Filozofski vestnik | Volume XXXVIII | Number 3 | 2017 | 137–153

Petra Čeferin*

Architecture: Constructing Concrete Utopias

The history of architecture presents us with numerous examples of drawings of utopian worlds that were designed to exist in some other place or in some other time – ideal worlds beyond reality. For those utopias conceived by architects, however, what is also characteristic is that not only have they been interested in drawing, in depicting these ideal worlds, but also particularly interested in how to realize them, how to build them. Such thinking can already be clearly seen at the end of the 18th century, when some of the best-known projects of ideal cities were designed, based on the conviction that with the means of architecture and urban planning at their disposal a better, highly moral and just society could be constructed. Among this group of utopian projects, however, are often counted also modernist projects from the early 20th century that were not conceived as depictions of ideal worlds but were "real projects", explicitly designed to be built and in some cases were indeed actually built. These include urban planning schemes, projects for social housing, and public buildings, all of which tried to follow the latest developments introduced by modern science and technology, and that were designed with the goal of creating a truly modern, quality living environment for all – even for the poorest or lowest social strata.

One example of just such a project is Le Corbusier's project for the low-cost Cité Frugès housing complex, partially realised in 1924 in Pessac, on the outskirts of Bordeaux. Cité Frugès was planned as a garden city for workers employed in the industrial complexes owned by the Bordeaux industrialist Henry Frugè. Frugè read Le Corbusier's celebrated *Vers une architecture*, was fascinated by his progressive views on modern architecture and commissioned the architect to design a complex of 200 houses on a piece of land he owned. Some 50 of these houses were built. This was an experimental project in many respects: in its use of an advanced system of industrial prefabrication and standardised building units, and the use of colour to compose, or, as Le Corbusier put it, to sculpt space.

* Faculty of Architecture, University of Ljubljana

According to the official story, however, all of these projects failed miserably – because they were doomed to fail. Supposedly they were blind idealisations conceived without consideration for the people, for the inhabitants, without paying attention to local cultures and traditions; they have been seen as banal, rootless, determinist, devoid of any civic, historical and human component and similar. This is also why they are considered utopian projects: it is true they were planned to be built, to be realised, but they were imagined and conceived in a way that their ideas and ideals could not be realised; to put it simply, they were unrealistic – in short, utopian.

This interpretation is (still) generally accepted today. Recent years have seen an increasing interest in the modernist project of building a better world – but with a certain reservation. According to this view it is necessary to work toward constructing a better world, but in the process of this pursuit one should leave behind the utopian dimension of the project and instead focus on concrete problems and address the concrete conditions that characterise today's reality.[1] In short, it is time to give up drawing ideal worlds and to focus instead on solving the challenges of this world.

I hold a different position, which is that architecture need not choose between these two options. The dilemma – whether architects should plan visions of the future, conceive new utopias, or instead put an end to such notions and focus on solving concrete problems and face the concrete conditions of the present – is, for architecture, not a relevant dilemma whatsoever. Why? Because architecture – insofar as it is practiced as a creative practice – is always, already, utopia realised. To be more precise: architecture is a utopian practice by virtue of its structural logic; that is, by the way the activity of architecture itself is structured, and by the way this activity appears and functions in the world. And if we really are interested in constructing a better world with architecture, we should insist precisely on its utopian structure, on enacting architecture in the world as a utopian, that is, creative practice.

[1] Some of the problems architects consider to be the problems that need to be addressed by architecture include homelessness, the growing crisis in affordable housing, the loss of environmental quality, the challenge posed by traffic-choked, increasingly unmanageable urban areas, the proliferation of slums, and similar.

