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PETER COOK BEYOND ARCHIGRAM:
TOWARDS A CRITICAL UTOPIANISM

SCIENTIFIC SUBJECT REVIEW
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FIG. 1 SWISS COTTAGE TOWER BY PETER COOK
SL. 1. ŠVICARSKI „COTTAGE TOWER” PETERA COOKA



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PETER COOK BEYOND ARCHIGRAM: TOWARDS A CRITICAL UTOPIANISM

PETER COOK IZVAN ARCHIGRAMA: PREMA KRITIČNOM UTOPIZMU

ARCHIGRAM
ARCHITECTURAL UTOPIANISM
COOK, PETER
UTOPIA

ARCHIGRAM
UTOPIZAM U ARHITEKTURI
COOK, PETER
UTOPIJA

This text visits and manifests the critical utopianism embedded in the praxis of Peter Cook, within which resides a promising mode of architectural thinking based on reflexive inquiries rather than absolute and closed utopias. It aims to revert questions that link utopia and spatial determinism towards questions that revolve around utopian methodologies that become trainings of architectural imagination.

Rad se bavi prikazom kritičkom utopizma ugrađenog u rad Petera Cooka, u kojemu se manifestira način arhitektonskog razmišljanja koji se više temelji na refleksivnim istraživanjima nego apsolutnim i zatvorenim utopijama. U radu se nastoji preusmjeriti pitanja koja povezuju utopiju i prostorni determinizam na pitanja koja se bave utopijskim metodologijama koje postaju poligoni za vježbanje arhitektonske imaginacije.

INTRODUCTION

UVOD

Utopia, as a means of reorganizing the relationships between problems and models, is returning to favor within the contemporary debates and practices of architecture.¹ There are a growing number of discussions revolving around the place a revised version of utopianism might potentially hold within the discipline as a means to revolutionize post-critical tendencies. These mostly recall utopianism primarily for its constitutive potential, as one of the very few survivors of holistic thinking.²

Central to these discussions is the conceptualization of utopian vision as a positive informing model rather than an absolute, restrictive and unobtainable one. Within these, utopia implies – if we are to put it in Ruth Levitas' words – a “desire” for wholeness³, but not absolute totalities.

Urban theorists and practitioners seeking the ‘relevance of utopia’ today are doing so with an eye to the dangers and risks of its direct translation into real-life practices. The aim in this approach is to examine the utopian tradition in order to drag out ‘useful ideas, enlightening images, challenging visions, and perspectives’, and therefore, use it as a ‘navigational compass’ to respond to the wide-ranging issues of contemporary urban settings⁴ – a tool (but not a goal) appropriate for practitioners, whose objectives have shifted from the goal of creating a perfect world towards the challenge of designing viable and

sustainable environments, capable of evolving in an era of expanded risks, scales, complexities, and asperities.

On parallel lines, utopian studies are shifting towards paradigms which favor open definitions of utopia(nism). Within these, descriptive tendencies, which create thick separations between the utopian and the non-utopian, are set aside for rather analytical ones, through which utopian aspects and methodologies embedded within cultural phenomena may be unraveled. Thuswise, utopianism's formal, functional and thematic variables multiply.

These mostly build upon the trajectory Ernst Bloch follows, claiming that utopia does not necessarily “require the imaginative construction of whole other worlds.”⁵ It may well be present as a pointed impulse embedded in different spheres of daily life. It may be “fragmentary, fleeting, elusive.”⁶ Within this framework, utopianism is not an inanimate concept, but rather, a dialectical and dynamic one, and it evolves parallel to the realities it is fed by, critical to, and influential on, within various thematic domains and in multitudes of forms and methodologies.

The discussion of utopianism here in this text is built upon this trajectory, within which a definitive distinction between what is utopia(n) and what is not is deliberately refrained from so as to accentuate the significance of methodological varieties of a reflexive and critical mode of utopianism, examples of which have been existent yet pigeonholed throughout the history of architecture.

This survey, here, intends to open a novel discussion ground over which specifically such utopianisms of critical inquiry within which utopia was exploited as a method, as a device to think with, but not as a goal, might be anatomized. To this end, parallel to an expansion on this critical form of utopianism, Peter Cook, a significantly momentous and exemplary figure whose utopian tendencies have spanned several decades up until the present, finding various forms throughout his

¹ This text is constituted based on the findings of the author's PhD dissertation entitled *A New Conceptual Framework for Architectural Utopia(nism)s* completed under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Suha Ozkan in the Department of Architecture at Middle East Technical University in 2014, funded by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey.

