



DOSSIER TRANSLATIONS

TO TEACH ARCHITECTURE

THE UNATTAINABLE PROFILE

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In a recent conversation, the owner of an Italian publishing company declared that his fascination with architecture, the subject of a large number of his publications (even though it meant a permanent risk of economic bankruptcy), depended on the fact that it is a discipline constantly reinventing and defining itself. And that, in fact, the very word discipline is not adequate to describe it.

The editor referred to is Cesare De Michelis, and the publishing company, Marsilio. He himself measured the gulf which exists between "Architettura della città", whose first 1966 edition was issued when the publisher was still in Padova, and the present interests and approaches which go through his work as an editor. According to De Michelis, unlike other practices, either more professional or more aesthetic, architecture is a fluid area constantly altering and modifying its fields of work, the objects of its interest, its research and work methodology and, in general, its horizon of cultural reference. In particular, while it is easy to see what literature, law or medicine are about, in the case of architecture this clarity does not exist, and it has weakened mainly since the affirmation of modern architecture.

Curiously, the consolidating moment of a new architectural language at the beginning of the 20th Century, coincided with a modification of the teaching of this discipline: it is no longer an art passed on inside Fine Arts academies, but rather an amalgamation of what is artistic and what is technical. The incorporation of architecture to the University was accompanied, then, by a hybridization between study programmes and trends of artistic origin and others coming from the area of engineering (in various countries, the German area in particular, it is still possible to graduate as an architect in Fine Arts academies as well as in polytechnic schools).

The strength of architecture, its validity in our culture, is not only due to the fact that it satisfies the basic needs of the human being (protection, enjoying a space, creating a home, getting together as a community, representing values symbolically), but also to his bastard origin, to his mongrel genetic code. This has always been a puzzle for philosophers (art or not art?), in its permanent and restless mobility, architecture remains alive, refusing to be crystallized.

Therefore, the teaching and pedagogical methodologies used to form new architects are a field of constant negotiation and debate, of adjustment and experimentation. In the current phase of modification of the economic, political and social systems worldwide, the originality of this field has been asserting itself in a paradoxical way: in order to outline their teaching, architecture schools increasingly resort to a retroactive methodology, unlike other traditions. First, schools construct an ideal model of the profile of their graduate architect, partly improvising sociologists or economists (some in a more marked way trying to interpret market logics), to then, walking backwards, build the theoretical and cultural system of teaching that they will use in order to achieve this objective.

This issue of *Materia* aims at dealing with how architecture is taught. Or how it should be taught.

Contents are organized in two parts. The first one presents five essays which intend to outline a fragmented historiography of the relationships between university and architecture: the inclusion of the urban subject into the workshop courses in Paris; the role of the masters, Manfredo Tafuri in this case; the successive changes of paradigms in the ETH of Zurich; the modes of self-management of Italian students in the 1970s and, finally, the teaching of architecture in a socialist State: Yugoslavia. The five papers are separate elements to widen a reference field and ways of operating which, probably, nowadays require a greater capacity of experimentation.

The second part focuses on a teaching method of the architecture workshop which has been strongly affirming and consolidating itself in various places: small architectural works built by students on a 1:1 scale.

This issue of *Materia*, then, tries to reflect on the present, drawing some possible historical lines supporting some following potential development. Due to the fast adaptation of architecture, this is probably bound soon to become an obsolete document, but not lacking in value as a witness of our present in transition.