the end of art

I had my first contact with Hegel through a text by an art theorist whom I am very fond of: John Roberts. The article is titled "Conceptual Art and Imageless Truth"[1] and begins precisely with an approach to Hegel's concept of "the end of art". The text is about conceptual art. It is structured by relating the work of different conceptual artists with a common denominator that Roberts identifies with Hegel's notion of "imageless truth". Hegel's main contribution towards an aesthetic, according to Roberts, relates to his disbelief of the universality of images – a universality that is characteristic of the stability of religious values and that was later surpassed by thought and reflection or the pursuit of what Hegel designates as "imageless truth". In this way, the road is paved towards an "art of thought". And, since thought reformulates itself continuously, art is faced with the problem of giving shape to what is in the making.

In as far as specifically concerns conceptual art, Roberts' theory is that the imageless truth underlies it. The truth without image is the paradigm that, in the context of conceptual art, leads to the emancipation of art and, simultaneously, to an awareness of the limitations of that emancipation:

> (…) Conceptual art is one of the major moments where reflection on art's conditions of production is driven by a dialectical consciousness of art's possibilities and boundaries, of sensible appearance and truth, of image and language. Conceptual art is the first avant-garde art to bring philosophical consciousness *in practice* to modern art's performance of its own alienation.[2]

This statement reveals the differences involved in establishing a comparison between the historical avant-gardes (and the apocalyptic heroicness that characterises them, whose dying breath may well have been situationism) and neo-avant-gardes, which started a very specific type of self-consciousness. Both promote the destabilisation of the category "art" by means of a radical departure from the formal and productive rules in force, but the respective "models" of critical operativity are very different, as are the stages of modernism that contextualise them and with which they interact. If the historical avant-gardes constitute a battleground against the idea of "art" as a whole, neo-avant-gardes question the concept of "art" based on the critical consideration of the actual setting they are faced with. In this regard, it is significant that Roberts should repeatedly use terminology related to debate. Namely, he uses the adjectives:

- "discoursive", to refer to the inherently argumentative content of the work of conceptual art;
- "*dialogical*" to designate the type of relationship that is established between the work and its receivers;
- and "*conversative*" to qualify the type of artistic activity promoted by the group Art & Language and which, as a paradigm of imageless truth, consisted in nothing more that sessions of discussion about

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[1] John ROBERTS, "Conceptual Art and Imageless Truth", in Michael CORRIS, *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice*, Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 305-325.

art.

Conceptual artwork is an instrument for debate that keeps artistic categories unstable just as the subject of an on-going argument is unstable. On the one hand, it conveys the speculation activated by the artist. On the other hand, it encourages the exercise of the conscience of the receiver that prolongs the sense of the proposed speculation. The meeting between the work and the receiver constitutes an *event* (word used by Roberts), not only of an eminently cognitive nature, but also *open-ended*.

In truth, this reference to Hegel with the purpose of defining the critic role of neo-avant-gardes – ultimately seeking the very definition of "art" – was formerly explored by Arthur Danto. Neo-avant-gardes are "art after the end of art".

the end of Architecture

As an architect, I must say that after reading this I felt really jealous of the end of art. If the end of art transformed art in such a positive manner, I regretted that architecture had not met its end as well.

There are some factors that can account for art being able to end easier than architecture. It is less committed. Construction requires financial investment, is relatively perennial and (almost) always fulfils a socially significant role – which binds it to some degree of conservatism. It seldom provides leeway for radical experimentalism and it is all but incapable of departing from the "retinal paradigm". On the other hand, even when there is room for creative freedom, there is a big operative difference – resulting from the great ontological difference – between visual arts and the architecture project. In very general terms, we can say that a work of art as an entity can be anything, while an architecture project cannot. Firstly, although I disagree as to the essentialness of the artifact in art (evoked by Dickie), the project of architecture aims at the artifact. Taking the risk of stating the obvious, I must note that the project of architecture aims at the definition of physical supports for human life and often seeks to ensure climate control and / or protection for the body – objectives that can only be met through artifacts. As Spinoza said (during an interview with Lefèbvre), "the concept of dog does not bark ".

