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Engraving theories in the long term, historicizing “design projects”?

- 1 The theory of architecture seems, in some respects, like a discursive field located outside of time. As Jean-Pierre Chupin reminds us:

Following the example of most scientific revolutions, transformations in architectural theory are most often “destructive” to previous paradigms. It is often the case that the virtues of an idea or a principle are only rediscovered after several generations. Architects, however, do not hesitate to redefine them inside or outside of history¹.

- 2 The desire to go behind the scenes of the construction of theoretical discourses initiated the making of this current issue, proposing to historicize the design processes into its theoretical components. This is in line with works dealing with the evolution of theory over the long term², or the genealogy of design approach plurality in contemporary design production³. The written dimension having already been widely investigated⁴, the aim here is to focus on theorizing processes, particularly in order to understand the methods of their transmission and the trace of certain intellectual legacies in the flow of ideas in architecture and urban planning. From this perspective, this soberly titled issue, “Theoretical Heritage” – which postulates the heterogeneity of contemporary stances – aims to question inherited components that arise out of already stated theories or doctrines. This is done by analyzing the interrelationships between designers' trajectories and their cultures, such as the nature of their respective fields of reference. The initial call for papers invited us to question contemporary situations – design projects, writings, designers – over the long term.

The objective was to identify continuity and permanence through theoretical devices that were inherited from the past century, *inter alia*. Three principle, yet relatively open, areas of focus were thus proposed: the first, “Format and Methods of Transmission”, in order to study the construction of theoretical frameworks; the second, “Uses, Evolution, and Detours”, proposing to analyze processes of reception; and, lastly, “Context of Formulation, Field of Operation”, offering to study the emergence of theories within various cultural contexts. The call for papers received positive feedback from the architectural research community. The different areas of focus also resonated amongst the authors, who were able to easily find their place. The under representation of the desired, very contemporary dimensions is undoubtedly due to the fact that authors, who proposed proven historical approaches, insisted more upon certain moments of “shift” throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

- 3 The challenge of the call for papers is thus only partially fulfilled, as it sought to question the permanence of certain legacies on current practices or their necessary transformation in the face of contemporary challenges⁵. Researchers insisted upon the solidification and boundaries of certain key theoretical bodies of work, going back to the source of approaches founded reactionarily or as an alternative to the dogma of the Modern Movement. History is very present among the various contributions selected, either as the basis for the analytical approach developed – in research aimed at understanding the interaction between theory and contexts of formulation, reception or transmission –, or as an argument and instrument for the definition of the theory itself, this time within approaches defining theorization processes in their internal complexity.

Outline of “The” Theory: Between Practice, Modelization and Models

- 4 From an epistemological point of view, several of the selected studies indeed place theoretical construction in architecture at the forefront of their analysis. These approaches, which are themselves theoretical, question a certain number of common references, by calling on the work of Françoise Choay, Philippe Boudon or Jean-Pierre Chupin. These three articles fall within the perspective of the first focus area, “Format and Methods of Transmission”, by broadening the proposed questions in order to come back to the very definition of architectural theory and the key role of certain notions.
- 5 Adrien Marchand's article thus enlightens and clarifies the epistemological and axiological status of architectural theory, which emerges “in a global and interconnected process between practices, knowledge and values” by analyzing certain texts on architectural theory, but also writings from scientific philosophy more broadly. The approach well demonstrates the circumstantial dimension of theory, which does not rise to the level of generalization that could be achieved by a true philosophy, freed from the contingencies and conjectures which are specific to architectural theorists. According to Marchand, the axiological dimension of diverse theories creates a form of “professional ethics” that reduces the purely scientific aspects of the theoretical process. Louis Vitalis and François Guéna also bring together the philosophy of science, in particular the concept of modelization, by previously attempting to characterize the theory in its shifting relationship to practice within the speeches and writings of Jean-Pierre Chupin, Stéphane Hanrot and Philippe Boudon.