² COLEMAN, 2005

³ LEVITAS, 1990

⁴ GEUS, 1999

⁵ BLOCH, 1995: 5

⁶ LEVITAS, 2013: 4

⁷ Utopias within which the imagined space is thought to steer social change. Given this definition, it would not be fallacious to claim that architectural utopias, once given specific architectural forms, for better or worse, might

architectural practice, is visited as an explanatory case.

UTOPIANISM AS CRITIQUE

UTOPIZAM KAO KRITIKA

Even though a significant number of theorists have expanded on the promises of a critical exploitation of utopianism for radicalizing various cultural practices, two significant figures come to the fore with their specific concern for *space* (production): David Harvey and Reinhold Martin.

Harvey, in his seminal text *Spaces of Hope*, (falsely) distinguishing between utopias of spatial form⁷, and utopias of social process⁸, propounds an alternative path of utopianism – “dialectical utopianism” – which is defined to be spatiotemporal and relies on reasoned, critical and reflexive inquiry.⁹

In dialectical utopianism, responses both to the materialist problems of *authority* and *closure* – problems of form –, and to problems relating to “some perfected emancipatory process”¹⁰ are to be balanced. This entails both an analysis of the actual conditions of the present and a forage for agents and means of its transformation over time, and certainly has solemn implications regarding what a critical take of utopianism might entail.¹¹ On parallel lines, Reinhold Martin also reflects on utopianism as a form of criticality, but not as an inanimate concept. The emphasis on animadversion, however, is more outspoken in his proposition. He endorses – as a means to rethink post-critical architecture rooted in “post-utopian pragmatism”¹² – a revised and alternative form of architectural practice based on critical utopian thinking, what he calls *utopian realism*. His take on utopianism, in this, is, certainly, not one which is associated with the constitution of perfect whole new worlds. It is rather one within which utopia itself always stays as the counter, a non-place, which diffuses into everyday realities and acts as a parallel and comparable ideal through which the existing might be diagnosed for its ills. It is like a specter that

never fully escape being utopias of spatial form – in Harvey’s definition –, substantially. Here, within the scope of this text, however, a discussion which revolves primarily around architectural utopias themselves is deliberately refrained from so as to propound a means through which varieties of the methodological exploitations of utopianism, which are majorly unbound by the forms or contents of utopias – if ever constituted –, might be exhibited.

⁸ Utopias within which temporal processes which never come to spatial closure are defined as the drivers of change.

⁹ HARVEY, 2000

¹⁰ HARVEY, 2000: 196

¹¹ LEVITAS, 2003

¹² MARTIN, 2005: 3

¹³ LEVITAS, 2003: 137

¹⁴ Archigram was a group constituted of radical British architects. Together with Peter Cook, the group members

haunts real architectural practices, mirroring the status quo and without having any specific form: it is a formless style. In this, like in Harvey’s conception, the reflexive and dialectical deployment of utopianism is central, rather than what very utopia is.

Even though his conception is very illuminating, within it there still persists a very strict and negative portraiture of utopia, as in Harvey’s mutually exclusive distinction between utopias of spatial form and utopias of process – something which radically prevents reading historical practices for the varieties of their methodological undertakings of utopianism. Once historical moments, approaches, or conceptions of utopia are labeled as totalities, and thus, accepted to be homogeneous, they are exempt from inquisition. In such treatments – which are certainly not limited to Harvey’s and Martin’s –, very often if not always, the matter is reduced to “lessons to be learned from the separate histories”¹³ of exclusively categorized utopias. When this is done, however, a great opportunity for uncovering various coexistent mediums, means and methodologies of utopianisms embedded in these practices slips away.

Herewith, in this text, in response, the intention is to introduce an alternative means of excavating utopianisms, focusing on methodological significances – rather than binary separations – unbound by any definitive, distinctive or time-specific formulations. This is posited as a means through which architecture might learn from promising critical modes of utopianism embedded in past practices to respond to recent calls to feed its long-lost critical artery.

Peter Cook’s notable praxis, based on critical inquiry that pushes architecture forward, imagining the otherwise, and impressions of which have found a wide plethora of bodies through concepts and languages, rather than figures, is dwelt upon here to illustrate this intended analytical conception of utopianism. In so doing, neither he nor his works or his discipline is distinguished as utopian. This is rather an effort to manifest the promising utopian methodologies Cook exploited in constituting an architecture that is both critical and operable, and propagate the significance of such methodologies for today’s practices, endeavoring to respond to the ever expanding scales and complexities of environmental problems.

CRITICALITY FOR (COOK, IN) ARCHIGRAM

KRITIČNOST PREMA (COOKU, U) ARCHIGRAMU

Peter Cook is primarily known as a member of the Archigram¹⁴ group. Associations between his practice and utopianism, alas, are very

often made solely in reference to his practice within the group. Certainly, Archigram's great influence on many emergent discourses and practices (from and beyond its time) via its critical hypothetical projects built upon its member's criticisms over the course of modernism is doubtless. The group came to the forefront with a compendious stance against the strict ordonnance of conventional architecture within which architecture referred to fixed form.¹⁵ They, in resistance, propagated an imaginary praxis of architecture, the outputs of which have never been built.

