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We don't need the umpteenth framework manifesto, neither the fast and blunt sentences of poetical manifestos. What we need, though, is to identify non limiting strategies that can give, through time, with a profound gaze, hypothetical solutions for a future ill-at-ease criticism, always questioning itself.

Criticism is not well, maybe it has already died. But this won't lead to aphasia or silence! Criticism is dead!

Long Live Criticism!

[1]

Analysing the alleged flattening of Italian architecture criticism, one convincing perspective hypothesis proposes the afterthought of the discipline in the light of research on the concept of body-of-rules-ness.

After the publication of Michel Foucault's works, especially *Discipline and Punish* or all the studies on deviance, it is possible to re-read the issue of the body of rules as a political issue, being it a dispositif that allows power operativity by identifying a norm and a deviance, separating what is acceptable from what is not. "Canonisation" usually serves whom has the power to absorb avantgardes and control deviant behaviours: avantgardes lose the revolutionary status gained by living in marginality and extremeness, as soon as they are normalized; for this reason, relations between criticism and avantgardes have usually been quite complex and usually exist post-mortem, when the revolution has failed and criticism around them has become nostalgia, revision or marketing.

Given that the issue of avantgarde is hard to tackle in the Realist Capitalism, where absorption and precorporation rule, whatever kind it is, whichever shape it has, avantgardes need space to exist far from criticism. This kind of radically projective and self-referential movements should always be supported by a theory usually given in the forms of poetics and manifesto. Instead, criticism is the external counterpart to the theory/design relation, that, through distance, can question exchanges that lie within this relation. In the avantgarde theory/design paradigm, the reference system is internal to the relation, as Gavin Perin explains in *Deviant Theory*; criticism is, on the contrary, heteroreferential, always related to the world as found, to reality data, to external references. For this reason it is not possible to call out for an avantgarde criticism, as it would neither respond to reality nor of reality, but it would confront only to utopias. On the other hand, there cannot be a criticism that only responds to reality and of reality, otherwise it would not pursue escape from the capitalist system, from the mechanism of visibility capital reproduction and its superstructures, remaining a withered practice, unable to propose radical and revolutionary perspectives. Criticism should be visionary, but not naive; smart but not disenchanting and hope-lost. It is not possible to ask criticism to be avant-gardist: may it be other-gardist, working like avantgardes, in marginality, borders and deviancy, but with a detached gaze, eteroreferen-

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tiated, capable of inclusion towards issues that are external to design.

Another thing that cannot be asked from criticism is to generate bodies of rules and canons, but it can be asked the will to provide value to things that deserve it: this value is not given by the impenetrable judgement of a single deus-ex-machina critic (who can decide the fate of an architect as much as Commodus the one of Massimo Decimo Meridio) but comes from 1. The mediatic exposure that a critical essay can give, 2. the semantic growth that discussion over the object causes, 3. the narrative that can multiply images and ideas over many platforms and, most importantly, 4. the engagement that generates in a community towards sharing the value recognition in an object. A critic, as Luigi Prestinenza Puglisi writes, should lose his/her role of gatekeeper and gain the one of catalyst, i.e the one that gets cracking the discourse, or the hub that multiplies interaction and connection in the network that produces contents and makes values (of whatever kind) reproduce. In this way, criticism shifts from exclusiveness towards inclusivity, that can, must steer towards the peripheries of the interesting and of the mainstream, so as to give value and redefine the boundaries of discipline, and to understand the perimeters of artistic and critical legitimacy of those spaces, and to understand whether and which value exists in marginal and deviant practices and theories. A weak criticism, after Vattimo, ready to welcome new meanings and positions.