When I say that architecture is a utopian practice, however, I understand utopia in a specific sense. To explain briefly: one has to make a distinction between two definitions of utopia: utopia as simple imaginary impossibility, and utopia in the more radical sense of enacting that which within the framework of existing social relations appears "impossible."[2] This second utopia is a-topical only with regard to these relations. In both cases we have to deal with something that is impossible, that doesn't have its place within the existing reality, that is a non-place with regard to this reality – that is *a-topical*. In the first case this is a vision of some better world – a world that enjoys a perfect, harmonious social order free of antagonisms – that is unattainable, nothing but a hope, a dream. It is something radically *other*, *outside* the given world. In the second case, however, this otherness, this exteriority is actually enacted *in* this world, *inside* the given world. And it is enacted precisely as *otherness*, as *exteriority*. The imagined better world thus functions in the way of opening up a space in the given world for something that is radically heterogeneous to it. It is a piercing of a world where everything has its place with a non-place, with a moment of the *a-topical*.

This is precisely what architecture as a creative practice does: it affirms something in the world that from the point of view of this world seems impossible, something that isn't part of this world. More precisely, which *is* in this world as something that isn't part of this world. In other words, architecture works in the way that in the situation, that is, within the set of various possibilities, affirms its *impossibility*; something that for the given situation and its regimes of knowledge doesn't count, that doesn't actually exist. It does this in the form of the objects it produces, such as buildings and other built structures, structural details, drawings, digital renderings, texts.[3] If it succeeds in doing this, such objects are objects of a special kind. They are an expression of the time and space in which they were made but can't be reduced to this time and space. They are anachronistic and a-topical objects: objects that are of and within the time in which they were made and simultaneously outside that time; and which are inside the space in which

[2] Here I refer to an elaboration of the meaning of utopia developed by Slavoj Žižek. See: S. Žižek, *The market mechanism for the race of devils*, http://www.lacan.com/zizliberal2.

[3] It is unimporant whether products of architecture are built or only remain depictions of some other, utopian worlds that are not even meant to be built. It matters only that they are constructed in the way – and such a construction does not need to be a built structure, it can also take the form of a drawing, a model, a text – that the moment of that which for the given situation is impossible, is affirmed, articulated in them.

they were made and simultaneously outside it. In other words, they are objects that pierce their given temporal and situational or cultural determination. They are trans-historical and trans-situational objects. They persist in *different* times and are valid for *different* cultures as something significant for architecture and society. Just such an object of a special kind is, in my view, also the Cité Frugès housing complex, and this is why it is worthy of attention. We will return to this assertion once we have moved through certain key constituent precepts.

Some starting points: Tectonic construction and the joint

Such a-topical and anachronistic objects are produced by all creative practices, and all such practices produce them in their own particular ways. Architecture – more precisely, the design practice of architecture – produces them in the way of construction, in the construction of joints, architectural or tectonic joints. With this claim I subscribe to one of the established views in architecture, according to which architecture is the art of construction or the poetics of construction. This view was brought back into the foreground of the larger architectural discussion by architect Kenneth Frampton in the late 1990s. In so doing Frampton succeeded to develop and present such position as a productive starting point for the contemporary thinking of architecture, both in theory and design practice. Let me summarise his theory in a few points, which also serve as the starting points for what I will try to develop herein.

That architecture is the poetics of construction is Frampton's response to what he recognised as the process of the trivialization or commodification of architecture. He further delineated this process as the understanding of architecture as scenography and its reduction to a commodity – or, as he put it, a giant commodity.[4] In order to stop or avoid this process one has to return to that which is both intrinsic to architecture and specific to it. And this is the way architecture produces its products – in Frampton's view this specific architectural way of production is tectonic construction. Frampton explains tectonics as craft in the original Greek sense of *poiesis*, the craft of making, that is, the making of mate-

4 Kenneth Frampton, "Rappel à l'Ordre: The Case for the Tectonic", in: K. Frampton, *Labour, Work and Architecture. Collected Essays in Architecture and Design*, Phaidon Press, London 2007, p. 91. Frampton further develops his theory of tectonics in his major work: *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*.

rial products. On the one hand tectonics is thus the craft of making, of handling materials, which is what both an architect and a carpenter-craftsman have in common. But on the other hand, as Frampton emphasises, tectonics shouldn't merely be understood in an instrumental, technical sense, as the craft of making that follows established procedures and techniques. In architectural or tectonic construction something else is at stake – but an adequate technical solution of what we could call a mere utilitarian object. What is at stake – and this is one of Frampton's key theses – is the production of *things*, *architectural things*. It is, however, important how Frampton understands that which he designates as an (architectural) thing.