Even if we only compare works of architecture with works of art that are artifacts, we can see that they are of very limited variety. If it were possible to examine all the works of architecture produced throughout human history, I believe that the variations would be relatively few. What elements make up a work of architecture? Pavements, natural things such as soil, trees or rocks, elements delimiting spaces (which are little more than walls and slabs), devices serving as connections between spaces (which are little more than doors and windows), a few elements conditioning or promoting use, such as fireplaces or traffic signs. Tents, trailers or other mobile units could also be included in this list, but there aren't many more. The same could not be said if we were to examine all the works of conceptual art because, like all examples of *post-media* art, they escape formal familiarity.

There is no such thing as *post-media* architecture.

This has implications on the project's design. Projects must provide a response to specific requirements of very different natures. In each project, it is necessary to resolve problems of different kinds. The landscape, the morphology of the site's location, the programme, the construction system, infrastructure

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[2] *Ibidem*, p. 307.

networks, regulations, costs, the client's wishes – these are all examples of matters which architects should consider in their full complexity when they design their projects. And, more than just consider them, they must combine them in such as manner as to obtain an articulate and coherent "whole". More even than each individual factor, it is their interrelationship that leads to the limitation of formal and methodological possibilities of architectural design. A work of art, similarly to an artifact, can be a simple entity: a glass plate, a fan that makes a cloth flutter or a device that measures the temperature of a room in a museum. A work of architecture is almost always a puzzle of construction elements that must be carefully organised so as to satisfy requirements of either a material or immaterial nature. A project: (1) requires that labour – that technical chore – and only within the scope of that labour (2) can be the object of relatively limited variations that add artistic value to it.

Nonetheless, despite the limitations originating from the definition of Architecture and its contingencies, I decided to try and find an "end of Architecture" – some sort of breach, whether in the work's *justification* or *constitution*, which could somehow be understood as an end. I tried to find that which, in art, Arthur C. Danto had found in the late 1960s, in a *box*.

Architecture *after Duchamp*. Or, *architecture after the end of architecture.*

lack of quality as a strategy

Danto repeatedly uses the expression "But is it art?". I believe no other expression would sum up so perfectly that which drives and stimulates the self-reflexive art that followed the end of art – an art which, also according to Danto, stems from the readymade Marcel Duchamp started producing in 1915[3].

I think no other artistic phenomenon was so exclusively focused on self-reflection as that which would become known as "conceptual art". This was not the first form of self-reflexive art, but it was the first time conceptual strategies were experimented with systematically. In conceptual art, the work's content is not detracted from, whether to a "theme" external to self-reflection, or to the field of aesthetic sensitivity – the field of the formal qualities of the work, in an abstract sense. Any of these attributes or any similarity with the preceding artwork would detract from the cognitive territory of the work. *Only a departure from the internal protocols of the discipline allows the focus of the creative or cognitive activity to shift towards questioning it.*

The properties of the specific work – its appearance when it encounters the public – are therefore not indifferent. They must start by disillusioning the public in relation to what that they consider art. It is essential that the work should offer, first and foremost, an apparent "lack of quality". This lack of quality performs an essential function: it causes the necessary perceptive disillusionment so that the "disillusioned" receiver of the work asks the question "But is it art?" and, in this way, engages in a cognitive exercise through which self-reflection occurs. This does not mean that the work should be precarious, symbolising the nature of its content – that would mean entering a universe of metaphor that is foreign to it. It is the strictly *functional* nature of the work (its concentration on the self-reflexive function, reflected in its appearance) that should be adequate to the ever-provisional nature of thought, appropriate to an imageless truth. The work is merely an experiment at the service of thought. Much as a note in a schoolbook or a laboratory experiment, the value of the work resides in its interest – its ability to nurture thought – and not in its formal attributes.

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[3] Arthur DANTO, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 184.

