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Form, Geometrie und Proportion sind seit jeher Grundfragen der Architektur. Dennoch entwickelt sich die Baukunst von den Ursprüngen der Disziplin weg und hin zu einem Prozess, in dem sie sich mit einer Vielzahl anderer Wissensgebiete verbindet.

Ein maßgeblicher Grund hierfür scheint das erstarkende Interesse am Thema des Gemeinen, des **COMMON** zu sein. Obwohl dieses Thema in den letzten Jahren vielfach ausgeleuchtet wurde, wagen wir den Versuch, es aus studentischer Perspektive erneut zu betrachten. Zwei Dinge beschäftigen uns dabei maßgeblich: Zuerst der Gedanke, wie eine Architektur geschaffen werden kann, die das Gemeine ernst nimmt und dessen Logik gerecht wird. Eine adäquate Architektur des **COMMON** also.

Gleichzeitig wollen wir genau diese Vorgehensweise hinterfragen – ist es der Architektur immanent, Gemeinschaft zu schaffen? Liegt es überhaupt in ihren Möglichkeiten, dies zu tun?

Das Gemeine ist Resultat koexistierender Singularitäten. Folglich definiert jede Entität ihre Rolle im Bezug zum Gemeinen und wird zugleich von ihrer Rolle innerhalb dessen definiert. Ist die Architektur Teil dieses Definitionsprozesses, dient sie als Hintergrund, oder kann sie beides sein?

In einem diskursiven Prozess sucht die dreizehnte Ausgabe der *HORIZONTE – Zeitschrift für Architekturdiskurs* nach Perspektiven innerhalb und außerhalb der gemeinen architektonischen Sichtweisen. Sie umfasst Gedanken, Thesen, Projekte und Argumente, die sich mit der Fähigkeit der Architektur, Teil des Definitionsprozesses des **COMMON** zu sein, auseinandersetzen.

Dabei stellt sie nie den Anspruch, vollständig oder allumfassend zu sein.

Questions of form, geometry and proportions have always been intrinsic to architecture. Nevertheless we consider architecture to be moving from its origin towards a process that is connected to several other fields of knowledge.

One main reason for this seems to be the growing interest in the topic of the COMMON. Even though it has already been widely discussed we want to attempt to reconsider it in a new light. There are two things we are primarily interested in:

Firstly, how to make architecture that takes the COMMON seriously and adapts to its logic. We wonder – what is the right process to reach an architecture that is adequate? Simultaneously however, we want to question this approach – is it part of architecture to make COMMON? Is Architecture

even able to produce
COMMON?

The COMMON is the result of co-existing singularities. Thus, each entity defines and is defined by its own role within the realm of the COMMON. Is Architecture part of this defining process, does it serve as a background or could it be both at the same time? In a discursive process which is neither complete nor all-embracing the thirteenth issue of the *HORIZONTE – Journal for Architectural Discourse* is looking for perspectives from within, and outside of, COMMON architectural view-points; searching for thoughts, theses, projects and arguments discussing architecture's actual ability to be part of the defining process of the COMMON. ■■■

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IMPRESSUM

INTER WITH ANNE LACATON

ANNE LACATON born in France in 1955. Partner at Lacaton & Vassal. Graduated from the School of Architecture of Bordeaux in 1980. Diploma in Urban Planning at the University of Bordeaux in 1984. Professor at ETH Zurich since 2017. Visiting professor at the University of Madrid, Master Housing since 2007, at EPFL Lausanne, 2004, 2006, 2010-11 and 2017, at the University of Florida: Ivan Smith Studio in 2012, at the University of NY-Buffalo: Clarkson Chair in 2013, at the Pavillon Neufize OBC-Palais de Tokyo, Paris, in 2015-2014, at Harvard GSD: Kenzo Tange 2011 & Design critic 2015, at Sassari University in Alghero 2014 & 2015, at TU Delft, sem 2016/17.