Firstly, he describes architectural things in a way similar to that which I described architectural objects earlier. Frampton writes that they are time-bound, but at the same time they are "excised from the continuity of time";[5] he defines architecture as an activity that "is anachronistic by definition", and emphasises that "duration and durability are its ultimate values."[6] In short, he describes them as the objects that are within their space and time in such a way as to be irreducible to them. Secondly, Frampton determines the status of architectural things – and here he refers to Heidegger – in opposition to a sign. This is how he explains such in one of the key paragraphs of his essay "Rappel à l'ordre: The Case for the Tectonic":

> Thus one may assert that building is ontological rather than representational in character, and that built form is a presence rather than something standing for an absence. In Martin Heidegger's terminology we may think of it as a 'thing' rather than a 'sign'.[7]

Based on this opposition between a thing and a sign, the built form as a thing appears as something that is directly given in what it is. A thing presents itself in its being or in its ontological meaning. As such it is supported in itself and

5 Frampton, "Rappel à l'Ordre", p. 103.

6 Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture*, MIT Press and Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Cambridge, Mass., London and Chicago 1996, p. 27.

7 Frampton, "Rappel à l'Ordre", p. 93.

in this sense it is self-supporting, independent.[8] In contrast to this, a built form as a sign is something that is not self-supporting, that does not present itself. Its fundamental function is in this case representational: as a sign, a built form represents or shows something that is not already itself, it exhibits or reveals something else, something absent or hidden. Architecture, which is a thing, to repeat once again, is not therefore primarily representational – such architecture Frampton calls "architecture as scenography" – but counts as a material object, in its immediate corporeal or material presence. Of course architecture also represents or bears various meanings, but this is secondary. What is of primary importance is that it presents itself, that it is the appearance of architecture itself, in its meaninglessness.

I will focus on that which Frampton considers to be the appearance or the embodiment of architecture at the smallest scale, as a kind of an atom of architecture, which is a detail of a structural joint.[9] Frampton describes such a joint as "the fundamental nexus around which a building comes into being, that is to say, comes to be articulated as a presence in itself."[10] So, in architecture a structural joint isn't simply a connection. But it is, according to Frampton, the fundamental architectural element, it is the *presence of architecture*. He formulates this even more explicitly when he writes that a structural joint is "a point of ontological condensation".[11] What does this mean? It means that an architectural joint is that key architectural element around which architecture as a thing is articulated. In a joint, with a joint, the *architecturalness of architecture*, or better, the *materiality of architecture as a thing* is present.

---

8 *Cf.* Martin Heidegger, "The Thing", in: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, transl. Albert Hofstader, New York 1971, pp, 163–180.

9 An important ground for Frampton's theory of tectonics and in particular for his thesis that a structural joint is a fundamental element of architecture, are the writings of Gottfried Semper and Karl Bötticher. Both 19th century architects advocated the view that architecture was a poetics of construction. It has to be mentioned that they were both interested also in the question how to understand materiality that is characteristic for architecture and that results from tectonic construction.

10 Frampton, "Rappel à l'Ordre", p. 95.

11 "There is a spritual value residing in the »thingness« of the constructed object, so much so that the generic joint becomes a point of ontological condensation rather than a mere connection." Frampton, "Rappel à l'Ordre", *op. cit.*, p. 95. It seems that here Frampton withdraws from the radicality of his thesis that architecture is a material thing, as he simply replaces the thingness of the thing with a spiritual value. In so doing he reduces the product of architecture, in opposition to his own theory, to a sign.

The question that occurs at this point – and which Frampton does not address – however, is what kind of materiality is at stake here, what is the materiality of architecture as a thing. Keeping in mind the fact that a thing is an object of a special kind, that it is an a-topical and trans-temporal object, this can't simply consist in the materiality of building materials. It can only be a special kind of materiality. I would argue – and this is the first point with which I supplement Frampton's theory – that this special kind of materiality is that which in the process of architectural construction is produced or created anew. It is produced precisely in the way of constructing tectonic joints – and appears in the world in the form of joints. The second point that I bring to Frampton's theory is this – that it is produced and appears in the form of joints of various scales. Not only does it appear in the small scale of the details of structural joints, but also in larger scales, all the way up to the largest scale of what I call a gigantic joint. With this I mean the connection between a building or some other built structure and its context. Let me begin with a small joint, a detail of a structural joint.