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Andrew Atwood's book *Not Interesting: On the Limits of Architecture Criticism* gives a lateral reading for architecture practice, that can be grasped from the title: yes, there is the interesting part of the world, nevertheless the other not interesting part can have value: Atwood identifies the categories (even though they're neither strict nor absolute, and the construct is deliberately liquid and open to incongruity) of boring (too much identical to itself, self-referential and ambiguous), confused (too different in itself and ambiguous), and comforting (not ambiguous but too identical), opposed to the one of interesting. Atwood undermines the notion of interest since its neurological meaning: the strict and necessary

relation between interest and attention, and the consequent implications of the concepts of clarity and immediacy erase the discerning role of the critic, being the foreground to give meaning to things, identifying it with the qualities of what is worth attention. What the author proposes instead is a profound afterthought of criticism and – partially – architecture. This idea fits perfectly with Gavin Perin's position towards heteroreference in discipline: Atwood observes that – even in conditions of confusion, boredom and comfort - an inclusive reconsideration of what is around can be possible through the blurring of disciplinary boundaries, enabling to approach an object in its inte-

grity, including it in a value group that's not based on canons, also those works that do not provide interest at first sight. The line drawn by the critic can be aligned, together with studies on neurosciences and his personal engagement being himself suffering from ADHD, to Eco's idea of *Opera Aperta*. Atwood's categories find sense only in the interaction of the observer: something boring leads the observer/reader to find new meanings and spaces of discussions (i.e. spaces of value); something confused leads the observer/reader to create new relations within the object to understand it; something deadpan leaves the observer without critical space but with possibility to understand the relation (a deliberate act) between the object and its context. These qualities derive from an encounter and a predisposition of the object (the abnegation of interest is a deliberate act) and of the observer/reader to pursue this boundary blur triggering that inner resonance space that Eco identified as own of the *Opera Aperta*. By accepting the loss of definition criticism abdicates the determination of the boundaries of what is signified, leaving an infinite number of significant and acceptable paths.

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It is therefore fundamental to re-read Gramsci's works to better understand the theoretical seeds that justify this position: humanity is – by itself – intellectual, even though not all humans have the social role of intellectuals, huh? The pandemic spreading and empowerment of this faculty is given by various factors, among which the increase of higher education rates, the lowering of criticism tones and social media. The increase of possibilities of understanding the system that gets criticised, the easement of regulating mechanics as well as the reproduction of ideas in niche/cliq-ue-based systems makes it easier for critical messages to catch on. Indeed, it is true that, as Werner Oechslin wrote, reductions in consideration for criticism might heavily attack the role and the “virtues” of the critic himself, and this result is given also by opening new communicative possibilities. It is also true that, as the critic states, reduction in consideration for the critical discipline jeopardizes statutes and roles of critics, and that result is given also by “opening the field” to new communicative modes, allowing everyone to critically address architecture- which is, according to Oechslin, as dangerous as letting an airplane amateur pilot an Alitalia flight. A critical position that accepts amateur expression and production, without really considering it, would be hypocrite, as much as the one that tries to correct it is paternalistic and out-of-hi-

story. Solutions can come from those instruments that gamification provides; when AntiTheSi in 1990s opens its comments section, for example, it acts ante litteram as a game, creating interaction and network among a clique of readers. Keeping in mind that, as Prestinzenza Puglisi states, the critic is a multiplier of energies, a promoter of ideas, and that's the only way he/she has to keep them alive, with no meaning to spark new interests, but only catalysing the ones that already exist. In fact, everyone practices critical thinking, nevertheless, not everyone is a critic. These kinds of relations, as the critic says, help, by themselves, to shape better ideas, both in the mind of critics and amateurs.

