

The Architecture of Effects

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Alessandro Armano. I will try to frame a bit the topic that Giovanni Durbiano and I are writing about. Leonardo Caffo is our critical reader, who is a student of Maurizio Ferraris, and together we are trying to construct a dialogue. We would like to engage with a problem that has to do with what we talked about earlier, namely the urban crisis and the “meltdown” – that even in our Turin context we have heard a lot about in recent years.

The city has almost stopped; there is some frustration in terms of the capacity of architects and the administration to have an effect on the collective city and on public space. In this work, we would like to deal with the effects of architectural design. To do so, we are trying to put up for discussion and recuperate the “forefathers,” such as Gabetti and Isola, who are kind of the architecture references in Turin, they were our teachers, and they fixed the standpoint on the project (and therefore also on the theory of architectural design) and whom we cannot overlook, from the outset. Then, of course, it seems inevitable to criticize these things. In particular, the figure of architect designer for Gabetti is closely linked to an idea of the presence and authenticity of a subject, who is able to take responsibility to face conditions of reality and recompose them in his own project and within his own competence. In our view, however, this attitude clashes with the conditions in which we are working (and we surely do not have the stature of Gabetti), in light of the fact that often projects have no effect, and with the problem that the authenticity of the designer does not guarantee getting to the heart of a process: the mayor who is opposed, competitions that are not completed... Despite the effort that can be exerted studying a project with the utmost concentration and intention, especially when confronted with open contexts (the collective dimension of the city), almost always the opportunity for the architect to guide the project is distorted or fails. Often we architects do not get to the end of the game, aside from a few (and my view has a tone of frustration, so I would even go further).

The architect's theoretical work can bring problems to light, for example, with regard to the assumption that a theory “of architecture” can be concerned with the best architecture and the best of all possible worlds we want to accomplish. The theory “of the project” can be concerned with other things: for example, it could be concerned with the project as the best possible “effects,” the most extensive of the possible effects; in short, it might be worried about the performativity of projects, and this moves quite a bit the axis of the problem.

The architect is the one who produces the projects. To be one who produces projects is different than making buildings; the architect will always do the things that separate him from the artifact. The distinction between the production of a project and the production of a building artifact involves a series

of differences. One of these is that when I produce a project, and I do not build things, in reality I am posing a problem, I am using an epistemic model that is “prospective,” looking forward to the things that are not there yet. Meanwhile, if I am the anthropologist or historian, I have a “retrospective” model, I look at the things that have already happened and that already exist or have already existed (including buildings). Thus, in one case demonstrated, in the other promised: when I do a project, I make a promise. This means that all orders of truth and reality are overturned with respect to other disciplines, which are also the strongest methodologically in the humanities.

In Turin, Carlo Olmo and historians have taught us to “discipline” many orders of questions, which are however inevitably retrospective in nature, coming from human sciences as sciences of description; we ourselves do not have so much to do with description, we have much more to do with the promise and with prescription. From here comes out another question, in the sense that obviously prescription is not only a persuasive way of convincing others, but also a way to “obligate” others, and if we had no obligations on our side, in our business we would not have any power. If we are not able to bring a project to approval – and thus we do not transform an idea into a series of strongly binding documents – we have not produced any effect (this is also a problem of ethics), and we are also bad architects.

Thus, in models that are behind this “prescriptive functionality” of our profession, a whole other host of issues are hidden: typically, behind the prescriptions lies a “linear model,” “for which I tell you what you need to do (construction design) and you do exactly that, and in the end you get this result – otherwise if you do not get it, you have not followed the project. Now, in reality, none of the determining of orders of our work is done linearly, whereby the paradigm of the diagram of flow and of the linear “program” is not realistic, because in the end the process is always divergent and undergoes deviations.

Now, all the work we do is produced by means of documents: and it is here that our philosopher friends come to our assistance, and even to critique, because the problem of documents is very articulated. It is a problem that we have studied in our own way, to try to understand what feature this “document” had, because in effect the architect only produces documents (more or less paper).