Constructing Tectonic Joints – Constructing Architectural Materiality

I. Small Joints

As an illustrative example I will use a structural detail of a church and community centre in Viikki, Finland, designed by JKMM Architects.

Here we see six wooden structural elements, four vertical and two horizontal; and at the same time we don't see simply these six connected elements. We also see something else: we see before us – as we would probably all, or at least most of us, agree – a *successful architectural solution*. In what is this successful architectural solution?

As "objectively speaking" there is nothing else before us but six connected elements, there is only one answer to this question: a successful architectural solution is contained precisely *in the way these elements are connected* – in short, *in the joint*.

So, how does their connection work? What is produced with it?

Here we have just six connected elements. Their joint, the specific scheme according to which these elements are connected, is not present as some addition-

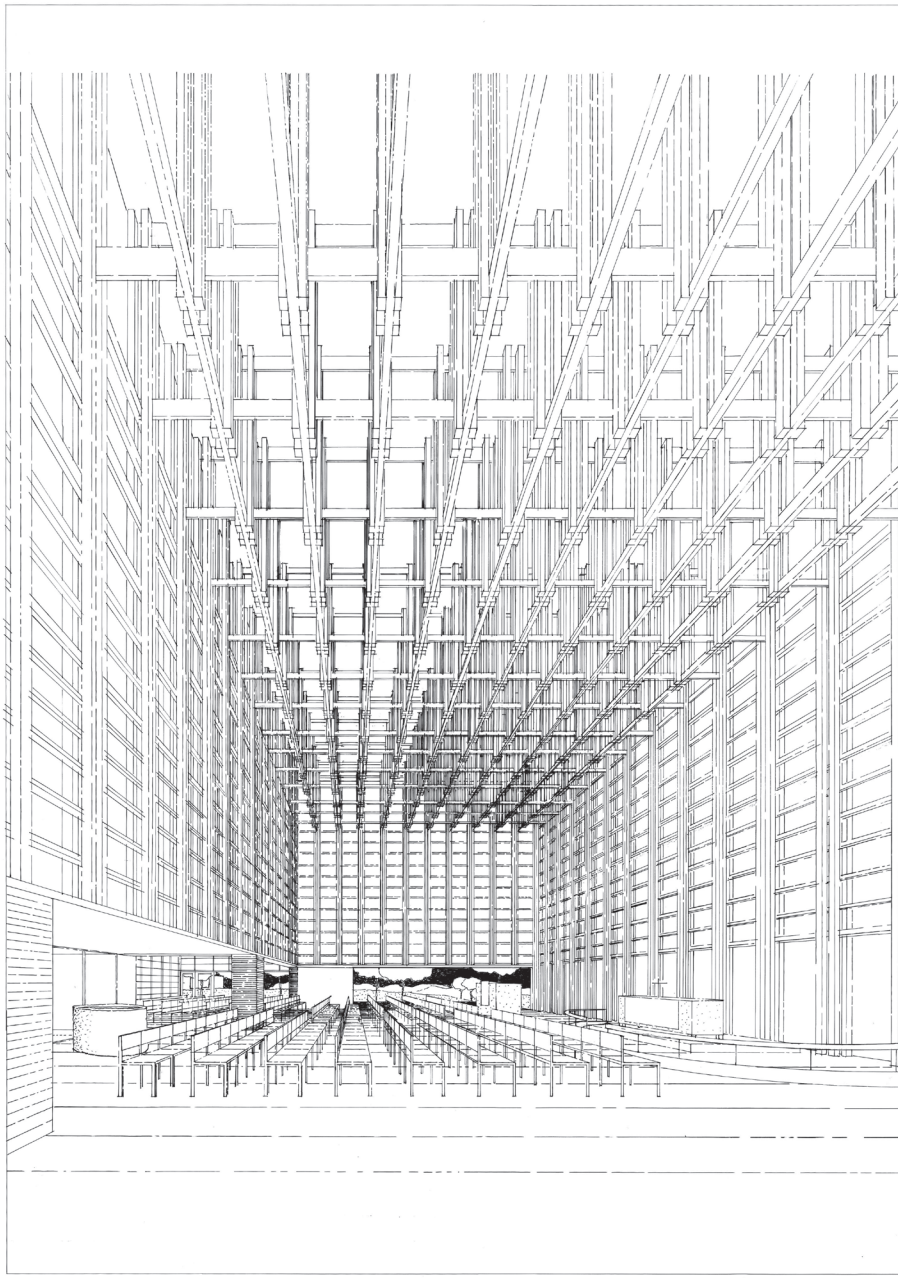

Fig. 1: Church and community centre in Viikki, Finland, designed by JKMM Architects; drawing of the interior by Samuli Miettinen (JKMM)

al, seventh element. Strictly speaking, we can't see the connection as such. We can't see the joint itself. The joint is present only in its *material effect* – in the way that we see or can see the connection of the six elements as a *successful architectural solution*. We see them as the *materialisation of architecture*.

The joint disappears, so to speak, in the solution and comes to life as the solution itself. It has a paradoxical status: *it is present as absent*. We can't see the joint – in that sense it is *absent*. And it is *present* in the sense that it produces material effects: it makes it possible to see the six wooden elements as a *body of architecture*, although "objectively" speaking we have nothing else in front of us but six connected elements.

So, as the result of a successful articulation of the joint we get an object that is Two at the same time: it is an architectural object, a materialisation of architecture; and at the same time it is an entirely ordinary object, a technical, structural detail.

