve more sharing. Architecture is not (just) its image; it is always political. It is also always

a social and economic affair. That's where the issues at stake lie. The culture that builds it should be analysed and its effects on the world should be traced back to it. Therefore we need more experts from various fields to evaluate the built environment and broaden the focus on architecture, while letting this analysis feed into the media that scrutinize design. Architecture should be seen as a societal project. The questions that should be asked include: whose interests are served? Who profits? What does it do for a city besides looking spectacular and being expensive? Why do we – the public – need this project? Why did the local government approve of it? Of course, beauty (although a subjective, fluctuating quality) is not something negligible. In fact it should also be promoted as an enriching public value that architecture can bring, but it should be something that everyone can enjoy, not just those who can afford the Pinterest-popular architecture.

The renewed serious interest in architecture should take root again in several fields of media. Dedicated architecture media have to pick up the critical magnifying glass again, while other media should reposition architecture at the heart of the societal debate. A prime example of the latter is British newspaper *The Guardian*, which has alleviated its 'Architecture and Design Blog' to a more active and committed architecture section over the past few years, currently being one of the go-to online sources for an intelligent contextualization of architecture. Here, architectural projects and urban plans are subjected to serious scrutiny and the appearance of the designs is anything but the main topic. Instead, spatial design is regarded a civic undertaking that is the result of politics and economics and influences the well being of people. Design is only seen as the physical expression that represents dominant ideals and agendas. If more media outlets would follow this example, the public attitude towards architecture can become more critical. Simultaneously, design professionals and architecture students will recapture the awareness that they are working on a social project – instead of seeing the job as being vain set-dressers for those that actually decide how cities work – and can eventually take back a central role in urban development.

The twenty-first century architecture critic is less preoccupied with geometry, dramatic light and other visual traits, but rather focuses on what architecture does and where it comes from, analysing not only single buildings but expanding her or his focus to entire cities and cultures. From the political process that led to certain designs or plans to be realized, to the effect on the socioeconomic composition of a city, to the public gains and public expenses architecture generates. Sure, no single person can do all of this on his or her own. But with all the available sharing tools, the broad body of architecture criticism can be brought together. Urban space philosophers, hard core planning legislation experts, social critics, architects, economy writers, geographers and others should all contribute to the debate.

And no, this kind of media attention for architecture doesn't have to be boring. It shouldn't be abstract, because it is about places that people can relate to. It's about the world we live in – or want to live in – and for that reason relevant to everyone. We should be talking about the things we see, but shed light on the dark matter behind it. In an age of growing urban development pressure worldwide that crowds out cities, the real issues call for more attention, and hence for real journalism that requires time and skill. But the result is worth it, and absolutely worth sharing. So let's change our architectural media diet from fast food to multi-ingredient slow cooking. Let's shift our focus from visual quantity to urban quality.

Mark Minkjan is an urban and architectural geographer. He is co-founder of the Failed Architecture Foundation and editor in chief at failedarchitecture.com. Mark is also part of Amsterdam-based Non-fiction, an office for cultural innovation.

This changes everything; Architecture of the Commons

Antoine Prokos
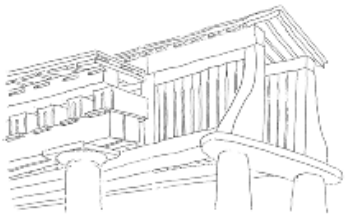
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1 Georg Peschken, Demokratie und Tempel: die Bedeutung der dorischen Architektur, Berlin, Verlag der Beeken, 1990. French translation by Corinne Jacquand in Marnes III, May 2014, p. 289.

2 Peschken, Ibid. pp. 289-313.

3 Bernard Rudofsky, Architecture without architects, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1964, illustrations 90-94.

4 Hans Soeder, Urformen der abendländlischen Baukunst, Köln, edited by Carl J. Soeder, M. DuMont Schauberg, 1964, pp.121-125.

5 Philippe Villien, Le Dorique bien tempéré, published in Marnes III, May 2014, pp. 329-341.

The narrative of architectural history is a powerful tool for theory, if not the authentic form of theory in our discipline. It is of course being continuously analyzed and debated with a huge degree of complication. Nowadays, 40 years after the reformulation of the context of architectural history by Manfredo Tafuri and his gang, merely going into the matter demands an immense amount of theoretical precision, in order to avoid repeating common knowledge or, worse, contributing to the pile of meaningless pseudo-theoretical alchemy. Nevertheless the debate is far from closed, especially if we consider new urgencies and new concerns, more real than ever. The agenda of a hundred, fifty or even ten years ago cannot be taken into account in the same way as before. We need to fish for new meaning, for new stories, so here are some thoughts about a possible one.