» <https://www.oralhistoryarchiv.ch/interviews/person/anne-lacaton>



VIEW



H I want us to start with this photograph since you start most of your lectures and books with this picture. What does this photograph represent for your office? Is it a starting point? Fig.001

Anne
Lacaton

It is both a starting point and a permanent goal. The story behind the picture is very long. It marks a time when we relearned architecture differently. After having graduated from the University in Bordeaux, France, we had the opportunity, especially my partner Jean-Philippe Vassal, to move to Niger for a quite long period. This photograph shows a house that was built in a village outside of the city. It was a place where normally nobody builds. The sand always moves, and the wind is very strong. Aside from that, the place was outstanding. Jean-Philippe asked the people from the neighbouring villages, first their permission, and then second to build the house. The only thing he did was to buy the materials and choose the location. We didn't draw a plan; the drawing was done afterwards. The house is made from three elements: A small circle five meters in diameter, the straw house itself, and the protective part where the most important functions of the house are situated – food, water and the bed. The second circle is just a straw wall and has a diameter of about 15m and is 1,80m high to act as protection from the wind. It has no roof. It determines a space functioning as a space for domestic tasks, like preparation of food. The third space is a rectangular roof structure with nine columns made of branches. It serves as a living room for welcoming people and having discussions facing the view to the river and far beyond to the city. The reason why we like this house so much: it represents the essential.

001

H When did you realise the importance of this photograph?

Anne
Lacaton

Already on site we had the feeling that it was totally exceptional. We realized that it is not necessary to have a lot to create space – a minimum creates space.

H This is a diagram by Alexander Klein that people often refer to when discussing your designs. Fig.002 It shows the same living function in apartments of different sizes – from small to large ones. It was made

002



for the *Minimum Housing CIAM* in Frankfurt. The housing you propose, I would say, is the smallest apartment; the minimum with an extra function-less space.

Anne Lacaton: We don't like this concept of minimum housing – we prefer to talk about how to give a maximum because for us the minimum is always related to constraints. Since our very first house design, the main question was: what does a family need to have a good life? Living can be understood in a broader sense than housing – we are also living in schools and museums for example. It is the idea that the program is always the result of a compromise. It always leads to a minimum. You are right, instead of extending everything in the house, we prefer to create an additional space which is free of function; free of program. A space for individual creation. It is the space of free use and the space of social live. So, for us it is really important to think with these two spaces in mind – the program and the non-program. Our goal is as much free space as programmed space. The maximum is there through the addition of extra space.



003

H For example, this house with the two volumes. One is used for the basic rooms; the program. The other volume is free of function; the non-program. This is a chronological list of French architects that Maria Shéhérazade Giudici showed at the AA in London. Fig.003 It places your office at the end of history of French housing. She argued that most apartments designed for the nuclear family forced women to be housewives; to be reproductive. She points out that your non-scripted space allows women to be non-reproductive, to not be a housewife.



004

Anne Lacaton: Yes, this is our most important goal – our focus. To design space which gives freedom. It encourages us to reinvent the space, to change the functions, to open up the mind and create the relations. It's a way to give freedom to everyone.

H Could this extra space be potentially dangerous? It could generate a surplus as an *Airbnb* room or a home office. It could give space for an additional person especially if it is in private ownership and not part of social housing restrictions. It could be misused.

But I would like to say something in addition to what you said about social housing. We don't want to talk about social housing as a special category of housing. We talk about housing. That's it. Housing is social by essence. Making social housing a category is dangerous because it introduces a classification and differences that materialize in architecture. For example, in the limited sized dwellings or the banishment of balconies. The same can be said of affordable housing. These categories are just restricting the possibilities of finding good solutions and creating visible differences. We don't accept it.

H This gap space could be seen as a very free space with a lot of potential, whilst the actual building is actually a small and quite limited space. Fig.004

Anne
Lacaton

H This is a screenshot from a website where you can buy the plans to build your own tiny house. Fig. 005

The freedom to build for yourself. What do you think about the tiny house movement? It derives from a





good idea, also seeking freedom in space. But the physical result is relatively small in comparison to the ideas that has become very large.

Anne
Lacaton

I don't just see the architecture of tiny houses, I see also that these houses materialize for people a desire of a way of inhabiting with more freedom – the idea that they can change the space themselves and vary its uses. What they probably don't feel in collective housing. For me the model of a single house is not sustainable because it's a horizontal occupation using a lot of land – it must be more efficient. But if we come back to what a house means, and the desire it arises, it is totally possible to turn it into a more sustainable and urban project, and to design the qualities of space of a house in every collective and dense housing project.

H It is a suburban idea. Fig.006

Anne
Lacaton

It is suburban, but the desire and the intention of way of life must be listened to. And of course, you can think of this project. But also, of Frei Otto's *Ökohäuser* in Berlin.

When we built this house, we were only provided with the envelope and the inside was done by the family themselves step by step.