The group's newsletter was the means through which a genuine conception of architecture – architecture not as mere architecture, but also as cultural practice – was disseminated and remained notably influential over time. Within it, not only the members' arguments on architectural style, daily life, technology, society or the discipline, but also their dominantly ironic representational language – a way out of the linguistic trap of Modern Architecture – was remarkable and distinctive.

In any effort to explicate the architectural conceptions and perceptions of Cook, it would certainly be fallacious to intend a probe peeled off from this tradition which relied on venturesome inquiries into the means, the language and the products of architecture. It is, however, also important to highlight that Cook's praxis is never limited to that. His utopian endeavors cannot be discussed merely through a mere Archigram – Utopia duo.¹⁶ Instead, within a utopia themed reading of his praxis, Archigram might be a notable chapter, but not a summary of the versatile methodologies of architectural utopianism he came to utilize.

Peter Cook's practice has always been centered on critical queries through which ambiguous and unexpected architectural possibilities were excavated. He was the most voluble member of the Archigram group.¹⁷ His illustrations – rather than writings – were loudly announced paper manifestations of such possibilities in forms of hypothetical environments.¹⁸

In these, he accentuated radical propositions, not only of architecture but also of living, different from those of the then immediate past. His lasting dialogic strictures of the antecedent and the prevailing modes of architectural and cultural practice of the urban were particularly notable. In them, Cook steered clear of a direct attack on the status-quo, to alter it completely and for all, but not from an effort to improve already existing or emerging conducts through critical dialogue. His architectural oeuvre very rarely conformed with the existing means of practice. This relied on the fact that he believed architecture

might well work with advanced techniques and contemporary production methods at hand and yet still embed a criticism on and challenge with the existing system. His use of textual material throughout his Archigram period, beyond sole descriptive and provocative purposes, as a means to *acuminate a distinction between built form and architectural possibility* certainly has references to this very attitude.¹⁹

It was the *Plug-in City* scheme, as developed by Peter Cook, which, for the first time, extensively capsulized the group's pursuits between the years 1962 and 1964. The project evolved through a critical dialogue with two relatively less formative themes of modernism – namely, the 'megastructure' and the 'building-in-becoming'. The intention was to experiment with architectural means of generating and sustaining urban vitality.²⁰ Initially experimenting with expendable buildings, the scheme went on to investigate possibilities for urban environments programmed and structured for change. It was a plan for a modular city – "a romantic extension of prefabrication into something else"²¹ which precisely presented itself at a *threshold between amnesic utopianism and nostalgia*.

The first exhibition and collective work of the group, *The Living City* (1963) also revolved around the same theme. In this, the group, meticulously, refrained from a suggestive plan for a new city – a blueprint. They rather revealed architecture's modest part within urban production. The emphasis was on the city not as mere accumulation of form but rather as a cultural artefact. The critical stance of the group was quite outspoken in this: "We must perpetuate this vitality or the city will die at the hands of the hard planners and architect-aesthetes."²²

This was an inquiry into what architecture could be(come) if not static form – something absolute –, and what the architect could be if

included Warren Chalk, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, Ron Herron and Michael Webb. The name Archigram not only referred to these influential figures but also their critical publication, the newsletter, which was published between the years 1961 and 1970.

15 PICKERING, 2006

16 Even the utopianism of Archigram cannot be discussed as a single entity, as the group was never univocal.

17 COOK, 1999

18 WEBB, 1999

19 GANNON, 2008

20 COOK, 1999

21 <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/cities-of-dreams>

22 COOK, 1999: 20

23 SADLER, 2005

24 COLEMAN, 2013: 135

25 Certainly, this owed very much to the Pop-art aesthetics that widely dominated the period subsuming endeavor

not the master. Cook experimented with these questions in his Plug-in City scheme. Within it, his emergent belief in *system-building's* central role, in response, for the future of architecture was outspoken – a system within which multitudes of fragmentary utopianisms could flourish.

The scheme allowed the architect to be both fully autonomous and also totally marginalized. Physicalistic conceptions of architecture were, thereby, replaced by an *architecture without architecture*.²³ This was because architecture, in the conventional sense, was postulated as a degenerate utopia upon its “fatal constraint by the given.”²⁴

The group made use of almost caricaturistic representations in manifesting an architecture otherwise.²⁵ Within them, the message outrode the form. The newsletter media prospered to transmit the group's radical conceptualizations of architecture through a means which read statementally rather than formally. Irony was central to this. It was the ironic tone which made certain propositions available only to certain groups and which required one always to question what was proposed for the real, the actual, the formal, and what was not. As such, the schemes proposed *were neither utopias nor jokes*. They were both and neither.

