Foreword: Architectonics of the Case

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"Thinking is a feast that consists in exhausting oneself on striving not to 'consume' any of the abundant dishes one finds set on the table." This phrase has appeared on the Research Unit of Architecture Theory and Philosophy of Technics homepage since its foundation in 2016. The following pages take up the challenge of this motto by proposing a journal in the form of a banquet, or rather a banquet in the form of a journal. Inspired by one of Dante Alighieri's lesser-known works,[1] *CONVIVIA* aims to multiply the analogy between thinking and feasting and subtract the first from the rampant logic of consumption and production. Similarly to its Greek kin, the symposium, a convivium puts into relation nutrition

1 *Il convivio* is an unfinished work written by Dante Alighieri between 1304 and 1307.

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and celebration, everyday necessities, and exceptional contingencies.[2] *CONVIVIA* involves the Pythagorean comma—something that evades exhaustiveness and yet makes it possible to have enough; something that provides for the possibility of a notion of proportionate moderateness: open and indefinite, situative. It is a proportionateness that, however, is not absolute: instead, it is both moderate and immense at the same time, an architectonic bridging that provides a scale for incommensurables.

A banquet, then. Yet, it is not just a matter of feeding or drinking. The word suggests it: *Convivium* involves "conviviality," which can be translated as "living together" without falling into multiple individuals or a unifying identity. Life, articulated and conjugated, finding ever new "fittings" in particular living formations, provides for pulse and heartbeat, harmonization as well as discordance. Life can hardly be attended to if it does not also involve its negative—death; it is what "feeds on negative entropy," a famous Viennese physicist answered to the question at the heart of one of his most popular books.[3] Negentropy was to become a way for quantifying information mathematically, an ever-impure something that all things in the universe send, receive, store, and process. *Non vita, sed convivium*: A cosmic feast, in which the world—the totality of what is—cannot be exhaustively defined once and for all, out of necessity, but has instead to be articulated, transcendentally sculpted out via a kind of immanence provided by code.

2 Contingencies that can, sometimes, start to bloom from accidental getting-in-touch (*tingere*, lat. for "happening; touching"). As Angelus Silesius knew, "The rose is without 'why'; it flowers because it flowers."

3 Erwin Schrödinger, *What Is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

To quote another notable Viennese figure, the world is "all that is the case."[4]

Each issue of *CONVIVIA* articulates a miniature cosmos, or a small set of cosmic constellations, precisely by making cases upon a determined pretext. Case, from Latin *casus*, is a matter of falling (that still echoes in the German *Fall*). But *case* is also quite an ambiguous term: On the one hand, it shares a certain kinship with chance (in Italian, both terms are translated as *caso*) and, on the other, it stands as a prerequisite for the determination of "domains of causes" for which no orientation is preset—what appears to be falling "down" could actually be in the course of being "lifted up," as if by the hands of winds or other circular currents. In such circuitous domains, *casual* and *causal* thus appear as two faces of the same coin. *CONVIVIA* proposes to look at such motion by considering its "climatic" nature. If there is no fall without inclination—no case without *clinamen*—the opposite also seems to be true: In grammar, cases allow for declension; here, "cases" allow for different "inclinations" of a single noun.

Not only causes and chance: The categorical nature of cases is able to join particular and universal. In *La categorie des cas*, Louis Hjemslev writes: "There is perhaps no grammatical category whose immediate aspect is so clear, so coherent, so symmetrical, so easily accessible as that of cases. On the other hand, if we look closely, the system of cases is in many languages of enormous complexity, posing at the same time all the fundamental problems of grammar."[5] By means of declensions and

4 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1974), 5.

5 Own translation. Louis Hjemslev, *La catégorie des cas. Étude de grammaire générale* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1975), 1.

particular endings, the case manages to transport nouns from the sacred domain of names (*onomai*) to the public one of discourse and language (*rhemata*, *logoi*). The "obliqueness" or the "inclination" of such declensions happens similarly to a *contrapposto*, as stances that are giving and catching at the same time. "If the phenomenon of cases is an essential feature of the *logos*, the case is also the category that distinguishes the main *merē tou logou* [*the "part" of the logos, nd*]. The *onoma* is characterized as a case-sensitive part of speech, and the *rhema* as a non-case-sensitive part of speech. This means that cases retain their place in antiquity as the primary category of the noun. The declension par excellence is the declension by case ".[6]

CONVIVIA is a journal, and as such, it has something to do with accounting and the keeping of time. It does not do so as a "chronicle"—as a day-by-day recollection—nor as a mere partitioning of a circle; the time of *CONVIVIA* is analogous to the one that passes at the crossing between the ecliptic—the imaginary plane that accommodates the Earth's orbit around the sun—and the equator. The different cases can be compared to the different astrological "houses," meeting points that form constellations, places of encounter between linear passing and eternal recurrence.

A recurrent question arises at this point: What does all of this have to do with architecture? If it is true that, as Ludwig Wittgenstein said, the world is whatever is the case, it is also true that cases are not just "there." They are not ontological or epistemological objects waiting to be discovered. One must always *make* a case; thus, cases always involve a crafting. Making cases is an art, a *techne*, that entails rhetorical craftsmanship and mathemat-

6 Ibid., 2.

ical precision—Vitruvius' *fabrica* and *raciotinatio*. The *tetractys* format which the Roman architect gave to his ten books is the archetypical template for case-making as we have just described it: Two incommensurable domains—two legs of a Platonic *lambda*—weaved together by a rhetorico-mathematical invention that proportions each figured-out instance as a case. *CONVIVIA* is a journal for architectonics: it is not a journal about the "art of building" (*Baukunst*) but a journal for the *techne* involved in what pertains to the architecture of the cosmos.

