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More Acting and Less Making

A Place for Ethics in Architecture's Epistemology

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For Greeks, “not Athens, but the Athenians, were the *polis*”¹.

Since architecture has reached academic status by being established within university departments, there seems to be a general agreement within the architectural research community to consider, at an epistemological level, the idea of the **project** as its main object of study. Since the Renaissance, the notion of *project*, used to traditionally structure the architectural practice, had become a useful concept capable of uniting the wide range of architecture's knowledge and theoretical discourses. Three constitutive elements of the project had been the focus of all these theoretical discourses and their conceptual representations: the **building**, i.e., the product or the outcome of the project; the **process** of the project, i.e., the design process; the **actors**, i.e., the stakeholders of the project. After a brief discussion of the main conceptual representations which have successively been developed, focused on the first two constituents (i.e. the building with

Montreal), he reoriented his interests toward the human and social aspects of engineering, technology, and design (M.A. in Architecture, Univ. of Montreal; Doct. in Aesthetics, Univ. of Paris). He concluded an extensive study of the history of design education in his book “Le Bauhaus de Chicago: l’oeuvre pédagogique de László Moholy-Nagy” (1995).

aesthetics-oriented inquiries, and the process with *logic*-oriented inquiries), we shall dwell on the last one (the actors) which requires a strong paradigmatic or philosophical shift, towards *ethics*-oriented inquiries. We try to demonstrate that the philosophical framework of ethics and its key concepts provides an insightful and indeed necessary contribution to architectural theory, and reveals some important aspects to which product-oriented and process-oriented inquiries are sometimes blind. From this perspective, we found Aristotle’s ethics and its modern commentators (Hannah Arendt and Paul Ricoeur) particularly helpful for constructing a more comprehensive vision of the architectural project that articulates its three basic constituents: the *actors*, the *process*, and the *building*.

A PROJECT ... as OBJECT of Study

After four decades of existence within the universities, research in architecture seems to recognise in the notion of *project* its main object of study². In 1986, having been invited to take part in a debate about research in architecture, Jean-Louis LeMoigne proposed the notion of *project* as the main object of this research. Inspired by the case of nineteenth century chemistry which, in order to escape the domination of physics created its own object of study, he stated:

“[...] because it could not find it [the object] in the universe, chemistry created it, *ex nihilo*, by an intentional and a voluntary act, by a project ! A PROJECT ... AS OBJECT ! It’s a strange circle: a discipline which must have the scientific “project” for willing a study “object”, ... and a scholar in architecture [...] will be surprised to discover instead of an object ... a project ! The project to design and to build [...] more or less stable forms in a territorial space [...]. Therefore, the object of scientific research in architecture will be the project? [...] If the Object is a Project, and if the Project is a project of the Subject (or for and by the Subject), then the Project unites, in an intelligible way, the Object and the Subject.”³

Whether we consider it at the symbolic or operational level, the notion of *project* has achieved a leading status in architecture. It has been associated with all the developments which have affected the historical evolution of this domain of knowledge and professional practice. Also, compared with other social activities, architectural practice was the first modern profession to declare the notion of *project* as its main framework for structuring both its domain of practice and its teaching programs. Therefore, in his essays about the project’s anthropology and psychology, Jean-Pierre Boutinet was delighted to remind and outline the architectural origins⁴ of this notion which is used today by a growing number of social

activities and areas of knowledge⁵. However, in order to assume completely its new status as the main object of architecture's knowledge, the idea of *project* has to be more than a simple notion in the architects' common vocabulary. This notion must go through some developments, clarifications and precisions to become a more rigorous *concept* able to structure and bring together architecture's knowledge.

There is a remarkable diversity of theoretical discourses about the project in architecture. These discourses are like *open windows* which have offered over history several viewpoints directed toward an aspect, a manifestation or a particular quality of the architectural project. Contemporary and historical treatises of architecture reveal a large variety of descriptive or prescriptive discourses: aesthetics discourses (including even the aesthetics of functionalism); utilitarian discourses; technical discourses; scientific and methodo-*logical* discourses, etc. However, the question remains: which constituents of the project are the real foci of these entire discourses?

If we consider the historical evolution of these discourses, we can see that their *focus* has shifted through time from the **product** of the project (i.e., the building) to the **process** of the project, and, in the last decades, from the process to the **actors**⁶ of the project. Philosophically speaking, the shift corresponds each time to a radical change in the paradigmatic framework of the inquiry: from **aesthetics** (*product-oriented*), to **logics** (*process-oriented*), to **ethics** (*actors-oriented*)⁷. Actually, these three phenomena (building, process, actors) are nothing else than the real objects of research investigations (the three main areas of knowledge) of the discipline of architecture. One of the suitable ways to review briefly the theoretical discourses about these three phenomena is to consider the main conceptual representations that have been developed through history to portray them. We will start with building's representations.

