ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES

Disciplines – including architecture – have flexible limits, which are modified according to new discourses and practices. The cases that defy these limits remain as 'alternatives' until they are internalized and become part of the status quo. A magazine like *ARQ* should also promote those examples that attempt to challenge the limits of each moment; this selection brings up ten cases in which this has happened.

What is this coherence – which, as is immediately apparent, is neither determined by an *a priori* and necessary concatenation, nor imposed on us by immediately perceptible contents? For it is not a question of linking consequences, but of grouping and isolating, of analyzing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents; there is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things; nothing that demands a sharper eye or a surer, better-articulated language; nothing that more insistently requires that one allow oneself to be carried along by the proliferation of qualities and forms. And yet an eye not consciously prepared might well group together certain similar figures and distinguish between others on the basis of such and such difference: in fact, there is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation and of the application of a preliminary criterion. (Foucault, 1994: xix-xx).

These ten projects speak, to varying degrees, of a broader, less tightly bound discipline. Practices ranging from makeshift technological apparatuses

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to public interventions and spectacles, from material fabrications to institutional and cultural critique, or the systematization and rendering visual of trivial procedures like the construction of a kite. We could provisionally call them 'alternatives': practices (once) located at the margins of the discipline – or definitely outside of it – yet somehow posing significant epistemological questions to the specific skillset of the architect. Performed by architects, designers or artists, each of these ten projects represents interesting re-significations – at a specific moment in time, within a particular context – of what architecture as a field might look like. Today, however, none of them would be considered radical, or even novel. We might then ask: 'alternatives' to what? If a discipline is a strategically defined system of order, as Foucault indicates, then what does it mean to stand as an alternative within such a framework? Are alternatives only provisional explosions that cannot yet – but eventually will – be subsumed into the larger *status quo*? Perhaps, one alternative (pun intended) is to critically interrogate each of these ten projects to understand in what ways and through which means they might have contributed or failed to push the boundaries of our field. If, as Foucault argues, a system of order is an essentially tentative, empirical and ultimately precarious structure, then there is no underlying order that, having sustained the field for 100 issues, will prove valid for the next 100. The question then is, how do we move forward? **ARQ**

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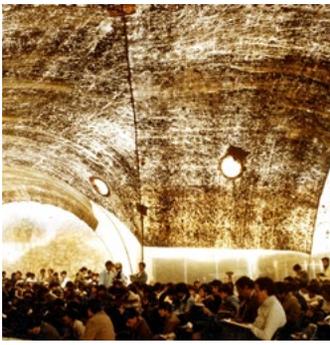
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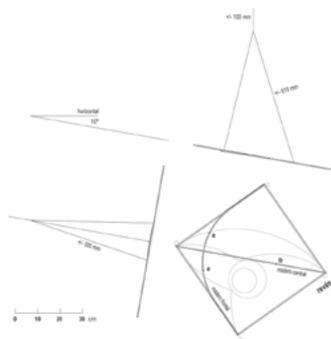

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