The acts of project(ion) / project acts or projacts

Petar Bojanić

ABSTRACT

I am interested in the epistemological status of «project(ion)», that is, the «act» or «strategy» of project(ion) in relation to various didactic protocols usually associated with an «author» and her intention or production. What is a plan, program, plot, platform, concept, conception, or even «meta-project»? Is a project or projection necessarily an «architectural matter»? Is it a prototypically Western or European procedure of specific use of time and space (literally, throwing forth into space/time)? I will attempt to explain some passages from Eisenman, Cacciari, as well as a theory recently put forth by Armando and Durbiano *(Teoria del progetto architettonico).*

TERMINI DI INDICIZZAZIONE

There is a latent confusion in philosophical-architectural vocabulary regarding the terms concept and project. Still, a preliminary and very broad adistinction between them would, above all, include a temporal aspect. If concept implies a notion of an exterior object that exists independently of us (whose representation would then be "in us," "in our thoughts" or "our heads"), then the project always refers to an act that establishes a new object that is to remain forever independent of us. It would probably be possible to define the status of the concept as a timeless or a pseudo-temporal notion, while the project would always concern the future, a time yet to come. When a project is constructed, it is determined by the time it took to be built. Therefore, the existence of a project implies a future time to be caught up and discontinued through various tools (which could be named as "design").

If I announce that I will shortly explain what it is that I am doing (my intention) then such an act of announcing that refers to the existence of something somewhere else (somewhere behind, underneath) would already be part of a protocol or register that refers to a project (but not «design») or perhaps even «meta-project».[1] Questions such as «what does he/she even want», «what is he/she talking about» seek a certain reflective reaction, unless one wishes to simply ignore «others'» curiosity. Certainly, we have here a «turn» (a word to which I will return a few times) or reflection or «reflection in action» (Donald Schön).[2] If what I am doing emerges from something else, then that something is only implicitly present at the moment (the absent is not

entirely here, but can be found in «traces»). When I attempt to reconstruct the emergent steps, what I wish to prove is merely that what we have here is a «projected act» or a planned, controlled action. In other words, the project of an action precedes the action, yet is nothing other than a portion of the content of the project, whose realization is announced by the project.**3** The existence of a project or projected acts would constitute one of the first (although certainly insufficient) basic guarantees that, for example, I am not currently spewing nonsense, I am not improvising, not bluffing. What is the further guarantee that I am not a cheater? Excluding personal familiar terms (those who know me), the guarantee that I am not a cheater and that there is indeed an idea and project here («*Entwurf*» in German or «*nabačaj*» in Serbo-Croatian**4**) are the title and abstract of the text. That is to say, the title and abstract oblige me to follow them.

I do, then, *have* a project. I do indeed have something to say, which I am attempting to now do carefully (because the title and abstract have been previously published, that is, documented).**5** Put simply, if I *have* a project (a plan, concept, idea, schema, conception, platform, etc. – words we have a hard time differentiating and connecting because they are of a single register), then what I am now doing is precisely the consistent act of that project (or «projected act»). Of many potential acts, this act is certainly part of and emerges from *my* project.

Now, where is that which I *have* or is *mine* (both words are italicized because problematic**6**)? And what does the description of the project consist of? Answers to both questions lie in the reflection connected to the word «turn». In order for what I am doing to truly be in harmony with the project I *have*, it is necessary that I constantly constitute it through reflection or through reflective reconstruction. The (myriad) operations which create the project, and which simultaneously confirm my acting in accordance with that project (making my actions «projected acts»), ought to be called «project acts» (that is, acts that create the project, rather than actions the project implies). My acts are projected if and only if I project or create a project, that is, if I simultaneously produce «project acts». This distinction between «project acts» and «projected acts» actually leads us into entirely uncharted difficulties that characterize a potential theory of projects and projecting/design.**7**

Before I explain the basic principle of the functioning of this «reflective gesture» and gradually elaborate what constitutes the difference between my understanding of the project from other similar theories (my only question is how and by what act is a project made?**8**), I would like to insist on a few elementary facts. When, some time ago, I initially proposed the title and abstract of this text, when I «projected» (pitching the suggestion), I did so within a reflective protocol – I «turned» and «pitched» something (which is why «turn» is a word within the same order as *proiectus* or *der Entwurf*).**9** A project or pitch do not *a priori* precede my action, but are rather constituted by this action, thus simultaneously correcting and converting it. A thematization of reflective acts that make up a project (concept, theme, *Gestalt* or positions – all words we differentiate insufficiently**10**) would construct and fix a project as (an acting) document.**11** A project as a document produces obligations and controlled actions, becoming the condition of existence of joint work in the studio or outside it. That is, the project as a document constructs disciplined work and is the condition of the existence of the institution (there can be no institution without a project).**12** A didactic reconstruction of projects (so-called didactic performance) and amendment to the rules of work by introducing competing projects**13** produces myriad disciplines and thus ultimately institutionalizes the possibility of interdisciplinary actions.