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Exploring boundaries for criticism also means getting in spaces of action where mainstream never hung about, leaving behind fields that editorial play-makers usually conquer, but also leaving behind the attention that online platforms give to the archistar system (and its visibility war mechanism). Just outside this glossy space there is another, marginal and built of other-names, that lies out of the filter bubble of architectural showbiz. Criticism should position itself as a stronghold in that left side (as Rorty would say) that recognises in the legitimacy of hope and struggle spaces of future, while accepting compromising with reality. In this subcultural field, the moving force should be intersectionality, i.e the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. On the one hand, a deep research, almost forensic, on the contextual conditions is needed: not only under the economical, political, social and cultural point of view, but also under the environmental, productive, conflictual, linguistic, and civic one, in order to pinpoint violation and interruption spaces. The most effective instrument is practicing the so-called prosopopoeia: that figure of speech that transforms inanimate objects into animate questions; reading spaces as facts that happen in them, and the existing as data and images, it is really possible to give criticism in architecture a forensic and intersectional quality. In addition, the social and political role of architecture, architects and their civic function have to be accepted, so as to work on those topics to find keys to understand the built world. As Pier Vittorio Aureli and Gabriele Mastrigli write, we have to understand the real conditions that shape social, cultural and political geographies,

especially for Italy, and to promote a criticism that does not stop on shallow vales, but, with lucid intellectual anger works on fundamental hopes for future: the overcoming of spectacular starchitecture, the acknowledgement of a responsibility of architecture in communities and the critical continuity with a history that shared heritage and a criticism that has the guts of confronting with architecture and city. This lucid anger permits to identify new values in deviant practices, such as dealing with environmental issues, sustaining feminist and LGBT struggles, working for homeless, migrants and marginalities. Those values radically different because they are little, and solve reality problems at life scale, confronting reality and utopias to get the best out of both. Revolutionary like that Ecce Bombo speech: “to be, but really, revolutionary in everyday life”.

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Even though it might sound very distant, kunstwollen idea of Riegl and its historical gaze can be fundamental in shaping a criticism of ideology for architecture. The idea nulls the possibility to think comparisons between ages and styles, not flattening but enhancing differences, definitely abandoning a judgmental will that blemishes criticism. This change is necessary when a diffuse nostalgia, i.e. the incapacity of reading kunstwollen in surrounding world, or a deliberate revanchist – if not revisionist – attitude of clear ideological matrix hides, in contemporary criticism. Abandoning nostalgia (the tafurian anguish of finding a meaning that is more meaningful than the ones already found for architecture) means also providing non-judgemental spaces where to foster a shared and deep analysis, comprehending reasons and compromises that shape architecture. This position leads to two clear and very different consequences: 1. the necessity of the creation of a historical criticism should derive from a reading of contemporary situations; the sparkle should be the search for answers in history, leaving aside instrumental and non-productive reactionary denigration. Saying, for example, that Po-Mo sucks will not lead anywhere, and for sure understanding and dissecting implications and economic causes will lead further. 2. Implying kunstwollen means implying convention, and therefore the idea that criticism is never defined unless given into precise space/time/culture conditions, that can change. So, criticism should continue interrogating itself, and confronting reality to criteria, not fearing to change and adapt (please don't call it resilience)

The theme of ideology, upon which the legacy of Manfredo Tafuri questions us, has become – with the arrival of alleged post-ideological times – a complex and slippery theme. Everything is ideology, as Žižek states, i.e. everything is an emanation of the capitalistic system, or finds itself in ideological opposition to it. If the narration of the end of grand récits is itself an ideological grand récit, as Vattimo teaches, it is not possible to position oneself out of the ideological perimeter, neither for a critic nor for an architect. This forced condition leads us to return to Rorty’s invitation to reappropriate grand récits, knowing their limits and their strengths. Even though it is now the time of post-theory, post-criticism and non-ideologic media, and maybe an ideological criticism of architecture might sound a bit 1968ish, ideological spaces become evident and inevitable in approaching production and re-production processes. The space in which it is possible to make a criticism of ideology after having historically accepted that all shapes are derivations of ideological premises lies in processes from “drawing table” to working site to magazine. Therefore, the space of criticism is in the process, natural arena of conflict and dialogue, where contradictions emerge spontaneously. But processes are more than that: they are also where critical practices can exist.