There is a first sphere, in which I do things on my own, then it widens out, and then it comes back to me. Thus cyclical conditions of document exchange are created between the parties involved in the process that make this cloud of documents grow over time. If I look retrospectively at a project after it is completed, I can define a enormous amount of documents that I have produced; then if I also add to that

the other spheres of exchange that do not come directly from me, a giant map comes out, that tells me what I did and can reestablish a measurable form of my work, within the general context. Obviously, it would be too little if everything were reduced to the registration of a single final trace that coincides with the “project image”: the cloud of documents is yes, made of designs, but also of contracts, specifications, certifications etc. I can try to hypothesize about how these “clouds” develop, I can come up with some correlation schemes and propose models which then are articulated over time.

There exist phases of the exchange that we can intuitively imagine opening in terms of “symbolic exchange,” in which more interlocutors need to be included, in such a way that the questions are registered in an order that must be stabilized, through contractual points. The exchanges are of different types: there are exchanges that are used to define the descriptions, and others that define the requirements. The narrative and symbolic dimension says how this future must be designed, while the prescriptive and “bureaucratic” one establishes the obliging conditions for such a future. The time in which this exchange is consumed will remain distinct from the lifetime of a work – or at least anticipates the time in which the work is built and used.

The symbolic exchanges must be fixed, and are recognized systematically through formal acts (permits, authorizations, certifications) that make up what we instead call “bureaucratic exchange.” There’s a whole network of constraints that ensures that everything is instituted, at certain times even against the will of individuals.

There are procedures that have a degree of automation such that at certain times any technical officer may be opposed, bureaucratically, to a possibly even important reconsideration from a policy maker; these are the automatic effects of certain processes, which are not attributable to the sphere of the intention of “free” subjects to decide what to do or not, but instead move forward on their behalf. Because there exists an order of reality of urban transformation that has its own autonomy, even if not absolute: we, collectively, are the ones who produce these conditions, and then we do not know how to control them.

If we imagine placing an approval step into this circle of exchanges – a step in which I create a design and present it – I have to think that this presentation will be fixed and registered, and it will become the basis for passing to a further detail, for defining boundaries, which then in the form of a provision delimits real space, and so on. Then I generate competitions, bids, and in the end I build this “thing,” without anyone having directly checked what form it has. It might be expected that the final effects that a project imagines in the beginning in reality is subjected to transformations over

time that lead it to be completed, and that otherwise it would not reach completion.

Then there are a whole series of considerations on the types of models that we can construct to describe these processes: they are representations that concern as much the single document as the complete process.

In the construction of our hypothetical scheme of processes, we have to pass from a network of simple corrections of a structural nature to systems of relations in which there is already a direction – so we are already in a series – up to the point of designing a further specification of networks, in which each of these nodes could be a single document, which has an implicit process of internal development: a generative scheme that is fixed in a certain design or authorization, and that then composes a system, legible in its final effects.

The fact that a project deviates is not necessarily a failure; it can be considered the way to connect further implications, further entities. If we were able to design this architecture of implications, which is produced over time, we could consider the project a “technical object,” one that can be put into a perspective of evolutionary deviation, in which the transformations can be represented in a diagram.

I can undertake this kind of reasoning at the scale of the individual document, at the scale of a building project, or at an urban scale (for example, considering a “executive planning instrument”). Each of these scales of deviation exist one inside the other: if I as the designer must deal with the city, I have to ask myself this question of successive nesting, which given that they start from a documental record will never allow me to separate a visionary idea from the crude practice of my bureaucratic being. Otherwise, I have to delegate the technical work to others, separating it from the “vision,” and therefore I would lose my professional identity.

All of this carries behind it other, more complicated considerations, which concern the problem of “perspectivism”: if a project effect depends on the fact that there has been an agreement, and this agreement has been approved by means of a contract, we could say that the person who designs it is a “subject who grows conventionally.”

