

ARCHITECTURE BY THEORY BY DESIGN BY RESEARCH BY REFLECTION BY PROJECTS BY EDUCATION

One knows that a computer exists in an operating system, a certain packet of hardware and integrated software, this all fitting in the best design as possible. Maybe one can also compare an architectural institute with a computer: first there is the need and necessity for good directives with a clear vision into content, secondly a hardware transferred in a knowledge transmission, thirdly a series of programs that need to be updated as quick as possible related on contemporary needs and finally the whole fitting in a global image representing the vision and ambition in architecture.

This looks simple but results being always quite complex, especially concerning the in-between links for a fluid functioning while also having a high potential on local and global response. Function is to be one of the main program concerns in architecture, but Peter Zumthor was always claiming that in architecture it is about use, not about function. Maybe here lies the difference between a computer and an institute in architecture: a computer is asked to function well as a tool, an institute is requested to be used by a young generation in the understanding of the world with its culture, economics, ecology, geography, typology, morphology... to achieve, through an act of seeing, feeling and reflecting, a sense of answering the nowadays problematic.

In his essay *Verstrooiingen* (Distractions), the Flemish writer Bernard Dewulf even speaks of 'watching without an agenda' when referring to Piet Meeuse who claims 'There exists also some other way of watching. Watching with no knowledge as result but rather provokes the opposite: the distortion of what one already knows.' Dewulf further reflects that he believes in unlearning, unlearning with an agenda. He also quotes Pam Emmerik mentioning the 'zigzag approach' as the image by which one characterizes the approach to art by which all tools are to be bet: art history, poems, speaking language, psychology, film, dreams, observations, philosophy, personal stories, doctrines, urban experiences, politics and more.¹

Maybe the individual parcours of students in architecture can be traced as a zigzag approaches. In their bachelor's course they are triggered to know more about what they see and maybe didn't understand yet. In the master's course they are requested to look more profound achieving a proper method, context, story resulting in the best architectonic forms. The more plural and ambiguous, the better. There is nothing more disgraceful than having only one solution resulting out of an academic education.

The academic year 2011-2012 was pressed between two important global art and architectonic events, namely the Venice Biennale of 2010 curated by Kazuo Sejima, in which international installations by well known or not yet known architects were shown and the Kassel Documenta of 2012 curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev showing us that the superiority of western reflections is in total decay and a new look to the world on the basis of contemporary questions is needed. While in the first event architecture could still be architecture, the second one expressed that art still can be art.

This expresses the main focus of architectural education: architecture needs to remain as architecture. And thus the whole program needs to be written within this aim. But 'As a consequence, architectural teaching must not restrict itself to the immediate architectural means; rather, it must convey a comprehensive understanding at a general epistemological level.' as Andras Palffy writes in *Concept and Empirism*.² Therefore teachers and students need to form a platform in the context of thinking and making, creating a visionary aura based on realities. There is hardly an architecture without reality: dreams are real and maybe unconsciousness is even the biggest real thing...

One theme occurs through the whole academic reflection in the hope for future existences: it is the link between theory, design and research. It was the Swiss architect Luigi Snozzi who was always mentioning *progettare* as the main concern for architects and institutes. 'Progettare' admits more translations and meanings than 'design': to plan, to sketch, to outline, to contemplate, to project and to design as well. This marks something becoming to the point because all things mentioned in theory and research and design – in architecture – are all framed in this one singular word: progettare.

Of course here it is not about the significance of the word itself, but about the transmission of it in an educational process and the intermediarities of the world outside the university (college) and the possible dealing with it giving back some answers and results to proposed problems: it is about so-called win-win operations helping the best of both worlds.

One can't do without some basic process: the start from zero and the hope to achieve something going beyond the project itself. Linked to the Bologna system of Bachelor's and Master's Courses, also the Antwerp institute, the forthcoming Faculty of Design Sciences of the University of Antwerp is now reviewing the proper curricula for making the whole educational process more appropriate to a changed generation and relationship with reality. New programs in which theory is immediately to be understood in/by/with projects and built objects are to be explained in the way of understanding how to design, is one of the main goals. This is what has been described as 'to watch'. Finally it is about more than just one singular figure in architecture: the architect as the solitary designer hardly survives, thus new directives and platforms need to be worked out. Management is becoming one of the main concerns, but management with a layer of content, not with only a formal solution. Herein lies the biggest task of institutes and its teachers: being an operating system and hardware in good and fluid understanding, accepting and requesting software that is challenging everybody into an ongoing contemporariness, even better if the formal multiple image of the whole (the students results) is expressing the ambition and vision creating a response beyond reality.

