

## *Transmettre*

*[L'obj. désigne une chose abstr.]*

<https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/transmettre> consulted on 08/05/2020. Translation by the author: "To pass on to someone a quality, a character, knowledge".

### 1. *Faire passer à quelqu'un une qualité, un caractère, des connaissances.*

Contemporary architectural practices have become diverse and eclectic. In Belgium, we can see the emergence of a number of young architectural firms, such as Raamwerk, whose founders have just finished their studies without completing an initiatory phase with a Master during their first years of professional practice.<sup>1</sup> It has become difficult to identify a unity that oversees the discipline of architecture or a form of 'hereditary' continuity. The issue of its transmission is a challenge. This is particularly true as in Belgium, the teaching of architecture, which originally stemmed from a fine arts tradition, has recently been integrated into universities. This means that it is important to find a new way of passing on architectural practices.

As Bernard Huet proposes in his conference 'Sur un état de la théorie de l'architecture du XXe siècle'<sup>2</sup>, we can observe the evolution of architecture theory, particularly the founding treaties which have marked its history and its teaching, to understand the divided landscape of our discipline.

Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the entire architectural debate was based around on the one hand, a definition of what architecture was, and on the other hand, a (re)definition of the Vitruvian categories: 'firmitas' (strength: materials and architecture), 'venustas' (beauty: how to create) and 'utilitas' (functionality: architectural objects-programme). These lines were clear and developed along with society around a common foundation based around universal laws (composition) and a common ideal (beauty): "Beauty is harmony, ruled by a given proportion, which rules between all the parties of the whole to which they belong, to which teacher, that nothing can be added, taken away or changed without making it less worthy of approval."<sup>3</sup>

An epidemiological rupture appeared in this equilibrium around the Vitruvian Triad, with the statement by Etienne-Louis Boullée that, "Vitruvius is mistaken, there are two parts to architecture, there is Art and Science, and Art alone, meaning Art and not the art of building, Art alone falls within architecture."<sup>4</sup> This rupture also occurred at the same time as the appearance of the first engineering colleges in France and the appearance of new materials such as steel and reinforced concrete, which would transform the role of architects, who until then had been omniscient and now saw their discipline gradually (de)limited and precised from the outside.

In his course entitled 'Précis des leçons d'architecture données à l'École Polytechnique'<sup>5</sup> in 1825, Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand anticipated the industrial era, proposing a system of composition that integrated simple and modular elements and questioned the role of ornamentation.

Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and Gottfried Semper were the first to truly distance themselves from the Vitruvian tradition<sup>6</sup>, putting forward a theory that only had recourse to the "requirements of the art of building"<sup>7</sup> for one, and a theory in which spatiality was the core concern through the skin (*Bekleidungprinzip*—principle of dress<sup>8</sup>) for the other.

In 2002, in his article 'On en veut à la composition', Jacques Lucan states that, the term composition is no longer able to describe design processes that do not respond anymore to compositional logics and objectives that make the necessary correspondence of the parts in the unity of the whole the understanding key of architecture."<sup>9</sup> In his book, *Composition, Non-composition*<sup>10</sup>, he looks at the architectures of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and offers a historical analysis of the many different approaches to architecture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is no longer concerned with the ideal to be achieved, but questions the strategies that make it possible to produce architecture.

Today, the question of passing on architecture and its theories is a vital one for education and university research. While the very broad field of contemporary practices that we can observe no longer allows the identification of unity in the discipline, made possible by composition, it is still possible to understand what confers consistency and coherence on individual motivations through the project processes. Understanding the nature of this journey through the reality of the working documents also means understanding the relationships between the abstraction of an intention and the concrete nature of materiality. Observing such a design process and these shifts between the abstract and the concrete also involves challenging an epistemological dichotomy of architectural research based between culture and technique, between dissemination (*faire-savoir*) and know-how (*savoir-faire*)<sup>11</sup>.

Currently, in architectural teaching, the question of how to 'do' is asked more often than that of the ideal to be achieved. How does a project emerge? What are its motivations? What project resources<sup>12</sup> are at work? What design tools are being used? What contingencies have affected the process? How is all this part of a consistent and shareable proposal? Because it is essential to have a basis for an architectural project and understanding the process is now one of the keys to this.

The design process of an architectural project is a complex, non-linear path. The 'post-operative' narration of the project therefore aims to bring together, reorganise and reveal, without preconditions, the acts and thoughts that really occur in the development of a project. It involves making the project processes intelligible and stating the operating methods involved in these processes in order to make them transmissible. There is no question here of developing and generalising decision-making procedures like the first generation of design thinking methodologies attempted to do in the 1960s<sup>13</sup>.

This methodology for discovering project operations is aimed at the practitioner, the theorist and the teacher of the architecture project. Rather than seeking to extract from certain projects a single theory, whose aim would be to bring together different practices, 'post-operative' narration sets out to reveal, demonstrate and disclose, without preconditions, the actions and thoughts that really occur during the development of a project. Beyond the process, it demonstrates the relevance of coherent, remarkable projects. The possibility of transmission is increased after this process, which involves the recognition and enhancement of the diversity of approaches.

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