The more he/she grows, the more powerful he/she becomes; the more powerful, the more fragile though, such are the many orders of constraints that he/she has generated. So, in this “collective subject,” unstable images of the final stage of the project are created, which are continually at risk of disappearing: we no longer have a single person like Gabetti who knew what he wanted and told others what to do. The subject, as an individual, advances by articulating a project and joins with an increasingly wide subjectivity, which goes beyond and which could fail at each step of widening. The internal fragility of this collective subject may even necessitate

something else beyond bureaucracy, and in fact needs something narrative, from a symbolic exchange, a weak device that holds together the parties of this unfinished subject prior to the contract. It is perhaps the concept of “storytelling” that we need, as it has been theorized by cognitive scientists, which defines storytelling as the means by which we build a common sense of something that is not yet common. If we ourselves analyze the dynamics between two members of a studio (one who starts by making a proposal and the other who responds by objecting and deciding), we could probably represent the symbolic exchange in this way: a narrative launching point, an action that deviates, and a new narrative launching point, which in turn registers a point that becomes a first agreement: namely, the first collectivization of the subject, from one to two. So, in this sense, the “narrator against the decision maker” are integrated into a collective subject and establish the first order of convention, which is however also an order of a “collectively registered intention.”

All of this should end up somewhere, in the sense that on the one hand we would like to say, “Well, then we need to do projects in a different way,” but on the other hand we know very well that we are in the process of systematizing practical questions, those already noted. Professionals are already acting in documental terms and by successive agreements, and work of this kind can provide a frame of reference for the pragmatic order within which the production of projects is already happening. In addition, there are some suggestions that come to mind: for example, we would like to show that projects could be diachronic, that is, they could identify orders of a concatenation of effects not only morphological, but in their making. The way in which we build the image of the project is instead always assimilable as a synchronic chart.

Leonardo Caffo. Something fairly taken for granted for you who have been involved with architecture, that for at least 50-60 years the relationship between architecture and philosophy has been very close and often has not lead anywhere, the most common notions that are often studied of the philosophers’ interaction between architecture and philosophy are those of deconstruction, in which Jacques Derrida has been given weight and inserted into well-known architectural theory is that particular text titled “Maintenant, l’architecture” (Now, Architecture), in which he presents a series of lessons on the subject and has often applied the theory of deconstruction that meant something different entirely, and one proceeded to disassemble pieces of that theory to see what to do with it in architecture. You all know how much has been speculated about the word “dwelling,” a reference to Martin Heidegger, who often did not say anything interesting from an architectural point of view and was hyper-interpreted.

For philosophers, architecture is not preoccupied with

what Alessandro Armando has just said, this is the interesting thing – philosophers for a long time thought that architecture should be concerned with the built, literally forgetting the project. Philosophers who deal with architecture deal with that which is called social reality. What comes out when philosophers deal with social reality and look to architecture is that what we do not know is that 80% of the built environment was completed without planning, and only 20% with planning. Max Horkheimer called out the “mass misery” in the metaphor “skyscraper,” social housing “in India, China and Africa, the mass misery goes beyond all imagination, extended areas of the Balkans are a torture chamber,” where buildings were made without planning.

With this book, I was able to finally figure out what the philosophy of architecture is talking about. It is important to interpret the project as a document. Derrida’s metaphor returns, he is a very complicated philosopher; one of the architects who understood him best was Eisenman, with whom he worked, and there is an anecdote in which Derrida tells Eisenman: “If you keep interpreting me like that you will end up forgetting the windows.”

Derrida interprets the built and not only as a text, for which deconstruction was a textual practice, that is, to see what is left when the unnecessary is eliminated from the text, what happens when architecture is interpreted as a text and one tries to apply deconstruction to the text, the first thing that comes from it is that the project as a document brings out the notions of traces, memory, and resistance, and one of the best comparisons for all of this is to bring to mind the novel *On the Natural History of Destruction* by W. G. Sebald. This book traces the architectural metaphor of the reconstruction of Germany, in which there is an attempt to remove certain things that had been built within a certain period of history in order to shift the sense of guilt; according to Nietzsche, guilt is the structural construction of a society.

Therefore, philosophy and architecture here begin a high-handed dialogue with each other; clearly philosophers should not be involved in building windows, but, if we are talking about society, the word “to build” has at least one polysemy, a double semantics: on the one hand it means Alessandro’s work, and on the other it means my job. The reason why the project becomes interesting to me in a book like the one that Giovanni and Alessandro are writing, why there are so many philosophical notions that are often elusive and that thanks to the architecture take shape, it is good to begin to go from the philosophy of architecture, which has often focused on the contingency of architecture, from the aesthetics of architecture (“Is architecture beautiful?” “Why are contemporary art museums more beautiful than the works inside?”), another typical theme is the ethics of architecture

("Is architecture responsible for what it does?"), it is necessary to pass to philosophical architecture, which is an entirely different thing, where one does not speak about ethics or aesthetics, but of the code of conduct of architecture, that is, what kind of relationships are created between worlds within the project; something that immediately brings to mind the notion of project as problematized by Alessandro, which is the notion of reflective equilibrium.