As Hal Foster states, the great “enemy” for a coherent criticism is “the nevertheless”: “I know the big museums have more to do with finance capital than with public culture, but nevertheless...”, “I know big urban redevelopment are a vehicle for gentrification and enhancement of differences, but nevertheless...”. The duty of criticism is to emancipate from the nevertheless and become a strong unmasking discourse, beneath the personal preferences and fetishes.

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Criticism, whose role is the one of propositive hub between individuals and generator of discourse without judgemental and absolute will, to continue on that track by Tafuri and its school, must return to crisis as a fundamental tool to analyse practices, before form and shape. Leading processes to crisis means identifying the underlying ideas of the world, independently from the ones that shape buildings (that are own of the developer).

Marco Biraghi asks whether there is any difference between the migrant, employed with no contract and almost no wage as a labourer in Southern Italy, and the young architect, employed with no contract and almost no wage. Obviously the comparison is

extreme

and provocative, but it

leads to note the great number

of inequalities that young architects

in seek of a job, not fame, not fortune, are

obliged to suffer. The same question has gained international importance when Serpentine Pavilion asked Junya Ishigama to make it clear about unpaid staff hired to design the London venture for 2019. Adam Nathaniel Furman pointed it out, and in a few weeks a huge amount of whistleblowing made it evident that the unpaid staff problem is widespread in all the system. The recognition (or the missing recognition) of a salary for a worker qualifies the working activity of one person – and therefore part of his/her dignity – as valid or not, and clearly defines an ethic and ideologic position in the process, as Ar-

gan and Panofsky

teach us: the genial gesture is not enough to fund a work of art, but also the process of production, reproduction and fruition of the same.

Given the importance of intersectionality in the critical praxis, many others issues relate to this, among which the feminist and gender question (both the aspect of Denise Scot Brown's Room at the Top and the wage/work conditions equality issue), that collective movements are tackling, and the safety on working site issue (how is it possible, in the case of Zaha's stadium of Qatar, to limit criticism only to shape and form, after her non concernment in the abominable working conditions for builders?), or the conditions of use and access to

buildings (from Heatherwick's Vessel to many public heritage access policy and fees), the lack of public competitions, the interference of politics into the public practice (see: Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara). It won't be fundamental anymore for the critic to address the building, as much as the process of production, reproduction and fruition of the object.

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Regarding the processes of production and re-production of images, criticism around narrations and rhetoric – also made with images – becomes fundamental. This idea was emphasised since the times of Raumgestaltung: space should communicate and be communicable to have a critical value, just like the mole hole that in once is and describes the movement of the animal. In 1992 Francesco Galofaro warned about the dangers of slogans, and their easy dribbling from high culture to middle culture (pop museum expositions) to low culture of viral sharing. With the 2000s, mechanisms seem to revert: slogans and mottos are not anymore the simplification of difficult theoretical instances thought to lower the level towards a greater popularity. Aided by the reduction of grip of theory and criticism on reality, slogans become the moving force of built environment. YES IS MORE! by Bjørke is the last one of a long list, comprehending FUCK THE CONTEXT by Rem Koolhaas up to LESS IS MORE by Mies. The problem with mottos, as seen in BIG's works and books, is highlighted by Manfredo di Robilant: slogans try to hyper-signify with redundancy contents already clear, born under the sign of the same slogan. Mottos, both a rhetoric instrument and a generative tool, push design into a self-referential circle, whose key image, together with the render, is the diagram. This, according to Alejandro Zaera-Polo, is a caricature of design process, not underpinning theories or ambiguities in favour of an alleged clearness. Behind slogans, keywords and poetics hide ideological processes, and the duty for criticism is to perform an unmasking act towards, as Mark Fisher with Lacan would say, those discourses to the Great Other, with no will to be judgmental. Together with words and rhetoric, criticism has the duty to demystify also those imaginative layers that are productive, critical and viral with which architecture gets narrated. Once again, the idea of a talking architecture, just like the mole hole, enlarges

the action arena for criticism to the image realm that world builds up around it: this too carries signs of compromise and productive processes.