This happens if the connection of elements is successfully articulated, if they are brought together well. If the connection isn't successful, if the joint is poorly articulated, we see only the elements and a failed attempt to connect them. In this case there is no architecture present, only a technical, structural detail.
If the joint is successful, however, things become more complex. Let's look at this in the case of the structural detail depicted in the photograph.

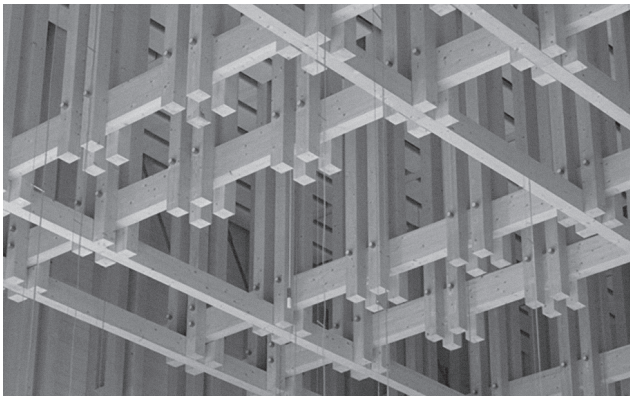

Fig. 2: Church and community centre in Viikki, structural detail / architectural joint; photo by Kimmo Räisänen

This detail is a structural joint, an element of the bearing structure, that is to say, an ordinary, useful or utilitarian object; and yet it is not only that. It is a utilitarian object in the way that it is at the same time also *something else* – it is also a successful architectural solution, a materialization of architecture. To which one must add: *without positively being that "something else"*.

The same can be said for the other dimension of this detail, for the detail as an architectural object. It is an object that sparks our sensual perception and expresses an idea of architecture. In short, it is an aesthetic object of architecture. But it isn't only that. It is an aesthetic object of architecture in the way that it is, at the same time, also *something else* – it is also a structural detail, that is, an ordinary, utilitarian object. And we must add here as well: *without objectively being "something else"*.

What does this mean, that each of the two objectal forms of the structural joint is something else or other than itself, without *objectively* or *positively* being "something else"?

This simply means that this "something else" isn't a kind of addition that could be subtracted from either of the two objects, be separated from them. It is not possible to subtract this "something else" from the utilitarian object and arrive at a pure utilitarian object, to a "pure usefulness" or "pure utility". Nor is it possible to subtract this "something else" – the utilitarian value – from the aesthetic object and arrive at "pure aesthetics" or "pure architecture".

