

ARGUMENTS

TOWARDS A CRITICAL PROJECT

«Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.»

Immanuel Kant. *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781.

A TALE OF TWO CRITICS

On October 10th 2005, at 3 p.m., in hall TU Delft of The Berlage Institute, Pier Vittorio Aureli's thesis defense took place. «The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture» was presented before a committee as exceptional as it was diverse; Wiel Arets, Peter Eisenman, Elia Zenghelis and Alejandro Zaera Polo, among others.

In the Netherlands, a place where the importance of the diagram impregnated the whole research, Aureli faced a way of understanding architecture which he was unfamiliar with, as well as a type of representation he felt skeptical about¹. In a time when the discipline embraced the practice beyond its traditional interests, Aureli responded by synthesizing in his thesis a political project not only for architecture, but also for the architectural form. A few years later, when interviewed by Eisenman, the conversation visited his teaching years at The Berlage where Dean Zaera Polo once confessed to him: «I'm not interested in politics; I'm only interested in the market». Aureli's work is clearly an utter opposition to said opinion.

In 2008, Zaera Polo published «The politics of the envelope» as an evident reply to Aureli. In this article, he articulates his distrust on political ideology and its

connection with architecture: «my experience of Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy has left me a rather cynical view of political ideology as an effective tool to understand or transform reality»². To him, architecture on paper is not effective as a political agent since «just like utopia, it is limited to pure representation without the attachments and frictions capable of making things political».

In 2016, the editors in charge of *El Croquis* magazine suggested he resumed his article «A world full of holes», published in 1998. By then, his fascination with the *star system* had come to an end. Together with Guillermo Fernández Abascal, they formulated a mapping of contemporary architectonic tendencies as alternatives to the consolidated neoliberal ones. The name given to the project was *the political compass of global architecture*, where speech is tainted by a renewed interest in architecture's political commitment.

The interrelation between critique and project is supported by the revalidation of argumentation in the discipline. In 2001, Sarah Whiting and Robert Somol mark the end of theory and the vindication of reflection only by means of practice.³ But the outbreak of the 2008 crisis resurfaces the interest in theory and its connection with practice, which is once again introduced in contemporary debate. Barely over a decade ago, the post critique had confined architecture to a position where politics were practically banned, yet today we witness the emergence of a series of architects and theorists who claim for a

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political agenda in the architectonic debate. This agenda frequently implies to embrace conflict which becomes explicit through arguments and allegations.

THE MEANS FOR ARGUMENTS

Robin Evans proposes that a drawing is a project by itself, different from the translation that becomes the finished work. A similar condition can be established with the text, if this is understood as a project itself. The dispute between Aureli and Zaera Polo may be comprehended after analyzing their work. However, when delving into their writings and interviews, their work can be visualized more sharply. The multiple shapes the argument can adopt define the interest for looking into the means which enable the generation of reasoning in our field.

Consequently, the thematic field for the magazine is structured in three concrete sections which frame part of the means for construction of meaning: *publish*, *expose* and *compete*. While some may be considered obsolete, others might take a new turn, and there are also those who –in spite of having great presence– fail to propose new topics.

Once the importance of a debate in the creation of critical view⁴ is understood, the invitation is to exchange ideas rather than proposing a single, rigid discourse. Therefore, each section counts with the participation of diverse authors who allow for conversations to rise from

their particular positions. The different articles should not be read in isolation, but as overlapping dialogs instead.

An argument is a discourse in favor or against someone or something, but it is also a dispute or disagreement. For that reason, this issue of R intends to bring forth an argument in favor of arguments and their possibility of being questioned.

Argument thus allows the advancement of discourse. It is multi-lateral it keeps more than one path of thought open. And at the same time, it aims to impose and demonstrate a specific perspective. Conversely, an image or slogan synthesized by an a priori concept -or even one chosen a posteriori- determines a reduction of a complex whole to a single keyword that leaves little scope for debate.⁴

THE INEXISTENCE OF ONE SINGLE ARGUMENT

A Tale of Two Cities was published with great praise in 31 weekly segments between April and November of 1859, in *All the Year Round* magazine. In this text, Charles Dickens unveils the contrast between two worlds. All his characters are identified by a dichotomy and there is proximity to the reader, marked by the use of very strong counterpoints between interconnected ideas: *it was the best of times, it was the worst of times*. The confronta-

tion between Aureli and Zaera Polo is also framed within a story of two opposites. Beyond the content of both arguments, the debate itself allows for the restoration of argumentation, and with it, the integration of spaces where the discipline may be critically assessed.

*Why should you particularly like a man who resembles you? There is nothing in you to like; you know that.*⁵

1. Aureli introduces these thoughts at the «After the Diagram» Conference (AA School of Architecture, October 2005) and in the namesake article in *Log Magazine*, No. 6 (Fall 2005), pp. 5-9.
2. *Log*, n.º 13-14 (Fall 2008), pp. 193-207.
3. Somol, R. y Whiting, S. «Notes around the doppler effect and other moods of modernism». *Perspecta* 33, 2002.
4. Pau F., Puddu, S. y Zuddas, F. «Argument vs. Concept: the City is not an Egg. An imagined dialogue between a tutor and a student». *Fuck Concepts! Context! San Rocco*, n.º 4, 2012, pp. 100-104.
5. Dickens, Ch. *A Tale of two Cities*, 1859.

The translation of this text has been reviewed by the editorial team.