The Building: Some Common Conceptual Lenses

The first and the most popular conceptual representation of the building in architecture is the vitruvian model: the "*firm, useful, and graceful*" building⁸. The interpretation of Vitruvius' *Ten Books on Architecture* in Leon Battista Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, considered with the study of antique monuments as models to follow, and the imitation (*mimesis*) of nature as a philosophy of aesthetics, are seen by Germann (1991) as the beginning of this tradition which he calls *Vitruvianism*. By the middle of the 18th century, debates about the principles which underlie architecture and its teaching program witnessed, especially in France, the advent of two schools of thought that can be distinguished as the *architect-artist* school and the *architect-engineer* school⁹. Started in the *École de l'Académie* and carried out along the Beaux-arts tradition, the first promoted

an artistic vision of architecture focusing on buildings' aesthetics (buildings as *works of art* and *spectacles*), since the architect-artist was destined to design the monuments and prestigious projects of the king. The architect-engineer school of thought, which appeared in the *École des Ponts et Chaussées* of Paris, developed a utilitarian and instrumental vision of architecture (buildings were seen as *mere means aimed to satisfy human needs*). This school cherished the dream of a scientifically based practice of building. Thus, engineers preferred to study issues of utility, firmness, and building techniques:

“Amongst the many influential events which took place around 1750, few exercised such a profound change on architectural theory as the establishment of civil and military engineering as distinct and separate disciplines. For as Hans Straub has rightly remarked in his *History of Civil Engineering*: “it was during the second half of the eighteenth century that the science of engineering proper came into existence, and with it the modern civil engineer who based his designs on scientific calculation”.¹⁰

By the second half of the 18th century, the systematic imitations of the architectural styles of antique buildings had become somewhat exhausted, leading to the abandonment of the ideal of beauty promoted by advocates of *Vitruvianism*. This motivation had pushed architectural theorists in a novelty quest, which can be established as the origins of modern architecture. According to Peter Collins (1998, p. 146), “functional analogies” were the only way which remained possible for architectural theorists. Among these functional analogies, the most established were the mechanical analogy (the building seen as a *machine*) and the biological analogy, i.e., the analogy between buildings and living organisms. The latter gave rise to two models: the “*organism/environment*” model and “*form/function*” model¹¹. The “*organism/environment*” model describes living organisms' relationships to their habitat; its equivalent in architecture is the “*man/environment*” model in which buildings are seen as the environments for their occupants. From this model developed the behaviorist school of thought in architecture, mostly known as *Environment and Behavior Studies*; in the second half of 20th century, this was extended with the concept of “*built environment*”¹². The “*form/function*” model drew on descriptions of biological organisms (such as the relationship between organs and their respective functions. Here, buildings are seen as a set of built forms suited to functions (i.e. human activities).

The Logical Turn: A Focus on Design Process

During two and half centuries, that is, until the 1960's, one conceptual and very practical representation of the design

process had prevailed in architecture. This was the *compositional* model of the Beaux-arts tradition, known by its three main steps: “*Esquisse/Development/Final project*”. Originally, this model portrayed the competition procedures carried out in the *Académie’s* school of architecture: the *Concours d’émulation* and the *Grand prix de l’Académie* competition which allowed access to the prestigious *Prix de l’Académie de France à Rome*:

“Nonetheless the chief end of architectural education at the *École* too often tended to become, not the design of architecture, but the production of mere paper projects aimed simply at winning the *Prix de Rome*; indeed, Larousse’s dictionary in 1930 defined the purpose of the *École* thus: “L’*École* prépare les artistes aux différents concours pour le grand prix de Rome.””¹³

By the beginning of the 1960’s, the focus of research investigations shifted from the *product* to the making *process*, especially on those intellectual tasks which we call *design process*¹⁴. This was a major epistemological turn. Not only the object of study completely changed, but also, the philosophical framework which served as its paradigmatic reference, split radically from aesthetics to logics and scientific rationality. Christopher Alexander was the first advocate of this dynamic with his now famous essay, *Notes Toward the Synthesis of Form*¹⁵, devoted completely to the issue of the design process. The subtitle to the *Introduction* was “the need for rationality”. The first sentence not only announced the epistemological turn, but also set out the philosophical orientation of its whole program: “These notes are about the process of design; the process of inventing physical things which display new physical order, organization, form, in response to function.”¹⁶

The design process was to be considered strictly within a general framework which can be identified with the philosophy of *making*; what Greek philosophers call *poiesis*¹⁷. Alexander delivered a detailed description and a conceptual representation of design process as an ‘*analysis/synthesis*’ activity, analogous to the production model of rational knowledge. Without considering its antique philosophical origins (in Plato and Aristotle), the modern sources of this model can be located in the second and third precepts of René Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* (1637):

“The second [the analysis precept] was to divide each of the problems I was examining in as many parts as I could, as many as should be necessary to solve them. The third, [the synthesis precept] to develop my thoughts in order, beginning with the simplest and easiest to understand matters, in order to reach by degrees, little by little, to the most complex knowledge, assuming an orderliness among

them which did not at all naturally seem to follow one from the other.”

There can be no doubt then, that this epistemological turn started with the less complex vision of *making*: the utilitarian and rationalistic one¹⁸. By the end of the 1960's, another theoretical framework, maybe the most popular, was proposed by Herbert A. Simon in his famous work *The Sciences of the Artificial*. This essay reaffirms the *poietic* character (artefacts production) as the substance of the design process: “Design [...] is concerned with how things ought to be, with devising artefacts to attain goals.”¹⁹. Simon introduced however a new separation line between natural sciences epistemology, which is concerned with *how things are*, and artificial sciences epistemology, which deals with *how things ought to be*.