The article thus proposes a classification of modelizations – processes producing models for theoretical use – according to three rubrics (design, analysis and simulation) borrowed from Jean-Louis Le Moigne.⁶ The conclusive application of this architecturological analytical framework founded by Philippe Boudon⁷ opens a fruitful perspective of study for the ways in which a theoretical device could have – or still can? – be disclaimed.

- 6 Finally, Filippo Fiandanese's contribution offers a rich literary and genealogical overview of the concept of model, which demonstrates the inclusion of this notion within multiple filiations, whether it be that of 18th century architectural theorists or through the influence of structuralism on the great French theorists of the 1970s and 1980s, again placing Philippe Boudon and Françoise Choay at the center of the analysis. Fiandanese also argues that the importance and validity of the concept of model for architecture and urban planning do not seem to weaken in the face of contemporary challenges with the circulation, transfer and development of transnational networks.
- 7 These first three contributions feed into questions that emerged fifty years ago surrounding the foundations of practice and research in architecture, which is well illustrated by epistemological-related work pertaining to theory. The French situation, influenced by the recent establishment of the Doctor of Architecture (2005) as well as the difficulty of architectural theory – caught between history and design project teachings in schools of architecture⁸ – emerge as a subject of teaching and autonomous field of research. This probably further accentuates the need to grasp the complexity of theorization processes by mapping them out⁹ or by breaking down the mechanisms of the dissemination and the reception of several major bodies of works.
- 8 Three other contributions from the “Uses, Evolution and Detours” section shed light on the fate of certain documentary bodies of work, whose interpretation over time questions the heritage they may constitute. These historically dimensioned approaches are included within fields of study that examine the reception of architecture, which has been very popular over the last fifteen years¹⁰. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that this approach – itself a subject of cultural transfer from language sciences, especially from the work of Hans Robert Jauss (1921-1997)¹¹ – is not explicitly called upon by researchers that fall into this methodological perspective. This probably testifies to the approach's implicitly acquired dimension within architectural research.
- 9 Here again, the attention of researchers focuses on the second half of the twentieth century. Even Bérénice Gaussein's study, on the reception of Eugène Viollet-le-Duc's “fragmentary” usages, explores the comeback of the architect, starting from the 1964 exhibition celebrating the 150th anniversary of his birth¹², up until the 1980s. According to the author, this is the time where the restoration of Viollet-le-Duc was in its “full state”. Gaussein clearly shows that the process of this historical rehabilitation coincides with the theoretical appropriation of his writings – albeit partial – by certain thinkers from this period, including Aldo Rossi (1931-1997) or Hubert Damisch (1928-2017), whose structuralist reading is continued – here again – by Philippe Boudon and Philippe Deshayes.¹³ The reception of Viollet-le-Duc's work is thus profoundly linked to this specific horizon of expectations. Having integrated several theoretical fragments of Viollet-le-Duc, the weight of Aldo Rossi's legacy is evaluated by Julien Correia as it exists in libraries and in the lectures given by architect and professor Bernard Huet (1932-2001) in France. Indeed, the delicate, delayed and partial transmission of Rossi's legacy in France¹⁴ is enlightened by the little-known potential of

his thought, particularly when looking at the perspective and synthesis carried out by Bernard Huet. The study of the original manuscript of an article written by Huet in French, but published in Italian¹⁵, indeed illustrates his refined knowledge of Rossi's work, in particular of the *Scritti scelti*¹⁶ and the notion of "exalted rationalism". Correia's approach thus seeks to shed light both on the dissemination of a major theoretical heritage – through the richness of the bibliographical exploration concerning the body of Rossi's texts – as it is on the means of its reception by a unique actor, who is central to the history of theory in France, and to which another article is also devoted.

