

NEW
PRAXES
NEW
TOOLS

A202 ARHITEKTI

ARHITEKTI POČIVAŠEK PETRANOVIČ

ELEMENTARNA

EMIL JURCAN

MERTELJ VRABIČ ARHITEKTI

PAZI!PARK

PROSTOROŽ

SOME PLACE STUDIO

SVET VMES

VIDIC GROHAR ARHITEKTI

Contents

00	dr. Bogo Zupančič	
	New Keepers of Order in the Universe	3
01	Introduction	8
02	Matevž Čelik	
	New Praxes, New Tools	17
03	Tia Čiček	
	The Ways We Work – A Different Perspective	21
04	Mika Cimolini	
	What Kind of Business is Architecture?	25
05	Maja Vardjan	
	The Power of the Table	34
06	Luka Skansi	
	On the Difficulty of Writing about Architecture Today	41
07	Radim Louda	
	Wandering Through “Young Slovenian Architecture”	47

PRAXES

a2o2 arhitekti	60
Arhitekti Počivašek Petranovič	78
Elementarna	96
Emil Jurcan	114
Mertelj Vrabič Arhitekti	130
Pazi!park	148
Prostorož	166
Some Place Studio	182
svet vmes	194
Vidic Grohar arhitekti	212

TOOLS

17. 3. 2021	svet vmes, Prostorož, Pazi!park	233
24. 3. 2021	Some Place Studio, Emil Jurcan, a2o2 arhitekti	245
31. 3. 2021	Arhitekti Počivašek Petranovič, Mertelj Vrabič Arhitekti, Vidic Grohar arhitekti, Elementarna	252

On the Difficulty of Writing About Architecture Today

It's no easy feat to talk and write about architecture today. Even more so because our opinions about architecture, its future, and the urgency of our discipline in the effort to realise a different and better tomorrow once they are given a context within the framework of the problems that press down on us today, are seldom anything but generic and superficial. And even when we succeed in defining more clearly and in more detail the problems that confront our reality and in turn architecture, we frequently (if not always) risk offering trivial, inefficient, even confusing solutions. In part, this is something we can blame on architecture itself, because it is not likely to produce answers to the monumental challenges of the present alone, whether they are manifested as the pandemic, ecology, migratory crises or geopolitical turmoil. So in order to continue to uphold its credibility and "ethical" existence, architecture was probably forced to find other problems, which automatically renders it untopical (some might say "a slave of mundane topicality").

I think it is undeniable that architecture hasn't been doing well. Our awareness of this crisis naturally depends on how deep we want to dig into it. The pandemic has blatantly revealed the contemporary crisis of architecture. At the moment, when we are discovering that the role of the state is again in the focus of our attention and plays a central role in our lives, at the very moment when it became clear to us that without the state, its health and social systems, and its rules that dictate how we live our public lives, we simply could not survive, it seems absurd to talk about architecture the same way we discussed it in recent decades, at a time when we progressively destroyed everything public. It seems absurd and anachronistic today to praise the same models, ambitions, and examples that represented the mythologies and leitmotifs of Western architecture during a time of pronounced affirmation of neoliberalism, at least from O'Gehry's enterprise in Bilbao onwards. To what extent can we still identify with the beautiful but empty examples of starchitecture that are inaccessible to ordinary people, with new outbreaks of tendencies advocating the autonomy of architecture, with fashionable and generic architectural vocabularies that flood our physical and virtual reality, not to mention the vulgar architecture and cities of "Dubai-esque" typology?

How to create the awareness of the "architecture's public", if I reference Giancarlo De Carlo's old anxiety, has probably resurfaced as the key question to which we have to look beyond our recent predecessors to find an answer. In other words, contemporary challenges of

architecture, of finding expressions of its ethics, are beyond a doubt different today than they were before the pandemic. Which in no way implies that the contemporary crisis of architecture did not exist before the outbreak of the pandemic and that the latter in a way only declared the end of a process that was already rather stuck.

