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JÖRG H. GLEITER, *ARCHITEKTURTHEORIE ZUR EINFÜHRUNG*, JUNIUS VERLAG, HAMBURG, 2022.

The fact that Jörg Gleiter's book *Architekturtheorie zur Einführung* was published in probably the most prominent German edition of Junius-Reihe's introductory texts can serve as an indicator that philosophical reflection on the problems of architecture is widely recognized as a legitimate philosophical discipline and issue. Gleiter's opus itself contributes to this significantly. The interweaving of considerations about "theory" or the theoretical element in Gleiter's also practically oriented concept of the theory of architecture includes various types of theoretical thinking – originally architectural, cultural, historical – among which philosophical concepts stand out as key places of defining architectural thinking.

In the introductory part, Gleiter includes architecture in the group of those objects, institutions and activities with which humans indirectly ensure their existence. From this he derives a very extensive definition of the theory of architecture: "The theory of architecture is a form of critical reflection on the conception, creation and effectiveness of architecture, as well as on the function of architecture in a wider, dynamically ever-changing field of culture. The goal of critical reflection is to review, confirm or formulate representations and models on the basis of which humans create for themselves the only suitable environment that differs from pure naturalness."¹ The three basic characteristics of architectural theory are its focus on practice, the dependence of architecture on theory, and the difference between a practical and a scientific kind of theory. Namely, architecture is necessarily practically oriented, whereby architectural work of course moves in the space of real possibilities, where it

¹ J. Gleiter, *Architekturtheorie zur Einführung*, p. 13.

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encounters resistances that return it to its theoretical foundations. They are implicitly or explicitly (design, construction, use) crucial to architecture itself. Gleiter points to a number of influential architects who have combined architectural theory and architectural practice in their work. In its scholarly form, architectural theory can be understood as an explanation of the implicit theoretical knowledge contained in architectural practice.

Gleiter organized his book according to basic concepts, trying to avoid the systematics that would be dictated by the usual divisions into epochs and paradigms. Given that similar objections can be made to the approach based on basic concepts, that is, that basic concepts generate a certain type of conceptual constancy and normativity according to their structure, Gleiter notes that apart from a certain ontological and cognitive-theoretical inherent constancy, basic concepts are also characterized by what he calls the historical index, which refers to the fact that theoretical synchronicity always overlaps with historical diachrony.

The basic terms featured are sign, phenomenon, ornament, language, form and space.

Referring directly to Kant and the systematization of categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Gleiter formulates four categories of architectural theory: quantity, quality, relation, and modality. In terms of quantity, which according to Kant is divided into universal, particular, singular, Gleiter makes a distinction between philosophy of architecture, which deals with the general function of architecture within cultural and social relations, architectural theory with its specific practice of conceiving, implementing and operating architectural ideas, and finally critique of architecture focusing on individual architectural cases. Gleiter understands the categorical determination of quality, which according to Kant is divided into affirmative, negative and infinite judgments, in a historical sense and differentiates between thinking about architecture, traditional architectural theory and critical architectural theory. In fact, these three phases testify how and to what extent social and historical changes affect changes in the way architecture is reflected upon. Thus, Gleiter emphasizes that certain changes in the understanding of architecture, such as the crisis of architecture in the nineteenth century and the criticism of modern architecture that began in the 1950s, can be connected to certain historical turning points, such as technical progress and civil emancipation, or the development of pop culture in the middle of the twentieth century. The category of relation in Gleiter's system of architectural

categories deals with the differentiation of scientific conceptions into anthropological, cognitive and aesthetic. The anthropological conception thematizes the relation between architecture and human needs and desires, the cognitive-theoretical tackles the relation between architecture and cognitive processes, while the aesthetic deals with the relation between architecture and sensory appearance and perception. When it comes to the category of modality related to the possibilities of doing and making, Gleiter distinguishes between the modalities of designing (conception), making (construction) and using (performance).

Considering the difference between the linguistic and architectural sign, Gleiter relies on Jacques Derrida and the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, which allows him to emphasize the “naturalness” of the architectural sign, that is, point out the materiality of the architectural sign, through which it primarily refers to itself. According to Gleiter, the architectural sign represents the unity of materiality, presence and form. However, he also points out the peculiarity of the architectural sign, which refers to its double character of simultaneously indicating presence and absence, whereby it actually transcends the mere materiality and presence of its own phenomenon. Therefore, the architectural sign is always determined by its own materiality, from which it simultaneously refers to an immaterial intelligible moment. Building on this elementary insight into the character of the architectural sign, Gleiter also systematizes the process of its perception, distinguishing between image, phenomenon and performance. Namely, the process of perceiving an architectural object generally begins with the phase of observing the pictorial appearance of the object. During this phase, the spectator gets a perspective on a given form and content. Through more detailed observation it passes into the phase of phenomenal, i.e., material appearance, in which the object is observed more precisely in its three-dimensionality and potential functionality. Gleiter marks the transition from the first pictorial to the second phenomenal phase of the process of perceiving architectural signs as necessary for the architectural experience, while the transition to the third, performative phase remains optional. This is also confirmed by everyday experience of dealing with architectural phenomena, when only in certain cases the position of phenomenal observation transitions into the “use” of the object itself, revealing other dimensions of its spatiality and functionality.