CRITICALITY FOR COOK (BEYOND ARCHIGRAM)

KRITIČNOST PREMA COOKU (IZVAN ARCHIGRAMA)

The group's, and certainly Cook's, inquiries over what an architecture without architecture might mean further revolved around two major concepts: indeterminacy and growth. These inquiries, which eventually evolved into a tradition of thematic development, very much shaped Cook's future career. The accumulative effect of projects which came

ours to dispose accepted rigidities in cultural and moral conceptions and an accompanying predominant search for new possibilities of representation. Archigram, in its intentions to release the bonds between architectural form and imagination – its challenge with accepted architectural rigidities –, might certainly not be understood without references to this then emergent Pop-art tradition.

²⁶ COOK, 1970: 133

²⁷ It is important to open a parenthesis here and note that Cook has collaborated with several figures during his career. His presence in the Archigram group continued until 1998. In 1976 he initiated his collaboration with Prof. Christine Hawley, which lasted until 1998. At that time, he started his partnership with Colin Founier, which ended in 2004, the year he started his ongoing collaboration with Gavin Robotham in the CRAB studio.

²⁸ COOK, 1997

²⁹ COOK, 1993

³⁰ SPENS, 2007: 14

³¹ See his elaborations on the lump in: COOK, 1993

one after another – closely-packed – reinforced a series of ideas constituting what he called “the Effect of Archigram.”²⁶

It would not be fallacious to state that a precise intellection of his praxis might never be possible through a sole chronological perusal but only through a thematic one. His propositions do not linearly evolve from the Plug-in City to the Kunsthaus Graz. Very often, Cook claims to find thematic advancement more interesting, since what interests him intellectually is the recurrence of certain themes.

In his praxis²⁷, there have been certain evolving themes which have found a significantly rich variety of forms. These forms were even contrasting from time to time as the formal languages of the Plug-in city and the Monte Carlo Competition entry. This was because his radicalizing exercise was not solely within the physical domain of architecture but was more on conceptual reorientations.

The winning scheme proposed by the group for the Monte Carlo Entertainment Center competition exhibited a profound maneuver of the formal language of the group. The proposal, outspokenly, built upon Cook's earlier design for the Mound – a grass-covered hill under which building functions took place. In it, the underground was designed as an open space which would allow endless reconfigurations of activities and services. It was a notable probe *into invisible architecture* – “an apparent nothing,” “just a piece of ground.”²⁸

This very similarly resonated in the competition entry. In this, the center was proposed to be totally underground, over which the beach functions could extend. Below ground were not only vast spaces but also robots, services and apparatus at the disposal of show producers. The group's purpose was clear: to maintain this precious piece of landscape while also allowing for an integrated design for devices, the building and also the landscape. This was “devices-with-architecture-with-landscape.”²⁹

Cook's further and profound involvement in landscape was very much inspired by this scheme. What he started with the Mound “as a separate vein of intellectual therapy”³⁰ evolved into a major preoccupation which nourished his utopian constructs.

Sponge city (1975) might be referred to as one of his most remarkable projects along this line. This was a novel interpretation of placing buildings under ‘lump's.³¹ The essence was identical: removing the outer skin of the building and replacing it with some sort of *landscape*. Here, Cook clothed the city he proposed with a landscape-like, porous zone which consisted of a variety of skins.

This was a very significant quest into the togetherness of architecture and landscape – as Michael Spens claimed, into building as landscape.³² It radicalized not only the way landscape was approached – as something over which the city rules – to “a growing, enfolding aspect of urban expansion, an absorbent city conurbation”³³ but also the way cities and landscapes could coexist. It would not be fallacious to claim that this was one of the very early incarnations of what we discuss today as landscape (as) urbanism.

Coupling this vast inquiry into the coming-togetherness of landscape, architecture and urbanism, was his interest in vegetation as an architectural artefact. As a response to his effort to redefine building boundaries so as to allow for the continuity of the outside to the inside and vice versa, Cook very often dwelled on the concept of *metamorphosis*.³⁴

He very often made use of sequential illustrations as means to exercise this concept of architectonic metamorphosis. On certain occasions, he worked with series of silhouettes, plans or sections – as in *Urban Mark* (1972) and *Way Out West Berlin* (1988) –, and on some others, he took a bit from the whole and massaged it with the concept – as in *Arcadia Towers* (1975 – 1978) and *Veg-house of Veg-village*. In all, he allowed the drawing to take over. This allowed his own conception of metamorphosis to also metamorphose. Drawing, for him, had been a medium of critical inquiry – rather than a mere means of formal representation – through which a profound change of one’s own regard for phenomena was rendered possible. It was the instrument to exercise utopianisms to constitute radical forms of architectural production but never formally closed utopias.