H I want to introduce you to an idea I had: if you would have transformed *Pruitt-Igoe* in 1971 like you did for example in Bordeaux, Charles Jencks would not have said *Pruitt-Igoe* was the death of modern architecture. Fig.007

Anne
Lacaton

In transforming modernist housing, like in Bordeaux, our first intention was not to save Modernism. It was to change and improve the quality of housing which was no longer sufficient. It was to, 50 years later, create something much better that could meet current expectations. This is a huge and ambitious task. We work with occupied buildings that are not at the end of their life. There is no reason for their demolition. This is not a pure attitude of conservation, but it just doesn't make sense to destroy these buildings that are less than 50 years old. Of course, we feel in line with modernity because it has brought architecture the freedom of the plan. Besides of course, the new relations to space, light and new construction methods. A freedom through the discon-



nection of structure and program, the »plan libre«; opening new possibilities and flexibility. Deviations have occurred, but overall, we consider modernity as something very positive, a step forward, and this is what we want to keep.

In France, nearly 200,000 units have been demolished in the last 15 years, and we have been carefully studying this issue within our research. The amount of money that has been spent is completely absurd – something like 20 or 30 billion euros to demolish all these buildings and to rebuild less. In the end, money is being spent to lose many dwellings, at a time when we face housing shortages in many cities. In our research *Plus* we studied different cases, to understand what was so bad that there was no other solution than demolition. We couldn't find a single example of a circumstance so dire.

Instead, we found out that this decision often came from people who were deciding from an external point of view, and as if it was an object; without looking carefully and paying attention to the situation and what the inhabitants represented. From this external perspective a few people decided that the buildings were ugly, and therefore there was nothing other to do than tear down the building. But when you visit the place, starting from the inside, you can see that the inhabitants gave a lot of personal value to the building. Nobody should be the sole individual able to decide whether to destroy a building or not. Instead we should be able to carefully improve buildings. This, of course, is also simply more sustainable and cheaper.

H You published the *Plus* research in 2004. Sadly, in Germany nobody seems to have noticed your arguments. Especially in the former GDR where large numbers of prefabricated housing were demolished. The same mechanism you just described applies to the former GDR, where people from West-Germany decided that this architecture was awful and should be demolished. Then people started leaving because their neighbouring buildings got torn down. They didn't want to leave because of the architecture, they just didn't want





to live in a half-demolished neighbourhood with the reputation of being awful.

Anne Lacaton: It is extremely violent. Especially for the inhabitants who see their homes disappearing, even if it was not ideal. Only war has destroyed as many buildings as that. Seeing this today, in our democracies, is just shocking.

H: Let us stay with the topic of destruction. Fig. 008

Anne Lacaton: One month ago, we couldn't have talked about this...

H: What do you think about this phenomenon and what do you think about the attack of the *Arc de Triomphe*, a national monument?

Anne Lacaton: I will comment on this picture more as a citizen than as an architect.

I don't think that attacking a national monument was the initial intention, but this is the impression given by the media because of the powerful pictures, with these photos focusing on this specific action whilst it was unfolding, despite this is only one part of a much bigger protest that day in France. It turned very nasty in many places. But it is important to return to what these people were asking for. They asked to be considered, to be respected, and to have a better life. This is not too much to ask for, and in general they are widely supported throughout France as they are also asking for greater participation in political decisions and for more social equality. Year after year the quality of life for a lot of people decreases because our system has become (and still is becoming), increasingly liberal. It doesn't take great care of people. I fully understand them. Too many people don't earn enough money from their job to survive with their families. This is not normal. I think they are right to express their situation because it is alarming to see how little our country cares about the lives of its people.


This photo of the deteriorated monument *Arc de Triomphe* is strong but not a good one to comment on; it detracts from the real subject.

H: I was thinking it might be nice to have a building that people could attack. A building as a target.

Anne Lacaton: But I think you shouldn't confuse the protesters. Big parts of the protesters were not in




favour of attacking monuments. This was not their goal. As normal in protests, there are groups of people that have other goals and want to fight with the police, the state and everything representing the institution. They get confused with the ›Gilets jaunes‹ movement and some of the ›Gilets jaunes‹ are also part of these people – so everything is a bit confusing. Most ›Gilets Jaunes‹ know what they want, and this is not to destroy the state.

