



## ARDETH #1: Architectural Design Theory

Theme Editor: Carlo Magnani

Can the project of architecture be considered as a specific field for scientific research?

Ardeth sets out to define this field as separated from architectural theory. If, in fact, architecture is a physical and social construction to which the whole world contributes, its discussion is – as it must – the legitimate object of a collective debate extended to the whole world. Whereas architectural design theory – within which the project is intended as the means to obtain effects in the transformation of the environment – can be considered as disciplinary knowledge with specific characteristics.

Ardeth aims at exploring this particular disciplinary autonomy, not of architecture – which belongs to everyone – but of the project, which is an exclusive domain of designers.

Ardeth proposes an investigation around the powers of the architectural project, which necessarily begins from the realization that such powers are indeed limited. We can certainly observe how products and producers of architecture benefit from a high degree of visibility, and that architecture offers a clear reality to everyone in the form of its insuppressible presence in the physical world. Still, neither its mediated visibility nor its physical presence help understand how architecture is, in fact, the effect of many products of a very diverse nature. Constructed architecture is a product of the building industry, whereas architecture projects are products of a documental nature which register chains of decisions, of description, of associations and exchanges of a various nature, even holding a degree of autonomy from the very subjects (architects) the project refers to. Architecture is discussed widely (everybody – legitimately – talks about architecture), but the project is not (not even by those who – professionally speaking – definitely should).

With this text we provide authors with a short series of wider topics for their contributions:

### **Subject-author vs. object-project.**

The project seems to sprout directly from the mind of its conceiver: the “master” holding the secrets of form, or the “expert” owning technical knowledge. Trapped in the impenetrable irreducibility of the subject, the project is but an intention, devoid of any specific consistency.

This characterization of the project’s prerogatives as objects of an unspeakable impenetrability, in the name of technical competence or artistic expression, may lead to an isolation of design practices from the social dimension, which is the only dimension in which the project can assess – through exchange – its own specific mandate.

What happens instead if we try to look at projects as technical and social objects, instead of focusing on their authors (architects) and their products (buildings)?

Can the project of architecture be described starting from the power of its inscriptions rather than the intentions of its author or the values it transmits?

### **The powers of the project**

The project of architecture exists because an institutional reality exists, which legitimizes it. This institutional reality lends projects validity as contracts, making them an instrument of power in terms of obligations, fines, deadlines, etc.

Traditionally, theoretical debate concentrates most on the narratives deployed by projects rather than on their contractual and bureaucratic implications embedded in the act of designing. In a pragmatic perspective, these narratives could be read as functional to the building of consensus, and thus to the definition of obligations and contracts.



What can the value and function be, of a design vision, of a promise for innovation conveyed by the project, if we accept this narrative as also actively shaping collective action besides creating the conditions for consensus and agreement? Is it possible to conceive a project of architecture as a critique of established power, despite the nature of the project as itself an institutional fact?

### **Negotiating values and practices**

The project can be read as the expression of an individual or collective subject's will, or as the effect of a series of interactions among agents of a various nature (subjects, rules, inscriptions, collective representations).

Is the project a means for the exchange of a system of values? If so, are these values prerequisites or effects of such an exchange?

If the project is not the result of an author's intention and is the means for the exchange of a system of values, then ordinary practices such as logistic organization of offices, bureaucratic and formalized procedures, become more intriguing as objects of investigation. Is a theoretical discussion integrating the problem of values (of quality, equity, innovation...) with explorations on ordinary design practices? Is a research on the strategies for design and method possible, which does not distinguish between ideology and procedures, values and techniques, but proposes instead strategic maps of a hybrid nature?

### **Graphic article**

The construction of a theoretical knowledge around the project of architecture requires a definition of a specific mode of producing scientific content. That is, a range of texts, drawings and documents constituting a transmittable, combinable and falsifiable corpus. Which are the writing and drawing devices that have to be developed in the context of architectural design theory? Can we imagine one of the fields for experimentation and innovation of intellectual technologies within architectural design to address the research and development of such a corpus specifically? What are the margins for a paradigmatic evolution of the drawing of architecture as it was defined in the construction of a technical and intellectual profession since the XVIII Century at least? What are the spans of that traditional domain, which do not represent artifacts and final products only, but in itinere processes and strategies as well? How can we propose an inclusion, within design production, of new space and time representations in which to locate maps for collective action made of bureaucratic procedures, predictable and unpredictable events, systems of contracts, etc.?

This section of Ardeth wishes to regularly feature innovative proposals that address the development of the project as intellectual technology of textual and figurative nature. Each issue of Ardeth will select and discuss articles centered around a graphic proposal (design drawings, diagrams, diachronic representations, maps) able to suggest measurable and falsifiable developments for the project of architecture.



### **Submission guidelines**

Articles should be written in standard English or Italian. Only original work will be considered for publication, i.e. outcomes of research conducted by the author/s which have not yet been published anywhere else and are not currently under review by any other journal.

Manuscripts should consist of a main text (3500/5000 words) with graphic material, captions, endnotes and references as appropriate to the case, and an abstract of 100 words to be translated into Italian; manuscripts should be sent to the Editorial Board specifying the call for papers the manuscript answers to (i.e. Ardeth #1\_Architectural Design Theory):

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Detailed guidelines are available on the magazine website:

**[www.ardeth.eu](http://www.ardeth.eu)**