Alongside his ongoing assay with metamorphosis Cook frequently made use of ‘layering.’ This was a revised strategy he commenced using to merge the architecture and the landscape of the city into one. In his *Layer City* (1986) – a city “somewhere along the Oslo Fjord”³⁵ – for instance, he utilized layering to transmit the imagery in his mind to three-dimensional form. It was another inquiry into a non-solid urban condition. In it, he experimented with possibilities for attaining urban porosity through a perusal of multiple-layered landscapes among which interstitial spaces existed. In between and through these layers, the building and the landscape melted. This novel modus of layering, not only as a domain of interest but also as a revised strategy of thematically advancing metamorphosis, may clearly be read from his drawings from the 80s onwards.

For Cook, drawing has always been a disjunctive instrument within which “more than

60 per cent was, at the outset, merely a ‘sniff’ of what was to come”³⁶. It was never taken to be static. Rather, drawings were deployed as kinetic and operative devices of critical dialogue between him and his ideas, and between his architecture, landscape and the city. What changed in these through time was their methodologies of inquiry as well as their carefully crafted tones.³⁷ His drawings which evolved through layers, a novel methodology for the time, were a reflection of his keen interest in layering as a conceptual medium to radicalize architecture and urbanism.

Cook kept producing series of drawings while advancing in this new technique. These, however, were, then, rarely sequential but rather subject-matter specific. They experimented, this time, not with the temporal aspects of metamorphosis but its vocabulary and schematic organizations. Cook’s drawing for the *Swiss Cottage Tower* (2011), for instance, was worked on four distinct sheets to be butted together. On all four, he intended to portray different and contrasting proceedings of the tower’s surface. In his design for the *Tower of Droplets* (2010), on the other hand, he investigated, with a set of drawings, different forms of experimental organization.

Drawing has always been “the motive force of architecture”³⁸ for Cook, a means to establish links between statemental notions and their visual accompaniments. His take on the drawing has been against its mere formal, supplementary and supportive depictions. Through his statementally charged drawings, Cook made the grade in conceiving a language for architectural representation that is dialogic and critical. In so doing, he distanced himself equally from his motive and from the *physicalistic paradigms of architecture*. He has been very diligent and precise in his linguistic tone. This is so as to calibrate to whom his plan specifically speaks and which precise message it conveys. Physical determinism, in his drawings, is replaced by an architectural

32 SPENS, 2007

33 SPENS, 2007: 15

34 According to Cook, metamorphosis is a tidal action which, architecturally speaking, involves both a form of thinking and a physicality. Metamorphosis as a form of thinking involves stepping outside mere architectural frames of reference, and might well be read from, as Cook himself refers, Bernard Tschumi’s conception of architecture in relation to use and events – notions out of the conventional lexicon of architecture. Physical metamorphosis, on the other hand, refers to reversible or irreversible change, as he himself exemplifies through his projects such as one of the early Archigram ones: *Blow-out village* – a mobile village which expands and contracts seasonally according to the needs of its community. In both conceptions it is depicted, by Cook, in its fullest sense as a significantly rich and fruitful notion which operates not only across physical and conceptual domains but also across scales that expand from the building to the urban such as *Arcadia City*, *Layer City*, *Way Out West-Berlin* and *Veg*.

interpretation of possibilism. His utopian experiments with and within architecture evolve through his drawings and these allow conceptual interpretations and thus give way to a rich plethora of architectural incarnations. The marks of his utopian experiments with and within architecture are substantially non-formal in all these incarnations. They are rather conceptual, outputs of which speak to a wide range of tectonic cultures.

His deliberate aloofness from aggressive formal postulations allow his drawings – his dialogic trainings of imagination – to speak for their embedded utopianism and to a specific and appreciative audience – be it either a group of radical architects/architectural students or the art-loving public – through ways that are placid.

This malleable quiddity of his representational means hides behind a significantly ambitious will: Cook's perpetual faculty to foster a bold group of architects and urban practitioners. As the doyen of the architectural drawing world,³⁹ it would not be fallacious to claim that Cook may have inspired a significantly large number of architect generations through his graphics. It was, however, not only this representational media he depended on to encourage potent architects that would experiment with the frontiers of architecture, but also lobbying.

