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The Use of the Project After the End of the Modern Project

ABSTRACT: Modernity has inextricably linked the idea of the project to the temporal dimension of the future. However, today the future is perceived as a dimension that is already exhausted in the present, either as the consummation of all novelty or as the threat of a catastrophic outcome. One thus ends up living in a kind of eternal present, which, referring to Reinhart Koselleck, is configured as a "space of expectations" without a time horizon. Such questions cannot but call into question architecture, which has made the project one of its fundamental categories. A genealogy of the architectural project is then proposed as it is connected to the political project, which already finds a spatial connotation in Plato, and "void" is identified as that concept from which different modes of projectuality are determined. It follows that, in today's ascertained end of the modern project, the possibility of a different conception of the project opens up, one that is not defined as an alternative to use as modernity intended, but rather is shaped from use itself, so that the present space of expectation can disclose its own horizon of the future.

KEYWORDS: future, project, use, utopia, modernity, void

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Space of Experience and Horizon of Expectation

"Every epoch appears to itself inescapably modern,"[1] argued Walter Benjamin in the *Passagen-Werk*. This implies for him that there is no epoch that "did not believe itself to be standing directly before an abyss. The desperately clear consciousness to be in the middle of a crisis is something chronic in humanity."[2] Modernity thus consists in conceiving the present in the face of an end that implies a moment of passage, as a condition of crisis that opens up an unknown: the future. The idea of the future as a radically different time, coming after the present and in discontinuity with it, is typically modern. Whether the future appears threatening or hopeful, whether the crisis is lethal or saving, depends on the present's perception of itself.

Before modernity, the future represented a prognosis that the present pronounced on the basis of the past. In Antiquity's circular conception of time, in fact, the future as conceived by modernity—as a time that, for better or worse, brings with it the new—was inconceivable. It is only with the emergence of modernity that the future presents itself as a time irreducible to the experience inherited from the past. Indeed, it is precisely the introduction of the idea of the future into history that is the distinctive trait of modernity; it is in fact the projection into the future that from then on makes every epoch, as "new time," modern in itself. Tracing it back to Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung*, Michel Foucault has therefore defined the modern conception of the present as "contemporaneity," thus distinguishing it from how previous epochs have thought of the present, i.e., in a certain way in relation to the past. With modernity, the future rather represents a "way out" from the present.[3] Instead, for some years now, it has been argued in theory and perception in Western society that our present has lost the future, that its crisis has become so chronicised that it has become permanent and endless, without a way out. This condition is called "presentism."[4]

Before analysing the contemporary condition, let us dwell further on modernity, to understand what has changed with respect to its idea of the

[1] W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass./London, 1999, p. 546.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 545.
[3] See M. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984, pp. 32–50.
[4] See D. Ingram, J. Tallant, "Presentism," https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/presentism/, (accessed 15 November 2024).

future. With modernity, to use Reinhart Koselleck's terms, the margin between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" has progressively widened in favour of the second term, that of the future: "My thesis is that during *Neuzeit* the difference between experience and expectation has increasingly expanded; more precisely, that *Neuzeit* is first understood as a *neue Zeit* from the time that expectations have distanced themselves evermore from all previous experience."[5] This idea of the future as "new time" produces an acceleration to approximate the expectations that the present has on its horizon. The arrow of time finds its propulsive energy in "progress." Progress that was inconceivable until modernity; for example, in the Middle Ages, progress implied the approach of the end of the world understood as the "end of history." But the disillusionment that followed the non-fulfilment of eschatological prophecies removed the hypothecation with which the prognosis of the present burdened the future and freed its horizon of expectation: the space of experience—the space of the present—became too narrow and limited for the acceleration of time that technologies were beginning to produce with a speed unimaginable in the past. The horizon of expectation of modernity became indefinite and infinite in order to comprehend what could not be anticipated in the present. This is why modernity has made the category of project its own, its "throwing forward" (this is the etymology from Latin) takes on its temporal function precisely in modernity. The project ends up representing the way of planning and managing the future, its unknowns: the way of making the "horizon of expectation" a projection of the "space of experience" of the present.

Consequently, the conception of utopia also changes in modernity: it is no longer a spatial concept, but becomes temporal, and ends up coinciding with the future and its purely temporal dimension, which "has no place," which has no circumscribed space of experience, or at least not yet. Western utopian imaginaries could sometimes be alarming, insofar as they were marked by a dehumanising technological accelerationism; yet, the turn in the direction of a better future is for the present always possible, that is, it is always possible to expand the horizon of expectation to include alternatives.[6] Although this is not the best of all possible worlds, it can still become one: there is always an alternative.