H I want to show you some details from your work that seemed important to me. This corner for example. Does this detail symbolize the concept of the old and the new? Or did it evolve out of necessity?

Anne Lacaton This is a zoomed in picture of a building. We wouldn't have made this photo especially to represent the building. It's just a construction detail. The concept of this project was to preserve the existing fantastic space with its huge and empty hall, and to not destroy it by creating floors inside. So, the idea evolved from the beginning of the competition, that instead of filling the existing building with the program, we proposed to build a twin to install the program with the ideal conditions for exhibitions and for conserving the artwork. At the same time the twin allows us to keep the void because it is exceptional. It was very important for us that the twin was really a twin with the same footprint, the same height and the same shape. The existing building had this detail, so it never came to our mind to cut this and make it straight – we took it as it was, in its entirety. It is also important to mention that the project proposed to do the doubling of the space with the same budget. Which was done.

Coming back to the detail, it is very important to keep what is there and in a good condition, and it is important not to see symbols where there are none.

H But I would say it became kind of a symbol even if it was not your intention.

This could be a similar case: I was wondering about the relationship with this particular tree because it is prominently positioned in the middle of the corridor – as if you want people to interact with the tree, it blocks the way.Fig.010

Anne Lacaton Again, it is simple. The project started with an observation: the site is wonderful, with the sand dunes, the forest of pine trees and the sea. The space already had a lot of qualities, so it was important for us not to lose or to waste any of these. The client wanted to build a house but at the same time was worried that the building would change the site too much. We decided not to cut any trees because there was no reason for us to do so. The second decision was not to build on the ground but to raise up above the ground. Firstly, because the ground, as a dune, isn't flat and for building on the ground we would have needed to make a platform. Which would lead to the removal of the trees. Secondly because the site was surrounded by bushes, to have a view out onto the beach it was necessary to stand higher.

The house was built on the maximum footprint allowed by the building regulations. For the construction we had to find a structural grid that would fit and leave gaps for the trees since the trees should never touch the structure. We had to measure their movement span during storms to find out how wide the gaps in the structure had to be. We found out that one meter was enough. This proved to be correct during a strong storm in 1999 where a lot of buildings in the area got damaged, and this house was not damaged at all.

H So, no special relationship with this tree?

Anne Lacaton No, not more than any of the others. This project talks about the disconnection of layer, which is very important in such a project. We are interested to see what happens when layers are superimposed. Working with an existing structure is exactly the same. The existing is already there whilst the new structure at the beginning is not – we have to invent it. It is important to overlap the two layers to see how they react. If there is a conflict, we have to solve it, but in our mind the existing is always winning and the new structure has to adapt.

H Because it is context?

Anne Lacaton Because it is context and what is existing, exists as a whole: like a landscape, or a relief, like a structural element of a site.

I think it's a game. Our attitude is to take it as it is, and if something has to adapt, then it's not the existing, but what we bring to it. Superimpose rather than impose.

H I think that your practice and other practices you have influenced are very important for my generation because of the pragmatism you put forward.

Anne Lacaton Pragmatism is a reduced interpretation of our work. Pragmatism is not enough to practice architecture. It is a straight way to realize something. What we are looking for is truth. Before pragmatism there are strong intentions. We never start a project with only the intention to be pragmatic and economic. Our intentions are much stronger. It's about generosity, it's about freedom and it's about economy to make all this possible. When we decide to build twice as much space without increasing the budget because we want to make a space generous and affordable, it is an intention that is determining the project. Then, the pragmatism permits us to fully achieve this intention. Being pragmatic means also being able to give priority to what is essential. I think it is important to say that because our work is often described only as pragmatic. But what is important are our positions and what the pragmatism serves.

H OK, then pragmatism is the wrong word. What I mean is a kind of logic. In almost all cases more space is better than less. To understand nature as the existing space, to understand existing architecture as some kind of nature makes sense. To analyse whether it is possible to add something or to improve the existing space, is logical to me. I wonder why don't more offices have this logic?

Anne Lacaton To do this we needed to unlearn. It was important to deconstruct what we have learnt in order to reopen our approach and questioning. We do not forbid ourselves of any thought. We always try to look at things with a fresh pair of eyes and we don't approach a site with the idea to change it absolutely. It is important to start a project with no apriori in mind to be open to every idea; every solution.

H Is this a piece of advice to us students?