We can go on and on disapproving of the anachronistic present-day discourses of architecture, the individualism of its aesthetic, its worn-out styles, but this won't get us anywhere beyond finger-pointing; we will continue to misunderstand the roots of the crisis and will not be ready to acknowledge two key aspects: on the one hand, the fact that reality wants the architecture we have today. The media that discuss architecture have a lot of say in this context. Their entirely uncritical approach to architecture confines its reading and describing to the economic sphere, which only upholds the taste and demand for its most commercial and fashionable aspects. The blame for this falls partly on those architects (albeit not all of them) who talk about their architecture on the theoretical level through outdated clichés that have become disconnected from the concrete implications of contemporary problems of people, cities, and the environment. The problems characterizing architecture lie, at least to my mind, in the original sin of neoliberal globalization – in Slovenia this means the transition or post-transition period after socialist Yugoslavia – namely that for the most part, the value of architecture and discussions about architecture are justified by the market – be it media, academic or economic – that allows it to survive.

On the other hand it is difficult for us to admit that for now the alternative to this system simply holds no sway, because the key factor that could allow the design discipline to take a different path, i.e. politics, has been dramatically deteriorating for some time, as we all know all too well – its crisis is ongoing and permanent. Even though the pandemic has suddenly restored the central role of politics, the reactions of such are not yet manifested as systemic, but cyclical. The urgent problems of the present day – finding a new balance in the public environment, be it natural or urban – cannot be resolved without politics, and asking architecture or architects to assume the role of politics is not only utopian, but also unfair.

But it's not only writing about and discussing architecture in the context of the current pandemic crisis that's problematic. The problem also lies in the fact that for architects the new objectives, the new morality, and new advocacy for a better or different future collide with the larger identity crisis that has left such a strong mark on society and its architects in Slovenia, Central Europe, the Balkans, the European Union in general. I am not here referring to any trivial concept of national identity, which has already more than proved its malignant character with tragic consequences across our territory since the late 1980s. What I have in mind is, first and foremost, the ethical and ideological identity, the individual (rather than collective) awareness of one's own intellectual and material roots within a single geopolitical space that extends from the culture of the city from

which we come to the culture of the region called Europe. The identity that should be rebuilt on the foundations of new paradigms outside the imposed globalization of taste and affiliation that comes with consumer culture. That consumer culture which, as theorists have been pointing out for a while, has (nearly) fulfilled the "historic dreams" and achieved the total depoliticization of society. We know all too well that identity has always been and always will be a false construct that is transformed in the context of social change. But if the time has come to seek out a new morality in architecture, it is also high time we started looking for new forms of identity.

It is true that we are living through turbulent and epochal changes, but it is also true that history has taught us – at least from the beginning of the industrial revolution on – that we are living through colossal ongoing change in which architecture and urbanism constantly lag behind the galloping present. In a way, they also both suffer from an inferiority complex, because they cannot keep up with the pace of change. But the 19th and 20th centuries have also taught us about endless struggle, experiments, solutions that architects offered our discipline in order to attempt, sometimes "vibrantly" and boldly, to restore the dignity of architectural thought and measure the ambitions or architecture in advance. For better and for worse, theory has seen a lot, if not everything; it is practice that, for the most part, has failed to realise that.

It's not easy to write about the new generation of Slovenian architects presented herein either, mainly because there is no clear generational commonality between them, neither ideological or ethical, nor project-defined. They belong (fortunately, we'd say) to different sensibilities and their relative biographic proximity – the fact that they entered the Slovenian market from the same school of architecture (albeit not all of them) after a generation of extremely successful architects under whom they studied, at least most of them weretrained or inspired by – is not enough to reflect the same kind of approach to architecture that would mark them as a generation, whether in their works, affinities, or practices.

This comes through in their very different answers to the basic questions with which they were confronted in this book. Some openly declare their project-oriented identity, everything that sets them apart from other generations. Others tend to avoid such paradigms as well as the contextualization of their production within any cultural arena. Some express their issues or disagreements with contemporaneity, their search for allies, and use their work to draw attention to the urgency of a different attitude to architecture, while others see form and architectural language as the central problem of their expression, still in a rather traditional fashion. Some look for like-minded peers in the international arena to justify their need to step away from their own school, while others carefully walk in the footsteps of their teachers, looking for affirmation within the traditional media system.

In this sense there are perhaps two characteristics that connect our

protagonists (although still not absolutely). The first – and definitely trivial – constatation is that the production of most of these architects is defined by the school they come from. Nearly all of them reference their formative experiences, albeit from different perspectives. These perspectives shaped their thought and work inside a relatively short time after they graduated from the Ljubljana school – in the context of its different orientations or, in some cases, against such, in the sense of a reaction to the education they didn't receive. A sensitivity to space, to the situation and the material context in which they design is the focus of their attention. Only rarely do their actions (with few exceptions) extend beyond the dimensions of the project at hand.