- 10 The last article, which studies the effects of reception, shifts the focus to a different time period – the two decades post World War II – and towards a somewhat different subject; its aim being mainly to evoke theory in terms urban planning. In line with her thesis work, Anne Portnoï indeed proposes to study the transfer of urban planning models and methods from England to France, in particular through the challenges of Town Design reception in France¹⁷. Describing the debates covered in specialized journals and the position taken by great designers from this period – including Patrick Abercrombie, Frederick Gibberd, Ernö Goldfinger, Robert Auzelle, Gaston Bardet, Jean Royer and Pierre Vago –, it goes back to the roots of the opposition between compositional town planning and an alternative vision that refers to British town planning. Here, the new theoretical formulation is born out of a desire for research that is alternative to an established system, the traces of which are sometimes less visible in the forms produced than in the evolution of lexical fields and the concepts developed. The three approaches together clearly demonstrate the efficiency of a study of reception in terms of theory, since it allows us to compare discourse, contexts and formats of transmission.

The Transmission of Heritage or Pedagogical Legacies

- 11 Two contributions offer a form of intersection between the first two areas of focus described here, by analyzing the vectors of transmission linked to the understanding of the theoretical and projectual dimension itself. These approaches, which probably fall more in line with an "operational" field of architectural design project, summon the role and the figure of major teachers from the 1950s to the 1980s, returning again to a pivotal and re-founding period of theory and teaching. As Peter Collins recalled in 1971 in *Judging architecture*¹⁸:

No serious teacher of architecture, whether they work in the academic environment of a university or within a very busy agency, can escape the strong desire to generalize their advice based on their accumulated and acquired knowledge. Not all architects can sum up the experience of a life with the same subtle conciseness as Mies van der Rohe. Nevertheless, any teacher of architecture worthy of the name must have found, at one time or another, the happy formulation of an architectural principle that transcends the specific character of a problem.

- 12 The teacher, even more than the designer, is therefore called upon to formulate and transmit a thought. Juliette Pommier's analysis thus focuses on the assimilations and detours of various theoretical heritages within the thinking of Bernard Huet. She examines in particular the tension between the significance of his training at the School of Fine Arts, whose theoretical course seems relatively imprecise, and the

impact of the symbol and thinking of Louis Kahn on his career. By focusing on the effects of “condensation” and “displacement” between several sources, Pommier sheds light on the subtlety of the theoretical assimilations of a great symbol in the architectural scene of the second half of the 20th century in France. It also clearly demonstrates how “Heritage is transformed to become meaningful and operative in new contexts, thus responding to the inadequacies of the teachings received”.

- 13 As such, Michael Jasper's analysis compares the design project teachings of Colin Rowe (1920-1999) and Peter Eisenman (1932-) as a specific form of theoretical practice. Indeed, the author offers here a study of Rowe's teachings at Cornell University and its possible legacy through Eisenman's teaching at the Yale School of Architecture. In addition to being based upon a strong desire to register architecture in the continuity of urban forms and types, this essay demonstrates that the approach of these architects, beyond their differences, are also founded upon similar intellectual operations in order to generate the architectural forms themselves (collision, collage, superposition). The approach initiated by Jasper thus analyzes the results of teaching, considered as an instrument of discourse and theoretical knowledge in the midst of being built. His approach informs historiography – in particular the history of teaching – but brings together several elements of reflection for the pedagogical definition of the architectural design project. The latter must nevertheless face the difficulties and obstacles summarized as follows by Antoine Picon:

From theory to design project, the why is never far from the how, and with it all kinds of uncertainties. We therefore understand the particular importance that today occupies the question of research, which would not be satisfied with the how but would target the why, a research which would combine action and knowledge according to original methods likely to grant an important place to the project as it is designed in architecture. (...) However, inscribed in a practice from which they are struggling to emerge, such know-how rarely leads to questions that can be transposed to other types of situations than those which gave rise to them¹⁹.

- 14 The initial mission of the call for papers, that is tracking “ghosts” – the permanence of certain major theoretical legacies –, in the way Michel Dénès had done with respect to the significance of the legacy of the School of Fine Arts, seems to above all enrich the history of architecture of the 1970s and 1980s.
- 15 If the theory of architecture has already given rise to numerous works over the last several decades, the results obtained within the framework of this thematic dossier show that the study of the theorization process, through its constitution and transmission methods, is a very lively field of analysis, the subject of which remains both complex and fluid. This approach is furthered by an intersection with cultural history and with the history of teaching, that of the profession and its doctrines. This field of analysis is thus a fertile ground for historical study, but also a place of open reflection that in many ways questions the epistemological and pedagogical foundations of the architectural discipline itself.