Also regarding this, a comparison can be established between the historical avant-gardes and conceptual art. The lack of quality in avant-garde works and the lack of quality in conceptual works are quite distinct from each other. Within the scope of the avant-gardes from the start of the 20th Century, the internal disruption of the works themselves – the formal disharmony of the parts that make up the whole – often corresponds to a disruption of the works in relation to the orthodoxies of their historical context. This is not what happens in conceptual art. The unusual appearance of the conceptual artwork does not result from the combination of heterogeneous components. It does not even result from procedures of *construction* that are made evident in the form of the work as a factor of artistic intentionality. The disillusionment caused by the conceptual artwork is of another type. It mainly results from *absence*. When someone, with normal expectations, comes face to face with a work of conceptual art, what stands out is absence: either it lacks content that can be identified as a "theme", or it is redundant, or it cannot be seen, or it is invisible, or it has not been made, or else it exists in the limit of contingence, or it has no body, etc. In this sense, the works of the historical avant-gardes that best serve as forerunners to conceptual art (and I have no intention of establishing a historical link) are the coloured squares of Malevich and the readymade of Marcel Duchamp. In these, formal disruption does not occur. Their peculiar appearance also results from absence. The squares of Malevich are no more than a literal presentation of a simple enunciation. *Black Square on White Background*, a painting from 1914, is an example of this, but the approximation to absence (metaphysical in Malevich's case) is more evident in *White on White*, from 1918. In addition to the processes of de-contextualisation they imply, Duchamp's readymade are also characterised by the absences they involve. As has been widely mentioned, there are two types of absence. The work no longer possesses visual qualities that are valuable in their own right – the so-called retinal qualities – and, at the same time, no longer depends on any manual virtuosity of the artist. Its appearance is therefore marked, both by the absence of independent formal qualities and the absence of manual qualities.

If one of the most relevant operative paradigms of the historical avant-gardes is "piecing together" (dissonant or heteroclite aggregation), then the operative paradigm of conceptual art can be considered as "doing nothing".

ways of doing nothing

When Duchamp places a urinal atop a plinth at an exhibition, he produces a dual effect of estrangement. On the one hand, the object that in its everyday context was not given any particular attention is observed more intensely, in the *unusual* context of the exhibition. Here, the object here performs a representative role: through this object its original universe is evoked and, therefore, subject to a supposedly critical perspective. On the other hand, it is the artistic production itself that is subject to estrangement, in that both the attributes necessary for a certain entity to be considered an "artwork" and the nature of the work of those who are designated as "artists" have been put into question. These two questions are thus addressed in view of the universe to which the object belongs and which it carries to the artistic scope.

Taking this into account, two distinct effects can be considered in the readymade. The first effect is the result of a shock. Its nature and the circumstance in which it is placed do not combine. A *disruptive* effect is created between the object and the context. From this point of view, as I have already mentioned, what

distinguishes it from the more common disruptive effect of the works of that time is the fact that the disruption does not occur within the object, but between the object and its context. This is why the readymade operates in the field of the administrative (the decision as to "where the object is placed") and not the field of the productive (the production of the object). The second effect is related to the opportunism involved in appropriating something already made, which indeed approaches the readymade to the paradigm of "doing nothing". With regard to certain tasks, the artist chooses inactivity. In as far as regards the object, it is a reflex of that inactivity.

     In summary, two phenomena are noted:

- *dislocation*. Something was expected and something else is in its place.
- *absence*. A determined task was expected to have been performed (and which the object should have reflected) but it wasn't (as the object demonstrates).

The readymade therefore contains the seeds for two procedures that conceptual art will resort to: the appropriation of what already exists and inaction itself. I believe, however, that between one and another, it is possible to define a third procedure: the artist adopts something that is external to him (a dislocation), but does not decide exactly what it is (absence of choice). He appropriates something that he does not choose:

- *indeterminacy*. A determined decision was expected, and instead there is a departure towards the unexpected [4].

In a way, all these strategies derive from the readymade. It is because the readymade inaugurates the possibility of acting by appointment, that they become possible.

doing nothing in architecture

These were the premises I based myself on to try and keep my promise of assessing the possibility of an architecture "without quality" – an architecture capable of leading to the question "But is it architecture?" and, following that question, capable also of promoting reflexion on the definition of "architecture". Starting from the definition of these three strategies – dislocation, indeterminacy and absence – I tried to apply them to the two stages involved in the production of a work of architecture: (1) the conception of the work (aspects related to the definition of form in the abstract sense) and (2) the production of the work (aspects related to the definition of the work as a material entity and the subject of the type of manipulation called "inhabiting"). This allows us to draw the following table:

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[4] It is mainly this operative possibility in conceptual art that Robert C. Morgan analyses in chapter "From Dada to Data" of his book *Conceptual Art: An American Perspective*. Morgan, *Conceptual Art*, pp. 1-25.

		stages	
		1. **conception** of the work	2. **production** of the work
Operative strategies	**dislocation**	form results from the appropriation of certain data	the work results from the appropriation of a certain artifact
	indeterminacy	form results from a random process	the work results from decisions not taken by the author
	absence	_	the work results from change in status of a certain artifact

