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ARCHITECTURE \cap PROJECT \cap PHILOSOPHY

ABSTRACT: The title of this first issue of *Khōrein* is written in the language of Boolean algebra: *Architecture \cap Philosophy*. This formal codification allows me to make three premises and begin to outline my project. First, I would like to make a distinction between symbols, starting with the consideration that the symbol representing intersection in set theory (\cap) is different from the symbol representing the Boolean operator *AND* (\wedge). Given the formal “correspondence” between Boolean AND and intersection in set theory, I would tend to use this second meaning for my reasoning: thus, to begin with, I would place “Architecture \cap Philosophy” as the premise, instead of “Architecture \wedge Philosophy.” Secondly, it is necessary for me to introduce another set into the discourse, namely the “project.” Thirdly, I must ask myself whether it is possible to find a further intersection between “architectural project” and “philosophy.” For this purpose, I will proceed through a series of statements, constructing them as transitions from a term X to a term Y. Each transit (“from X to Y”) should be verified in two stages: first by describing how it belongs to the intersection set ‘architecture \cap project’. In a second step, I should provide some references to philosophy texts that have made each transit viable within the architectural project. Both operations will only be carried out on the first two statements in a sketchy manner, then my project draft will stop.

KEYWORDS: architectural design theory, project of architecture, architectural practice, process innovation, intersection set

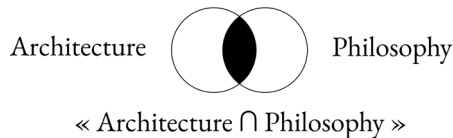
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I will approach this text as if it were a draft for a book, in which I must establish a formal criterion to order the topics within a readable structure, without, however, developing them exhaustively. Consequently, the text is structurally homologous to a distribution scheme, in which the main elements are the distinctions between the parts, and not their detailed and definitive development. Furthermore, some parts of the distribution are developed less than others, or simply sketched for further development or modification. Consequently, the text may provoke some dissatisfaction in the reader since it comes across as incomplete or apparently interrupted work.

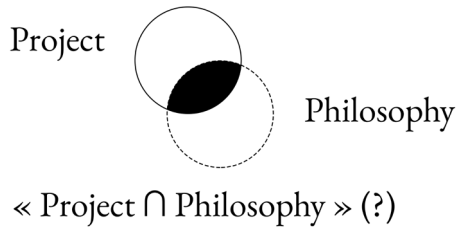
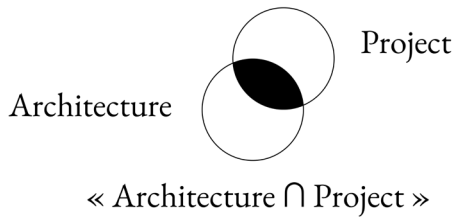
The title of this first issue of *Khōrein* is written in the language of Boolean algebra: *Architecture \wedge Philosophy*. This formal codification allows me to make three premises and begin to outline my project.

First, I would like to make a distinction between symbols, starting with the consideration that the symbol representing intersection in set theory (\cap) is different from the symbol representing the Boolean operator *AND* (\wedge). The Boolean operator *AND*, intersection of sets and conjunction in logic are considered corresponding. However, the consistency of Boolean operations, which take place between “true” and “false,” or between 0 and 1, is different from the intersections that occur between sets, and even more so from what is understood in computer graphics, where “Boolean” operations denote the transformation algorithms of polygons or solids and, in particular in the case of *AND*, the intersection between two plane or three-dimensional shapes. Given the formal “correspondence” between Boolean *AND* and intersection in set theory, I would tend to use this second meaning for my reasoning: thus, to begin with, I would place “Architecture \cap Philosophy” as the premise, instead of “Architecture \wedge Philosophy.” Using sets, I can also draw a diagram of the *Khōrein* issue’s title – whereas in Boolean writing I can only draw a matrix.

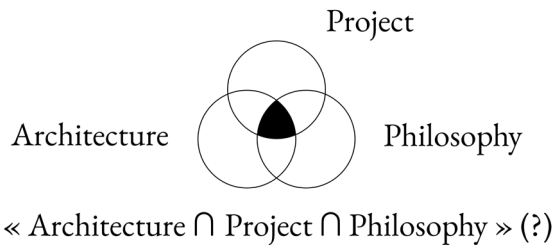


A	P	$\ll A \wedge P \gg$
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	1	0
1	1	1

Secondly, it is necessary for me to introduce another set into the discourse, namely the “project.” Immediately the problem arises of the intersections that result with the other two sets. I have some arguments to support the hypothesis that “architecture \cap project” is not an empty set, whereas I find it more difficult to have well-founded arguments for “philosophy \cap project.” Put in less formal terms, I am sure I can find a way to develop an argument about the “project of architecture/architectural project,” whereas I would not be capable to discuss the “project of philosophy/philosophical project.” I will assume, however, in a completely abstract way, that this second intersecting set is not empty either.