From the early days of his career, Cook got involved in running spaces for art for which he believed "architecture not only is art, but must be art."⁴⁰ He came to direct several art institutions such as the Institute of Contemporary Arts and later Art Net, an independent gallery in London, in the 1970s and 80s until his relationship with such establishments soured with his experience at the Art Academy in Frankfurt. Those were the occasions when "he introduced new ideas and people to audiences, and stimulated discussions about the nature of art and contemporary culture."⁴¹ Cook never ceased curating, orga-

nizing and exhibiting around the world. He continued to submit drawings to the Summer Exhibitions of the Royal Academy from the mid-1960s onwards as he saw this "as an opportunity to show architectural ideas to a public that wouldn't otherwise see them."⁴²

His capacity as an instructor also dilated the extent of his influence. Through his preceptorship and jury memberships in prime competitions, Cook encouraged radical *raisonneurs* that would testify new possibilities of/in architecture. Zaha Hadid's international recognition, to illustrate, was procured by his diligent effort. It was Cook, as the jury chairman of the Hong Kong Peak Competition (1983), who insisted on Hadid's unrealizable scheme which he believed developed a new emergent form of architecture.⁴³ Hadid, in her winning entry, extended the verticality of the site and, working with *layers*, stratified the building, like a mountain. Her intention was to create a man-made hill of polished granite – a significantly unparalleled topology – that was to be composed of spaces underground, easily identifiable horizontal layers and floating masses which housed the club facilities.⁴⁴ That, certainly, was her interpretation of layering in relation to architecture, the city and the landscape.

In her following career, Hadid went on to experiment with the themes she introduced with the Peak, and those bore traces of Cook's conceptualizations of layers and landscape. Hadid's experiment with landscape-like viscous building forms and skins spoke of her perpetual preoccupation with landscape. Landscape, however was not the only domain of architectural inquiry through which Cook inspired Hadid. His mark can also be traced in her experimental architectural language – in her unusual modes of representation. Beyond doubt, Hadid's language of representation played a very fundamental role in her highly original and influential formal and conceptual repertoire.⁴⁵ For Hadid, the medium of representation was invariably charged and never external to her work. It was an inseparable component of her design thinking, questioning and reasoning. This was exactly what Cook intended to encourage in his audience, an intrepid inquiry into new architectural (representational) aesthetics that would pursue an evolving conception of modernism.

What had been central throughout Cook's career was his keen resistance to the univocal understanding of modern movement in architecture. In that, he continuously challenged with the direct attachment of a liberated society – a broad and almost all-encompassing social and cultural program –, to a specific architectural expression and a very specific moment in architectural history.

Village as early examples, and *Hidden City* and *Soak City* as more recent elaborations.

35 COOK, 1993: 34

36 COOK, 2013: 80

37 What Cook, whilst a part of Archigram, commenced, with the humorous Pop-artisan language, later on evolved into rather serious yet never absolutist architectural drawing techniques. This paralleled his ever present endeavor to disconnect architectural form from architectural imagination.

38 COOK, 2008

39 COOK, 2008: 201

40 COOK, 1993: 126

41 The Royal Academy, n.d.

42 GOODWIN, 2016

43 BETSKY, 1998

44 Zaha Hadid Architects, n.d.

45 SCHUMACHER, 2004

His inquiry has been into various possible exploitations of modernity in and for architecture. He, thus, succeeded in situating himself at the threshold between the overly simplistic understandings of modernism and post-modernism. Philosophically, he defended modernity. His search for possible formal and aesthetic undertakings of this ever evolving modernity, however, never remained constant and never owed to any specific domain. This enabled his practice to be read as one which has never been limited to any specific form of spatial utopias per se. His works, rather, widely rested on a methodological exploitation of utopianism as a means of architectural imagination and critical inquiry, evolving parallel to his dialectical architectural dialogue with modernity, and disallowed any undialectical architectural interpretations.

CONCLUSION: OPERATING AT THRESHOLDS

ZAKLJUČAK: DJELOVANJE NA RUBU

It is beyond doubt that historically significant and definitive utopian moments have always been those within which different sets of ideas have come explicitly into collision. Those have been the moments of awakening, resistance, insistence and notably loud rhetoric. To speak of exact instances in time, one may immediately refer to the symbolic moments of post-war modernism which witnessed and were marked by both the triumph

and the failure of utopian practices. Those were the moments within which the far-reaching excitement caused by ambitious and gigantic plans swiftly collapsed under the backlash that unsuccessful attempts to materialize utopias without a negotiation with spatiality and the geography of place yielded. Very many spaces of Modernism – but certainly not all – failed in the hands of urban practitioners, specifically *en passant* this threshold within which utopian ideals transformed to real world practices, the threshold Peter Cook rather successfully operated from within.

Even though, for many, it might not be easy to accept, this widely-known failure had comparably much less to do with the very concept, form or content of utopia but rather with the temperament of the author architect who did not always seem to be highly conscious of the mediums, means and methods through which he/she manifested utopian ideals.⁴⁶

Today, however, the sirens of the widely incapacitated post-critical architecture are calling out for utopia infused architectural practices, authors of which circumspectly operate at *thresholds*, neither silent nor loud but diligently toned.

