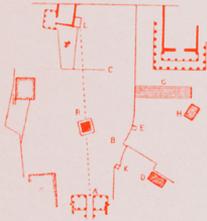


# Praxis

July 13th, 2018  
Praxis  
Supervoid

DE



## TROIS RAPPELS A MESSIEURS LES ARCHITECTES III LE PLAN

ACROPOLE D'ATHÈNES. Coup d'œil sur le Parthénon, l'Érechthéon, l'Athéna-Parthénon depuis les Propylées. Il ne faut pas oublier que le sol de l'Acropole est très mouvementé, avec des différences de niveaux considérables qui ont été employées pour constituer des socles imposants aux édifices. Les fausses équerres ont fourni des vues riches et d'un effet subtil; les masses asymétriques des édifices créent un rythme intense. Le spectacle est massif, élastique, nerveux, écrasant d'acuité, dominateur.

When asked to give our opinion on what might be a relevant issue in architecture today, we took some time to consider what our generation is producing in terms of work. We came to realise that while there is a lot being said around the field of architecture, not many of us talk about architecture itself. What really stands out is an overproduction of what may come before and after the project: theoretical statements like a manifesto and representation. What was lost in the middle is architecture.

Originating most of the times from an uncritical and aestheticized veneration of the so-called radical architects and designers of the '70s (recently joined by a superficial vision of postmodernism). A manifesto driven approach risks, in a time when the boundaries of our agency are essentially shaped by market forces, confining one's visions of grandeur in the realm of vain desire. We feel that this attitude – often nostalgic – has brought many to a self-celebratory dead end.

On the other hand, we have seen our generation grow, for various reasons, an obsession with representation. The dominant trend has shifted from the optimistic renders of the 2000s towards the hypocrisy of cute collages of the 2010s. In most cases such collages are just a manifestation of the same shallowness

that they were meant to criticise in the first place. Representation became an end in itself and therefore a means to avoid a discussion on the architectural merits of a project.

It is as if architecture should be sorry for what it produces and we should muffle it through other languages. Spatial choices don't need to be justified by adding other layers of meaning, they should be judged for what they are. There is really no need for metaphors, no need for narratives and definitively no need for all these mugs, rugs, cats and plants which populate architectural collages today. Often this abundance of objects is just a cover-up for spatial poverty.

We seem to be trapped in a two dimensional foil whose two faces are extreme disillusion and a generic will to restate architecture's role in society. This foil fluctuates in the space of ineffectiveness and irrelevance.

So where do we stand in this rather bleak context? Drawing from Alejandro Zaera-Polo schematic classification of current tendencies in architecture, they are all somehow acceptable (possibly the only exception is populists) as long as the interpreters are skilled architects. There seems to be no clear specific relevance to one discourse over another, even if there are quite a few talented architects in the generation that preceded us. However, if one is to put forward meaningful work then they must be able to make decisions, from the Latin term *de-caedere*, which means cutting off, and the best method to cut off what is not relevant is the project itself.

We are discovering that a practical approach, i.e. producing architecture and designing buildings, is for us the best way to constantly think and position ourselves within the field of architecture.

If theory is related to the realm of vision (*theoréin*) and is fundamental for reading and analysing a complex reality, praxis is, for marxist theory, the human activity that transforms the real and produces history. Architecture's relevance in society is indissolubly related to practical activity, we design buildings in relation or reaction to a given political, social and physical context. In turn, buildings modify the context they are immersed in. As architects though, we must not forget that our tools to engage with reality are merely architectural. There are far too many architects posing as sociologists, philosophers, ecologists, artists. Maybe it could be a good idea to be architects who are just architects.

We are interested in architecture itself, and the way this interest unfolds is the project of the space as well as the complex and often contradictory relationships it entails with its physical and disciplinary context. We could say that everything then becomes a consequence of the project, starting from its representation. Of course there are certain authors and fields of interest, but again, they are confined within the boundaries of the discipline, and represent in a way our 'non-dogmatic accumulation of formal knowledge' (OASE #79), a repository of solutions from which we freely draw from.

For all the aforementioned reasons we are going to restate here the importance of the plan in our work. As Le Corbusier wrote in *Vers une Architecture*: 'The Plan is the generator. Without a plan you have a lack of order, and willfulness,' the plan is the tool for a rational organisation of the program and the spatial sequence, i.e. the use and perception of space. It is an abstraction that transcends questions of materiality, texture, colour which largely depend on the fashion of the moment and therefore forces us to focus on the spatial qualities of a project.

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