Anne Lacaton This is what I tell the students in the studio. When you start a project, you must forget what you know, in order to be more receptive and

more curious. Look at things positively. From our education we architects tend to think that doing a project always means to change; to do something new; to replace something by something else.

H Thank you for this interview!



This interview was done by Jakob Walter.

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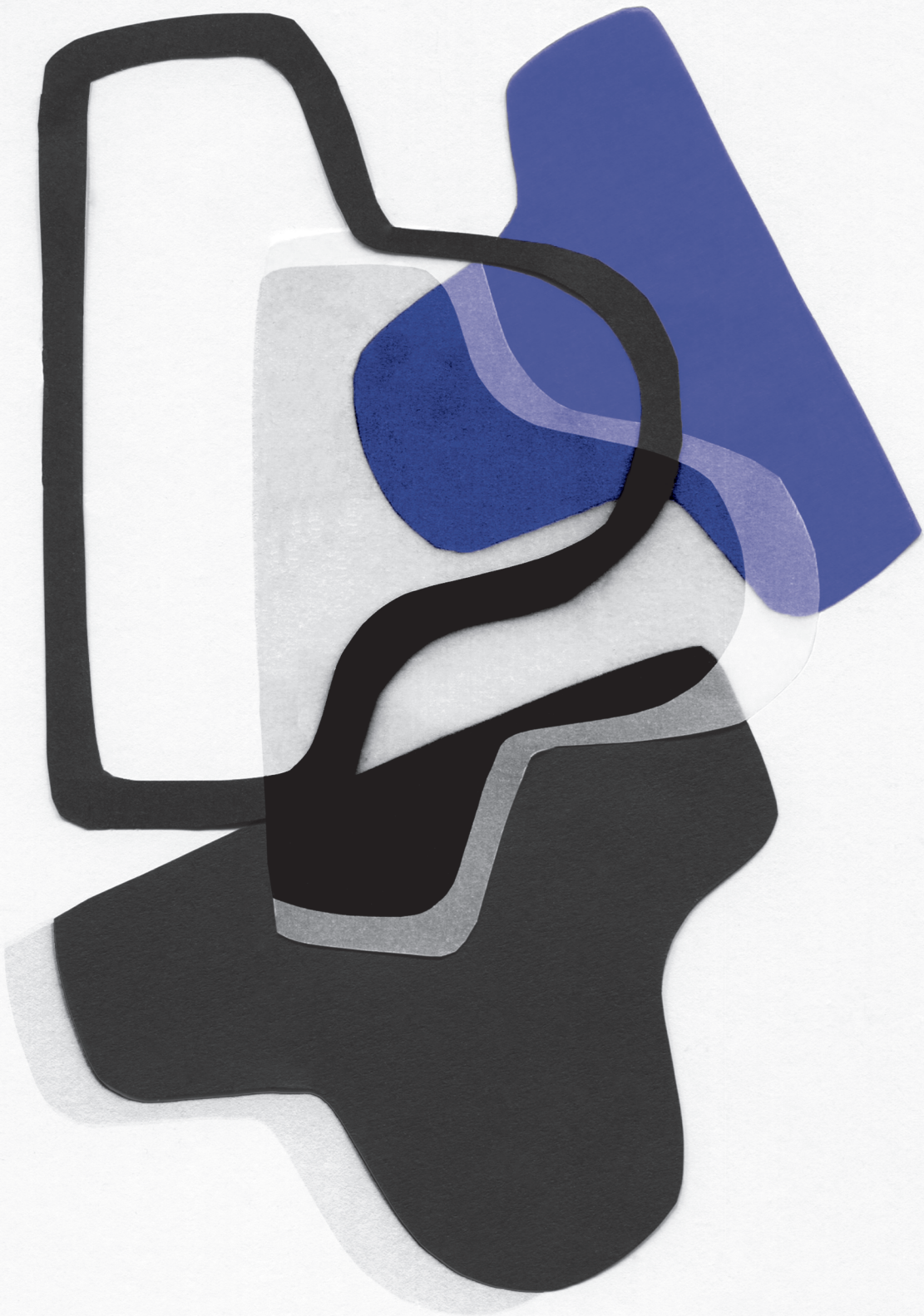
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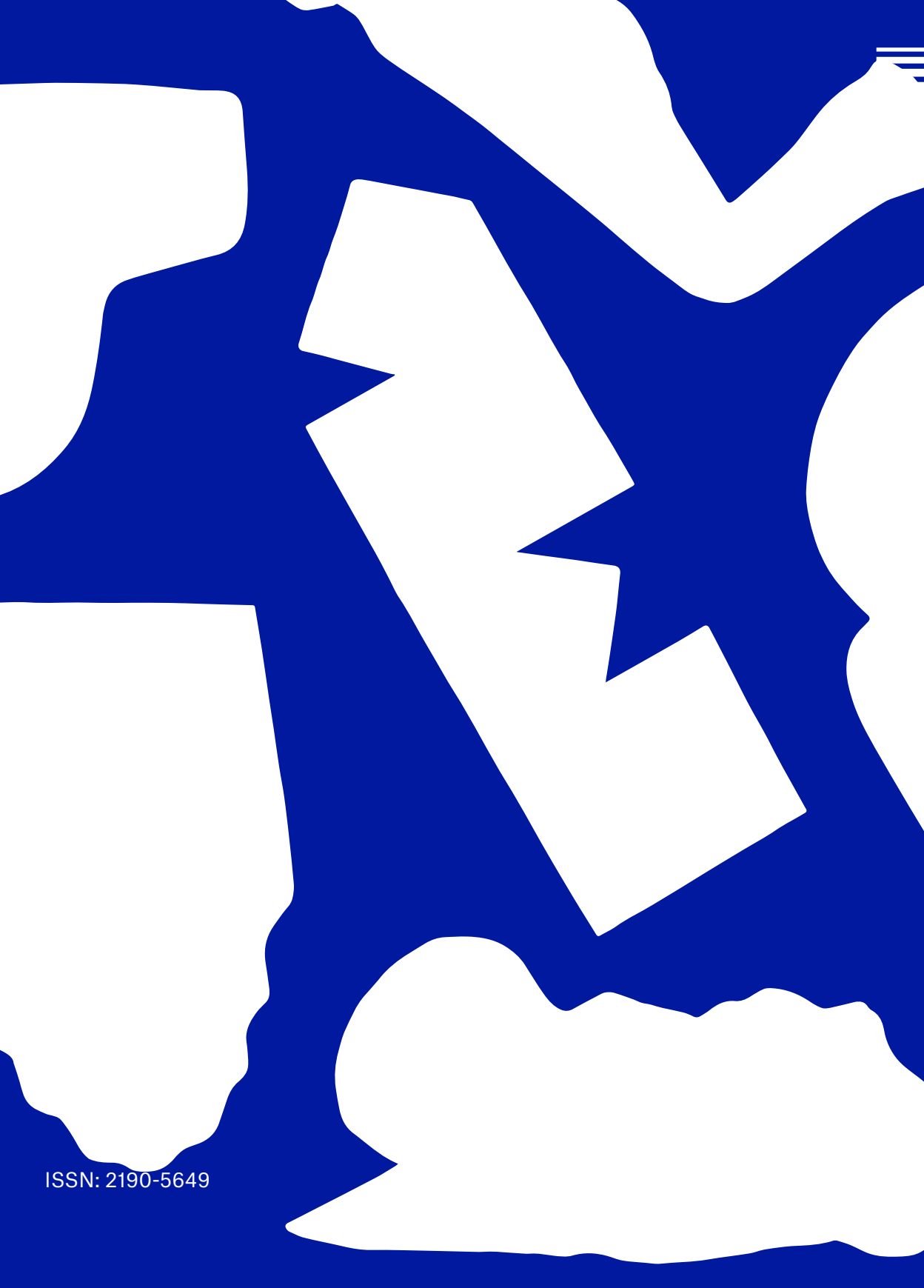
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Form, Geometrie und Proportion sind seit jeher Grundfragen der Architektur. Dennoch entwickelt sich die Kunst von den Ursprüngen der Disziplin hin zu einem Prozess, in dem die Einflüsse einer Vielzahl anderer Wissenschaften zu sehen sind. Ein maßgeblicher Grund für das erstarkende Interesse am Common ist das Thema, des Common zu sein. Ein Thema, das in den letzten Jahren vermehrt beachtet wurde, wagen wir der Disziplin aus studentischer Perspektive erneut zu betrachten...

»Editorial

Questions of form, geometry and proportions have always been intrinsic to architecture. Nevertheless we consider architecture to be moving towards a process that is connected to several other fields of knowledge. One reason for this seems to be the increasing importance of the topic of the Common. It has already been widely discussed and we attempt to reconsider it in this issue.