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[5] R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2004, p. 263.

[6] See F. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, London/New York, 2007.

The Western world had a future—a time to progress, to improve—as long as it could present itself as the best possible world, as long as it could oppose itself to "another" world. This other world, in the twentieth century, was represented by the Communism. After 1989, the idea of the future as a time of perfectibility opposing the static nature of the other world increasingly lost that political efficacy that had brought the dawn of the future to shine on its horizon, thus enabling the Western liberal world to win the Cold War.

Finally, it was the global market that united the world. And yet, what opened in the first phase of globalisation soon turned out not to be the era of the "end of history"[7] at all, but rather a new historical phase, a new configuration of history, where the relationship between "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" is being articulated differently than in modernity.

Space of Expectation

What, then, is happening today in our future-poor and, therefore, post-modern times? The current perception of an acceleration of time has reduced the future to the present. If in Antiquity it was the past that reduced the present to its repetition, today it is the present that has reduced the future to its repetition. Reversing Koselleck's terms, it could be argued that our age configures the present as a "space of expectation"—which, however, having bridged the gap between experience and expectation to the point of consuming it, is without a horizon: "The horizon is that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen. The legibility of the future, despite possible prognoses confronts an absolute limit, for it cannot be experienced."[8] Koselleck himself considered the possibility of a "space of expectation," but ruled it out: "it is more precise to make use of the metaphor of an expectational horizon instead of a space of expectation."[9] Certainly the spatiality that expresses the experience of the past is distinct from that which expresses the expectation of the future; however, the disappearance of a desirable horizon, of expectations to be approximated, makes this future, whose prognosis is increasingly to be averted (think for example of the ecological crisis), a present experience:

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7 F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Free Press, New York, 1992.
8 R. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, pp. 260–261.
9 *Ibid*., p. 260.

> Time, as it is known, can only be expressed in spatial metaphors, but all the same, it is more illuminating to speak of "space of experience" and "horizon of expectation" than of "horizon of experience" and "space of expectation," although there is still some meaning in these expressions. What is at stake here is the demonstration that the presence of the past is distinct from the presence of the future.[10]

It is precisely the suggestion that Koselleck provides the plausibility, albeit problematic, of a "space of expectation" that I intend to develop. In fact, our epoch, subsequent to the one in which Koselleck wrote, seems to be characterised precisely by the "presence of the future," by the disappearance of that "absolute limit" between experience and expectation. Ours is indeed the era governed by neoliberal reason—the era to which Margaret Thatcher, during the 1980s, said: "there is no alternative." After the fall of the Berlin Wall, this world—the globalised world—no longer needs to present itself as the best possible world by virtue of its perfectibility, its potential and the persuasive force of its "horizon of expectation." Rather, this world of ours is, though not the best, the only possible world—that is the rhetorical and ideological premise of the neoliberal art of government, which Mark Fisher has called "capitalist realism."[11]

Every expectation no longer requires a time for its own realisation, it is rather already present in this space: it is already now possible, i.e., it is already now "real." The prognosis of the future already corresponds to the diagnosis of the present. Whether the expectation of the future is marked by disillusionment or catastrophe, one remains in the present and expands its time. In modernity, the future also represented a limitation of the present, a possibility and an alternative to its reality. Today, reality tends instead to subsume possibilities and alternatives within its own imaginary and space. "Augmented reality" not only represents the most current frontier of information technologies, but also configures the idea of a present that spatialises possibilities and alternatives, subsuming the future within reality. Likewise, financial capitalism consists precisely in the neutralisation of the alternatives that the future might bring; speculation is in fact a form of prognosis of the future, an investment that

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[10] *Ibid*.

[11] M. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books, Winchester/Washington, 2009.

consumes the horizon of the future and mortgages its expectation, reducing it to a mere projection and, hence, validation of the present reality.

Is it then true that we have lost the future today? Yes, it certainly is, if we understand the future in the modern sense, as that "time" that comes to allow the present to configure its own space of experience in a "new" way. Today, rather, the future is already now present in the space of reality. Questioning the future thus entails asking what is future in our present space; in short, we must conceive of the future in the way Benjamin conceives of history: not as "homogeneous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [*Jetztzeit*]."[12] But to do so, one must change the order of discourse. We usually conceive of possibility, but also of alternative itself, as notions strongly imbued with temporality. What if instead we thought of them as spatial dimensions? Modernity has led us to conceive of spatiality in relation to reality and temporality in relation to possibility–what if we instead tried to relate possibility to spatiality? What if, then, we conceived of spaces that have lost their function and functionality—that have therefore lost a certain "reality"—as spaces of possibility and alternative? Are we in fact so sure that what is spatial is necessarily real? What if reality were modifiable—that is, had potentialities for the future–through our use of space?

