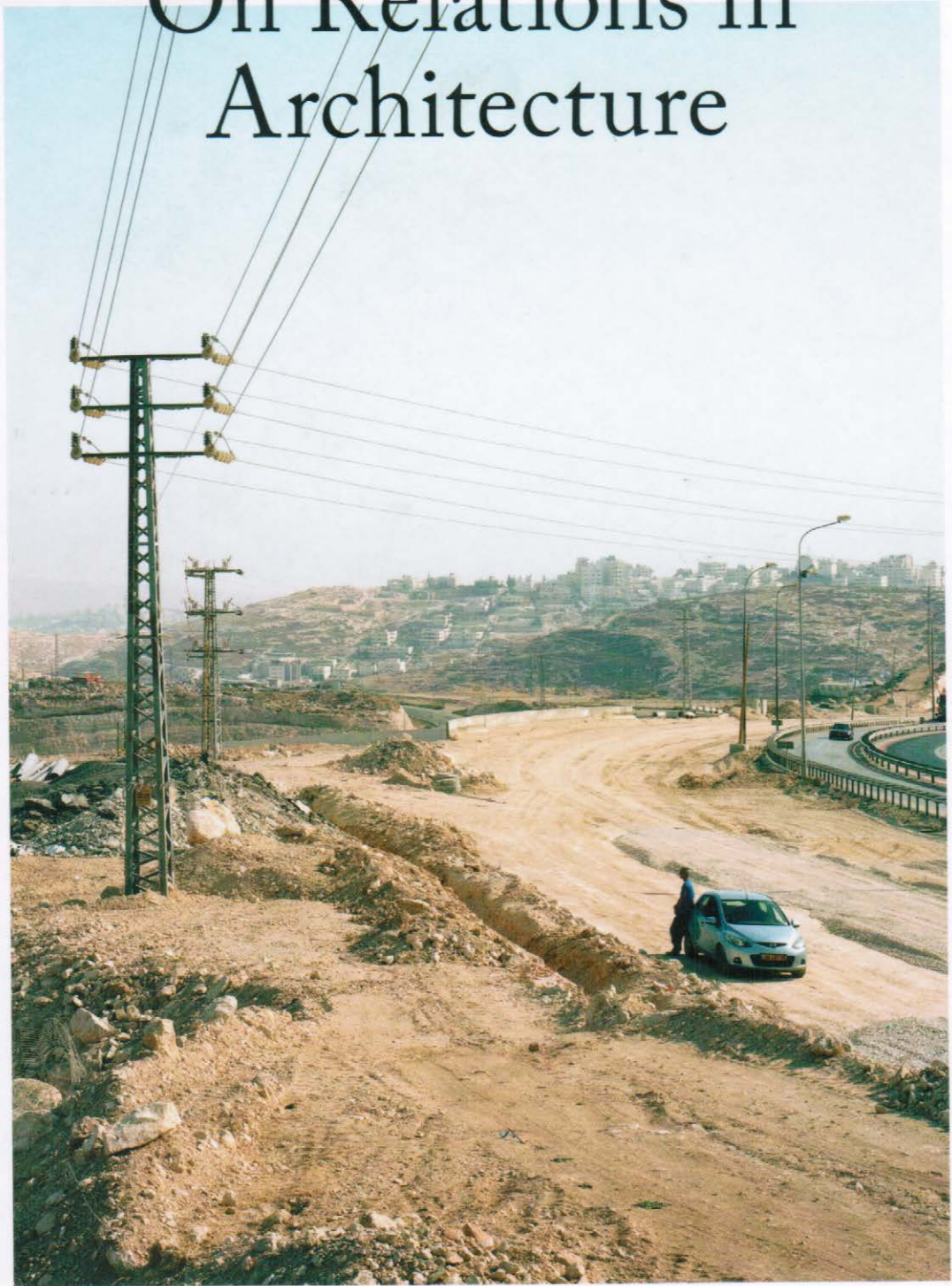


On Relations in Architecture

CARTHA



WORTH SHARING CONFRÈRES MANNSCHAFT SANTÍSIMA TRINIDAD

Foreword

The decision to make a book nowadays often involves a welter of grave questions. Especially those new to publishing might end up pondering the book's very right to exist; a significant amount of time will also be spent weighing the "digital" vs. "physical" options; one might even speak of the responsibility that making a book implies. Novice editors often put themselves under pressure, prompted both by the expectations they place on themselves and an anxiety for the outcome to correspond to different pre-conceived ideas of what a book should be. This is fuelled by a strange combination of idealism and a desire to "make it right", in which "right" usually remains a rather vague concept. This charged mental predisposition, combined with a massive amount of working hours,

is enough to suppress all the joy this kind of endeavour can bring. These are also times in which we are constantly told of the imminent death of printed media, and in which – even if not acknowledging this as a valid speculation – some people fear that books may become objects of pure luxury and speculation. Publishing a book has never been so frightening a task. It seems that in this context, books have become the holy grail of the savvy, the last bastions of durability, heavy not only physically but also in their contents. In all the musing, one has lost a certain impartiality.

It is time to calm down a little, to recoup ease and pleasure, to veer away from the overheated and somewhat dogmatic discussions, to regain a certain nonchalance in dealing with books and their “capacity”, their meaning and position within the broader context of publishing. This is not to say that one should not ask the “existential” questions, but they should not weigh so gravely. They should be asked from a slightly different perspective and in different terms.

