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MARK JARZOMBEK, *ARCHITECTURE CONSTRUCTED: NOTES ON A DISCIPLINE*, BLOOMSBURY, LONDON, 2023.

In exploring “architecture”’s grammatological possibilities, I am not following the linguistic determinist pattern often deployed in these circumstances that searches for an inherent clarifying structure. Instead, I am using Derrida’s idea of grammatology to study the way in which thoughts as recorded in writing affect the nature of knowledge. I am looking in particular to bring us closer to the wound that is at the heart of the etymological separation and contraction—a wound laid bare by Alberti and that, as I will show, has its prehistory in Greek philosophy.¹

The book *Architecture Constructed: Notes on a Discipline* is an almost unique text in the contemporary landscape of architectural theory and criticism (but also beyond those). Namely, it is not a book of theory, not a book of criticism, not a book of history, but at the same time it is certainly a book of theory, criticism and history.

And it does so by reviving the aphoristic genre, here following Jacques Derrida and Friedrich Nietzsche, that has largely fallen into disuse, as it is considered neither scientific nor academic in current (scientific and academic) production. By stepping back from the details, one is in fact still able to perceive the synthetic complete image.

The author defines *tektōn*² in this book as one of the constituent parts of architecture, that *other part* of architecture that often suffers from

¹ M. Jarzombek, *Architecture Constructed: Notes on a Discipline*, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 5: “In separating the architect from the *faber* and in then excluding the upwardly mobile *faber* from the possibility of discourse-making, Alberti was certainly well aware that, in ancient Greek, *tektōn* (τέκτων) was a word directly associated with woodworking.”

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underestimation.³ It is about that constitutive *other part* of the discipline that Jarzombek writes, making a non-linear history of it, over some 300 pages, 400 footnotes, 200 images, 12 index pages of names, in 18 sections across 7 parts (with no titles).

Amidst countless points of reflection, paradoxes and conflicts and challenges, erudition and *divertissement*, quotations ranging from Herodotus to Tange, from Homer to Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie*, the author shows how (contemporary) architecture is traversed by the same tensions that Alberti, and his colleagues, shared.

The unresolved tension between *archē*⁴ and *tektōn* over the centuries has led to various relationships, similar to the equally unstable relationship between *theorēin* and *praxis*. In architecture this relationship is, by definition, never peaceful, always in a state of *polemos*, that is, troubled and variable and yet interconnected: the theoretical invisibility of the *tektōn* is addressed here as an indispensable and indissoluble part of architecture as a discipline, and above all, not colonised by the words and the interpretive and creative *poiēsis* forces of the *archē*. The aphoristic genre originated in Ancient Greece as a collection of medical knowledge. Jarzombek's text is fragmented into sections that vary in length from a few lines to a full page.

It is in this very interesting progression that the text takes shape: the quality of the aphorism is indeed compression, conciseness and anti-systematic thinking but there are also short sections in which the prose opens up into genuine micro-essays. It moves between what are often called fragments (*Fragment*), maxims (*Maxime*), mottos (*Spruch*) and concise statements (*Sentenz*), each of which can often be read on its own, though not out of context.

The way in which this journey through time and space of the *tektōn* of architecture moves is often philological analysis of terms (mainly Greek and Latin) that define activities, going back to the origins of semantic fields and searching for their inheritance in the contemporary

Tektōn, in fact, derives from the proto-Indo-European root *tetk-*, meaning 'to carve wood', and was also used to distinguish the activity of the woodworker from other crafts such as stonemasonry and metalworking. According to the Author, in doing so Alberti "displaces and silences *tektōn* in *archē-tektōn*". *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11: "My point is simple. Derrida's discussion of "habitation," though certainly well-meaning, overdetermines and overdramatizes the role of *archē*. Furthermore, it completely ignores the obvious fact that there is a second half to the word."

⁴ *Archē* in addition to the meaning of "origin" or "beginning" was also used to indicate a position of command or superiority.

world, how they have expanded or shrunk. A humanist endeavor, aware that words have constantly changing boundaries but rarely leave the original centre that created them uncovered, and that language is not only a useful communication tool.

This search for the various manifestations of the *tektōn* of architecture allows us to project forward the characters and canons of a discipline that, as always, is changing under changing forces and pressures; on the basis on which Jarzombek builds his historical-theoretical edifice, however, one does not lose oneself in the fear of seeing the invariants of the discipline slip through one's fingers.

Finally, it is precisely the *presence* of architecture that is presented here as an inescapable fact, both technical and cultural, economic and social. This book is in itself a new cartography of the discipline, drawing attention to all those people who have embodied the toil of building, that daily habit of mankind that we variously call architecture: a kind of daily fresco that moves continuously, like players in the same game, from Vasari to Derrida, from Loos to the Homeric hymns, to the Building Completion Certificates.