This reflection I am speaking of is a collective or social gesture. Analogously, Schön's often criticized phrase «reflection in action», always and necessarily assumes a group or a plural agent. The situation in which an individual publicly explains his own action, thus harmonizing it with a general position or a foreseeable and advertised plan (whether a child before her kindergarten teacher, a college professor before a student, one friend to another), represents at once a common assessment of the plan (conception or project) and, potentially an introduction to joint thematization, participation, acceptance of the plan on behalf of the group. A group is always constituted in the course of constructing and executing a project: it executes a project together while also at once constituting itself.

It seems to me that the existence and validity of a project can only be ensured by a group, and that the group determines the potential development and ultimate fate of, say, an abstract or a title.**14** In that sense, the acts that make up the project, with which something is projected (thrown up, pitched, «spun» forth), represent on the one hand an attempt to impute current action into something new (a project or platform) that would ensure their validity and duration; on the other hand, the authors of these acts are necessarily diverse, but it is their very multiplicity that will ensure the validity and duration of the project as such. Doubtlessly, the fact that the group exists implies two protocols contained in the word *proiectus*: space and time. And conversely, *proiectus* holds this very same group together for joint action and motion in time and space. The group is the body of the project.

Let us thus return to the ur-scene of the founding of the institution, the first effort of constructing an architectural bureau, indeed, one of the first attempts at *incorporatio* in the histories of the West. A group of people who work and build together in Babylon is without a doubt the prototype of the group assembled much later by Filippo Brunelleschi, circa 1420, in Florence.**15** There are any number of assumptions as to why the largest construction site in the history of mankind was discontinued and destroyed. Nor can it be said unequivocally that the project was unsuccessful and futile, given that the action lasted a very long time, possibly even centuries. Indeed, the (unhappy) «end» of a project or its «failure» could always be one the first and rather important characteristics of the project as such.

9Two verses in *Genesis* (at the beginning of chapter 11) speak of the construction site, the technological innovation, and a monstrous vision that certainly has an outline similar to what I am here designating with the word «project»:

3. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for morter.
4. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

10It seems to me that there are ever-new and all too complicated reasons why this group was denied a construction license, and why the erection and this grandiose edifice was not born out. Above all, the «project» could not be carefully thematized or constituted because it was not presented to the highest power before the work began. The group is rushing with the work and does not negotiate. It does not draw its own limits, give itself shape, does not adjust its aims. The group, which as we know, does not have issues with communication and cooperation: all members of the group speak the same language, the group is innovative, collective intentionality has been achieved, the group is without leader and in perfect equality, etc. It imitates its creator (God) by performatively acting and utilizing various imperatives that mobilize its members. Although the group manifests a grand plan (idea, conception), in contrast with the first creator who does not (God is above all a laborer, a practitioner, not a thinker), the group still does not possess reflective strength that would enable the members of the group to remain in one place for any sustained period. And this is precisely the definition of institutional activity: using this repertoire of acts (institutional acts) that can for as long as possible keep the group in a single place. All these acts always concern reflection, that is, the project. The name mentioned in this fragment («and let us make us a name») is the great project itself, but also one on which the group is unable to hold focus for a sustained period of time. Why?

We must not forget that all we are left with from the Tower of Babel is precisely the kind of project (a tower «whose top may reach unto heaven») that each one of us, in our life's endeavor, is in one way or another trying to complete: unity of all, the world, the production of grand institutions, (Europe too as a project, as a set of documents and their constant assessment) - having a project has become nearly self-regulating for us. Nevertheless, one answer to the question «Why?» would certainly concern the violence of the project. Of course, the violence would also immediately have to refer to reflection, that is, violence of reflection.**16** Lest we forget, among the more important characteristics of the project (*nabačaj*, *proiectus*, *Entwurf*) is that it does not mean a weak pitch (swing). *Entwerfen* does not mean to drop something just in front or very close behind oneself (in German, such a weak gesture might be designated with the word *Vorwurf*). Rather, it means to throw very far, far afield (reflection is an operation of emergence, through reflection I emerge beyond myself). A consequence of this move (easily confirmed with the word «projectile») does not only consist of some kind of separation and production of a completely uncontrollable, self-sufficient entity (image, projection, idol), unreachable in its perfection (impossible to process reflexively).**17** We are dealing with an act of overshooting and expanding to beyond the surface or edge (*proictus*), which then always implies exclusion, abolishment, banishment, expulsion (*proicto*). «Exclusion», «expulsion», «elimination», etc. are moments about which we must think, in the context of the project, only in the most abstract sense, without dwelling on them. Yet we must also be aware that in order for a group to constitute itself temporarily and work actively (which would mean work on a project), it of necessity excludes the insufficiently engaged/committed, insufficiently competent, dynamic, even insufficiently intelligent, and thus asocial.**18** It would probably be incorrect to say here that reflection or «reflection in action» does not imply critique or systemic doubt as an integral portion of the project's strategy of structuring and execution. However, hesitation, procrastination, delay or alternate work on *counter-projects* certainly need to be accounted for and placed within potential new processes and aims.

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