In his discursive note explaining his master project the graduate student Maarten Lambrechts writes: 'The way we are looking to the past defines how we understand the contemporary and what we will make in the future. [...] It is to the avant-garde to show the new preciseness, to propose radical alternatives. [...] What show and, more important, what not to show? This is the fundamental

question for the designer who wants an interaction with the contemporary context. [...] It is therefore essential in understanding the tradition because this insight gives the designer the ability to see through the architecture and to manipulate.’³

This leads immediately to the deep core of nowadays analogy in European architecture and also our nowadays task as teachers as well as students and the defined programs: the valid rules versus the manipulated exceptions. Asking the teachers on their ambition it came out that the making and the thinking were the main focus points while for students the visionary was the most important theme.⁴ What students see in books, magazines and on the internet comes out as achieved matter of ‘knowing’. So education is about watching, understanding and indeed, unlearn...

The following projects in architecture take all part into these mentioned concerns of evolving from initiation to finalizing. In this process some moments are to be pointed as being most important such as the Bachelor Integral Design project, the Master’s Course, the Master’s Projects and the international ADSL-week.

The Bachelor’s Integral Design was about an institute for architecture, call it the real existence and program reflecting spatial ambition transferred in a ‘thick’ building with building structure as an a priori or starting point, as building content towards space, not as a afterwards solution.

The themes for the Master’s Course were linked to research items - from abstract to concrete related requests – into the question and the discussion on the as found, the analogue, the abstract, the technological, the autonomous and/or the radical. This debate wanted to be a start for finding a proper design context, besides the site, thus replaced by ‘situation’.

Mostly all Master’s Projects items and themes – Master Projects designs as well as written Master theses – are defined through studio’s in which programs were defined, such as the Stuyvenbergh site in the 19th century district of Antwerp or the Antwerp public space and squares – Groenplaats and Astrid Square –.

Projects on sites in Paramaribo as well as in Caïro were also proposed next to an ‘open studio’ in which students could study on a theme being important for their own reflection, based on ‘personal roots’. Finally the possibility to graduate with a written report was creating a direction into the multiplicity and aim for broadening possibilities towards future careers.

The selected projects show the impact of this master’s structure and the personal responses that lead beyond form. Reactions against building development, the play on the thin line between beauty and dirty realism, the understanding of the Israel-Palestina walls, spatial qualities on the fringe between inside and outside, the understanding of the work of Luc Deleu’s ‘Inadapted City’... they all express that hummingbirds don’t need legs to fly.

Finally, the ADSL 2012 workshop and lecture series on ‘transformer’ placed architectural reflections into the frame of a global context connecting architecture to art, film, urban acupuncture, ruins, habitus, imagination and the act of ‘*indignez-vous*’ or ‘enough is enough’.

There is a time difference between the writing of the text, the assembling of the book and reading it, looking at the projects and reflecting on the words.

Architecture, although inert in itself, is now evolving faster than ever. But nevertheless, slow or fast, our common concerns in architecture – locally or globally – are about inspirations and influences that define our profession, as David Chipperfield is stating in his *Common Ground* Biennale 2012 press release “The phrase also trains our attention on the city, which is our area of expertise and activity, but is something created with every citizen and the many stakeholders and participants in the process of building. This discipline of architecture involves diverse and often contradictory concerns.”⁵ It is in this way of ‘watching’ that new opportunities and challenges of architectural education are situated.

Christian Kieckens

- 1 Bernard Dewulf, *Verstrooiingen – over kijken en zien*, Atlas Contact, Amsterdam/Antwerpen, 2012, p. 26
- 2 Andras Palfy, ‘Concept and Empirism’, in *Concept and Design*, Palfy Editions, Niggli, 2012, p. 6
- 3 Maarten Lambrechts, Concept nota master ontwerp, Artesis University College, 2012, p. 7,27,28
- 4 Interviews by prof. Johan De Walsche in relation to his Phd ‘Genus, Locus, Nexus - on the nature, place and interweaving of research in architectural education’, Antwerp, 2012
- 5 David Chipperfield, *Common Ground*, Biennale press release, Venice, 2012