While the now orthodox debate on operative criticism was still radical and revolutionary, one of the founding principles of architecture as we know it was silently getting scrutiny under an angle of huge pertinence. The Doric temple, the „starting point for European architecture"[1] might have been born through a process much less self-referential than we thought until now. In 1990, Goerd Peschken, German archeologist and architectural historian published a text called „Demokratie und Tempel"[2], temple and democracy. Based on the abundant visual material published by

Rudofsky[3] and an earlier study by another historian, Hans Soeder[4], he attempts to explain the ancestry of the Doric order within the functional vernacular of granaries. Peschken, following Soeder's trace, observed the similarities between the triglyph-metope sequence and the lateral walls of various types of vernacular granaries, ventilated with thin vertical openings in a rhythm of plain parts and regrouped slits. In addition, a picture of such a barn is a pretty self-explanatory statement on the columns and the capital. To protect the grain from rodents, the construction is placed on top of columns themselves finished with a horizontal plate. According to Peschken, often added to this capital were pieces of cloth drenched in repellent (Ionic order) or acanthus leaves (Corinthian order) that are naturally unpleasant to vermin.

Peschken's work has come back to light with the third issue of the French architectural journal „Marnes", which brought along an initial debate on the implications of the matter. Most notably, in an article published in the same issue, Philippe Villien proposed to look at Peschken's interpretation of the Doric order in line with Banham's pledge for the well-tempered environment[5]. The thick roof and the triglyph as ventilation apparatus support such an idea, but can we run away with reiterating a well-known and decently understood point where there is room for so much more? Where Villien sees an argument about climate in

6 In this way our own society is not too dissimilar to the Roman one, the soldier/agent of acceleration having been replaced by the consumer and the slave/source of energy having been replaced by fossil fuels. The decrease in resilience as the system stretched and overshot was meant to be the main reason of the decline of the Empire, as it will be for our own empire.
See Paolo Fedeli, Ecologie Antique, Paris, inFolio, 2005. and Jared Diamond, Collapse: How societies choose to Fail or Succeed, New York, Penguin Books, 2005.

7 Peschken, Ibidem pp. 289-290.

8 On the significations of the tomb see Lauren Hackworth Petersen, The Baker, his tomb, his wife and her breadbasket: The monument of Eurysaces in Rome, Art Bulletin Volume 85, Issue 2, 2003 and, by the same author, The freedman in Roman Art and History, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

9 Samuel Ball Platner & Thomas Ashby, A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome, Oxford Reprints Series, Oxford, Oxbow books, 2002.

architecture, there is probably the missed opportunity for symbolism that goes much further than the hierarchy between structure and tubing.

Despite this argument that is no worthy counterpart to the opportunity at hand, the French architect grasps the most important point that we all need to acknowledge; „Demokratie und Tempel'' is an excellent starting point for a very important evolutionary step in the current status quo of architectural theory. If not a call for the complete reversal of our knowledge, these observations offer a new, stimulating possibility for the whole moral genealogy behind architectural thought. Until now we thought that a given structure, the temple, invited reflection through its special character on the perfect construction and led to the sublimation of previous construction. Peschken's and Soeder's assumptions link this open question of the language of architecture with the most pure form of collective meaning: the agricultural and territorial organization that is the one and only origin, the unique true subject of common existence as we know it.

It goes without saying that the topic of the commons has always been current. While ancient Greece coped rather simply with the issue, maybe in part thanks to the symbolic power of the temple, the Roman Empire had a pronounced dependency to a much more complex scheme. With its accomplished territorial management and the powerful soldier-slave feedback loop, it achieved a very high level of sophistication in the distribution and transformation of common goods[6]. Although the Doric order had been almost forgotten by the time Rome started its expansion[7], there is evidence for civic architecture with explicit symbolism related to the commons within the intriguing artifacts that the empire left behind. Not least so would be the tomb of Eurysaces, the freedman baker.

The symbol retained for this tomb is mostly that of the freedman[8]. Its' outmost significance is understood inclusively within social status, underlining the importance of family line within the roman empire and the struggle of the former slaves, the bourgeois of their age, to elevate themselves and their families into some form of posterity. But the most important symbol might be the other one, that of the baker. The ornament of the

tomb stems in fact from Eurysace's occupation. The round motives on the façade are alleged to correspond to the measuring units of grain[9], thereby making a posterity for those, if not for Eurysace's family. The passage from the form of the granary to the rules of bakery is very well suiting to schematize the different hierarchies in the handling of resources between the Greek and Roman periods. The question is no longer about the collective capacity to provide society with grain, as that is taken for granted, but much more about individual capacity to succeed through transformation of a resource that is given. This dislocation in a vast scale is the same one operated since a couple of centuries. It is at the very center of our own predicament.

There is an opening here to move towards the crisis of the present, the environmental crisis, while refraining of course from theorizing any form of sustainable development. This term in itself has become a label for an anti-theoretical phantasy, a form of wishful thinking already lurking within Banham's technological dream. It isn't a secret to anyone that the modes of common existence, embodied in their initial purity by the temple, need profound questioning in their current form, 2500 years later. This interpretation is getting more current every day, with the problem of the 21st century rapidly emerging not as a mere problem of technology but as an inclusive ethical problem, a problem of capacity, of resources and of mere honesty and morality towards the commons. This naïve speculation on language doesn't offer any solution to the current set of problems, but I hope is a clear introduction to something worth sharing.