During the 1970's and early 1980's, several other investigations, more empirical in nature, tried to develop substantial descriptions of design's activities at a methodological level by observing designers at work. This shifted the focus of investigations from the *process* to the *actors*. However, this kind of research was generally rooted in cognitive psychology²⁰. These scientific and *methodological*-oriented efforts began to be strongly criticised by the early 1980's. Donald Schön's account of design activities was significant here. He argued that there was a general crisis of confidence in professional knowledge, which had its sources in the epistemological basis upon which professional education had been established in the modern university since 19th century. This epistemology is one of technical rationality with its philosophical foundations in the positivist view of the relationships between theory and practice; that is, the philosophy underlying applied sciences²¹. In his chief research work, *The Reflective Practitioner*²², Schön proposed another epistemological shift which presents professional practices as reflective conversations with problematic situations. He called this new design process epistemology “*reflection in action*”, and suggested the architectural design studio tradition as an excellent methodological example of *reflection in action*²³. However, despite his reflective character, Schön's practitioner remains philosophically speaking in the *poiesis* realm, because Schön considers designers basically as *makers* of artefacts:

“I see designing as a kind of making. Architects, landscape architects, interior or industrial or engineering designers, make physical objects that occupy space and have plastic and visual form. In a more general sense, a designer makes an image – a representation – of something to be brought to reality [...]. Artists make things and are, in this sense, designers. Indeed, the ancient Greeks used the term *poetics* to refer to the study of making things – poems being one

category of things made. Professional practitioners are also makers of artefacts.”²⁴

In the next section, we propose a critical approach to what we have called the “logical turn”. As noted, since the 1970’s the focus of research has been to progressively direct attention to the **actors** of the project. This started with empirical investigations about *designers* and the way they tackle design situations. As the failures of certain modernist architectural ideas, especially as applied to housing became apparent, it became the turn of building *occupants* to be investigated. In general, most of these studies were rooted in social and human sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.). Our principal argument is the following: when the time comes to understand and focus specifically on people (the actors of the project, their ways of being, their actions, their motivations and their mutual concerns), neither *poiesis* (philosophy of making), nor logic or philosophy of science are the most suited for this task. The framework of ethics (that is, practical philosophy) is, by nature, more appropriate, since ethics’ concern is the human person, his/her way of life (how should I live?), and his/her relationships to his/herself and to other persons.

The Framework of Ethics, or Design’s Praxis

If the project, in architecture or in any design area, is by definition a project *of, by, with* and *for* persons (the actors or the stakeholders: *client, architect, contractor, occupant*, etc.), whether they are actively or passively concerned, then, a theoretical investigation about these persons cannot escape the anthropological question: what is the conception of the human person (the person of the designer, the occupant, the client, etc.) which underlies implicitly these theoretical efforts? In other words, what is the philosophical anthropology²⁵ which serves as the reference for such efforts? Can architecture as a discipline pretend to build its whole sustainability on these anthropological visions which conceive the designer as an *artist*, or as a *problem solver* (a practitioner who applies logical and scientific grounded methods), or as a *reflective practitioner* according to Donald Schön’s account? Can architecture continue to conceive of the occupants as mere *spectators* of buildings’ beauty (according to some aesthetic doctrines), or as mere *users* of buildings (according to some utilitarian doctrines), or mere *biological organisms* (according to the functionalist and ergonomic doctrines), and finally, as beings whose behaviors are determined by the built environment (according to some behaviourist doctrines)?

As a discipline, ethics belongs to the general field of practical philosophy. The “practical” idea, associated with this philosophy, has its origins in two philosophers’ works: Aristotle’s writings about ethics²⁶ and politics, and Kant’s writings about morals²⁷

in his *Critique of pure practical reason*. Since the nineteenth century, the word *practical* has usually been opposed to *theoretical*. Theory is considered as the main characteristic of science, and practice, which derives from *praxis*, refers to concrete applications of science. For the Ancient Greeks, where the word *philosophy* refers to a certain *way of life*²⁸ rather than to a set of speculative and abstract knowledge, the division between *theoretical philosophy* and *practical philosophy* connects to the traditional and well-known division, admitted since Pythagoras, between the three main *ways of life* (*bios*) which characterise that society: life of pleasure and enjoyment, the active or political life (*bios politikos*), and the contemplative or theoretical life (*bios theoretikos*). Practical philosophy (which includes ethics) deals with the active life of citizens, who act within the city (*polis*), *among, with* and *for* their fellows.

For many decades, professional knowledges have been going through a crisis both epistemologically (an internal crisis), and in terms of the support they receive from society (social validity). This latter aspect, is often raised and reported, within all social activities, in the form of ethical problems or dilemmas. The scale of many of these ethical issues has overwhelmed the capability of many professional departments of universities to re-think theoretical frameworks and subsequently set guidelines for action in their respective domains of intervention. If bioethics, environmental ethics, business ethics, and of course the ethics of “political affairs” represent the most media-covered and investigated domains of the *ethical turn*, architecture, planning and design have also engaged substantial reflections in this way. The increasing number of publications about ethics in architecture²⁹ is a strong indication in this sense.