The two components or dimensions of the object are in this structural detail connected in the way that they are inseparable. But they are not fused into one. This structural detail, which is an example of an architectural thing, is Two at the same time – or more precisely, it is Two in One. The simultaneity of Two in One is the result of an *architectural or tectonic joint*. The architectural or tectonic joint is the joint that works in two distinct ways at the same time. It simultaneously connects AND separates the Two.

The dimensions of utility and architecturalness are in the architectural thing connected such that the result of this connection is a single object, and yet in this single object a difference is articulated – a difference that is at the same time also a joint between both dimensions. This difference/joint is *intrinsic* to the

object. And it is from this joint/difference that the object or architectural thing is made. To put it briefly: an architectural thing is an *object with an internal difference*. Because of this difference it is an object of a special kind – one that is always also something else, something other than what it is. It is an object that is not identical to itself.

In this simple example of a structural detail we can see the logic that is characteristic for the constructing of architecture in general. It is the logic that is in a way illogical. The operation of constructing architecture – and this is clearly seen in the case of this detail – is not merely the process of adding parts and elements in accordance with a simple formula, like 1+1=2. In order to define architectural joints, we must abandon the elementary logic of mathematical addition. We can describe the operation of architectural construction only with an in-equation – 1+1≠2. Or in our case: 1+1+1+1+1+1≠6.

II. Gigantic joints

The same logic is at work in the case of the gigantic joint, that is, in the connection between a built structure and its context. Architects, if they work seriously, never design just a building, but think about a building together with the site for which the building is planned. And if they succeed in designing a building-on-site well, then it seems as if, together with a new building, also its site, the context itself appeared, as if anew. It seems that only as the result of their successful connection did they both come into being. As a simple example of such a successful connection – a successful gigantic joint – let us take the example of a bridge.

If a bridge is well constructed, that is, architecturally constructed, the connection between the bridge and the landscape is not simply the sum of the two – the bridge and the landscape, its context – but we can actually say that their connection too, is indirectly present, their joint. This connection is present *indirectly* in the way we see *both the bridge and its context* as *a place* – the *place where the bridge is*. In short, we see the bridge and its context as the *place of the bridge*. *A place* is a successful joint – in our case this is the joint of the bridge and the landscape – into One, which is in itself already Two. (This Two is the place of the bridge, of course.) Which is why we can call examples of a successful or well-articulated gigantic joint simply a *place*.

Fig. 3: An example of a gigantic joint: bridge Hõse in Suldal, Norwey, designed by Rintala-Eggertson Architects 2008-2013; photo by Dag Jenssen.

Just as in the case of a small joint the joint itself is not directly visible; also in the case of a gigantic joint, the place itself is not directly visible. It is not a positive element of the situation, it is not something objectively given. Instead of a place, *topos*, it would thus be more appropriate to call it a non-place, *a-topos*. Because, to repeat once again, it is not an additional element that would appear on-site; we have before us only a bridge and its context. And yet it works, it has effects. It is present in its material effects, in the way that both the bridge and the landscape appear as objects of a special kind. As was formulated earlier, it seems as if they both appeared anew.

The bridge isn't simply a useful and usable object that enables the crossing of the river, but it is also something else – it is also an *instance of architecture*. And the context isn't simply a set of specific local conditions, but it is also something else – it is also a *localised context*. They both appear as objects of a special kind, objects that are always also something else than themselves without actually being something else. They appear as objects with an internal difference.

An architect is one who succeeds in creating such objects with an internal difference. Of this difference we can say that it is minimal or even null, as it were. Why null? Because it is not directly visible – we have only a single object in front of us, like a bridge in its context, and a context with its bridge. At the same time, however, it is not really something null. For architecture it is crucial. This minimal, as it were null difference, works in the way – and this is what is essential here – that we see in a perceptibly sensorial way, some material object: a detail, a bridge, its context, as a *materialization of architecture; as its body*.