Today this may sound far-fetched, and yet, is not the millenary tradition of architectural treatises, from the *Libri Decem* to *S, M, L, XL*, precisely about such an art of case-making? Aren't architectural orders precisely a way to connect sacred and public domains? And could we not understand the various volumes on architectural orders—Vignola, Palladio, Serlio, Scamozzi, and so on—as different "declensions" of a number of cases? To preserve order and continuity (Vitruvius called the orders *genera*, from *genus*, in tune with the idea of a family lineage, something that endures through time and in spite of individual mortality) in a way that is always mindful that this can be done not just in epistemic terms, as an apodeictic placing, but in architectonic, i.e., proportional terms, by means of an analogy that—as Simone Weil reminds us—is always performed thanks to the absent presence of something "negligible," of a residue.[7]

7 "Contradiction essentielle dans notre conception de la science : la fiction du vase clos (fondement de toute science expérimentale) est contraire à la conception scientifique du monde. Deux expériences ne devraient jamais donner de résultats identiques. On s'en tire par la notion de négligeable. Or le négligeable, c'est le monde… / Il en est ainsi de la plus simple technique. On la choisit pour modèle. / La notion d'analogie, de rapports identiques, est centrale chez les Grecs. Pont

Perhaps on this note, the "pretext" for this issue can be best introduced: Being antinomic both to property and to propriety, *filth* is precisely what escapes and exceeds a neat definition of things. In this regard, filth can be likened to *dirt*—a term that has recently met quite some success, also in the field of architecture theory. Differently from dirt, filth entails a quasi-moral dimension that the notion of dirt carefully "washes" off from itself. In this sense, filth is not merely "matter out of place" but also has some spiritual substance.

The first two essays of this issue make a case for it: Michael R. Doyle's "Masks of the Genius Loci: Towards a Phenotechnics of Place" picks up Norberg-Schulz's famous notion by relating the "spirit of the place" with a "technics of detachment." Such a relation is mediated by a notion of the mask that has to do precisely with filth as a mismatch between the rational and the real. In Andrea Kopranovic's essay, "Grace—Filth—Gravity. Being Attentive to the In-Between," filth is something to be attentive to instead, an in-between gravity and light in which grace can emerge. Love—son of Poros and Penia—is one of the "masks" of such an in-between. The erotic theme is also at the center of Emmanuelle Chiappone-Piriou's essay, "Onanistic Engenderings." Here, it is precisely the masculine marking of the proper name to be not only questioned but turned against itself, from a logic of reproduction—of spreading and continuation of the name—to an onanistic one of self-complementation. Chiappone-Piriou alchemically turns the "filthy" character of masturbation into one of intellectual fertility. The "feminist" take is echoed by Selena Savic: in "Facing Mud. On Matter-Informational Building and Writing,"

entre le fini et l'infini." Simone Weil, *Cahiers*, in *Œuvres complètes*, tome VI, Vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 547.

she encodes filth in terms of a matter—mud—which is pre-specific to standards, yet it can engender them. On this side of the spectrum, filth reveals itself in terms of waste. Klaus Spiess brings our attention from waste at large to a rather organic kind of waste: his essay, "Redefining Waste: A Review of Fecal Matter Inspiring Novel Life Forms," focuses on feces and on the intelligent life that it enshrines. In "Cosmetics of Hospitality: A Question of Limits," Jordi Vivaldi brings, in turn, the theme of waste to a cosmic dimension through the analogy between waste (*immunditia*) and world (*mundus*). Such cosmic character assumes finally an apocalyptic yet parodistic take in Georgios Tsagdis's essay on "The Parody of Matter: Bataille, Pu'iito, Tlazolteotl, and the Filth to Come."

The Kitchen ought to be neither just under the Noses of the Guests, nor at too great a Distance; but so that the Victuals may be brought in neither too hot nor too cold, and that the Noise of the Scullions, with the Clatter of their Pans, Dishes and other Utensils, may not be troublesome. The Passage through which the Victuals are to be carried, should be handsome and convenient, not open to the Weather nor dishonoured by any Filth that may offend the Stomachs of the Guests.
— Leon Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria* (1485)

Contagion, after all, and as with contract, indicates not only a form of generation but also of relation and subjectivity. As in the contractual, contagion implies a kind of contact. Yet, as François Delaporte has noted, contagion (as well as contamination) "are words derived from the Latin for 'contact with filth'" whereas contract, I would add, signifies the making of a bargain or drawing together.
— Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion* (2012)

Cleanliness is a nationalvirtue in America. No filth, no dust. Sea breezes incessantly sweep through the limpid maritime sky. The offices are clean; the bath tubs, the shops, the glistening hotels; the dazzling restaurants and bars. The immaculate personnel, in shirt sleeves, is shining white. Food is wrapped up in bright cellophane. There is no more real dust than there is symbolic dust, everything is new and spotless, including the collegiate Gothic of the universities. [...] People who wash their shirts, paint their houses, clean the glass in their windows, have an ethic different from those who cultivate dust and filth. To prove that they possess an age-old culture, the latter preserve the cracks in the walls, the patina, and what is worse, they have even established the taste