The *ethical turn* is a consequence of the failure of a certain philosophical vision of human action. The rediscovery and rehabilitation of practical philosophy, after revisiting its Aristotelian origins, is considered in this turmoil situation as an alternative philosophy of action³⁰. Hannah Arendt³¹, Paul Ricœur³², and Hans-Georg Gadamer³³ are principal interpreters and advocates of this philosophy in 20th century. In this paper we cannot embrace all the full range of complexity of the relationship between ethics and architecture. We prefer to limit our investigations to one polarity chosen for its fecundity and heuristic potential. This is Aristotle’s distinction between the activity of **production** (*poiesis*), which is aimed to an external end (the thing or effect to be produced), and **action** (*praxis*), an activity which is an end of its own (that of *acting well*). Hannah Arendt has developed a modern interpretation of this polarity, which she describes in terms of **making** (*poiesis*) and **acting** (*praxis*)³⁴. How can the “*poiesis/praxis*” and “*making/acting*” couples inform architecture and the concept of project? We will start by giving some detailed descriptions of these concepts. After providing a brief review of

the Aristotelian sources³⁵, we decided to emphasise Hannah Arendt's philosophical interpretation.

The “Poiesis/Praxis” Polarity in Aristotle's Philosophy

The ideas of *poiesis* and *praxis* appear in the first sentences of the *Ethica Nicomachea*:

“Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is found among ends; some are activities [*praxis*], others are products apart from the activities that produce them [*poiesis*].”³⁶

As noted previously, *poiesis* designates the activity of production, an activity aimed to an end beyond the agent (that is, the thing or the effect to be produced). *Poiesis* refers specifically to the **transitive** condition of the activity. *Praxis*, on the other hand, is an activity which is an end of its own. Similar to a musician who practices his instrument in order to learn how to play or practice well, the end which is aimed by *praxis* is nothing else than *acting well*. In this sense, *praxis* refers to the **reflective** and **immanent** character of the activity, and its aim is nothing else than the perfection of the agent³⁷. Thus, this activity does not tend to the achievement of some end or effect outside the agent, and the idea of conducting and helping the agent in order to be a *best agent* in a moral sense, is what Aristotle's ethics is all about. How does the concept of *praxis* comes to assume the conditions and requirements of ethics in Aristotle's work? As stated by the first sentence of *Ethica Nicomachea*, it is the entire deeds of human being (art, inquiry, action and pursuit) which are put in a moral perspective: the orientation of these deeds towards the **good**³⁸. The Aristotelian anthropology is expressed in such a moral mode that it is hard to imagine a theory or discourse about human action which can be neutral. In this anthropology, the concept of *praxis* expresses a particular relationship of the human being to him/herself during action. By keeping attention upon its own end, which is *acting well*, the *praxis* mode forces the agent to watch constantly his/her own attitudes and behaviors which he/she tries continually to improve. In this sense, the agent should be reflective and deliberative: How should I act? Which good is the aim of my action? Which are the particular characteristics of the situation? What can be the consequences to me and to others? Which harm or problem can be produced by my action? It appears finally that *poiesis* can be described as an activity of *representation* or *modelling* (it *pictures* the thing to produce). On the other hand, *praxis* appears more as

a *questioning* or *reflective* activity (it constantly questions itself about its own conditions).

The “Making/Acting” Couple in Hannah Arendt’s Thinking

Among twentieth century practical philosophers, Hannah Arendt has certainly developed the most comprehensive interpretation of the Greek polarity *poiesis/praxis*. In *The Human Condition*, she interprets this polarity in terms of *making/acting* or *work/action*. Early in the essay, she makes a distinction between three fundamental human activities:

“[...] labor, work, and action. They are fundamental because each corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man. Labor is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body [...]. The human condition of labor is life itself. Work is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence [...]. Work provides an “artificial” world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings. [...] Action, the only activity that goes directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”³⁹

The Making Character of the Work

Within the trilogy “*labor, work, action*”, which structures *The Human Condition*, the activity of *work* represents a hinge that allows us to understand the other two, particularly *action*. In fact, Arendt’s central thesis is that, in the modern era, *making* has been progressively substituted by *acting* within the domain of human affairs, i.e. in politics. Three main characteristics describe *making* or the activity of *work*. They are: the *durability* and *stability* attributes of the *work*; the *reification* of its results; and the relationships of making to the categories of *means* and *end*.

