

INSTRUMENTS FOR WHAT?

In her book *The Architecture of Error*, Francesca Hughes argues that “behind the naivety of architecture’s current return to an all-invested faith in the instrumentalist premise – that technology is somehow outside of culture, and therefore able to arbitrate over things cultural – lies the ongoing denial of technology’s partiality” (Hughes, 2014:77). As a branch of the philosophy of knowledge, instrumentalism is a long-standing idea stating that theories cannot be assessed in terms of their veracity but rather on the basis of their usefulness in explaining things and predicting events. Indeed, its more radical variant – eliminative instrumentalism – even suggests that once facts prove a theory, this can be discarded and, if nothing proves it, all the more reasons to disregard it.

Although Hughes acknowledges (in a footnote) that her use of the idea of instrumentalism is not precise in conceptual terms, it is possible to appreciate the craftiness of her misrepresentation: she is not only playing with the usual lightness with which architects borrow concepts from other disciplines, but her imprecision also echoes the provocative title of her book. In this way, her goal goes in another direction. Hughes claims that, with certain nuances and without so much theorizing, this instrumental vision would lie behind not only the modern alliance between architecture and technology but also the contemporary obsession with precision. It is the fear of imprecision, the terror of error, which leads architecture to yield towards technological pragmatism or to rely on instruments – from typology to software – to guarantee the validity of the result within an uncertain and chaotic design process.

In the search for certainties in which to lean on after having evicted theory in the past decade, architecture has once again relied on instruments. These not only allow to argue the verifiability of the process after the recent (and justified) discredit in which authorship has fallen but also to hide the responsibility in the decision making behind an aura of neutrality and, why not, of a scientific fantasy. However, we know very well that these instruments are not neutral: whether intentional or not, their use is inevitably political.

This issue of ARQ presents a wide critical discussion on the alleged neutrality of instruments. This focus appears in the conversation between Andrés Jaque and Enrique Walker, in the texts of Zeynep Çelik Alexander, Ignacio G. Galán, Gonzalo Carrasco, and also in the debate about the Law on Promotion of Architecture, which seeks to support architecture made in Chile through a legal instrument. But in addition, this issue analyzes a territory where architecture can make a contribution: the creation of instruments. There are proposals such as DSGN AGNC’s or the one by Carlo

Ratti and the MIT Senseable City Lab, the projects by Gonzalo Claro, Renato Rizzi and S9 Architecture, the text by Hidalgo, Rosas and Strabucchi or LOFscapes' portfolio. Finally, this edition also puts forward certain instruments that had gone unnoticed, uncovered in the texts by Temtem and Alfaro, and by Cortés, Saric and Puig.

These cases not only show that the uncritical use of instruments is not the only way, but also remind us that the building remains beyond the design process. At that moment, the relation between architecture and instruments takes a second meaning.

Because instruments can also be understood through Heidegger's example – that a hammer is not a hammer because it has a specific shape but rather because it serves to hammer – implying that its use (hammering a nail or someone's head) does not change its nature at all: the object thus becomes neutral. Here lies the difference between the instrument and the *dispositif* (or apparatus) which, according to Agamben (2009), would have a specific goal.

Although we know that architecture requires instruments for its conception, once it starts to be used it can become itself an instrument; as argued by Tschumi, no matter how much the architect tries to define the fate of a building it is impossible to control what happens with it. In other words, if an instrument is something that serves a purpose and its use is independent of its nature, architecture, understood this way, would be foreign to the intentions of the architect. As with the National Stadium of Chile, a building can serve for joyful or heinous purposes, depending on who is managing.

Thus, in architecture, the question on instruments involves two levels of analysis: first, attention to the process and its mechanisms, and second, that its result is instrumental to something over which we have no control. And although the latter does not depend on us, it would be irresponsible to disregard its implications: when architecture enters an area as ambiguous as the hammer that can be used to hit a nail or a head, the least an issue on instruments can do is warn us that, when it comes to architecture, the only error we should fear is the pragmatic comfort of naïveté or, even worse, of ignorance. **ARQ**

Referencias / References

AGAMBEN, Giorgio. *What is an Apparatus?*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009.

HUGHES, Francesca. *The Architecture of Error: Matter, Measure, and the Misadventures of Precision*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014.