Thirdly, I must ask myself whether it is possible to find a further intersection between “architectural project” and “philosophy,” i.e., I must define the set “architecture \cap project \cap philosophy,” which I can draw with a Venn diagram. For this purpose, I will proceed through a series of statements, constructing them as transitions from a term X to a term Y. Each transit (“from X to Y”) should be verified in two stages: first by describing how it belongs to the intersection set “architecture \cap project,” with respect to which I must inscribe my competency as architect project-maker and university researcher.¹ In a second step, I should provide some references to philosophy texts that have made each transit viable within the architectural project. Both operations will only be carried out on the first two statements as a sketch, then my design draft will stop.



¹ It is a competency, moreover, certified by a public university institution, according to which I am qualified to do research in the field of architectural and urban design, ICAR/14. Where in truth “design” does not appear, but it is “composition” (*Composizione architettonica e urbana*). The definition of “architect project-maker” is necessary to specify the centrality of design and project activity, which is not the case for all architects within academia.

X	Y
Object	Thing
Design	Project
Idea	Trace
Concept	Effect
Revolution	Explication
Engagement	Deployment
Instrument	Prosthesis
Complexity	Complication
(...)	(...)

The aim of the text is to show that the construction of a theoretical hypothesis for the architectural project can be effectively delineated (designed) through a series of paradigmatic transitions that affect the practice of the project itself, and that these transitions are possible thanks to the translation of philosophy texts into project operations. The pairs of transitions enunciated here are a partial set, compared to those that could usefully be carried out in a more comprehensive exercise.

FROM OBJECT TO THING

1. *The architect as a subject who thinks his object*: this is the initial scene from which theories of design, from Leon Battista Alberti to Peter Eisenman, take their starting point. The thought object is architecture as a built work (*aliquas aedificationes*).² In Alberti, for example, it is a matter of drawing the object and then building it.³

This first scene, which would appear to be synchronous and complete, is followed by others in which this object unfolds over time and must be developed, both conceptually and materially: in essence, the need for a project emerges, which allows the object to be completed. Being considered an object, in this hypothesis architecture is perfectly identified

² “*Et quam saepe venit, ut etiam rebus aliis occupati nequeamus non facer, quin mente et animo aliquas aedificationes commentemur!*” [How many times has it happened to us, even in the midst of other occupations, to feel the need to conceive of some construction in our minds!], L. B. Alberti, *L'architettura*, Il Polifilo, Milano, 1966, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

and separable from the material space in which it arises as a built work. Good design of an object requires a precise description of its parts that converges within a coherent definition of the whole. Any disputes, regarding the principles of coherence or the correct execution of those precise descriptions, are obstacles, which the experienced architect must be able to resolve by demonstrating all the resilience of which he/she is capable. In the end, the quality of the object-architecture and the value of the subject-architect will depend on how well the work corresponds to the initial scene, according to a principle of mirroring.

2. *Some architects as actors grappling with a thing*: it is a different scene that needs to be located in order to take shape. The thing is first and foremost a problem, a stumbling block in which the characters are already grappling with something as the scene opens. Who was on the phone? What are they asking us to do? Did they send you a signed letter or did they just call you? How much money do they have, how much time do we have? Etc.

The scenes that follow are no less complicated. Project operations respond to fragmented, contradictory, changing demands. The architects aim for project approval, then prepare for the course of events: when (and if) the construction site opens, other actors will intervene, bringing other unforeseen and unpredictable variables. When (and if) the building site is completed, the material effect of these vicissitudes will show the real point of accumulation of all the discourses, conflicts, changes in the trajectory of the architects' project-labyrinth. Architecture will not be an object, but a thing: i.e., a hybrid assemblage that holds together building components, rules, values, institutional bodies, infrastructures, biological materials, etc., as the temporarily stable result of a chain of adjustments that occurred after many detours.

As every reader of Heidegger knows, or as every glance at an English dictionary under the heading "Thing" will certify, the old word "Thing" or "Ding" designated originally a certain type of archaic assembly. Many parliaments in Nordic or Saxon nations still activate the old root of this etymology: Norwegian congressmen assemble in the *Storting*; Icelandic deputies called the equivalent of "thingmen" gather in the *Althing*; Isle of Man seniors used to gather around the *Ting*; the German landscape is dotted with *Thingstätten* and you can see in many places the circles of stones where the Thing used to stand. Thus, long before designating an object thrown out of the political

sphere and standing there objectively and independently, the *Ding* or Thing has for many centuries meant the issue that brings people together because it divides them. The same etymology lies dormant in the Latin *res*, the Greek *aitia* and the French or Italian *cause*. Even the Russian *soviet* still dreams of bridges and churches.⁴

FROM DESIGN TO PROJECT

I can enumerate at least four criteria that distinguish design from project to show that architects distinguish themselves from other designers by their peculiar ability to make projects, rather than design works.