The proper characteristic of *work* is its position within the unnaturalness of the human condition; work provides “an ‘artificial’ world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings”⁴⁰. The durability which distinguishes artificial things provides that ever-changing creature, i.e. man, with a stable and solid world without which he/she becomes homeless. Thus, artefacts inherit the role of *objectifying* the world, whose stability allows the ever-changing nature of man to recover and recognise each time his identity and his marks:

“From this viewpoint, the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that [...] men, their ever-changing nature

notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table. In other words, against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world [...].”⁴¹

Beyond durability and stability, the characteristic which singularly distinguishes the activity of making is the reification of its results. That is the meaning of the Aristotelian concept of *poiesis*; an activity which is aimed at an external end (the thing to be produced, an end which is distinct from the activity itself). The product’s model or image, which are carried by the producer and guide him during the reification process, can be recognised as some of the main features of the activity of work:

“The actual work of fabrication is performed under the guidance of a model in accordance with which the object is constructed. This model can be an image beheld by the eye of the mind or a blueprint in which the image has already found a tentative materialization through work.”⁴²

Finally, the fabricated thing, since it is considered as an external end to the activity which gives birth to it, drives the *making* of the work in the turmoil of the means/end scheme and the determinations by which it is characterised⁴³. The final product becomes as a tour from which once observes and designs the organisation of the process, and chooses and justifies the means. In this sense, the produced thing gets a kind of sovereignty which reveals the primacy of the product upon the process:

“The final product organises the process of the work, decides upon the specialists who are needed, the co-operative tasks, and the number of participants and co-operators. Evaluation upon everything and everyone is made in terms of convenience and utility for the desired final product, and nothing else.”⁴⁴

The Human Condition of Action

Action occupies the most important status within the trilogy which structures *The Human Condition*. If the main character of *work* is the reification of its results, *action* does not leave any perceptible result behind. However, this aspect does not seem sufficient for Arendt. A fundamental aspect must be missing, though she prefers to put emphasis on two other characteristics without which any action is inconceivable. These are *plurality* and *otherness*:

“Action, the only activity that goes directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to

the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”⁴⁵

“*Living together*” is the principal element which describes humans dwelling in the world. Therefore, action is performed in what Arendt calls the realm of “*human affairs*”, a domain which is concerned not by man’s relationships to things, but man’s relationships to other men: “[...] while the activity of work leaves monuments and documents behind it, which in general constitute the durability of the world, action in common exist only if the actors sustain it.”⁴⁶ In this sense, the result of action is nothing else than the *polis*, because, for Greeks, “not Athens, but the Athenians, were the *polis*”⁴⁷.

Within the ideas of plurality and otherness, we can now perceive a fundamental link and affinity between any action and *speech*. If no action can be considered without other’s presence (whether this presence is physical or mental), the relationship which is developed between man and this “other” is mostly initiated and conveyed by speech, and can end in a narrative, tale, or story form:

“Action, as distinguished from fabrication, is never possible in isolation; to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act. Action and speech need the surrounding presence of others no less than fabrication needs the surrounding presence of nature for its material, and of a world in which to place the finished product.”⁴⁸

This privileged link between action and speech sets a space to consider two other fundamental aspects of human action. These are the ideas of *initiative* and *disclosure* of the agent (the *who* of the action) to his fellows by words and deeds⁴⁹:

“With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. [...] To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, “to begin”, “to lead”, and eventually “to rule”, indicates), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin *agere*). Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action. [...] This beginning [...] is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is beginner himself.”⁵⁰

By our ability to initiate actions and launch speech within the web of relationships which constitute the realm of human affairs, we disclose ourselves to our fellows, and we provide an answer to the question asked of every newcomer: *Who are you?*, because

what speech and action disclose is really the subject⁵¹ of the action:

“Without the disclosure of the agent in the act, action loses its specific character and becomes one form of achievement among others. It is then no less a means to an end than making is a means to produce an object. This happens whenever human togetherness is lost [...].”⁵²

Some Ethics’ Lenses for the Concept of “Project” in Architecture

Following this philosophical journey, we can now recognise two basic anthropological features expressed by the *poiesis/praxis* and *making/acting* polarities. These are the two fundamental relationships which describe the human condition on which philosophers, from Aristotle to Heidegger, had put emphasis: man’s relation to **things** and man’s relation to **persons** (others persons and one’s own person). The former is generally a predominant concern of aesthetics where the latter, as we noted, is mostly a basic concern of ethics and politics. How can we now view the concept of project in architecture, especially its three main components, under the lenses of ethics?

Considering the three principal constituents of the project in architecture (*building, process, actors*), our survey so far has shown that the *making (or poietic)* vision, whether aesthetic or logical/scientific in orientation, underlies most of the theoretical discourses on architecture. This is a consequence of the historical fact that architecture *as a discipline* was primarily conceived and devoted to the purpose of building. So, the claim of our paper’s title for “more *acting* and less *making*”⁵³ does not aim to diminish or devalue this constituent side of architecture. It rather invites and urges thinking in architecture to promote and exalt *acting* in order to advance its importance to the same level as *making*.

If we are now to develop an understanding of the project in architecture from the perspective of man’s relation to *persons*, it will be natural to start with the issue of the *actors*, that is, to give back the project to whom it is a project. And, instead of dealing with each actor figure separately (client, architect, contractor, occupant), we should rather try to hold a common view, that is, a common anthropological conception of the actors, which gathers them and serves as a common anthropological ground for the project (according to the conditions of *plurality, otherness, and living together* in Hannah Arendt’s thinking). We propose to consider all the actors as “**projecting beings**”, since every actor is able to bring *initiatives* into the design situation: every actor is able to initiate speech and/or actions (i.e. projects) in his/her own domain of skills. Actors are also, beyond their respective special

skills, *practical persons (praxis)*, whose actions or speech are aimed at achieving a *good life with and for* the others. They acknowledge the *plurality and otherness* of their fellows, within whom each one *discloses* him/herself by *words*⁵⁴ and *deeds*.

