

THE EXAMPLE OF THE *ARGO*, THE ETHICS OF LABOR, AND THE RIDDLE OF THE TRAUMA

With this study, Dora Theodoropoulou contributes to the dialog around Takis C. Zenetos' work *inter alia* in two ways. Firstly, it is a thesis that is a conflation of methodological discipline and idiosyncratic priority; in other words, a combination not commonly encountered in domestic academic research. Usually, we lean in one direction or the other. Here, however, there is use of methodological tools, while at the same time use of what we call *by project*; that is to say, with the character of design in its interpretative approach. Such a choice I consider a distinctive element of this study, one that forces us to swing continuously between scientific method and idiosyncratic interpretation.

The second, clearly stated in the title, is the fact that it is not a work concerning Takis Zenetos in general, but one focused on the specific FIX building. In short, this is a crucial differentiation since we often talk about this building in vague or sublime terms, forgetting the phases of its gradual reconstruction and its dismantling. What conclusion can be drawn from this? The realization that at the core of Zenetos' architecture we find *reconstruction* and not the *ex-novo* creation of the building.

Modernity, for the most part, did not welcome such a view. It preferred the logic of the 'blank slate', the infamous *tabula rasa*; that is, the emptying and dismantling of what pre-existed and building again from scratch. In Zenetos' conceptual framework - which, to a certain extent, we also see in the City of the Future - it is not always clear what happens on the ground where the pylons of the hanging grand structure rise up. However, here, too, we have a notion of architecture as continuous remodeling and derivative addition. After all, the idea of infinite 'flexibility' and constant 'change' appears to be a constancy in his architecture.

We can cite from mythology, as a cultural example of such a stance, the notion of the *Argo*; that is, the ship on which the Argonauts sailed and which was constantly being repaired while at sea. Something similar happened at the Fix factory, as this book proves most convincingly: production continued in the brewery's elongated factory at the same time it was being reconstructed. In short, we could argue that the architecture of the Fix factory has never been Fixed. This is a critical and radical breakthrough in how we look at the building itself. Stoppage of production, dead time during the carrying out of works, clinical death - to use physical terms. That is, there was no suspension of the functional life of the building. This obviously reframes the data, and the example of the *Argo* emerges as a design archetype for such a stance: the factory, like the mythical ship, is repaired at sea, while continuing to function, and not decommissioned in a dockyard.

Dora Theodoropoulou's work integrates this dimension into the history—or even better, the *chronicle*—of the factory, while simultaneously examining some of the psychopathological elements of Greek modernity, such as the concept of the gaping wound or trauma. It also attaches importance to the interim period, which for most is a dark time, deleted from memory, i.e. from 1977 until the transformation of a large segment of the incomplete industrial unit into the National Museum of Contemporary Art, the building having had been turned into a Pyrenean ruin.

The Fix building does not have, we would say, one ideal, unique moment of publicity. Zenetos himself drew special attention to this fact, from the very first publications on the building. We know that modernity has developed a psychotic obsession with the ideal moment of photographing a building. For at least 15 minutes, all the wondrous buildings of modernity have been considered masterpieces when photographed and published for the first time. It is a moment of extraordinary focus and clarity that we are unlikely ever to see again. In this case, Zenetos incorporates and highlights the transitional difficulty of the transformation in the architectural process. Or rather, the focus is on transformation and its procedures rather than merely static and idealized configuration. This is a special and contemporary element of architectural design that is closely and resolutely observed in Dora Theodoropoulou's study.

Equally critical is the typological shift from the model of the enclosed factory that develops around an inner courtyard and the radical transformation of the perception of work. I would like to dwell a little on this connection, reconnecting architecture with the concepts of labor, while also recalling the close and organic relationship between the concepts of industrial labor and abstract language. We are already aware of a number of appreciable changes in factory architecture since the early 20th century. Industrial labor is no longer considered repulsive, nor shameful, as it used to be seen throughout almost all of the 18th and 19th centuries, and gradually there is reconciliation with the model of the industrial worker. The proletarian labor ethic gradually identifies with the idealization of the working body.

In this sense, the FIX building introduces us to one of the structural and political elements of the revisions that modernity induced: What is our stance towards the working body? Most of the factories located on the outskirts of Athens before World War II developed around closed quads and impenetrable stockyards. The FIX factory radically changes such a perception. This is a particularly modernist element that was obviously also exploited for communication or advertising purposes by the company. To passers-by in Syngrou Avenue, the linear glazing of the building reveals – one might say, promotes - *machinery* and *workers* in uniform clothing mass-producing a liquid product that we drink. This is one of the profound changes introduced by Zenetos and his associates into the architecture of the building, one that is worth a closer examination. The visualization of the Fordian structure of the Fix plant, namely the production line and the chain of actions, is reproduced in the linearity of the aspects. Of course, what follows is the linearity of the avenue. In short, this is the culmination of the fusion of production and metropolitan aesthetics. Everything we term the 'abstract/subtractive language' of architecture is driven by such a fusion.

This is why I believe that the analogies Dora Theodoropoulou attempts to draw, and the dialectic that this monumental linear building has developed, with its metaphors of the body and the city, covering all the different historic periods, is indeed of interest.

I highlight two additional critical elements of this study.

The first has to do with the fact that this study refers to and uses rich historical data. Much of the narrative documentation is in the form of cellphone photos and, above all, from newspapers or other electronic media. This makes for an enrichment of the sources of architectural historiography: from the official document, the correspondence of the stakeholders or the architect's plans, to the unofficial personal or media record. What I mean to say here is that the material scope of the research evidence does not only include the archive of the architect or the industrial enterprise, but also media material, proof indeed that the very building is reproduced in the mass media.

The second and final comment is on the concept of trauma presented in this work. The incisive definition of trauma reminds us that trauma is essentially an impossible encounter with reality. It occurs when we fail to meet with reality. I would note, therefore, this idea within the context of the concepts under investigation. This is because our attitude to trauma is often nothing less than its repetition.