1. *Insularization*

The notion of design presupposes the possibility of operating undisturbed, within an environment in which the concept, prototyping and testing operations take place separately from the external environment, allowing the optimization of an autonomous result. A good design object responds coherently to a program that was established at the beginning of the process. In other words, design presupposes a technical island. Peter Sloterdijk named the operative environment of design and technology as “absolute island.” Of course, the absolute island is itself a design product.

The notion of architectural project presupposes that any action of transformation of space takes place in an open situation. The effects of a project are the assemblage of conditions which arise unpredictably during the process, and which cannot be calculated at the outset. In other words, the architectural project presupposes the continuity of the geographical and geopolitical space. Sloterdijk defined this situation as a “natural island” or “relative island.” In general terms, each architectural project attempts to act on a continuum through operations aimed to modify the space in a permanent and unique way.

It is therefore insularization that makes the island what it is. What the frame does for the image, excluding it from the context of the world, and what fortified borders do for peoples and groups, the sea, the insulating element, does for the island. If islands are models of

⁴ B. Latour, “From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or How to Make Things Public,” B. Latour, P. Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, 2005, pp. 22–23.

the world, it is precisely because they are sufficiently separated from the rest of the worldly context to accommodate an experiment about the institution [*Aufstellung*] of a totality in a limited format. If, according to Heidegger, the work of art institutes a world, then the sea institutes a world.⁵

Absolute islands emerge through the radicalisation of the principle of building enclaves. Simple pieces of land framed by the sea are not capable of this effect because they only lead to a horizontal insularisation, in which the vertical remains open. [...] The absolute island presupposes three-dimensional insularity – including the transition from frame to capsule or, to borrow an analogy from art, from painting on wood to installation in space. Without vertical insularisation, there is no complete closure.

In order to be absolute, a technically created island must also put the premises of fixity out of play and become a mobile island. The insuperable relativity of natural islands is therefore doubly conditioned: by the two-dimensionality of its own insularisation and the immobility of its own condition. For an absolute, three-dimensional, and mobile island, a revision of its relationship with its surroundings is indispensable. It no longer stands still within it, but navigates it in a relatively mobile manner, swimming or floating.⁶

2. Temporality

A design work represents the final frame or the happy ending, that is, the promise of a future result that must be pursued as consistently as possible. The designed frame is *an* end as well as *the* end, frozen in a synchronic representation of final fulfilment.

The project of a building represents an entire film, of which the design work is only the last frame. The project concerns the design of the action that takes place through the spacing and timing of many different operations, carried out by a multitude of entities, with the aim of converging towards a material transformation of a place on Earth.

We should finally be able to picture a building as a *navigation* through a controversial datascape: as an animated series of projects, successful

⁵ P. Sloterdijk, *Sfere III: Schiume*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2015, p. 293.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

and failing, as a changing and criss-crossing trajectory of unstable definitions and expertise, of recalcitrant materials and building technologies, of flip-flopping users' concerns and communities' appraisals. That is, we should finally be able to picture a building as a moving modulator regulating different intensities of engagement, redirecting users' attention, mixing and putting people together, *concentrating* flows of actors and *distributing* them so as to *compose* a productive force in time-space. Rather than peacefully occupying a distinct analogical space, a building-on-the-move leaves behind the spaces labeled and conceptualized as enclosed, to navigate easily in open circuits. That is why as a gull-in-a-flight in a complex and multiverse argumentative space, a building appears to be composed of apertures and closures enabling, impeding and even changing the speed of the free-floating actors, data and resources, links and opinions, which are all in orbit, in a network, and never *within* static enclosures.⁷

3. Singularity

Design can be repeated: from one (patented) design you can make many identical objects. Although even mass-designed objects are not entirely separable from the accidents of the world, it is possible to emphasize their difference from an architectural work. The space of serial design and production is the factory (which in turn is an architecture), within which the object is designed, produced as a prototype, tested and finally stabilized through the registration of a design-patent. The factory functions as an absolute island, within certain limits. Once put into production, the object is produced as a series and released into the world, from which it will receive an endless series of feedback. Consequently, technical deviations affect serial objects after they have been manufactured, so that we can study technical "innovations" as transformations of models, i.e., groups of objects that have been manufactured from a single design.