This is why, for such a structure we can say that it has a *double materiality*: the ordinary materiality of building materials, wood, concrete, bricks, steel, and the materiality of architecture itself. Both materialities are inseparably connected: there is only a single object in front of us (a bridge in its context, a structural detail, etc.). The materiality of architecture itself is not visible as such. Yet it is more durable and enduring than the materiality of wood, concrete, bricks or steel. It is that which gives successful architectural products – architectural things – their particular resilience and resistance in the face of time and situation. It is that which in an architectural thing is the trans-situational and trans-temporal.

This special materiality is that which in an architectural thing is created *anew*. It is created as the result of a successful construction, a successful articulation of the architectural or tectonic joint. This is the materiality of architecture as a *thing*.

III. Joints of the object and the subject

Until now we have focused on the production of a special kind of materiality of architectural things, that is, we have focused on the "objective" side of this production. But what about the "subjective" side? The "subjective" side are the human beings, the people who are involved in the process of the production and reception of architecture, that is, its producers and users. Let us first focus on the producers, the architects.

I said earlier that an architect is one who succeeds in creating objects with an internal difference. To be yet more precise, however, only when an architect creates an object with an internal difference does she become an architect. An architect who practices architecture as a creative practice isn't simply one who as a sovereign actor creates her objects. It would be better to say that exactly the opposite is true: it is the object that creates the architect. This object is an object of a special kind, one that is not directly visible and yet for architecture is crucial. It might be best to describe this object using Lacan's concept of the object-cause of desire – here as the object-cause of architecture; or, in short, as the architectural cause. We can also define it as that specific architectural idea that an architect tries to realise in the construction of her objects. The architectural cause is a firm presupposition as well as that which guides and drives an architect in her work. But as such a driving force and a presupposition it exists only in architect's capacity to construct and re-construct it in her products again and again. It manifests itself in the form of that minimal, internal difference that

gives a successful architectural product, an architectural thing, its special materiality, and as the result of which this thing remains eternally something else, something that differs from itself.

It is owing to this internal difference that an architectural thing itself works as an open question. It is an object with a hole of meaning; or, as I also designated it here, an object with an internal difference. Its internal difference works as a ceaseless call to repeatedly rethink architecture, it is something that triggers our thinking and acting, each new attempt to repeat that which in an architectural solution set our thinking in motion. Not, of course, to repeat the solution itself, but rather to repeat that *cause* that manifests itself in it – the architectural cause. This way of acting – which is summarised by the formulation "to create oneself as an architect" – can be called the process of subjectification of an architect. This is the process in which those who enter architecture – from the architect to the many possible users of architecture – become subjects.

The figure of subject on the most elementary level designates, as we know, somebody who thinks independently. It is a synonym for independent thinking. However, for the process of subjectification – which is the modus operandi not only of architecture but of all creative practices – a specific independence is characteristic. This is a double independence; that is, the coinciding of independent *thinking* and independent *acting*. Subjectification or the becoming of a subject therefore means to be in the process of becoming an actor of independent thinking and acting.[12]

This kind of acting is characterised by an inner necessity, almost an enforced action. Such a condition is well expressed by architect Zvi Hecker, when he says he "draws because he has to think".[13] According to Hecker, an architect *has to* think. I understand this in the following way: what literally *forces* him to think is the *cause* that guides him as an architect and which he, as an architect, tries to *objectify*, render *present*, *visible* in the world. He is trying to do that in order to be – to be as an architect. And this is why he draws. Drawing is a way, one of the ways, of constructing "the cause of architecture" in the world. Only by

[12] This is a "shared independence"; the subject shares her independence with that cause which drives her in her thinking and acting, that is, with the architectural cause.

[13] Zvi Hecker and Andres Lepik (eds.), *Sketches*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern 2012, p. 24.

constructing it in the world, in the form of material objects, such as drawings – or structural details, buildings, bridges – can he find it. And precisely because of what he *finds* in a drawing can he continue, make another drawing, another construction, so that he can *find again* that which he is looking for, so that he can repeat that encounter through which he becomes what he *is – is as an architect*.