Agora and Acropolis

These are all questions concerning the configuration and constitution of spatiality that cannot but call architecture into question. If with Foucault one can define the current, post-modern epoch as the "epoch of space," however, it must be made clear that the spatiality that characterises this epoch is that of the "space of expectation," the peculiar traits of which I have outlined. And this is precisely where architecture comes into play: has architecture not always declined on the spatial plane a concept as temporal as that of "project?" What is the project after all if not the projection of an expectation? However, now that the temporal horizon of any expectation has disappeared, the project in the modern sense has come to its end. Hence the now increasingly common and widespread impression that precisely those architectural works that still attribute novelty to themselves are already old; this is the fate of the project within the space

[12] W. Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938–1940*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass./London, 2006, p. 395.

of expectation: it is easy for any ostentatious novelty to be irremediably disappointing. And yet, this does not preclude that the project still has something to do with expectation; is it, however, able to renounce projecting itself towards the horizon in order to rather remain within this space? Which space of expectation, then, can the architectural project take on today–the one capable of configuring alternatives, thus giving space to expectations, or the one entrusted with the spatial representation of expectations produced by the same order of neoliberal discourse that governs in the name of the absence of alternatives? In short, who promotes the expectations—those who live and inhabit the space of the present or those who govern it?

But let us start at the beginning, from the moment when the philosophical and political project directly becomes an architectural project. I refer to the shift of the centre of political life from the *agora* to the *acropolis*, which, in describing the "new city," the ideal city, Plato decrees in *The Laws*. The peculiar space of politics from the "void" space of the *agora*—a non-architectural space, an open esplanade where buildings were scattered and random, without defining an order—becomes the enclosed space of the citadel overlooking the city, surrounded by walls and whose access is limited to those who are the repositories of exclusive and esoteric knowledge:

> the first thing to be done is to build the city as close to the center of the territory as possible, having chosen a spot which has also those other advantages for the city that can without difficulty be understood and enumerated. Then after these things there should be a division into twelve parts. First a sanctuary should be set up to Hestia, Zeus, and Athena, called the "acropolis," and surrounded with a circular wall. From there the twelve parts should radiate, dividing the city itself as well as the whole territory.[13]

The relocation of political life to the *acropolis* and the placing of the *acropolis* at the centre of the *polis* determines perhaps for the first time the coincidence of political utopia and "urban project", that is, the spatial definition of an urban and architectural order that can correspond to the ideal order that the legislator-demiurge-founder draws from looking

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[13] Plato, *The Laws*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 1988, pp. 132–133 (745b).

downward: "when future courses of action are being considered, the most just thing to do in each case is this: he who presents the model of what should be attempted should depart in no way from what is most noble and most true"[14]. Jean-Pierre Vernant clarifies the significance of Plato's political-architectural revolution:

> The central position is occupied no longer by the agora but by the Acropolis, which is consecrated to Zeus and Athena, the patron deities of the city. Thus, in contrast to practical custom in all Greek cities, Hestia has her seat not on the agora but on the Acropolis. This shift in the center is significant. The Acropolis opposes the agora as the religious domain (the *hiera*) does the profane or legal domain (the *hosia*) and as the divine does the human.[15]

With Plato's last dialogue, *The Laws*, in which he appears disillusioned about the possibility of Athenian democracy overcoming its crisis, politics becomes a knowledge and practice for the few, close to religion, and no longer "common;" so much so that the *hestía koiné* (the city's common fireplace) dedicated to Hestia—not coincidentally, in addition to the house and the fireplace, also the goddess of architecture—is now housed in the Palace of the *acropolis* and no longer in the heart of the *agora*. The *agora* therefore ends up being defined by contrast as a "profane space," "lowered" to a place for the exchange of goods and opinions that are now excluded from the realm of "real" politics.[16] The entrenchment of politics in the Palace and the consequent attribution to the market of a disorderly—but also free, open and participatory—space has consequences of enormous significance,[17] the repercussions of which reach as far as today. However, I would like to emphasise here another effect of

[14] *Ibid*., p. 134. The coincidence of political utopia and urban project was also strongly present, right up to modernity, in the way in which the urban planner conceived his task and his role, attributing to himself a paternalistic if not—to put it in Foucault's terms—"pastoral" function. This is the case with Le Corbusier. See F. Choay, *L'urbanisme: utopies et réalités*, Seuil, Paris, 1965.