This common representation of the actors as *projecting beings* brings about new understandings of the two other constituents of the project: the design *process* and the *building*. Since the project is, above all, the project of the actors, the entire *design process* can be regarded now as a federating setting within which all the specific projects of the actors find their expression. If this federating characteristic is to be considered under the lens of ethics, then *design process* can be viewed as “a **concord**⁵⁵ of several **projects**” (a joint project), i.e. a *practical, reflective, and deliberative* process:

“Some see practitioners’ reflection-in-action as a largely psychological process of reframing problems, as process of changing one’s mind (Schön 1983); I see such re-cognition as integral to deliberation in which parties together learn about fact, value, and strategy all together.”⁵⁶

Finally, one of the ways to advance the acting side of architecture is to balance the strength and power of the dominant aesthetic vision of building: buildings as *works of art*. We propose to consider buildings as “**works in project**”. Two theoretical essays on architecture can be specifically helpful in this respect. The first derives from Robert Prost’s writings and it presents buildings as “*works in process*”:

“We want to draw attention on the possibility to consider architectural phenomena as works in process, rather than works which only find their status and their total and final legitimacy during their creation moment – as it is the fact with works of art.”⁵⁷

“Rather than investigating architectural solutions from the unique question: what constitutes them?, I will introduce three additional questions: to which aims, goals and utilities they are responding to? How they are composed?, and finally, how they are transformed?”⁵⁸

The second one is Philippe Boudon’s description of buildings as “*open works*” or “*open construction*”⁵⁹; opened to the projects and initiatives of their occupants. The concept of *open work* refers to that idea which views the building, once it is designed and delivered to occupation, as “an infrastructure, a basic framework, within which the occupants would be able to give a more or less free rein to their own ideas [that is, their own initiatives or projects] in both a qualitative [...] and quantitative [...] sense.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the design professions, the idea of design has been associated with a *poietic* vision, that of the devising and making of the artefacts. Design was thought to belong essentially to the realm of things. According to this vision, Herbert Simon described design as an activity which “is concerned with how things ought to be, with devising artefacts to attain goals.”⁶¹ This definition may assume that problems lie generally in man’s environment, and the role of design is to bring some modifications to the environment to make it much better. By the beginning of this new millennium, the discourse of ethics, specifically virtue ethics (Aristotelian ethics), shows regularly that problematic matters lie not always and necessarily in the environment but mostly in humans’ way of being: their ways of life and dwelling with their fellows. Therefore, it is sometimes the human person which can be considered as an *existing situation* to change into a *preferred one*⁶²; that’s what education is about. So, we would add to Simon’s definition: “Design is also concerned with **how humans** (especially *designers*) **would have to be**, by educating them to become not only best *poietical* but also best *practical* persons”. This is what “design as *praxis*” really means; it is primarily about the designer’s own *ethos*, not just about things.

Notes

1. H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998 (First ed. 1958), p. 195.
2. In France, the reform of architecture’s educational programs which followed the Frémont’s Report represents a turning point in this sense. See Frémont, A. and Marques, R., *Écoles d’architecture 2000. Schéma de développement*, Paris, Ministère de l’Équipement, du Logement et des Transports, 1992. See also the section “Nouveau champ d’action: le projet” in Prost, R. (ed.), *Concevoir, inventer, créer: réflexions sur les pratiques*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1995; and, more generally, see: Findeli, A., “Rethinking Design Education for the 21st Century: Theoretical, Methodological, and Ethical Discussion”, *Design Issues*, Vol. 17, No 1, 2001, pp. 5–17; Boutinet, J.-P., *Anthropologie du projet*, Paris, PUF, (2nd ed.), 1992.
3. J.-L. LeMoigne, “Recherche scientifique en architecture?”, in *La recherche architecturale: un bilan international*, Marseille, Parenthèses, 1986, p. 97 (authors’ English translation).
4. [...] beginning to focus our interest on the architectural project is also a matter of historical fairness because [...] the practice of the project was firstly introduced in our culture from architecture; since Renaissance in fact, architects are professionals of the project” (Boutinet, J.-P., *Psychologie des conduites à projet*, Paris, PUF, 1996, p. 44, authors’ English translation).

