

# e(time)ologies

or the changing meaning of architectural words

The study of the origin and history of words has played a central role in the recurrent search for a deep, allegedly forgotten, meaning of architecture. The strikingly persistent and often problematic influence of Martin Heidegger's *Bauen Wohnen Denken* proves the fascination of architects with the ancestral power of words. The same fascination explains the equally recurrent urge to explore new meanings and invent new terms in architecture, in order to alleviate the weight of old cultural prejudices and connotations. Hence, etymological lines extend in two opposite time directions: one pointing to roots and sources, the other to future visions and transformations. Architectural thought oscillates between the illusory stability of conventional, present meanings, the mystery of remote, often obscure, connotations, and the poetic, creative drive of language invention. Choosing between communication (order) and noise (entropy), the opposite terms used by Umberto Eco, becomes a typically architectural problem, one which relates both to words and forms, terms and materials.

The heavy architecture-is-a-language fever of the 1960s is long overcome. Robin Evans' "all things with conceptual dimension are like language, as all grey things are like elephants" might suffice to prevent its return. However, the multiplication and transformation of architectural words has probably accelerated since then, pushed by the development of competitive research production. In fact, every research problem is, at its core, a problem of language, of word use and word definition. Research on the contemporary urban and architectural condition can be no exception.

Meaningful arguments about the changing meaning of architectural words need to address the role of language in the description of current matters and realities as well as its potential to unchain innovative perspectives and actions. New situations call for new terms as much as new terms provoke new situations. Today's interface of

architecture with other disciplines is exemplary in this sense. The growing need to establish meaningful communication between experts from different fields fosters both codification and distortion of language, the homologation of terms and its expansion through translation and borrowing. In the first case, the descriptive precision is favoured to produce an objective (codified) system, whereas misunderstandings, metaphors and inaccuracies can lead to the generation of new knowledge and actions in the second. Such complexities are especially evident in the terminology emerging from practice-based or design-based research. In fact, the translation between visual and verbal signs, which is at the core of architectural practice, tends to obscure the distinction between descriptions and actions.

While the transdisciplinary context might certainly lead to an intensified look, in the last decades architecture has engaged in a process of expansion and adjustment led, in part, by new combinations of old keywords (ecology, landscape, urbanism, infrastructure, logistics...). Beyond disciplinary discourses, contemporary debates addressing the social, ecological and political connotations of architecture are providing a new set of critical words. Adjectives ("post-anthropocentric", "non-human", "inclusive", "transcultural"...), names ("decolonization", "decarbonization"...), and phrases ("climate change", "race and gender identity"...), have gained increasing visibility over the last two decades, both to inform and transform architecture's critical thinking. The proliferation of prefixes in many of them (post-, de-, trans-), denotes the urge to build new words and concepts from existing materials, pushed by the speed of contemporary culture. The problem of meaning persistence and change, but also of the tacit positions inscribed in words, can be exemplified by the crucial differences between "post-colonization" and "decolonization".

These and other terms are generated by a sequence of adjustments and oppositions, distortions and borrowings. The study of such processes, not in strict etymological terms but in a broader sense including the complex relations between words, practices, disciplines, is key to unveil the cultural and ideological positions behind current architectural debates. We propose to carry out this critique as a tool to explore today's emerging terminologies, and the ones to come.

The 5th edition of Critic|all Conference welcomes contributions that critically address the uses and misuses, the creation and wearing, the transformation and timeliness of the words with which architecture is - or has been - described, historized or updated through time. We expect interpretive work that draws new relations between words, concepts, things and practices, not strict etymological studies.

The most basic structure should present the expression or word under scrutiny, explain the reasons that justify the choice, formulate new interpretations or perspectives stemming from it, support these with arguments in the main body and bring the paper to a conclusion.

Papers must be limited to 5000 words, written in English and preceded by a 300-word abstract. Peer reviewing will be carried out in two phases.

Abstract deadline: 16 January 2023

Full-paper deadline: 24 May 2023

Critic|all is an initiative lead by the Architectural Design Department of Madrid ETSAM—UPM. This two-days edition of the conference is organized in collaboration with the Department of Architecture & the Built Environment, Delft University of Technology, and will be held in Delft on the 10–11 October 2023. This research event aims to bring together both young and established scholars from every discipline dealing with architectural thought, including approaches from history, historiography, theory or design.

All accepted contributions will be included in the digital proceedings of the conference, a publication with ISBN that will be available online. Previous editions have already been indexed in CPCI (WoS). Depending on the amount of works submitted, the Scientific Committee will carry out a selection of papers for presentation during the conference.

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