[15] J.-P. Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, Zone Books, New York, 2006, p. 258.

[16] In the *Politics* (VII, 1331a31–1331b13), Aristotle radicalises the Platonic urban planning approach and the spatial separation of politics and economics, distinguishing two types of *agora*: an *agora* dedicated "to leisure" (at the base of the *acropolis*), which he defines as "free," and a market *agora*, destined exclusively for "necessary business." See Aristotle, *Politics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass./London, 1959, pp. 593–595.

[17] This conception of market space remained so until the beginning of modernity. See D. Calabi, *Il mercato e la città: piazze, strade, architetture d'Europa in età moderna*, Marsilio, Venezia, 1993.

the distinction between *agora* and *acropolis*: I think that it also had decisive consequences for architecture, which, to the extent that it served political and religious power, has from then on considered disorderly space—the legacy of the "anarchitectural" spatiality of the *agora*—as an "empty space," hence as its negative: *tabula rasa* on which to draw and build. Rather, I follow the approach of Jacques Derrida, who defines as "anarchitectural" a mode, however architectural, that does not conceive of disordered and chaotic space simply as "empty:"

> The commitment, the wager: taking account of the architectural or anarchitectural necessity without destroying, without drawing only negative consequences from it. The without-ground of a "deconstructive" and affirmative architecture can cause vertigo, but it is not the void, it is not the gaping and chaotic remainder, the hiatus of destruction.[18]

The conception of the void is thus a discriminating factor in understanding which idea of architecture we are talking about: architecture as a self-representation of power in charge of creating order, or architecture as the production of alternative uses of space. The "void space" is in fact the architectural concept from which to start rethinking the terms, categories and dispositifs with which we conceive and organise space. It is, however, far from simple to demystify the ideological framework that leads us to conceive of "void space" as being "devoid of reality" or at least as a space whose reality we have lost or seems elusive. What is perhaps missing is an idea of reality appropriate to void, and not vice versa. But what kind of void are we talking about? Is it possible to conceive of a void that is not simply a space that can be filled with reality, but that is already real, that is, as it is, a "space of experience"? A starting point can be offered by the confrontation that Jacques Derrida and Daniel Libeskind had regarding the design of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which—as is well known—is built around a void that cannot be accessed by visitors. Derrida's misgivings about Libeskind's project focus precisely on the concept of the "void:"

> This void which has to be made visible is not simply any void. It is a void that is historically determined or circumscribed; and it is not, for example, the indeterminate place in which everything takes place. It is

[18] J. Derrida, "Fifty-two Aphorisms for a Foreword," in *Psyche: Invention of the Other*, vol. 2, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2008, p. 126.

> a void that corresponds to an experience which somewhere else you have called the end of history–the Holocaust as the end of history. You have said, again somewhere else, that architecture should start at the "end" of architecture. The "end" would mean a number of things exemplified here. The end could be a limit, but also the origin. Architecture starting from the end means that it has to understand itself and its practice by coming back to precisely what is its own limit; it must go to its limit in order to start from it.[19]

Leaving aside what most troubles Derrida, namely the spatial representability of the Holocaust even as void, what interests me here is Derrida's definition of "void" as a full space and not as "emptiness," that is, the geometric space of the *tabula rasa*. First, Derrida points out that this void has to do with the "end," with a "limit" that is also "origin." But if the void is not the emptiness as *tabula rasa* that the sovereign politics—that of Plato's legislator—makes available to *its* architecture, what politics can originate from the history-filled space of the void?

Void

"Void" is etymologically derived from the Latin word *vacuum*. In the course of time, the meaning of "vacuous" has come to coincide almost entirely with that of "emptiness." Yet, originally, "vacuous" indicated a particular quality of emptiness: to be "vacant," "devoid" of any determination and pre-established identity. And yet, "space." We are not so distant from the sense Derrida ascribes to *khôra*,[20] of which one of the possible etymological meanings (from *khéros*) is precisely "devoid of." Vacuity defines a peculiar spatiality, different from that of emptiness: the "vacuous" cannot be considered in itself, but its meaning always results from the reference to what it is devoid of. Therefore, the void cannot be reducible to the reality of a place, an identity or a function. Moreover, in English, "void" has a further meaning: "to void" is a transitive verb whose semantic spectrum is of the utmost interest. It means, in fact: "to free a

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[19] J. Derrida, "Response to Daniel Libeskind," *Research in Phenomenology*, 22, 1992, p. 92.