"dislocation" in the scope of the conception of the work

The first possibility I put forward is: **the architect does not create an enunciation for the project: he appropriates one that already exists**. The dislocation of a given content to the scope of a project has one limitation: that content has to be able to serve the purpose of the project. That which is dislocated must be capable of being transformed into a work of architecture. I will mention two examples which I believe illustrate this possibility. The first example is the set of projects from the MVRDV group based on the idea of "*datascape*" – which, in a 1966 text, Winy Maas defined as:

> Psychological issues, anti-disaster patterns, lighting regulations, acoustic treatments. All these manifestations can be seen as 'scapes' of the data behind it.
>
> **Extremities** (...) In order to understand the behaviour of massiveness, we have to push it to the limits and adopt this 'extremizing' as a technique of architectural research. Assuming a possible maximization (the word 'maximum' already implies rules), society will be confronted with the laws and by-laws that it has set up and that are extrapolated with an iron logic.[5]

So this is about applying rules literally, following them to the bitter end and confronting them with their context. One of the projects where MVRDV applied this over-obedience principle was *Shadowtown*[6], dated 1993. It is a "Competition design for the Railway station area in Bergen op Zoom, The Netherlands"[7]. The intervention area is close to the town's medieval centre. For this reason, it is subject to legislation that determines that new buildings must be low enough not to be visible from any point within the historic centre. This limitation determines a virtual volume inside which any construction must be contained. Naturally, all competing teams applying must comply with that volume. It conditions the proposals. Rather than just complying with it, the MVRDV collective used it as a proposal. Instead of deciding about the form of the new buildings, they used that legally imposed volume as the

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[5] MVRDV, *Farmax*, pp. 102-103 [Psychological issues, anti-disaster patterns, lighting regulations, acoustic treatments. All these manifestations can be seen as 'scapes' of the data behind it. **Extremities** If 'progress' remains the main reason for 'research', the hypothesis remains the most effective way to deal with it. In order to understand the behaviour of massiveness, we have to push it to the limits and adopt this 'extremizing' as a technique of architectural research. Assuming a possible maximization (the word 'maximum' already implies rules), society will be confronted with the laws and by-laws that it has set up and that are extrapolated with an iron logic.].
[6] *Ibidem*, pp. 250-263 [*Shadowtown*].
[7] *Ibidem*, p. 251 [Competition design for the Railway station area in Bergen op Zoom, The Netherlands].

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work's proposed form.

"indeterminacy" in the scope of the production of the work

Yona Friedman conceived a process that, instead of being performed by the author himself, is made available to others so that they can achieve concrete results themselves. This is a project device Friedman developed for Expo '70, the universal fair that took place in Osaka, which he called the Flatwriter[8]. Friedman's intention is that each resident should be able to determine the configuration of their own house (one of his work themes since the late 1940s) and, in order to make that possible, he creates a system that he describes as follows:

> The Flatwriter keyboard consists of 53 keys, each printing the figure shown upon it. They represent configurations possible within three volumes as well as the different forms that can be assumed by each volume. These choices are predicated by a framework of existing stocks of prefabricated elements, service units, bathroom and kitchen units, and by the location of each within the house structure. Costs are also computed for each selection. It is thus possible for any future resident of a neighbourhood to print his preferences for an apartment. He does this by utilizing a simple code that visualizes all elements involved in his decision in such a way that his decision is easily comprehended by the constructor as well as by all other residents of the future neighbourhood.
>
> *(…)*
>
> The keyboard of the Flatwriter contains: all possible linkages and configurations of the three distinct volumes (three volumes used here to simplify explanations and illustrations); all shapes any of the volumes can have (depending on the given technological context); all possible positions for a package kitchen, bathroom or any special equipment; all climatic orientations the apartment can have.[9]

The results obtained with the Flatwriter are limited by the matrix governing the combinations permitted by the system, in the sense that it predetermines the partial options that, as a whole, will configure each house. But this provides the basis enabling obtaining results to be shifted to a point in time subsequent to the definition of the enunciation, and to the hands of others. Friedman invents the game but he doesn't play it; he invents it so that others can. **The architect does not create a form for the design: a device is created which will determine that form based on factors external to the architect's authorship and, to that extent, "random".**

"dislocation" in the scope of the production of the work

I will now consider the possibility of an architectural readymade.

