

THE ART OF BEER AND THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE

The FIX brewery building on Syngrou Avenue, as we older folks came to know it, represented the architectural modernity of post-war Athens and the productive dynamics of a growth-oriented economy. Both of these were in the vortex of decline at the end of the 20th Century, when the salvation of the building that bore the signature of Takis Zenetos and Margaritis Apostolidis became a *cause célèbre* for a great many architects, albeit with no support from the government or public opinion. Within the semantics of architectural perception, the FIX building was modern and ideal, representing visions, even if these were, to a large extent, ineffective. At the same time, however, it was mythical, rising like a magic veil and refusing to allow one to look upon it as being real. I remember that, in 1990, the doubt and the retort to the 'certainties' had to be published under an alias so as not to provoke the wrath of our dear colleagues. In the meantime, FIX was cleaved two, to the sound of false promises from the political class in power at the time, subsequently being put through the wringer before being transformed into what is today the National Museum of Contemporary Art. Yet, it conceals inside it, deep in its entrails and recorded memory, a multidimensional, inconsistent and enchanting story of production and construction mutations, herein revealed through an anatomical probing into the built volume, which enriches its contemporary image by adding a depth of time that is its own.

The book's interest lies in this anatomical probing and the effort to highlight the extent of the history attached to the FIX building / National Museum of Contemporary Art through the stratification of its constant modifications. This methodological approach responds to the multidimensional and inconsistent aspect of its subject matter, seeking parallel or diagonal crisscrossed approaches that do not follow acceptable disciplines, as with the FIX building itself throughout its long course. The restiveness and indiscipline of this approach constitute its wealth.

Undoubtedly, the most significant contribution is the systematic effort to reconstruct the archive of the construction and architectural phases of the building parallel to an investigation of the course of the industrial enterprise and the family that had founded and developed it. About Zenetos' masterpiece, of which we are all certain, we know much less than anyone would have imagined: it appears we are able to document little more than what he himself had published in magazines, and are unable to substantiate the extent to which his intentions were included in the building. Many consecutive building permits and supplementary construction phases, in a factory that would continue to grow and operate uninterrupted, map out a far from ideal reality. In this complex stratification dating back to the end of the 19th century, the role of the static calculation is fundamental, and the civil engineer's archive, complemented by that of the city planning service, is a valuable source of information. However, the architect's archive, deliberately latent, reveals one of the many wounds that cannot be healed on Syngrou Avenue, in this way concealing evidence that could be revealing. And despite the impressive retrospective documentation of the phases, we are still not able today to say if, and to what extent, as many people claim, Pericles Sakellarios was involved, where and to what extent the preexisting buildings designed by Sotiris Magiasis and Alexandros Nikoloudis continued to exist in the factory in 1960, whether or not Metaxas was also involved at the very beginning, and what exactly all of them had contributed. And all this has been reconfigured and transformed into the National Contemporary Museum of Art.

Another important dimension of the research came about by happenchance. The anatomical observation of the body of the already-mutilated building became feasible the moment the works to convert the abandoned factory into a museum began. Observing the demolition and works necessary for the configuration of new operational spaces nonetheless predetermined by the coexistence of cumulative stonework and arches with load-bearing reinforced concrete elements at different horizontal and vertical levels, the observer – that is to say, the author – was privilege to an event that happens only once, and was able to perceive what until then had been hidden in our collective consciousness: the successive buildings and continuous mutations under the seemingly cohesive shell of 1960, behind the protected facade of Syngrou Avenue and Frantzi Str. and the non-protected facade of Kallirois Avenue and the traumatic incision. As happens in archeology, the layers become visible for a while until they are removed to reveal the next, and the result does not reflect the beginning but the end of the excavation. This book is also a vessel for this unique dimension made possible by the transformation of the factory into a museum.

The third research dimension was the brewery's attempt to reconstitute itself within the changing dynamics of its evolution from a small to a great industrial enterprise, with evidence of the economic history and the functional organization of the production process inside the shell of the building, which explained and prescribed the course of its development. Moreover, this was not impersonal, i.e. not simply taken from the archives of the Bank that kept the relics of a company in liquidation; it also took on a living and experiential character, seeking to interpret the contribution of all the human actors and protagonists of an era when FIX was part of our everyday lives. Due to the slow but steady march of time, this became another primary and indispensable record.

The last dimension that I would like to highlight concerns the body – both the body of architecture and the human body – which necessarily experiences the trauma of its existence, the trauma of contradiction and decay, both literal and allegorical, deliberate or accidental or random. The consideration of FIX from the perspective of trauma – with the successive additions, the mutilation and the constant healing – is one that touches on the essence of the body of architecture, that of the architect and even that of the resident themselves. In this case, all levels of the traumatic consideration of the object have their point, and are engraved in our collective memory, in the building as an archive, in the archive of the building and in the psychosomatic status of those who still experience its legacy.

This book is the result of long-term research on many levels, and it is aimed at both the specialist and a broader audience in a way that reflects its course and aspirations. Like any research, it has a subject, an author who is active and expresses herself but at the same time acknowledges the collaboration and 'fermentation' that is necessary when encountering objective data, people and real-life situations. In this case, fermentation is the most appropriate word since it points to a long and a fruitful process that produces a 'nutritious' and 'satisfying' result: a book that has gone through the maturation of a thesis, and a beer that has undergone sufficient fermentation. Both depend on the raw materials, knowledge and the art of processing. Cheers!