[20] "*Khôra* 'means:' place occupied by someone, country, inhabited place, marked place, rank, post, assigned position, territory, or region. And in fact. *Khôra* will always already be occupied, invested, even as a general place, and even when it is distinguished from everything that takes place in it. Whence the difficulty [...] of treating it as an empty or geometric space." J. Derrida, "Khôra," in *On the Name*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995, p. 109.

certain place from something, to make room, to clear" and, furthermore, "to deprive (something) of legal validity." The original scope of the term "void" is thus the legal one: "having no legal force or effect; not legally binding or enforceable; legally null, invalid or ineffectual." Even the oldest ascertained usage (1290) entails: "having no incumbent, holder, or possessor."[21] Does invalidating the legal status of a space or denying the claim of possession or ownership over it therefore mean abandoning that space, simply leaving it empty? Certainly not. Rather, to void means to return a given space to its original condition, that of being available for use by the community.[22] It basically means making a given space available, whether materially full or empty, abandoned and disused or not.[23]

There is a verb that might suit us: "evacuate," which derives precisely from the term "vacuous." As with "to void", in the case of "to evacuate" we must emphasise its transitivity and active meaning: "to evacuate" also means "to make available."[24] It is interesting to point out how today the meaning of "to evacuate"—but more or less the same has also happened to "to void"—is exactly the opposite of its original meaning, while retaining its legal meaning. As the synonym "to vacate" indicates even more clearly, "to evacuate" does indeed mean the restoration of the

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[21] All these definitions of "void" as an adjective, noun, and verb are taken from the corresponding entry in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

[22] As Yan Thomas and other legal historians have pointed out, Roman law itself, to which a long tradition traces the proprietary and patrimonial character of Western law, contemplated goods that were "unavailable" to appropriation and exchange, and therefore invaluable. These *res* were therefore accessible to the "use" of each member of the *populus*. See Y. Thomas, "La valeur des choses: le droit romain hors la religion," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 6, 2002, pp. 1431–1462. "Vacants" were also defined in Roman law as those properties whose inheritance cannot be accepted by anyone and therefore end up in the availability of the state.

[23] Spaces that are no longer functional and in disuse—urban drifting, discards, waste—often considered simply as "urban voids," take on an obvious exemplarity here, but the discourse being pursued is not intended to find its exclusive application in them.

[24] In "The Destructive Character," Benjamin provides an outline for conceiving such a practice of "evacuation" (he uses the German verb *räumen*, which literally means "to make space"—*Raum*, in fact, means "space"—but can also be rendered as "to evacuate"); this passage, moreover, acquires its own poignancy within the legal context we have outlined: "The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: to evacuate (*räumen*). His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred. [...] The destructive character sees no image hovering before him. He has few needs, and the least of them is to know what will replace what has been destroyed. First of all, for a moment at least, void space—the place where the thing stood or the victim lived. Someone is sure to be found who needs this space without occupying it." W. Benjamin, "The Destructive Character," in *Selected Writings, Vol. 2, Part 2, 1931–1934*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass./London, 2005, p. 541 (translation modified).

original condition of a given space that someone has taken possession of, but what is restored is not the availability of that space for common use, but its legal condition—i.e., in most cases, ownership. In short, an idea of reality is thus affirmed that has come to correspond to the possession or ownership of a given space, implying that the space that is devoid of it is not "vacuous"—that is, available for use—but simply "empty." Devoid of reality.

Project and Use

This conception of "vacuous" space—we must now call it this, rather than "empty"—makes it possible to think of and configure a space of which any given present reality is not the presupposition but rather one among several realised possibilities. This can be a way of delineating the "horizon of expectation" of the future already here, in this "space of experience." Alternatives could then arise, a gap between experience and expectation could be produced: this is how this "space of expectation" could gain its "horizon." Obviously delicate questions open up at this point, especially if—as Derrida warns—one intends to make this space accessible to a politics. In short, based on the discourse so far, it is a question of thinking of a politics that abandons the *acropolis*—and thus its "state" realm—and descends into the disorderly space of the *agora*. And yet, the disorder of the *agora* is only such if observed "from above" and does not require a power, from outside, to bring order to it; the market, in fact, already expresses its own politics, often without regard for the projects of Palace politics, which has indeed already "lowered" itself to its logic. Market self-regulation represents precisely the undermining of the idea—especially in its political meaning—of "project." The space of expectation that configures an absence of alternatives is in fact the product of the irreversible crisis of that idea of projectuality that—on the basis of Koselleck's reading of modernity—drew its meaning from the widening of the horizon of expectation with respect to the space of experience.

