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Preface

After the eventful decades of production of 'critical' discourses in architectural theory, new paradigms are emerging which are affecting the status of 'theory' inside the discourse of architecture as well as the practice of architecture as a discipline.

In contrast to the debates of the 1970s and 80's, some would argue that we are moving towards a 'post-critical' phase in architecture, where criticism is suspended in the face of major technical and economic challenges. This in turn is affecting and challenging the pedagogical mission of architecture as a discipline of intellectual inquiry that addresses concrete problems of life. While certain aspects of the older critical discourses are still valid to address the emerging paradigms, others are becoming inadequate to the new reality.

What should be the goals of theory and pedagogy, and the role of praxis under this new condition? How should we address the conditions imposed by reality within these various discourses? Are the traditional ideological and aesthetic critiques of the "object" and the theoretical formulations of the "City" still valid tools of analysis for this new condition?

This was the basic platform based on which a number of participants presented their papers to this third architectural symposium held at the Lebanese American University in Beirut.

There may have been an original bias on our part, as organizers, by inviting two keynote speakers, both critical in their own ways of the new hyper-reality that has affected the contemporary condition of architecture: **Hilde Heynen** on the one hand, who in her *Architecture and Modernity*, analyzed the intricacies of modern architecture, following the parcoures of the critical thinkers of the Frankfurt School [Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer and others] all the way to Tafuri and Koolhaas in our own times. In this work, Heynen clearly took a stand, in the end, for an architecture of social relevance, which does not divorce itself from its mimetic function:

One thus should accept it as a given that architecture- in its most broadly conceived sense- forms the framework of life. But in accepting this as a starting point, one should also recognize that there can be something more. [...] Like art and literature, architecture is capable of suspending the continuity of the normal and generating a moment of intensity that subverts what is self-evident.

Neil Leach, in his own way, radically attacked the image-culture that has become pervasive in much of our contemporary cultural representations in *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, pointing to this “anaesthetic” capacity of images, from the rendering of the war on Iraq as a fireworks spectacle on CNN, to the fetishization of technology in much of contemporary architectural works:

The world has become aestheticized and anaestheticized, emptied of all content. And nowhere is this condition more marked, it would seem, than in the glossy pages of our architectural magazines and the fashion-conscious domains of our schools of architecture.

In the concluding presentation of this symposium, Leach took the iconic sculpture of Bernini, *The Ecstasy of St Teresa*, as a point of departure for a discussion of “ecstasy”, and a deeper probe into the relevance of aesthetic and psychoanalytic interpretations of certain phenomena that fall between the mystical, the erotic, and the hysteric. These investigations hint to a possible understanding, or recognition, of the architectural in terms of such symbolic attachments.

The majority of papers in this symposium addressed the critical relation between theory and practice, while some focused theoretically on specific themes that constitute, for the authors, important markers along this path traced by modern architecture.

In this respect, the essay by **Jay Randle**, who has taught in schools around the world, bears a great significance, not just for those of us who have been touched by his deep and authentic perception of the world and by his idiosyncratic reading of architecture as one manifestation among many, of the human activity within a natural realm of things. His comprehensive essay is a timely call for order, drawing on four decades of experience in both education and practice, and on the lessons of the past. **Antoine Romanos**, in his turn, addressed the opposition between theory and practice, through a historical survey of the major benchmarks in the evolution of this opposition, which in the end, resulted in much of the degradation of the built environment all around the world. Still, Romanos holds some hope that the re-establishment of a rapport between professionals and academics could reform the current condition. On the other hand, **Charles Meyer's** reflections invite us to a phenomenological re-cognition of architecture as both lived experience and

atmosphere. The references he often makes to photography, indicate his persistence in developing a feeling for architecture through the act of looking; of a deep, penetrating, but sympathetic act of looking coupled with an investigative analysis of the matter out of which reality, and architecture, are inherently formed.

Katrin Fagerstrom explored in her presentation the significance of “color” in architecture, and the appearance and disappearance of this notion in the practice and discourse of architecture in the Twentieth century. From the vernacular traditions in Sweden to the developments of Modern Architecture, Fagerstrom examined the changing perceptions of color in its dual manifestations as inherent to the material, or as applied paint.