NOTES

1. Jean-Pierre Chupin, "Un compas des théories dans l'océan doctoral en architecture", in Jean-Louis Cohen (dir.), *Architecture, entre pratique et connaissance scientifique*, Paris, Éditions du Patrimoine, 2018.
2. Hanno-Walter Kruft, *Geschichte der Architekturtheorie von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, München, C.H. Beck, 1985.
3. Jacques Lucan, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture*, Lausanne, Presses polytechniques romandes, 2015.
4. A number of works were specifically dedicated to the question of writings and architects, see Pierre Chabard and Marilena Korniaty, *Raisons d'écrire : livres d'architectes, 1945-1999*, Paris, Éd. de la Villette, 2013. See also Jean-Philippe Garric, Émilie d'Orgeix et Estelle Thibault, *Le Livre et l'architecte*, actes du colloque, Paris, 31 janv.-2 fév. 2008, Wavre, Mardaga, 2011; André Tavares, *The Anatomy of the Architectural Book*, Zurich, Lars Müller Publishers, 2016; Beatriz Colomina, *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines*, Barcelone, Actar, 2006.
5. Chupin also recalls the need for certain authors to recast theory in the face of contemporary issues, such as Greig Cryslé, Stephen Cairns and Hilde Heynen (dir.), *The Sage Handbook of Architectural Theory*, Londres, Sage Publications, 2012; J.-P. Chupin, *op. cit.*
6. Jean-Louis Le Moigne, *Théorie du système général. Théorie de la modélisation*, Paris, Les classiques du réseau Intelligence de la complexité, 2006.
7. Philippe Boudon, *Introduction à l'architecturologie*, Paris, Dunod, 1992.
8. Soline Nivet, "Qui a peur de la théorie ?", *d'architectures*, dossier thématique, n°173, mai 2008, pp. 37-51.
9. Jean-Pierre Chupin, *op. cit.* See also: Alejandro Zaera Polo, "Well Into the 21st Century. The Architectures of Post-Capitalism?", *El Croquis*, n°187, 2016, pp. 252-287.
10. Gérard Monnier, "L'architecture et sa réception", *Cahiers Thématiques*, École nationale supérieure d'Architecture de Lille, n°2, 2002, pp. 43-46.
11. Hans Robert Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978.
12. Pierre-Marie Auzas (dir.), *Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, 1814-1879*, Paris, Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques, 1965.
13. Viollet-le-Duc, *Le Dictionnaire d'architecture. Relevés et observations par Philippe Boudon et Philippe Deshayes*, Bruxelles, Mardaga, 1979.
14. Jean-Louis Cohen, "Aldo Rossi en France l'incompris intime", *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, n°263, Paris, 1989, pp. 134-135.
15. Bernard Huet, "Aldo Rossi, o l'esaltazione della ragione", "Aldo Rossi, or the exaltation of reason", in Aldo Rossi, *Tre città, Three Cities, Perugia, Milano, Mantova*, Milan, Electa (Quaderni di Lotus), 1984, pp. 9-21.
16. Aldo Rossi et Rosaldo Bonicalzi (coord.), *Scritti scelti sull'architettura e la città 1956-1972*, Macerata, Quodlibet 2012 (1975).
17. Frederick Gibberd, *Town Design*, London, The Architectural Press, 1959 [1953].
18. Peter Collins, *Juger l'architecture*, traduit par Pierre Lebrun, Gollion, Infolio, 2017, p. 129.
19. Antoine Picon, "La recherche par le projet, au-delà et au cœur de l'architecture", in Jean-Louis Cohen (dir.), *L'architecture entre pratique et connaissance scientifique*, Paris, Éditions du Patrimoine, 2018, p. 150.

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