Architecture, too, has long been involved in the phenomenon; its project no longer aspires to build the new city, but rather consists of "renderings," a mode of graphic design that fits perfectly within the logic of "augmented reality," since silhouettes are included that foreshadow the use to be expected of the people who will have to inhabit or pass through that particular architectural space. Sometimes it even happens, scrolling through some renders, that one is not able to distinguish whether they

are images of the realised architectures or just their designs. In short, reality and project end up coinciding; this reduces the horizon of the project or, in other words, its utopian dimension.

And yet, there is no lack of examples of conceptions of architecture that have proposed to think of the project as immanent to the space of the *agora*, but which, while operating in the same space, are also not reducible to the logic of the market as a principle of self-regulation without a project. One of these examples is Giancarlo De Carlo's "architecture of participation." During the 1970s, De Carlo theorised and practised[25] an architecture in which use by people is not expected by the project, as is still the case in rendering, but rather use is an integral and immanent part of the project:

> Participation implies the presence of users throughout the entire course of the operation. This fact generates at least three fundamental consequences: each moment of the operation becomes a phase of the project; 'use' also becomes a moment of the operation and therefore a phase of the project; the different moments fade into one another and the operation ceases to be linear, one-way and self-sufficient.[26]

In the architecture of participation, the space of design cannot but be "vacuous" if it is to give use a projectual value; this space cannot therefore be that *tabula rasa* and that "empty space" from which a certain architecture has designed its project. It is probably with reference to this idea of architecture that, not without a taste for provocation, De Carlo invites to "subtract architecture from architects" or, to put it another way, to make architecture after the end of architecture: "The perspective that actually seems very interesting to me is that of subtracting architecture from architects to give it back to the people who use it."[27] The essential aspect in De Carlo's proposal of an architecture of participation, which makes it irreducible to both the architecture that proceeds from the *acropolis* and the projectless architecture of the market, is the attribution of a

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[25] Examples are the project for the Matteotti Village in Terni, only part of which was realised (1969–1975), and the Detailed Plan for the Centre of Rimini, which was rejected by the administration of the Romagna city.

[26] G. De Carlo, *L'architettura della partecipazione*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2013, pp. 69–70. For a contextualisation and analysis of the architecture of participation—which also dwells on its difficulties and ambiguities—within related architectural currents, see Sara Marini's *Introduzione* to De Carlo's book.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 60.

projectual character to use. Such a projectual dimension of use–where conflictuality plays a productive role that is far from being neutralised–defines for De Carlo a "realistic utopia:"

> If a counter-image of the organisation of physical space, without omitting any of the forces acting in the context and taking into account not only their current energies but also their potential energies, disrupts the image that derives from the present artificial situation, then that counter-image is a realistic utopia. It is a utopia that will become a reality when the latent energies have all been liberated and subvert the condition of overpowering that currently compresses them.[28]

Certainly, at the time when De Carlo was writing, although the crisis of Palace politics was already evident, the reduction of the *agora* exclusively to the market and its logic was just looming; yet, he had understood that the political task of architecture was there, in the *agora*, and not in the *acropolis* that had to be pursued, converting the economic exchange of commodities into the political exchange of opinions, taking care that such conversion did not reduce the latter to commodities. Today, it is apparent that the *acropolis* has lowered itself to the level of the market and it is illusory to think that it can regain its privileged position. This has resulted, among other things, in the separation of the political project from the architectural project. However, this does not detract from the fact that the architectural project can still become a political project, but a political project of the *agora* and not of the *acropolis*—that is, a project conducted from the use of space and the horizontal exchange of opinions. After all, it is in the conversion into politics of the space of expectations of the *agora* and, therefore, in its subtraction from the domination of the projectless logic of the market that the architectural project can consist today, after the end of the modern project.

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[28] *Ibid*., p. 62. That De Carlo's position, although a minority one, is not isolated is shown by the fact that, in the same years, Yona Friedman also wrote about "realisable utopias." However, not only does Friedman speak of "consensus" and not of participation, but unlike De Carlo he does not intervene on the statute of the project. See Y. Friedman, *Utopies réalisables*, Éditions de l'éclat, Paris, 2000.

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