The use of existing structures is archaic. It goes back to the use of caves as shelters. Caves provide a

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[8] "*Flatwriter*" *is the result of the appropriation of "typewriter" – a word in which the particle "type" is substituted for "flat" as the prefix for "writer". Friedman explained that he uses this word to distinguish his system from the systems applicable to computers and software.*

[9] Yona Friedman, *Pro Domo*, Barcelona: Actar / Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Cultura, 2006, p. 130-132 [The Flatwriter keyboard consists of 53 keys, each printing the figure shown upon it. They represent configurations possible within three volumes as well as the different forms that can be assumed by each volume. These choices are predicated by a framework of existing stocks of prefabricated elements, service units, bathroom and kitchen units, and by the location of each within the house structure. Costs are also computed for each selection. It is thus possible for any future resident of a neighbourhood to print his preferences for an apartment. He does this by utilizing a simple code that visualizes all elements involved in his decision in such a way that his decision is easily comprehended by the constructor as well as by all other residents of the future neighbourhood. (…) The keyboard of the Flatwriter contains: all possible linkages and configurations of the three distinct volumes (three volumes used here to simplify explanations and illustrations); all shapes any of the volumes can have (depending on the given technological context); all possible positions for a package kitchen, bathroom or any special

building which is "ready" enough, capable of surrounding with "walls" and "ceiling" and configuring a "doorway". In the contemporary world, caves can still be used, but standards of comfort require them to be completed with further construction. The photographic work that Alec Soth compiles in his book *Broken Manual*[10] provides an account of this type of buildings. This is also the case with available natural structures which are more incomplete and therefore require additional building, such as for example the Portuguese village of Monsanto. The mountainside is strewn with large boulders and all that was needed was to build around them so that they would become the walls and ceilings of the houses. In addition to natural structures, built structures are also suitable as outer shells for interior spaces. An example is the use of the interior space of arches, whose apparent function is structural though their concavity is proven to serve as shelter.

These procedures are infrequent in authorship works. I could mention some examples of the transformation of ruins (some were turned into *Follies*) by Eduardo Souto Moura, which are more than a mere "rehabilitation", but do not get to acquire a self-reflexive dimension. In these works "what is done with the appropriated element" is discursive enough to be considered an enunciation. "Reassign a function to the ruin by adding a lid" (*Reconversion of a Ruin in Gerês*, 1980), "empty the ruin so that it becomes a *Follie*" (*House in Baião*, 1990-1993) or "invert the internal and external sides of a building" (*Inn at Santa Maria do Bouro*, 1989-1997) are examples of this. However, these are manoeuvres that do not acquire a self-reflexive dimension. They may produce a romantic or ironic effect, but they do not question any disciplinary assumptions.

I believe that, in order to be able to consider the readymade in architecture, the dislocation needs to be more significant. The distance between the origin and the destination of what is appropriated needs to be greater. I propose two possibilities. The first is the closest to the concept of readymade in art, according to which the artist does not produce the work: he appropriates an object that already exists. To put this in the context of architecture, one could say that **the architect does not produce the work: he appropriates an object that already exists.** The greenhouses appropriated by Lacaton & Vassal to become dwellings, as is the case of House in Coutras (2000), are an example that is particularly close to the readymade as invented by Duchamp. The work is the result of (1) a choice and (2) a re-contextualisation.

S*quatting* can also be viewed as a practice of production of readymade. I that case, **the "architect" does not produce the work: he appropriates a work that already exists**. The process of re-contextualisation of the work does not involve its introduction into a new context, but only the act of using it for a new purpose. If, according to Al Held, "all conceptual art is just pointing at things", in architecture there is a possibility of "just inhabiting things".