An architect that is driven by the architectural cause thus not only produces objects with a potentially trans-situational and trans-temporal materiality, but also acts in a potentially trans-situational and trans-temporal way. She is in the given world in the way that in the midst of that world and its logic acts regardless of that logic. The firm point of support or grounding of her acting is that specific architectural cause or idea which is, in relation to the given world, its moment of a-topical, and which exists only in new attempts to objectify it in the world.[14] She pursues her own logic, the logic of the architectural cause – that is, the logic of creativity. In this way she tears herself out of the mechanism of the market-instrumental logic that so organises the world today.

By creating the possibility to tear oneself out of the mechanism of the given world, architecture – like all creative practices – opens up this possibility not only to architects, but to all. Not only to those who themselves construct architecture, not only to the producers, but also the observers and users of architecture. Here lies the universal dimension of architecture.

*

This is precisely how the project Cité Frugès, designed by Le Corbusier, worked and continues to work. It has triggered the thinking and acting of architects, has inspired various attempts to repeat, in their own way and in different situations, that which in their view succeeded in this project and which they recognised as a good solution. Another such successful housing project, which is in a specific sense a repetition of the Cité Frugès complex, is the PREVI housing project designed in Lima in the late 1960s. This is a project for low-cost hous-

14 The subjectification of an architect is that way of working that is not driven by financial motives, nor by the challenge of (creating) the new or the creation of various "architectural effects", nor by an appeal to put architecture in the service of society. Rather, it is the way of working that is driven by the architectural cause – that is to say, by something that is, with regard to the given world, something radically other.

Fig. 4: Cité Frugès Housing in Pessac, France, designed by Le Corbusier 1923–1926; photo by Jeff Bickert.

ing for 1,500 families that also includes community facilities such as schools, sports centres, services and infrastructure. Another such project is the Quinta Monroy housing complex designed by the Elemental collective in Chile in 2006.

It is important to note, however, that the Cité Frugès complex hasn't only functioned as good architecture for architects alone, but also for its users, for its inhabitants. When it was built, it was very poorly accepted and actually remained uninhabited for years. It actually didn't quite fully come to life until the 1970s. Then it was precisely the inhabitants who recognised it as a successful housing solution, as good architecture, at which point they began the process of acquiring heritage status for the houses. Today the complex is included in the Unesco Cultural Heritage register.[15] But what is more important is this: that the users recognised the complex as good housing can be seen in the fact that these houses and gardens live on, most animatedly, that the users have been

[15] *Cf.* http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1321 (28.8.2016).

developing them both in tune with the starting points outlined by Le Corbusier and in their own specific ways.

The central architectural capacity of this project – which in my view is also one of the key characteristics of good housing solutions in general – lies in the fact that it allows, even encourages such development, such continuation. Le Corbusier did not plan it as such, but it is contained, nevertheless, in his project. This is evidenced by the condition in which the complex and many of its houses stand today, in the fact that they work as a distinctly good living environment. And this is also what has been systematically, in a planned way, developed in the aforementioned examples of low-cost housing projects that were inspired or indeed caused by the Cité Frugès. Both the Previ housing and the Quinta Monroy complex are explicitly designed as "unfinished" projects, they are envisioned as projects to be continued by their users – who would as a result become their inhabitants, would actually inhabit the projects.

In conclusion I would offer that the Cité Frugès is indeed a successful realisation of utopia – and it is successful because it is an instance of architecture, of good architecture. It is not a failed project; it is a project that truly lives, in the sense of both meanings that are important for architecture: it lives on its site in the way that its inhabitants keep developing it as an instance of architecture; and it lives in the form of different architectural projects that try to repeat that which succeeded in it.

To conclude by returning to the beginning: The utopia of the "impossible" connects in and by itself both of the definitions of utopia I mentioned in the beginning. It connects them in a way that the demand for a different, egalitarian world of free people no longer represents or works as an unattainable ideal of some other, radically different world – but as a point of orientation in our acting and thinking within this existing world. This is why, for the practice of architecture, it isn't actually enough to confront the concrete problems and conditions of the here and now. It is of equal or perhaps even greater importance to preserve the "idealism" inherent in a stubborn militant insistence on the utopian structure of this very practice.