The notion of reflective equilibrium is one of the best concepts on the market of contemporary moral philosophy; it has produced a philosopher called John Rawls who wrote the book *A Theory of Justice*. The notion of reflective equilibrium is the idea that societies arise to the extent that a group of people put their personal interests in brackets, and try in some way to abstract the categories, principles, and fundamental parameters of human existence and create a contract between them, and they try to establish something, typically it is spoken about on the level of ignorance. The project then as it is problematized by them, there is a part of the book in which they make a comparison between Leibnitz and Deleuze and in which there is the famous diagram of the book on the Baroque fold, in which Alexander has explained that the project eats the other points of view, which I have seen as an agreement of points of view. Thus, that particular 20% of architecture that has been left alone on the part of philosophers was actually the most important thing, because it was the precise putting into practice of this process of contractualization that moral philosophy seeks to understand in the present day, that is, precisely when one does something that makes you want to go from the intrinsic to the extrinsic, wants to move from the inside to the outside, the project moves from the mind to the world, and to do that we must look to link the two things.

Another thing is that the action of a project is something completely new compared to actions in the way that philosophers have always understood them; philosophers define actions as something different than a movement: action is something that is done with the intention of reaching an objective, and if the objective is reached with the initial intentions, philosophers call these theoretical entities action – here is where the project completely breaks with this idea of action as philosophers have traditionally defined it.

The action of a project is something that transcends the individual who is undertaking it, because there are those whole series of processes seen before with Alexander, but also because there is an issue of generations; we know well that if architecture is text, is trace, is document, then architecture is memory to the extent that you do and you are doing something that will be interpreted by someone who is not here now, and if it is found again and from there it will start off again to do something else. The project as architecture

is a relay race; it is done today so someone else has a part of the world on which to interpret something that does not exist yet, and you will no longer be there to the extent that someone else will be interpreting it. Here, this is architecture as resistance, as trace, and as memory, and the project is therefore something that is done in the hope that someone will resume from where you left off; here, this is architecture as humanity, that is, the idea that what you are doing will give meaning to the reality that someone will create later – the idea of the continuation of the species *homo sapiens*. The time has arrived to understand that interdisciplinarity is not just a word with which to obtain research funding, but the only hope of trying to understand that, to the extent in which a world is made, either it is done together or something is done that will not go well literally. Thus, the time has come to restructure the shelves of contemporary bookstores, the time has come to not cling to the polysemy; if I write a book on living; I am not necessarily saying anything useful for architects, and conversely if I write *Inside Out* as a collection of writings after so many years they are not necessarily interesting to a philosopher, because perchance I said something interesting, but I have not worked in that space. The research that you have heard now is that space, within which one becomes conscious that designing is doing something that has to do with the intrinsic and the extrinsic, one needs to have an idea of humanity, an idea of the future, one has to have an idea of progress, and perhaps only Jacques Derrida could have been over-interpreted by architects because he had this idea of the perennial textuality of the world, and when he said that the future belongs to ghosts, he meant that the future belongs to those who have indicated that future, and if there is someone who indicates the future in an arrogant way beyond the culture of the one who then will go to approach this future it is the architect, the designer, and so on. For this reason, I believe that philosophical architecture, which is the gaining of awareness that when doing architecture you are building social reality, you are building the world, you are addressing humanity; it is the new outlook of research. First, there was the ethics and then the aesthetics of architecture done from the point of view of philosophers; meanwhile, there is no doubt that the future of forms of life passes to the environment that we build, and that there is mutual and reciprocal assistance between construction and form of life, because we are not only a biological object, but above all social.

When Foucault says that man is a recent invention, he means that the human as we understand it today is an invention of the social sciences. Here is this restructuring of the concept and of philosophy, and the destruction of the place in which man lives is part of architecture – working together is the only option.