This is also what happens when, instead of appropriation involving the general "inhabiting", it involves the enhancement of the appropriated artifact's performance. I am not referring to changes to the artifact itself, but the addition of supplementary elements that also determine a new function for "what already exists". Banham addresses this possibility and uses two concepts – "gizmo" and "clip-on". He defines "gizmo", a product he considers typically American, as

> (...) a small self-contained unit of high performance in relation to its size and cost, whose function is to transform

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equipment; all climatic orientations the apartment can have.].

some undifferentiated set of circumstances to a condition nearer human desires. The minimum of skill is required in its installation and use, and it is independent of any physical or social infrastructure beyond that by which it may be ordered from catalogue and delivered to prospective user.[11]

A *gizmo*, as a simple equipment to assemble and use, can be prepared for any artifact, allowing it to perform in a different way. Household appliances or infrastructural devices are examples of this. Regarding the concept of "clip-on", Banham explains it using the image of a motor that

Can convert practically any floating object into a navigable vessel. A small concentrating package of machinery converts an undifferentiated structure into something having function and purpose.[12]

In both cases, the added gizmo acts as a device of re-functionalisation. It transforms the pre-existing artifact into a new artifact with the same appearance but with a new function, i.e., transforming it into a readymade.

Before moving on to other "ways of doing nothing", I will just mention the fact that a readymade work of architecture raises a problem of acknowledgement which it shares with art and which was enunciated by Danto: one can only look for artistic meaning in the work to the extent that the work is put in a situation where it is considered the result of an artistic procedure. In architecture, even when an object of this kind is not recognised as art, it fulfils its role as a support for the everyday life of those who inhabit it – this does not apply to art. But a work only acquires its full meaning after an institutional validation device pays attention to that work (in the material sense) as a work (in the artistic sense). This is true for the Lacaton & Vassal greenhouses, but even more so for squatting. The artistic meaning of the appropriated artifact – in this case an object that is not subject to any dislocation – is only considered after the work is put in a situation where it is considered the result of an artistic procedure. More precisely, artistic meaning is only considered to the extent that use is presented as a procedure with an artistic dimension.

"indeterminacy in the scope of the production of the work
I will now address works whose configuration is indeterminate. The first possibility is that the project does not define a fixed form. Among these works, those whose configuration is changed by factors external to human will and those which, once again, are based on the fact that architectural artifacts are destined for those who will inhabit them:

(1) The architect does not define the form of the work: he/she only defines a device whose form is indefinitely self-changing, depending on external factors. That is what happens in Toyo Ito's *Tower of Winds* – a project dating back to 1986. It is an intervention regarding an outer layer for a water reservoir and a ventilation exhaust in a part of Yokohama with a great deal of road traffic. Since this is a cosmetic project, Ito resorted to interactive technology in order to create a "skin" whose image is under constant transformation. The *Tower of*

[10] Alec Soth and Lester B. Morrison, *Broken Manual*, London: Steidl, 2010.
[11] Reyner Banham, "The Great Gizmo", in *Design by Choice*, p. 110. [Originally published in *Industrial Design* 12 (September 1965), pp. 58-59].
[12] Reyner Banham, "A Clip-on Architecture", *Design Quarterly* 63 (1965), p. 10.

Winds is an illuminated device that reacts to wind and to noise. It is described in the following manner in the *El Croquis* magazine,

> There are 1,280 mini-lamps and 12 white ring-like neons inside the tower, and 30 flood lights at the base of the tower (6 outside the tower and 24 inside the tower). These lights draw various patterns as they are controlled by a personal computer which is placed at the foot of the tower. The patterns of light changes in accordance with the wind direction and velocity, and thus surrounding noises. The movement of light is controlled as if it were environmental music.[13]

The *Tower of Winds* reacts to external phenomena, changing its own image as induced by the dynamics of those phenomena.

The same happens in the *Blur Building*[14] by the duo Diller + Scofidio[15]. This was a "pavilion" of sprayed water that the New York duo designed for Expo 2002 and was installed at Lake Neuchâtel, in Western Switzerland, taking its material from the lake. It sprays 5,000 litres of water per minute, through 31,400 outlets, forming a cloud approximately 100m long, 60m wide and 20m high. Besides introducing an event in the landscape, this architectural installation provides whoever visits it with a perceptual experience marked by the difficulty of vision and some disorientation.

(2) The architect does not define the form of the work: he leaves the decision to someone else.