Christos Hadjichristos addressed the epistemological foundations of architecture and questioned its role as a discipline, employing the scientific models of Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos and others to elucidate the particularities of our profession, drawing informative parallels and contrasts between this profession and the other sciences. Drawing on his experience of teaching in the Arab world, **Kevin Mitchell** chose to examine the question of architectural education, providing a set of practical tools for a pedagogy that does not turn its back on the material and cultural baggage that a student comes with, but neither holds back and retracts into subjectivity, thus countering the prevailing trends of imitating imported models or surrendering to kitsch. One paper addressed the relationship between architecture and art, as seen through the work of a major artist of this century, Antoni Tapies. **Beshir Kenzari** interpreted the work of Tapies through an architectonic lens, probing deeply into his “walls” and their connotations of violence, concreteness, of a return to the primeval elements of art, which, as Kenzari alluded, hold important lessons for architecture as well in a time that witnesses a return to formalism.

Hani Asfour, George Katodrytis and Iradj Moeini addressed the emerging paradigms in architectural education and practice, namely, the important consequences of the information technology on the discipline. While **George Katodrytis** stressed that the new developments in digital technology have irreversibly altered the making and perception of architecture, arguing that architecture can no longer limit itself to “craftsmanship” or “aesthetics”, enthusiastically espousing the new possibilities, **Iradj Moeini's** essay took a more historical and analytical approach, and traced the development

of information-age architecture, in its multiple variations, from the platforms of Modernism; to the developments that go beyond the original framework. **Hani Asfour**, on the other hand, proposed a radical revision of the way architects have used and interacted with technology, especially as we witness the great transformations provoked by the new Information Age. For Asfour, such paradigmatic shifts should not provoke an abandonment of critical discourse, rather the opposite, the re-engagement of this very discourse in a more productive, disseminative and resistant practice. The warnings he gives are worth heeding, the new technologies should not be emulated or mimicked, and then translated into forms, as the assimilation of such new technologies goes beyond the question of form and style.

Three other participants addressed the crisis of the architectural object and the city, especially as seen in the developing world. While the question of "tradition" is a loaded question, especially where it is confronted by the drive towards modernity, the relevance of the question can not be overlooked, especially where the struggle towards modernity continues in the face of a reactionary return to fundamentalist models that seek to abolish the achievements of secularism by proposing a "unitary" model purified of difference and diversity.

Karima Benachenhou, in her presentation, addressed the problems of applying architectural education in practice, building on her experience as one of the architects involved in the reconstruction of Ain Temouchent after the earthquake that demolished this town in the West of Algeria. Benachenhou testified to the difficulty of applying a postmodern language of architecture that would answer to the inhabitants' Islamic culture, although for her, this approach carries more legitimacy than the blind application of city planning dogmas of the 1950's. In a similar vein, **Tarek Abdelsalam** reviewed the role of the Agha Khan Award for Architecture, and assessed its importance in reviving an interest in Islamic architecture and a concern for local traditions of building, which have been largely overlooked by contemporary practice in the Islamic world. Building upon an investigation of different "city center" models, and using Bombay as an example of a city growing at an exponential rate with its population reaching over 10 millions, **Deb Upadhyaya** argued for the development of a new urban model that can take into account these dynamics and deal more effectively with the challenges that such growth imposes on resources, land and infrastructure.

Finally, the session on *Architecture and its Other*, brought together three veteran theoreticians who have had each a long record of dissent from the normative readings of architecture. In his essay that weaves the filmic imaginary with the current political manipulations of the post 9/11 phase, building upon his interpretations of the Lacanian notion of hysteria, **Donald Kunze** asserted the role of discourse in architecture as a *symptomatic* discourse, resistant to the simplifications of the formalist currents. **Nadir Lahiji**, for his part, summarized the current debates on the state of architecture, also starting with the events of 9/11, and the role that the competition for the ground-zero site in New York City has taken in re-activating a discourse that can no longer ignore architecture's place in the political. As a historical model, Lahiji reflected again on the notion that Reyner Banham articulated as "Une Architecture Autre", and the promises it held for an architecture that doesn't get stuck in an impasse between pure aesthetics and functional requirements. **Libero Andreotti**, on the other hand, discussed the counter-movement of the Situationists in the 1960's suggesting that lessons could still be learned from their activist and socially engaged practice, and demonstrating their influence, although at times discreet, on contemporary artistic and architectural forms.

While the symposium theme raised questions that were too ambitious to be settled within the scope of any single event, yet this event proved fruitful in bringing together these different positions that address, *theoretically*, the theoretical dimension in architecture, as well as its interrelation with *praxis*, in a discipline that must in the end translate into practice. A discipline which proves, against skepticism and its occasional downfalls, its ability to re-assert its role as a fundamental activity in the humanist edifice that remains our best hope for a world where we attempt to live in dignity and respect for others.

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