

DEMOUNTING STRUCTURES

Shortly before his death in 2003, Cedric Price made sure that the Interaction Centre –building he designed twenty seven years earlier– was demolished. While this act may be interpreted as a demonstration of eccentricity, it could also be argued that Price was being faithful to an architecture that, to him, should be like food—which is prepared, eaten, digested and later evacuated; therefore, there would be no need to maintain a building beyond its useful life, even if this implied to reject the community's intention of preserving it as a historical building.¹

This unique example gives account, however, of a much broader idea: that some inhabitable structures could not be destined to endure, thus questioning the notion that architecture is defined by its permanence. We are talking about those structures which –like the tents Semper proposed as the origin of architecture– are thought with a limited temporality, capable of being dismantled and removed, but that remain ready to be re-installed again.

This notion, which may appear rather simple, implies a fundamental redefinition that hasn't been yet resolved. Because if the architectural project seeks to envisage final form and design details that will allow the construction to resist weather and endure in time, demountable structures imply an additional concern about the reversibility of the process, demanding at least a broader definition of the extents of a project. The recent insistence over these architectures and the several paths of exploration opened, are presented in this edition through a dossier of 12 examples of different scales and backgrounds.

Yet, beyond the project itself, it's interesting to remember that the concepts of assembly and disassembly operate in other spheres too, with architecture participating as a tool, objective or even as a problem. For example, Andrea Ferro's photographs of the Expo Milano 2015 assembly process –which open this issue– lead us to ask about the future of these pavilions once the exhibition ends. As an initial answer to these concerns, Rahul Mehrotra and Felipe Vera presents us the case of the Kumbh Mela, a city which is assembled and disassembled every year, temporarily hosting over 5 million people. Elvira Pérez opens up another possibility by de-dramatizing the supposedly intrinsic relation between architecture and place reminding us that even heritage can be dismantled and assembled again. Reaffirming the validity of this argument we present the journeys of a concrete panel which in every stop seems to gain more value, a phenomenon accurately observed –and also produced– by Pedro Alonso and Hugo Palmarola. Following this idea, Tania Tovar brilliantly describes the changing mechanisms –from building to document– that architecture

¹ Mathews, Stanley. *From Agit-Prop to Free Space: The Architecture of Cedric Price* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007)

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uses to endure once it assumes that its products will not last forever. At this point José Hernández brings us back to Price, who in 1976 designed a building capable of getting 'bored' if its users didn't reconfigure it. This line of thought is reinforced by Matías Garretón, who proposes that co-production is essential for the proliferation of subjectivities. Finally, and closing the circle of questions opened by the photographs of the Expo Milano, Marina Otero's research not only unveils that the Serpentine Gallery pavilions in London have a new life in the hands of private collectors, but also dismantles the mechanisms of capital accumulation that occur around name-brand architecture.

This London episode also reminds us that the first large demountable structure –the Crystal Palace– was designed in 1851 by the English gardener Joseph Paxton and that it was precisely in the England of the sixties where young architects such as Price or Archigram revived this tradition either as disposable, plug-in, instant, or mobile architecture. But while we can understand that these structures emerged within the context of the Industrial Revolution, and later reappeared together with the ideals of emancipation and mobility of young people in the sixties, how do we explain that today they are no longer marginal manifestations and have become protagonists of contemporary architecture's discourse?

Boltanski and Chiapello argued in 1999 that the most recent mutation of capitalism was precisely the appropriation of the ideals of emancipation and freedom that the youth of '68 had raised as their fighting flag.² Hence, we could interpret the revival of sixties' architecture –and its demountable structures– as representations of the ductility of this new capitalism. But we could also understand the recent global avalanche of temporary architectures as a reaction to the 'timeless' adjective with which some contemporary practices justify their projects.

Without any intention to resolve this interrogation, and following Price, in this issue of ARQ we ask ourselves about these demountable structures simply for the curiosity that their resurgence yields within the current context. If that same youthful curiosity to understand is what led the avant-gardes to demount structures and existing assumptions, renewing and vitalizing architecture's discourse, shouldn't we be constantly dismantling structures to understand, question and thus vitalize our discipline? We obviously don't have the answer, but about to turn 35, and with 90 issues already published, in ARQ we keep intact the curiosity to ask ourselves these and many other questions. **ARQ**

² Boltanski, Luc; Chiapello, Eve. *The New Spirit of Capitalism* Traducción de Gregory Elliot. (London: Verso, 2005). Original en francés de 1999.

² Boltanski, Luc; Chiapello, Eve. *The New Spirit of Capitalism* Translated by Gregory Elliot. (London: Verso, 2005). Original in French from 1999.