In as far as concerns this second possibility, it can be identified with several project strategies. Starting with the more limited scopes of action, I can mention a project by Alejandro Aravena of the Elemental team of the Elemental team (with Alfonso Montero, Tomás Cortese and Emilio de la Cerda), which involves leaving the work incomplete, letting their inhabitants complete it: Aravena's project consists in a group of low cost houses, in order to replace a group of illegal houses in the area of *Quinta Monroy*, city of Iquique, in the Chilean desert. It was a government initiative, and the work was completed in 2004. With a limited budget for land and construction, and wanting to guarantee housing for the 100 families, the team chose to build what was just a "starting point" for what would become houses of the future. The houses are economically arranged into rows, with building volumes alternating with free spaces for self-construction. Each house is therefore juxtaposed to a land parcel on the side which is occupied only by a slab which doubles as a cover for the ground floor and as a balcony. Each family can occupy this part of their land parcel with further construction according to their needs and their own capacity to build. On the other hand, the project does not include the cost of cladding. The houses are built without cladding or painting, because these construction components are less essential for the operation of the houses and can also be applied by the families with relative ease.

A step up the scale, I could mention the curved *redent* that Le Corbusier imagines in his plan of Algiers, during the Project "A" stage, from 1931 -1932. Le Corbusier proposes to create a large scale *Dom-ino* structure. He provides a series of superposed slabs, supported only by pillars, so that, functioning as artificial land parcels, they can be occupied by different houses, according to the preference of each individual. The project

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[13] *El Croquis* 71 (1995), p. 50

[14] See: Diller + Scofidio, *Blur: The Making of Nothing*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2002.

consists in a large support of "artificial land" for several small projects.

Cedric Price presented a different strategy when he designed the *Fun Palace* together with Joan Littlewood (founder of Theatre Workshop) between 1961 and 1972[16]. The work is not meant to be *completed*, but instead *manipulated*. It is a game. Given that the passage of time means that the buildings are subject to various demands, Price argues that those who are directly involved in those changes - the inhabitants - should determine, or progressively determine, the form. He wants architecture to provide a fun and liberating experience. In the words of Royston Landau:

> For Joan Littlewood and Cedric Price, it would be fun if the visitor could be stimulated or informed, could react or interact, but if none of these suited, had the freedom to withdraw.[17]

In order to meet this objective, the Fun Palace is composed of a steel structure to which the construction elements that define spaces can be provisionally attached. The set is served by a crane assisting with the tasks of moving, mounting and dismounting the various parts of the building. Price and Littlewood develop the project, making several versions of it over about eleven years – curiously, longer than the building's estimated service life, which was only ten years. It was never built.

"absence" in the scope of the production of the work

Finally, I propose to enunciate the most radical way of doing nothing: literally, the architect does not do anything.

In 1976, in a radio interview, Banham stated:

> (…) the basic approach is certainly one that appeals to me, a way of really not saying 'What kind of building do you want?' but almost of asking first of all, 'Do you really need a building?"[18]

Banham's position is in agreement with Price's, according to Alper Semih Alkan. Alkan refers to

> (…) Price's programmatic emphasis over physical requirements, which sometimes even caused him to decline project commissions by questioning the necessity of a building at its expense.[19]

Banham and Price enunciate ethical, or even ontological principles that are not usually found in architecture. Doing nothing acquires the dimension of asking "what is architecture for?"[20] – a question as radically lucid as it is inconceivable from the commercial perspective of architecture studios. I end this intervention on the self-reflexive dimension that works of architecture can acquire with a reference to the Lacaton & Vassal project Place Léon

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[15] Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio

[16] See Cedric Price, *The Square Book*, 2ª ed., Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2003, pp. 56-61.

[17] Royston Landau, "A Philosophy of Enabling", in Price, *The Square Book*, p. 11 [For Joan Littlewood and Cedric Price, it would be *fun* if the visitor could be stimulated or informed, could react or interact, but if none of these suited, had the freedom to withdraw.].

[18] Reyner Banham, BBC Radio 4 (5th November 1976), cited in Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schregenberger (eds.), *As Found: The Discovery of the Ordinary*, Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2001 [originally published in *Cedric Price, Architectural Association Works 2*, London: Architectural Association, 1984, p. 107.]

[19] Alkan, "Architectural Representation Beyond Visualization", p. 130.

[20] I have borrowed the title of the seminar "*Para que Serve a Arquitectura?"* (What is Architecture for?) given by André Tavares and Pedro Bandeira, which arose due to a partnership between the publishers Dafne and the Minho University School of Architecture, which took

Aucoc, from 1996. Following a survey among the neighbourhood's residents and against the expectations of the city's Mayor, the French architects adopted "the form the square already had" as a proposal for the square – an act paradoxically more disruptive than any intervention could ever be.

place in Guimarães, in October 2006.