Gleiter’s links the consideration of the problems of architectural theory to the concepts of aura, atmosphere, mood and immersion. Referring

to Walter Benjamin's indispensable theses about the suppression of auraticity from art in the age of increasingly pronounced technicization and scientism, Gleiter observes similar phenomena in the field of architecture. According to Gleiter, just as with the disintegration of the role of the aura in art, attempts will also be made to "reauratize" architecture. Much as Benjamin sees attempts to introduce new forms of auraticity in technically predetermined arts (i.e., the establishment of the movie stars cult), he points to phenomena in architecture that can be considered as reinventive attempts to introduce the aura into modern architecture. Thus, he emphasizes that traces of the aura can be found in classicist and neo-historical architectural genres, but also in a number of modern steel and glass constructions that have not relinquished ornaments and similar additions that fall out of the scope of pure functionalism. In this regard, Gleiter speaks of "repressing the ornament into material,"² citing examples of residential buildings from the beginning of the twentieth century designed by Adolf Loos in which, within a clearly functionally defined project, the architect plays with expensive materials and spatial relationships that exhibit moments of auraticity. When it comes to theories of immersion, Gleiter points out that this concept has opened a perspective on modern architecture: previously perceived as fundamentally soulless and devoid of all non-functional elements, it appeared as an expression of psychological energies in which one could be immersed. Therefore, modern architecture, even in its most minimalistic form, is understood as something that develops a certain expressive dynamic that can potentially be part of a process of emotive understanding.

Some of the key observations are introduced in the chapter dedicated to space as the basic concept. Referring to Derrida and Huber, Gleiter points to the parergonality of architecture, meaning that the relationship between the whole and the detail is established as a relationship between center and periphery, the ergonal core and the parergonal additions, the secondary and the detail. Therefore, architecture turns out to be "a topological landscape permeated by the most diverse marginal conditions."³ Topological space is understood as a space organized according to sensory, social and psychological aspects, a space that is not homogenous in meaning, but is structured as something that has a center and periphery, where the latter has its own share in the constitution of the respective

² *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

topological space. Included in the chapter “Space,” these considerations can be found in the sub-chapters entitled “The Body” and “Time,” for certain reasons included in the chapter on space. This is all the more interesting, if we take into account that Gleiter points to a realization that occurred in modern architecture, that space is a function of time and something that can only be experienced in movement, freeing it from historicist restraints still present in the nineteenth century. It becomes apparent that Modernity in architecture places time, the processuality of becoming and change, at the center of its considerations. In this regard, Gleiter shows the way in which August Schmarsow questions the vertical and the surface as the two formal dominants of Vitruvian understanding of architecture; Schmarsow adds the horizontal movement, that is, the performative act as the third dominant of architecture that actively opens up space, moving through its various levels across time, passing from the present into the past, that is, memory.⁴

All functions in modern architecture become functions of movement and therefore functions of time. However, one cannot speak of representative, but of experiential time, or what is called immanent time in the theory of architecture (Zucker). Gleiter shows how Modernity has not only established the primacy, but rather a special understanding of time that is also characteristic of modern science and art. At the same time, he emphasizes that architectural structuralism is also subject to the concept of immanent temporality, and that it cannot be hastily classified into a linguistic paradigm. “Structure” here refers to the “internal rationality and conception of architecture” which actually permanently question the constants of perception. Structure primarily means “internal forces that apparently produce unusual, perspectival effects.”⁵ In the context of said considerations about structure, the notion of virtuality appears as something that is generated by the elements of structure. In addition to the influence of structuralist-oriented philosophy, of particular importance here is the emergence of digital techniques that define the potentiality of projects and concepts as virtual creations and their actualization, transcending the relationship of two actual forms. The author of *Architekturtheorie zur Einführung* notes that this context gives rise to the problem of radical formalization, through the growing disconnect between virtual design and its material and anthropological foundations.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 251ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

In his conclusion, which is short but very important for understanding his objectives, Gleiter closes this introductory book by appealing to reason, enlightenment and humanism as “moments of resistance”⁶ against reductionism and the alienation of the instrumental mind. In this context, the issue of “orientation in thinking,”⁷ the insight into the inevitable connection between theoretical and practical thinking, is of key importance. The theory of architecture that Gleiter has in mind turns out to be something that should have the characteristics of a critically oriented theory of cognition, whereby a productive relationship with one’s own heritage and past must be taken as a fundamental prerequisite. According to him, the historical index implies not only that we “have” a past, but above all that we have “historically-spiritually become.”⁸ In an almost hermeneutic tone of Heideggerian-Gadamerian provenance, Gleiter formulates his critical-theoretical approach as “an open adoption of procedures on the basis of which the new appears in the old, which then produces impulses for the future.”⁹ Thus, the aim of the book is to formulate a critical understanding of the overall structure of history.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

⁹ *Ibid.*