Antoine Prokos was born and raised in Athens, Greece. He left the country to undertake his studies in architecture, at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale of Lausanne. After his undergraduate studies in Lausanne and Delft, Antoine worked with architect Jean-Gilles Décosterd, while also participating in projects by Studio KG and the organization of Lausanne-Jardins 2014. He has also realized freelance projects, in Switzerland and Ivory Coast.

Images:
a Image from Le Corbusier, Vers une Architecture, p. 16
b © Philippe Villien, Marnes III p. 332
c Image from Samuel Ball Platner, A topographical dictionary of ancient rome, p. 412-413

Under demand

AbdulFatah Adam

"What is the city today, for us? I believe that I have written something like a last love poem addressed to the city, at a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult to live there."

Italo Calvino on 'Invisible Cites.'

The conception of contemporary architecture relies very much on the ways in which art and culture intervene in the conversations and debates about the modern city. The paradigm of the contemporary African city – in this context, Nairobi and Mogadishu specifically – depends wholly on the ever changing worldview of what Africa is, what an 'African' is and most importantly where Africa seeks to define itself in the context of its constant conflicted reference to the West. African architecture has had a protracted engagement with the natural and material sciences – what it is experiencing now is not an organic transition but rather the constant morphing of the persona of the architect, the actor in this instance, from artist, to draftsman, to cultural consultant and occasionally in the inane role of plumber, electrician or mason.

In Africa, the architect encounters cities facing, today, the crises of post war Europe or America. These are cities long deemed incapable of meeting the demands of societies in rapid expansion but still in a constant rush to add to a concrete melee that grows more and more entangled by the day. Cities ravaged by war and economic crisis which insist on expanding along the grain and every day continue to attract immigrants from all over – an engagement forced by multiple circumstances, often urgently and without the foresight that is an urban planners dent. Government task forces and professional urbanists are constantly engaged in discussions about urban revitalization, while the architect on the ground lays slab after slab to keep up with the demand of cities constantly on the rise.

We observe two cities, growing in tandem but confronting distinct realities. Mogadishu builds against the living legacy of a thirty year war that has ravaged a once beautiful landscape – there the architect is challenged to create an experience of the land that is aesthetically rehabilitative, responding constantly to physically traumatic realities. Nairobi on the other hand attempts to erase the heavy memory of apartheid. A city built as the ideal manifestation of racial classification, the architect has the heady task of creating an environment where the city's denizens are mobilized into a tangible social mobility, contrary to the historic restrictions of their environment.

In thinking about the possibility of architecture to profoundly alter the makeup of individual nations and the world order more broadly it is the architect's challenge to seek out new coordinates for architecture after the exhaustion of the impositions of the modernist movement on a landscape such as this. In that respect

the architect is pushed to question the purpose of architecture in the physical context, to begin with, and moreover in the metaphysical context – frankly to examine the genesis of movements for which there is often little motivation beyond urgency and necessity.

It is in these ways in which the architect comes to stand precariously on untested ground. He becomes both urban planner and design theorist to a new age of architecture fitted to the social realities of a modern Africa. One where the landscape is advised by both the residue of colonialism – a long and dark legacy – and the neo "Afropolitan" fantasy which merges a savvy Africa on the move with a returning diaspora that brings new perspectives of the West – perspectives which are no longer heavy with the inheritance of war, drought or hunger.

The architect designs for spaces in which trauma is deeply imbedded in the physical archive. A 'spatial therapist' his work does not end on his computer screen or on his drafting board. He is challenged to engage the spaces in which he works in a constant discussion of past disturbances pitted against the promise of a brighter future. In every way he is challenged to re-create the narratives of spaces whose history cannot be determined but yet are hungry to build a future rooted in a glorious past. To these changing realities he is obliged to adapt by using a thoroughly interdisciplinary approach, one that reaches beyond the concept of form in order to include technical, economic, social and political needs in urban design discussions. In this respect he is obliged to form collaborative creative relationships with artists of various disciplines engaging conversations across mediums to inform what he then manifests in his construction of a lived reality. In engaging cross creatively the architect, as the creator of tangible or literally concrete spaces becomes in his realm the primary incubator of artistic thought – building the infrastructure in which culture is able to thrive.

Here we step away from the utopic fantasy of architecture where the architect designs for a demystified context. Immersed in the chaos of modernity the architect builds a response, often facing off and challenging business monopolies, politicians and develo-pers. In this respect utopia becomes a question of engagement – an ethical and social stance or commitment towards creating worlds that respond to the needs of their populations rather than imposing a physical scope on urbanites and urging them into a reluctant and impractical adjustment.

AbdulFatah Adam (Nairobi, 1982) studied architecture at the University of Nairobi. After doing an internship at Herzog & de Meuron (2009) he went back to Nairobi where he worked for DesignARTitude and was involved in design and construction of several projects and notably a mosque and community center. Thereafter, AbdulFatah founded studio.14, which is based in Nairobi and Mogadishu [Somalia] and is involved in solving design problems, ranging from graphic to architectural.

Images: AbdulFatah Adam

carthamagazine.com