A project is always a singularity: once you have completed it, you will need a new one (you can eventually archive the old ones, as clinical cases). A project is always something whose outcome we do not know in advance, which takes place in a unique and contingent situation, which depends on unforeseeable accidents. The exchange with someone else,

⁷ B. Latour, A. Yaneva, "Give Me a Gun and I Will Make All Buildings Move": An ANT's View of Architecture," R. Geiser (ed.), *Explorations in Architecture: Teaching, Design, Research*, Birkhäuser, Basel, 2008, p. 87.

in the course of a negotiation necessary to form a shared objective, brings forth a form that is recorded and becomes the common element of composition. Architectural composition (as a project) is precisely that operation that allows two initially opposing parties to become co-operative. It is not so much a transaction based on initial values, but a transaction that produces values at the end of it. Design is a moral act, whereas Project is an ethical operation.

The classical conception requires man to reunite with his unfinished essence, which exists in potency. Morality would therefore be the process of realising human essence. How can the essence be realised? Through morality. Realising the essence of man will therefore be the end of the truly existing man. Conducting life rationally is thus to realise the essence: this is the purpose of morality. Consequently, value becomes the essence set as the end. [...] I call this whole complex of things “morality,” which instead disappears in the ethical worldview. [...] In ethics there are no general ideas, there is you, one person, or another: singularities. The word essence definitely changes meaning. When Spinoza speaks of essence, he is not interested in abstract essence, but in existence and beings.

[...] In ethics, one always remains within existing modes, never seeking transcendent values: this brings everything back to the level of immanence [...] The point of view of an ethic is: what are you capable of? What is it possible for you to do? Let us take up Spinoza’s prompt: what is a body capable of? We will never know in advance, we will never know how a body will organise itself, or how its modes of existence will change. Furthermore, Spinoza emphasises that it is never a question of the possibilities of a body generically understood, but of you, of us, of what you alone can, only and exclusively you.⁸

4. *Thinking*

Design is primarily about thinking, it is even considered as a way of thinking: we can establish a general notion of design, which is prior to any disciplinary or professional categorization.

Project is primarily about making. Architects make projects in a specific way because they deal with a specific matter, that is trying to modify

⁸ G. Deleuze, *Cosa può un corpo? Lezioni su Spinoza*, Obre Corte, Verona, 2010, pp. 78–80.

the shaping of the Earth to make people (and other organisms) inhabit and dwell. Because of a such challenging task, they design the trajectories of the transformation of a place, by pretending to design its final shape. Making a Project means first of all regulating operations within a hybrid assembly, rather than thinking up an autonomous content to translate it into a material form. This practice of regulation can be likened to the type of activity required for the operation of a machine, where the “machine” in this case is the technical ensemble constituted by the project documents, structured as a complicated chain of contracts and descriptions that produce institutional effects.

There is something alive in a technical ensemble, and the integrative function of life can be ensured only by human beings; the human being has the capacity to understand the functioning of the machine, on the one hand, and the capacity to live, on the other: one can speak of technical life as being that which actualizes this relation between these two functions in man. Man is capable of taken upon himself the relation between the living being that he is and the machine he fabricates; the technical operation requires both technical and natural life. [...]

The technician is indeed in a certain sense the man of ensembles, but in a very different way from the one that characterizes the industrialist. The industrialist, in the same way as the worker, is pushed by finality: he targets a result; herein lies their alienation; the technician is the man of the operation in the course of its accomplishment; he does not take charge of directing the ensemble but rather guides its self-regulation during functioning. He absorbs within himself the sense of the work and the sense of the industrial direction. He is the man who knows the internal schemas of functioning and organizes them in relation to each other. On the contrary, machines are ignorant of general solutions and cannot resolve general problems.⁹

The series of transitions should continue further, to describe in an increasingly articulate manner the pragmatic shifts that the architectural project can mark, crossing the discursive space of philosophy. However, the text stops here, up to the point where it was outlined as a working

⁹ G. Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, Univocal Publishing, Minneapolis, 2017, p. 140.

hypothesis. I can only transcribe the last notes, from which it would be necessary to start again in order to extend the list I drew up at the beginning.

Consider what is materially marked (the *trace*) as antecedent to the possibility of “having an *idea*.” Consequently, admitting that a design act is located from the *effect* that the trace produces, as registration and inscription, before it can be given as a *concept*. But also questioning the perspective of *revolution*, as leap or cut, re-reading radical upheavals (and their project) as *explications* of an already existing state of affairs. Hence, among other things, a transition from *engagement*, built on a moral and coherent form of one’s disposition to act, to a kind of ethical *deployment*, towards what I can do from the situation of immanence in which I find myself. Without forgetting the technological dimension that these transitions imply, to the point of assuming the *instruments* of design production as co-extensive *prostheses* with respect to the body of those who think by drawing, that is, projecting. And who always find themselves inside a tangle, whose *complication* cannot be generalized according to the systemic laws of *complexity*, but remains prisoner of its own contingency.

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