Cook's practice implies two major conceptual fissures within which such critical formulations of architectural utopianism might flourish, and their authors operate: The threshold between amnesia and nostalgia,

⁴⁶ COOK, 2008: 10

⁴⁷ ZAWIA, 2013

⁴⁸ COOK, 2016

and the threshold between representation and production.

Cook, very often, claimed that he found the concept of back-and-forth between reality and detachment from reality electric. In his formulations he meticulously operated at the thin line which separates what exists from what does not. Never abnegating his aspirations for past precedents such as “some of the architects of the early ‘20s particularly in Germany, particularly the people who revolved around Bruno Taut who were socialists”⁴⁷, his “‘English’ memories that could only have come from those moments in” his “past”⁴⁸, or sincerely enjoying and massaging what exists in daily life, Cook succeeded in recognizing “‘reality’ itself as—precisely—an all-too-real dream enforced by those who prefer to accept a destructive and oppressive status quo.”⁴⁹ Even in his entirely abstract propositions which imply a sort of amnesic pleasure, connections to reality – and not only to reality as/of the present but reality as a historical, cultural and spatial artefact – reside. Even in those, he operates at the threshold between desires to render pasts present and a complete rejection of and resistance to whatever exists.

Interwoven into this operational ground at the threshold between amnesia and nostalgia is Cook’s keen use of representation as a means to mediate between architectural desire and physicality, symbolism and built form, representation and production. Cook has always been very successful in avoiding “‘obviousness’, ‘full-frontality’ or the direct answer”⁵⁰

in his architectural language conveying his utopianisms as a means to encourage interpretations by the audience. This, certainly, relies on the fact that he believes the author architect should always keep a critical distance between himself/herself, his/her motive, and the motive’s thrust so as to contemplate his works’ possible impacts. The virtue of drawings that convey his utopian conceptualizations of architecture is that they “look like something”⁵¹ – something never ready-served for architectural form-hunters, but also something which still looks architectural. In these, Cook goes back and forth between architectural solutions that satisfy practical demands and almost romantic expeditions that owe rather to artistic domains.

Building upon self-conscious commentaries of his perception and conception of a geographical and temporal status quo, keeping and propagating a state of mind that is critical but not extremely radical, and elaborating keenly on his motive yet always keeping it at a critical distance from physicalistic paradigms of architecture, Cook, with his praxis, well exemplifies what critical utopianism might offer and entail. In this, rather than explosive utopian moments, one might read a rather silent and diffused existence of utopianism, one which parallels reality as a way of thinking differently, one within which utopias are never present as architectural forms but as trainings of architectural imagination.

[Written in English by the author,
proof-read by BETH ELAINE DOGAN]

49 MARTIN, 2005: 5

50 COOK, 2016: 148

51 COOK, 2008: 22

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ILLUSTRATION SOURCE

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- FIG. 1 © Peter Cook, Photo: Royal Academy of Arts, London, Photographer: John Bodkin / DawkinsColour

SUMMARY

SAŽETAK

PETER COOK IZVAN ARCHIGRAMA: PREMA KRITIČNOM UTOPIZMU

Peter Cook zauzima značajno mjesto u svijetu arhitekture. Poznat je po svojem radu u Archigramu – avangardnoj skupini arhitekata iz 60-ih godina 20. stoljeća nadahnutoj tehnološkim napretkom svojega vremena i prikazivanjem provokativne stvarnosti kroz hipotetičke projekte. Rad Petera Cooka proteže se ipak izvan radikalnih vizija same grupe. On propituje standarde arhitektonske produkcije svrstavajući sebe izvan podjela na modernističku i postmodernističku paradigmu.

Ovaj se tekst bavi kritičkim utopizmom u praksi, unutar koje postoji način arhitektonskog razmišljanja utemeljen prije u refleksivnim propitivanjima negoli u apsolutnim i zatvorenim utopijama. Cilj mu je preokrenuti pitanja koja povezuju utopiju i prostorni determinizam prema pitanjima koja se vrte oko utopijskih metodologija koje postaju poligoni za vježbanje arhitektonske imaginacije. Takvi utopizmi i njihove specifične reference na prostor predmet su proučavanja u sklopu rada dvaju značajnih autora: Davida Harveyja i Reinholda Martina. U svojem značajnom radu *Spaces of Hope*, Harvey (pogrešno) razlikuje utopije prostorne forme i utopije društvenih procesa te predlaže alternativni put utopizma – ‘dijalektički utopizam’ koji je definiran prostorno-vremenskim odrednicama i oslanja se na razumno, kritičko i refleksivno propitivanje.