I, for one, do not see much hope in the attempts small independent publishers have made to compete with the larger, commercially successful ones. This has involved internalising a profit-driven mindset and reproducing their strategies and evaluation criteria. There is however a huge potential for small, ephemeral initiatives such as CARTHA and their aims to take on the pioneering

task of redefining the concept of publishing and opening new paths towards alternative market ideas and distribution networks. Initiatives born out of shared beliefs and interpersonal relationships, rather than out of imposed institutional structures or a financial necessity. Initiatives which base their undertaking on a variety of skills, interests, and means possess the mental and structural ability (and agility) to work towards a radical change in our understanding of publishing and its aims.

Rather than thinking about what a book should be, they can think about what it can be; what value it might have beyond the one determined by the market or the most widespread, thus non-directional transmission of all the knowledge that can fit into a book case; where a book's position might be in the whole process of a recalibrated publishing. Initiatives such as CARTHA are in a position to re-align their value systems, shift them away from the businesses' prevalent evaluation criteria, away from numbers and an obsessive search for exposure. They can avoid considering maximum coverage of the distribution network as a synonym for success, break away from a project-imposed time frame, stop thinking of digital versus analogue as a relevant dichotomy, and develop entirely new ways of understanding the concept of publishing, and the related motivations and practices. Because – despite all prophecies of doom – the profound changes the field of publishing is undoubtedly undergoing, may not

only lead towards segregation, exclusion or a capitalization of knowledge or of the means of publishing but – with the attentive and proactive concern of the people involved – also towards its democratization.

How? By cherishing and fostering the value embedded in the manifold networks underlining the construct, and by embracing and exploring the potential of current technologies for cross-overs, sampling, remixing, appropriation, and sharing; and by challenging ostensibly fixed poles. This would allow for established genres and perceptions to become more fluid, opening up new possibilities for experimentation.

If publishing which sets aside all prejudice is understood in its very basic meaning – making information available to the public, one can imagine publishing breaking free from its formal or medial confines, conquering three-dimensional space and slipping away from the accepted notion of printed or digitalized matter as its only modes of expression. A book in this context appears to be only one of many valid publishing strategies, one expression, one of the channels under the roof of “publishing”. Each channel has its own means, outcomes, languages and possibilities, each of them offers a ground for specific yet internally diverse collaborations, relationships, exchanges and degrees of participation; each channel is connected to the other, all of them complementary and conjoined. Rather than merely depicting a reality, stating

a fact or capturing a specific moment in time, a book, a magazine, a physical encounter, a blog or a flyer, are complementary facets of one endeavour, each of them revealing intermediate insights, which only make sense in a very specific time, environment, and in front of a specific public. A book in this sense could be seen as a material expression of (spatial and interpersonal) processes and experiments with no final outcome, not offering one truth but many truths for the editors as well as for the recipients.

Departing from this idea, let's look at publishing as a post-representational process: A form of publishing that is not about depicting, objectivizing, illustrating, communicating or drawing conclusions, but lays the ground for an intellectual and socio-political practice. The process of publishing under these premises becomes a gathering of empathic individuals, working and thinking together, sharing ideas. Post-representational publishing is about allowing communication to happen. Publishing in this sense also asks for a specific mind-set: being aware, being informed, being critical, being incredulous, letting a multi-vocal choir evolve and persist without excluding its cacophonous voices, without following the desire to smoothen them. The publishing context can be a unifying pretext for experimentation, a heterotopia where resonance (rather than competition), reverberation, exchange, humanity, subjectivity, absurdity, ephemerality,

the refusal of utilitarianism, shared hope, empathy and friendship become the base and direction of publishing work; a place to find a sense of joy and ease that should be inherent in the pursuit of our practices.

CARTHA, born out of shared beliefs, have united under their “publishing roof” diverse personalities, professions and aims, drawing from a network of guests and friends. They have implemented a variety of digital and physical means of making public. In their own words: “A geography under construction shaped by diverse forms of representations. It is a map where opinions relate, diverge, collapse. A foggy world in which borders are constantly questioned, shifted, moved by its own tectonics but never ceasing to exist. (...) An evergrowing system of references that allows us to position ourselves. It shows us what we can get to know and what surrounds us, waiting for us to reach for it, if we so wish.”

For CARTHA this book seems a way to look back on their production through their interpersonal relationships, their common work and shared beliefs. It is a moment to reflect on things that happened and might happen, a pause which enables them to sum up and collect, a way to explore the different means of publishing with which they are operating (the website, the book, the event) in relation to the published content and their personal structure, to explore possibilities and specificities, creating a tool for themselves as well as for others

to generate knowledge in the realms of their topic for this year: on relations in architecture. CARTHA are also well aware of the public's prevalent reception – and without giving it too much importance, they are consciously playing with it: they are aware that printed matter transmits a sense of reliability, which is – in the eye of the recipient – different to the one of digital means: the printed, according to the predominant perception, creates a different kind of response, and “enhances” the value of the published content as well as the credibility of the publishers.

Initiatives such as CARTHA take on a crucial role in the process of re-purposing publishing: They are the enablers and guardians of a heterotopic publishing sphere and custodians of its outcomes.

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