5. It is the case of the *pedagogy by project* in educational sectors, or the *management by project* in administration departments, or *urban planning by project*, etc. For more, see the interesting taxonomy developed by Boutinet (1992) in order to present the several categories of projects.
6. We do not include non-human entities (“Actants” in Bruno Latour’s or Edgar Morin’s words) under the term “actors”. This choice derives from our ethical-philosophical framework.
7. At first sight, this typology may seem somewhat reductionist in the two following aspects: 1) the apparent exclusive emphasis of the discourses on one dimension only and 2) the historical sequence of emergence of the three elements and its – apparent – determinism. One needs to remember that our aim here is not to provide a definitive theory of the architectural project, but a pragmatic model which is meant to help us to think about the project more thoroughly and more adequately. In other words, and in such perspective, the purpose of a theoretical model is not to stop the thinking process but, on the contrary, to stimulate it. Moreover, when our model tells that for instance aesthetics is the main *focus* of architectural discourses, it does not mean of course that the other dimensions (logics, ethics) are totally absent. Finally, there is no determinism, no evolution, and no philosophy of history related to the observed historical sequence.
8. The threefold division stated in the chapter 3 of his *First Book*, “firmitas” (firmness), “utilitas” (utility) et “venustas” (delight, grace), became, since Renaissance, the core of the vitruvian theory of architecture, even though these are not the principles which had been privileged by Vitruvius him self. According to Germann, Vitruvius valued rather six other principles found in the Greek sources: Order, Arrangement, Proportion, Symmetry, Decoration and Distribution (*Book 1*, chapter 2). See Germann, G., *Vitruve et le Vitruvianisme: Introduction à l’histoire de la théorie architecturale*, Lausanne, Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 1991, p. 17.
9. For more about these two schools of thought, see Picon, A., *Architectes et ingénieurs au siècle des Lumières*, Marseille, Parenthèses, 1988; Pfammatter, U., *The Making of the Modern Architect and Engineer: The Origins and Development of a Scientific and Industrially Oriented Education*, Boston, Birkhäuser, 2000.
10. P. Collins *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture. 1750–1950*, Montréal, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998 (1st ed. 1965), p. 185.
11. For more about the historical aspects of these models, see Hillier, B. et Leaman, A., “The man-environment paradigm and its paradoxes”, *Architectural Design*, No 8, 1973, pp. 507–511; Steadman, P., *The Evolution of Designs. Biological analogy*

- in architecture and the applied arts*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1979.
12. The failure of some housing projects produced according to ideas of the Modern movement in architecture was the principal phenomenon which motivated psychologists to seek to understand the relation of occupants to their living environment. By 1968, this school launched its first annual meeting: the *Environmental Design Research Association* (EDRA).
 13. D. D. Egbert *The Beaux-arts Tradition in French Architecture*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 158.
 14. The *Design Methodology Movement* had started this dynamic formally by launching its 1962's Conference in UK. See Cross, N. (ed.), *Developments in Design Methodology*, Toronto, Wiley, 1984. However, it is worth to notice that methodological considerations of the design process had started to preoccupy architectural thinking as soon as the 18th century, and by the 19th century J.N.-L. Durand's and Viollet-le-Duc's thinking were very influenced by the Cartesian method which they tried explicitly to bring into architecture.
 15. C. Alexander *Notes Toward the Synthesis of Form*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1964.
 16. Alexander (1964, p.1).
 17. According to Aristotle, *poiesis* is an activity which is aimed to produce a work or an effect outside the agent. By the opposite, *praxis* is an activity which constitutes an end of its own. We will deal more about these concepts in the last part of this paper.
 18. By the early 1970's, Alexander will abandon completely this vision of design process, and initiate a radical shift which leads him to develop another approach to design, based on an empirical orientation known by his other major work, *A Pattern Language*.
 19. H. A., Simon *The Sciences of the Artificial*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1969, p. 59.
 20. See the following works: Darke, J., "The Primary Generator and the Design Process", *Design Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1979, pp. 36–44; Zeisel, J., *Inquiry by Design: Tools for Environment Behavior Research*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.
 21. See D. Schön "Towards a New Epistemology of Practice: A Response to the Crisis of Professional Knowledge", in A. Thomas and E. W. Ploman (Eds), *Learning and Development: A Global Perspective*, Toronto, Oise Press, 1986, pp. 56–79.
 22. D. Schön *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action?*, New York, Basic Books, 1983.
 23. See the chapter 3 in Schön (1983), entitled "Design as a Reflective Conversation with the Situation".

24. D. Schön *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1990, pp. 41–42.
25. Philosophical anthropology is a branch of philosophy which deals specifically with the conceptions of human person.
26. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, (trans. by W. D. Ross), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1925.
27. Kant, I., *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (trans. by J. W. Ellington), Indianapolis, Ind., Hackett Pub. Co., 1981.
28. See Hadot, Pierre, *What is ancient philosophy?* (trans. by M. Chase), Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002; *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, (trans. by M. Chase), New York, Blackwell, 1995.
29. See the non-exhaustive following list of research works: Findeli, A., “Éthique, technique et design: éléments de problématique et de méthodologie”, in Prost, R. (ed.), *Concevoir, inventer, créer: réflexions sur les pratiques*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1995; Fox, W., *Ethics and the Built Environment*, New York, Routledge, 2000; Harries, K., *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1997; Pelletier, L. and Perez-Gomez, A. (Eds.), *Architecture, ethics and technology*, Montréal, McGill Queen’s University Press, 1994; Spector, T., *The Ethical Architect*, New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2001; Wasserman, B., Sullivan, P. and Palermo, G., *Ethics and the practice of architecture*, Toronto, Wiley, 2000; Watkin, D., *Morality and architecture: the development of a theme in architectural history and theory from the Gothic revival to the modern movement*, Oxford (Eng.), Clarendon Press, 1977; and Younès, Ch. and Paquot, Th. (Eds), *Éthique, architecture, urbain*, Paris, La Découverte, 2000.
30. See the two sections entitled “Le renouveau de la philosophie de l’action” and “Réhabilitation de la philosophie pratique” in Tosel, A. (ed.), *Les logiques de l’agir dans la modernité*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1992.
31. H. Arendt *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998 (First ed. 1958).
32. P. Ricœur *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1990 (*Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992).
33. Gadamer H.-G., *Truth and method* (trans. by G. Barden and J. Cumming), New York, Seabury Press, 1975.
34. The corresponding words in French language are *faire* and *agir*.
35. A deepen examination of the “*poiesis/praxis*” polarity within Aristotle’s philosophy requires developments which can exceed the limits of this paper. It is necessary for this sake to refer to Book Θ of his *Metaphysics*, and to the various Books which compose *Ethica Nicomachea*.

36. Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, I, 1, 1094a 1–5.
37. However, it is worth to specify that the ideas of *poiesis* and *praxis* do not refer to the physical activity of the agent. Rather, they refer to the thinking which guides and goes with the action. When this thinking pictures the thing to be produced, it is called *poiesis*. And when it tries to consider the action itself, it becomes *praxis*. That's this thinking activities underlying the action which we call *design*: “[...] all thought is either practical [*praxis*] or productive [*poietical*] or theoretical [...]” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, E, 1, 1025b, 20–25).
38. Following Aristotle, Paul Ricoeur (1990, p. 202) calls this aim-to-good character “the action aim to good life with and for others”.
39. Arendt (1998, p. 7). For the purpose of this paper, we will deal only with the activities of *work* and *action* which are the very corresponding concepts of the Greeks’ *poiesis* and *praxis*.
40. Arendt (1998, p. 7).
41. Arendt (1998, p. 137).
42. Arendt (1998, p. 140).
43. “The fabricated thing is an end product in the twofold sense that the production process comes to an end in it (“the process disappears in the product”, as Marx said) and that it is only a means to produce this end.” (Arendt 1998, p. 143).
44. Arendt, H., “Travail, œuvre, action”, *Études phénoménologiques*, Vol. 1, No 2, 1985, p. 17 (authors’ English translation).
45. Arendt (1998, p. 7). In his *Ethics*, Aristotle proposed to found these conditions of plurality and otherness on the concept of *civic* or *political friendship* where some other concepts like *goodwill*, *concord*, and *benefaction* play a key role. See Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, Books 8 and 9.
46. Paul Ricoeur, *Preface* to the French edition of Arendt’s *The Human Condition*. See Arendt, H., *Condition de l’homme moderne*, (trans. by G. Fradier), Paris, Pocket, 1997, p. 26 (authors’ English translation).
47. Arendt (1998, p. 195).
48. Arendt (1998, p. 188).
49. These three ideas (the *who* of the action, *initiative*, and *disclosure*) are also some of the key concepts in Paul Ricoeur’s ethics. See Ricoeur (1990).
50. Arendt (1998, pp. 176–177).
51. “Finally, the “who” which is disclosed by the action is the citizen, since he is distinct from the worker or even the manufacturer of artefacts made by human hand.” (Paul Ricoeur, *Preface* to Arendt, H., *Condition de l’homme moderne*, p. 24, authors’ English translation).
52. Arendt (1998, p. 180).
53. See Bousbaci, R., *Les modèles théoriques de l’architecture: de l’exaltation du faire à la réhabilitation de l’agir dans le bâtir*,

- Doctoral thesis, Faculté de l'aménagement, University of Montreal, 2002. Also, most of this paper's ideas and contents are adapted from this Ph.D. thesis.
54. In his several works on housing domestic practices, Henri Raymond concludes to a certain skill which he attributes to the occupant (the user of the building). He calls it *The language skill* of the occupant (in French: *La compétence langagière de l'habitant*). See Raymond, H., *L'architecture, les aventures spatiales de la raison*, Paris, CCI, 1984, pp. 252–253. That is what Hannah Arendt would rather identify as the ability of the occupant to *initiate a speech* in order to express his/her own project or desire, and to *disclose* him/herself to *others*.
 55. The concept of *concord* is an important one in the Aristotelian philosophy of *friendship*, especially the political friendship. See Book 9 of the *Ethica Nicomachea*.
 56. Forester, J., *The Deliberative Practitioner. Encouraging Participatory Planning Processes*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press, 1999, pp. 6–7.
 57. Prost, R., "L'architecture et la question de l'éthique", *Informel*, Vol. 4, No 2, 1991, p. 40. (authors' English translation)
 58. Prost, R., *Conception architecturale: une investigation méthodologique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1992, p. 13 (authors' English translation).
 59. See the section "Pessac: an example of open construction" in Boudon, Ph., *Lived-in Architecture. Le Corbusier's Pessac revisited*, (trans. By G. Onn), Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1972, p. 120.
 60. Boudon (1972, p. 120).
 61. Simon, H. A., *The Sciences of the Artificial*, p. 59.
 62. "[...] everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (Simon 1969, p. 55).