Reinhold Martin također promišlja o utopizmu kao obliku kritičkog propitivanja. On podupire revidirani i alternativni oblik arhitektonske prakse utemeljen na kritičkom utopijskom razmišljanju o onome

što on naziva ‘utopijskim realizmom’. Ipak, u koncepcijama obaju autora postoji stroga i negativna kategorizacija utopije. Time se ne dopušta razotkrivanje različitih medija, sredstava i metodologija utopizama koje su ukorijenjene u tim praksama.

U ovome je radu namjera predstaviti alternativni put razotkrivanja utopizama s naglaskom na važnosti metodologije, bez ograničenja definirajućih, razlikovnih i vremenski povezanih formulacija. To je način na koji arhitektura može učiti od kritičkih načina utopizama ukorijenjenih u prošlim praksama kako bi odgovorila novijim zahtjevima prema odavno izgubljenom kritičnosti. Praksa Petera Cooka uvijek je bila usmjerena prema kritičkim istraživanjima kroz koja su izranjale dvosmislene i neočekivane arhitektonske mogućnosti. Na početku svoje karijere on je bio najrječitiji član grupe Archigram. Njegove ilustracije, više negoli njegovi tekstovi, glasno su najavljivale takve mogućnosti u vidu hipotetičkih okolisa.

Ne samo Cook nego i skupina kao cjelina proizveli su gotovo karikaturalne prikaze drukcije arhitekture. U njima je poruka nadmašila formu. Za Cooka je crtez uvijek bio motivirajuća snaga arhitekture, sredstvo uspostavljanja veza između pojmova i njihovih vizualnih reprezentacija. Njegov je pogled na crtez bio u suprotnosti s onim što čini crtez formalnim, dopunskim i podržavajućim prikazom. Kroz njih Cook je osmislio jezik za arhitektonsku reprezentaciju, koji je dijaloški i kritičan. Pritom se podjednako distancirao od svoga motiva i od fizikih paradigmi arhitekture.

Bio je vrlo marljiv i precizan u svom jezičnom izražavanju. Fizicki determinizam u svojim crtežima zamjenjuje arhitektonskim tumačenjem mogućnosti. Njegovi utopijski eksperimenti s arhitekturom i unutar nje razvijaju se kroz njegove crteže koji omogućuju konceptualne interpretacije i tako ustupaju mjesto bogatim arhitektonskim inkarnacijama. Tragovi njegovih utopijskih eksperimenata s arhitekturom i unutar nje u osnovi su neformalni u svim tim utjelovljenjima. Oni su prilično konceptualni.

Sve u svemu, Cookova praksa podrazumijeva dvije glavne konceptualne pukotine unutar kojih bi mogle procvjetati kritičke formulacije arhitektonskog utopizma, a njihovi autori djelovati: razdjelnica između amnezije i nostalgije te razdjelnica između reprezentacije i produkcije. Djelujući na razdjelnica, nadograđujući se na samosvjesne komentare svoje percepcije i koncepcije zemljopisnog i vremenskog *statusa quo*, čuvajući i promičući stanje uma koje je kritično, ali ne krajnje radikalno, te razradujući svoj motiv, ali uvijek ga čuvajući na kritičnoj distanci od fizikalnih paradigmi arhitekture – Cook, sa svojom praksom, predstavlja dobar primjer onoga što kritički utopizam može ponuditi i što povlači za sobom. U tome, umjesto eksplozivnih utopijskih trenutaka, može se razabrati prilično tiho i difuzno postojanje utopizma, onoga koji odražava paralelnu stvarnost kao drukčijeg načina razmišljanja, onoga u kojem utopije nikada nisu prisutne kao arhitektonske forme.

BIOGRAPHY

BIOGRAFIJA

GIZEM DENIZ GUNERI, PhD, holds a professional degree in architecture. She completed a Masters in Architecture and Urban Design at Columbia University as a Fulbright scholar and a PhD in Architecture at Middle East Technical University. She has recently completed her studies as a research fellow at Harvard University Graduate School of Design. Her major interests include architectural utopias, collective urban form, landscape and urban design.

Dr.sc. **GIZEM DENIZ GUNERI** diplomirala je arhitekturu. Magistrirala je u području arhitekture i urbanog dizajna na Sveučilištu Columbia kao Fulbrightova stipendistica, a doktorirala u području arhitekture na Tehničkom sveučilištu Bliskog istoka. Nedavno je završila svoj studij u svojstvu istraživača na Sveučilištu Harvard (Graduate School of Design). Njezini interesi usmjereni su prema utopijama u arhitekturi, kolektivnoj urbanoj formi, krajobrazu i urbanom dizajnu.

