

# DT

## DOSSIER TRANSLATIONS

### The Form of Conventions

Guest Editor: Gonzalo Carrasco Purull

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We lived in unconventional times, or at least that is what a sector of architectural practice believed, a sector that had been mainly focused on responding to the commissions, the needs, and the demands of an economic model that has driven architects into transforming their working conditions, favoring strategies that have adopted the ways of the generic and the standardized, while reaching a differentiation, socially acceptable, that allows them to achieve a certain distinction within the status quo determined by convention.

These conventions, fundamentally understood as the whole set of agreements tacitly accepted by a social group, but perhaps not explicitly formalized, have accompanied the creative process from the moment it became an activity socially conceived and constructed and, thus, subject to habits, manners, uses, and institutions. All of which, over time, have crystallized into norm, standard, canon, bureaucracy, discipline, and, even, tradition, subject also to acquiring the exclusionary form of social, gender ethnicity, and class dogmas and prejudices.

In this context, we proposed *Materia Arquitectura* #19 as an invitation to identify and critically discuss the conditions that lay behind some of the conventions that have characterized and tensioned the debates and practices of architecture, conventions that have dimensioned, typified, classified, validated, controlled, uniformed and made recognizable means, tools, languages, and discourses, transforming, also, the conventional figure of architects, both in their own profession and the choice of the means of representation and dissemination as in the role they assume before society. To examine these fields was the aim of an issue that is structured based on the following questions: what are the conditions behind the conventions still taking shape? And, above all, what are the possibilities of rewriting, from within architecture, the agreements behind the form of conventions?

For Megahed, the development of a 'normative' or commercial architecture not only came to produce a myriad of conventional and generic buildings elaborated on the basis of the strict rules dictated by the market, but also may have made evident the strong relation of these architectures with a technical-rational ideology – that became common since the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – which prioritizes

discourses about the principles of efficiency and performance above any other architectural value.

But conventions also may take the form of a code, as Barrientos rightly exemplifies through the case he analyzes: the process of discussion, development, and implementation of the Chilean seismic-resistant design code, where the answer to a series of catastrophes allowed to configure, from within the world of engineering, the conventions around what was called 'the Chilean building'.

These conventions also affected the means used to disseminate and consume architecture, especially, as Méndez poses, through the construction of a whole field of common visual references and codes afforded by photography during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in an approach that defines the modes of looking at architecture.

On their part, Courrèges and De Ferrari address the political, economic, and architectural possibilities that allow to critically discuss one of the conventional products of late capitalism: hypermarkets. In an analysis where market conventions serve to initiate explorations that allow unfolding the realm of the socially possible.

Puig, on his part, reviews the transformation of conventions based on the redefinitions of normativity of the body done by architect Bernard Rudofsky in his role as curator at MoMA, which allowed him to establish a discourse around the relations between modernity and dress.

Finally, Varas discusses the role that the construction of conventions has had in regard to the figure of the 'user', a key protagonist in the many debates that have taken place around housing since the last century.

All of these works attempt to offer perspectives, establish positions, and propose fields of action from where to discuss and make evident some of the contradictions that lay behind much of what we nowadays consider – or used to consider – conventional. This debate is pertinent, above all, when facing a moment that appears as the cusp of new deliberations, debates, and social contracts that will shape that dimension of the common that constitutes that great conventions which happens to be the polis. **m**