The other characteristic is that (with few exceptions) architects don't generally engage in intellectual or theoretical discourse: they don't write (and rarely read), their critiques are often unfounded, they don't look to theory and architectural history for tools with which to read the present-day situation. A flame of resistance burns inside them, a kind of not yet fully defined indignation over the present day, but this flame is not fuelled as it was in the past (again, with few exceptions) by the need to conceptualize, by a curiosity about the genealogy of the crisis of their own discipline. What's missing is an understanding of history, not as a sequence of examples of architecture and styles through time, but as a reservoir of architectural ideas, struggles, experiments, solutions, conflicts: history as a body, a context, of contradictions and dialectics.

The exceptions enumerated herein point to the need to rethink architecture today, its crisis and possible reform. We speak of individual practices, fascinating research that points a finger at the contradictions of today. But in the absence of broader and deeper conceptualization, in the absence of activism beyond the system of architecture these practices will never create a system, a transferrable methodology, if they remain confined in their isolation, individuality, and mundaneness. At least not until the need for such practices becomes commonplace, which is something we may never live to see.

But if architects in general don't recognize conceptualization as a problem, then speaking and writing about architecture in this context simply no longer makes any sense.

NEW PRACTICES, NEW TOOLS

Publisher

Centre for Creativity (CzK)
Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana
Rusjanov trg 7, SI-1000 Ljubljana
www.czk.si

For the publisher

dr. Bogo Zupančič, Director, MAO
Head of Centre for Creativity
mag. Anja Zorko

Editor

Mika Cimolini, MArch BI

Texts

Bogo Zupančič, Luka Skansi, Maja Vardjan,
Matevž Čelik, Mika Cimolini, Radim Louda,
Tia Čiček

Project descriptions:

a2o2, Arhitekti Počivašek Petranovič,
Elementarna, Emil Jurcan, Mertelj Vrabič
Arhitekti, Pazi!park, Prostorož, Some Place
Studio, svet vmes, Vidic Grohar arhitekti

Catalogue design

Dominik Vrabič Dežman

Photos of participating practices

Klemen Ilovar, Ansambel

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition of the
same name, created in collaboration with ŠKUC
Gallery.

Curators

Mika Cimolini, Matevž Čelik

Exhibition management:

Mika Cimolini

Exhibition design

Mertelj Vrabič Arhitekti

Identity and communication design

Dominik Vrabič Dežman

Centre for Creativity

Anja Zorko, Head of CzK
Mika Cimolini, Head of Programme CzK
Maja Kovačič, Project Manager
Urška Krivograd, Project Manager
Marko Podjavoršek, Project Manager

Social media

Zavod Neuropolis

Translation (SLO - EN)

Andreja Šalamon Verbič

Copy editor (EN)

Jeff Bickert

Copy editor (SLO)

Katja Paladin

Typefaces

GT Zirkon, Grilli Type

Whyte Inktrap Semi-Mono, ABC Dinamo

Paper

Sora Mat 1.1 115gsm

Fedrigoni Constellation Snow Merida 280g

Print

Collegium Graphicum

Circulation

535 copies

© 2022 MAO / Centre for Creativity, Ljubljana

© Texts copyrighted by the authors

© photos and other images are the property of
the authors

All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any
way – electronically, mechanically, photocopied
or otherwise recorded – without the prior written
consent of the publisher.

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

72(497.4)

NEW praxes, new tools / [texts Bogo Zupančič ... [et al.] ; editor
Mika Cimolini ; project descriptions a202 ... [et al.] ; photos of participating
practices Klemen Ilovar ; translation Andreja Šalamon Verbič].
- Ljubljana : Centre for Creativity (CzK) Museum of Architecture and Design,
2022

ISBN 978-961-6669-81-8
COBISS.SI-ID 97001987

The project is co-financed by the European Union (European Regional
Development Fund) and the Republic of Slovenia.

The project is implemented in the framework of the Operational
Program for the Implementation of the European Cohesion Policy
2014–2020.

The Centre for Creativity program is conceived by the Museum
of Architecture and Design (MAO).

