

THE POTENTIALS FOR THE ARCHAIC TODAY

Architecture and philosophy

Colloquium at the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine
Paris, France – 15-16 June 2018

CALL FOR PAPERS

Transition, uncertainties and practices of initiality

At the same time they make territories more fragile, new contemporary circumstances of uncertainty and disorientation bear witness to the emergence, perhaps the resurgence, of practices involving recommencing, repetition, and resetting. What we mean by this is a very broad scope of approaches that could respond to the uncertainty and complexity of the contemporary world by taking up again the gesture of building in its archaic dimensions. These experiments in *initiality* take on highly diverse forms and are expressed in various milieux:

- reviving archetypal building modes (hut, cave, monoliths, etc.),
- taking up once again the primitive gesture of 'building' (logics of stacking, simple assemblages, excavation, etc.),
- phenomenological approach and redefinition of architecture as creating atmospheres, purposely choosing to ignore cultural conditions, in favor of bodily experience,
- reinvesting in basic materials (earth, stone, wood...) and their use...
- returning to roots by linking up with nature in its double – physical and symbolic – dimension (geography, elements, etc.)



Peter Zumthor, Aires Mateus, OMA



Rural Studio, cabaned'enfants, Francis Kéré

Encouraged by eminent figures in contemporary architecture such as Peter Zumthor or Aires Mateus, by professions or groups engaged in the *empowerment* of builder-dwellers, such as Rural Studio, Francis Kéréor the Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée, these experiments all share, in spite of the immense differences that separate them, a confidence in these archaic gestures to once again infuse the act of building with meaning and seek references less in the wealth of the learned culture of architecture and the

city than in the originary and ahistorical experience of human settlement practices. Going back to initial conditions is a high impossible challenge in a world deeply marked by anthropization.

The hypothesis underwriting this colloquium is that these strategies – rather these strategems of initiality – are far from representing a regression, a retrograde approach, at the same time that they “provide us with bearings” by proposing simple actions, all of which aim at resisting powerful forms of separation (Edgar Morin’s *déliance*), dividing, and dissociating that fragilize inhabited places. This separation, at work in the modes of acting (specialization of tasks and “experts”, administrative divisions, sectorization of management authorities) as well as in the modes of intelligibility of milieux (disciplines, natural sciences and cultural sciences...), whose deleterious effects Morin analyzed, conflicts with the fundamental alliances and linkages necessary to the act of building and the practices involved in inhabiting places. The archaic gesture, that is, the initial (*arkhè*), inaugural gesture, thus aims at re-appropriating this special moment, before divisions and sharing, whether they take place between human institutions and the geographic substrate or between the various biological, psychic, social, symbolic and cultural dimensions of inhabiting. So it is that an alternative shape is outlined, perhaps a primitive and essential one, of territorial intelligence – yes, far from *smart cities* – but one that is committed to a relationship with the world which is more creative and more originary.

The archaic *today*

This formula might sound paradoxical. Does not the archaic belong to a long-gone “epoch”? Are we not very far from these origins? Is there still any connection between architecture, urbanism, landscape design and what might at first appear to be original, primitive, crude or prehistoric? Are not our territories palimpsests made up of a long and complex history that carries them infinitely far away from the earliest ages?

The use of the term archaic is not neutral and at once necessitates making a crucial conceptual distinction. For historical thinking, the archaic is indeed a period, an era, an age preceeding other epochs that are classical, modern, post-modern.... The word *arkhè* that gives us archaic emphasizes the origin, the departure point, the beginning. According to this conception and in a progressivist perspective, the archaic is what brings us back to ancestrality, to the obscurities that our civilization was thought to have done away with. In a contemporary context, the archaic is called upon only to refer to inertias, retrograde forms, behaviors, ways of thinking that are at best out-dated and obsolete, and at worst dangerous. According to the order of historical temporality and the values of progressivism, the archaic is thus what we are inexorably distanced from, some far-away origin in the light of which we measure our own development.

In philosophy, but also in the field of natural sciences, genetics or even psychoanalysis, the archaic does not have the same meaning. If it does involve qualifying a nascent or commencing phase, this is not to be relegated to some distant past; on the contrary, the archaic is still and ever at work. Stem cells, the unconscious, such principles have in common this quality of acting at the very heart of current concerns. It is even specific to the archaic to persist and resist the passage of time, the contingencies of the moment, of the present. It is thus a question of an ahistorical category, yes, of a beginning, but of a beginning that continues. In a certain sense, it is the atemporality, the atemporality of the archaic that paradoxically makes it acutely relevant.

One of the theoretical stakes involved in the colloquium thus consists in better identifying the figures of expression relating to the archaic in contemporary architecture, as well as seeking the more or less conscious patterns of these resurgences.

The archaic immediately immerses us in an ambiguity: is the return of the archaic a form of conservatism or it is, on the contrary, a new celebration of invention?

In order to lend substance to this debate, to map out these initiality experiments and deploy the various meanings they involve, we propose a colloquium at the City of Architecture that will interweave the threads of architecture and philosophy. This call for papers is addressed to:

- architects, urbanists and landscape designers for whom this notion is invigorating and who wish to present

and share their own questions,

- teachers and researchers whose courses and/or research interweave with these initiality experiments,
- philosophers who see in architecture an opportunity to deepen their own thinking about this concept and its relevance.

Please send proposals for papers maximum 300 words in french or in english before 31 January 2018 to the following address: gerphau@gmail.com

The conference will be conducted in french or in english.

PROJECTED CALENDAR

30 November 2017: Call for papers.

31 January 2018: Deadline for proposals

20 February 2018: Selection of papers and response to participants

15 and 16 June 2018: Colloquium at the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Paris.

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Xavier BONNAUD, architect, doctorate in urbanism, professor of architecture at the ENSA of Paris-La-Villette and the École Polytechnique, Director of the GERPHAU.

Stéphane BONZANI, architect, doctorate in philosophy, professor of architecture at the ENSA of Clermont-Ferrand and the École Spéciale d'Architecture, researcher and co-chair of the GERPHAU.

Marie-Hélène CONTAL, Director for Cultural Development at the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine.

Philippe MADEC, architect and urbanist, professor at the ENSA de Bretagne.

David MARCILLON, architect, maître-assistant at the ENSA of Clermont-Ferrand, Director of the RST PhilAU (Science Theme Network/Réseau Scientifique Thématique PhilAU).

Daniel PAYOT, philosopher, professor of philosophy of art at Marc Bloch University.

David VANDERBURGH, architect, professor of architecture in the Architecture Department, architectural engineering and urbanism, at the University of Louvain.

Chris YOUNES, philosopher, emeritus professor at the ENSA of Paris-La Villette and the École Spéciale d'Architecture, founder of the GERPHAU and the international Network PhiLAU.

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Xavier BONNAUD, Stéphane BONZANI, Dimitri SZUTER, Chris YOUNÈS

PARTNERS

The international colloquium THE POTENTIALS FOR THE ARCHAIC TODAY is an initiative of the GERPHAU lab, research group for Philosophy, Architecture, Urban (Architecture School of Paris La Villette, EA 7486), in partnership with Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine and philAU (a scientific thematic network : Philosophy, Architecture, Urban). This conference is also supported by ARENA (Architectural Research in Europe Network Association), a shared platform that aims to promote, support, develop and disseminate high-quality research in all fields of architecture in the widest sense. The Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture and the Caisse des Dépôts also support this event.

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