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A rhetoric that is particularly dangerous for criticism is the Next Big Thing hype. Linking the idea of criticism to the one of process, for how much one can be optimistic and stuff, weakens, if not nulls, whichever critical value to processes. Criticism should comprehend this, knowing that not all must be progressive and productive. Practices and projects with deliberate unproductive footprint should produce discourse as much as the ones of greater step-forwarding program.

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On the other hand, a greater number of practices far from the radars, with no world-scale ambitions, operate hope strategies in marginal and complex contexts, with limited budgets or as public workers: they pose themselves as strongholds on the left side. The question for criticism is the same as the one that existed for avantgarde: how to act regarding those little revolutions? The answer sounds similar: if criticism is a tool to spark debates, and not to assess definitive values, then a critic can pose him/herself, with no fear of sounding too much on the left, in contact with those environments, with no scientific attitude, but with the desire of putting in contact architecture and the reality of context. Both as an a priori and as an a posteriori. The spaces of these practices are usually public, contended and ambiguous, the transformation processes are long and the actions discreet, and therefore difficult to interpret and not at all a market product: luckily, academia works as a safe space for these practices, that can find occasion to reproduce themselves, with appreciation and free buffet. Plus, with all that media 2.0. can give to criticism. Recently, a number of online magazines has begun to louden the voices of these practices: Curbed and CityLab for participation; Parlour for feminism, LegallySociable and MasContext on planning an urban marginalities, and the list can be long. What is peculiar is the intersectionality of the approach of these critical platforms: by mutual interest, collaboration and sponsoring, they are building a strong network, alternative to mainstream, playing at the level of the bigger fishes in the pond.

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In the group of little revolutions, participative processes at urban scale and in the public realm are the most important ones. First of all, because they try to reside out of ideological structures, in scale and objectives, and in methodologic processes: opening the discourse means to reduce the impact of the room at the top on urban and built realm, connecting users and space and making the design process more fair and correct towards public life, public stakeholders and citizens.

In general, criticism on form and shape is sterile without criticism on the process: otherwise, the critic would play the part of Monthly Python's guard that, seeing Brian writing "ROMANES EUNT DOMUS" corrects his grammar and, instead of hiding the infamous message, forces the young revolutionary to write it a hundred times before the sun rises.

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In a 2010 shortfilm, the Italian filmmaker Gipi states “*In a society that imposes excellence, being dreadful is a moral duty*”. Apart from the radical position of the director, it is possible to see an instance of detachment from times and modes of production, as well as from the imperative of excellence and formalism. If in order to criticise processes a certain distance is due to have correct instruments and sight to question, therefore working on modalities, alterity and form might succeed in building distance. Moving out from traditional stereotypes means accepting new objects and new media, but also new actors and relational spaces.

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Legitimizing and recognising as valuable criticism on social media can be an effective strategy that would lead to invade the field of sharing platforms, playing against them. This action would not only open the field to new actors, but also provoke an infinite number of individual and ever-changing sub-strategies and sub-supports. Methodological changes, even though shaping this discipline since the idea of conventional criteria, and the lack of shared fundamentals make traditional critic's ottuagenary back shiver. Whenever it is possible to shock a discipline that lacks self-doubtfulness, well please do.

Moreover, playing on the same pitch with sharing platforms permits to highlight paradoxes and reconfigure their boundaries: legitimating architecture would still run on digital / 2.0. media, but in a really critical environment that

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can overcome visionary images and coolness to land in a more consistent criticism. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter allow an enormous range of tools to create interaction between critic and users, without marking enormous gaps between the two. One good practice, apart from old-on-Facebook behaviours of many users, is Luigi Prestinenzza Puglisi page. Mastering instruments of the social media, such as videos, LIVE!, the almost literary form of posting, becomes a must to build that relation between critic and reader, that,

somehow, tries to solve the Gramscian dichotomy. While making the two parts get closer and closer, the interface and the

algorithm help to maintain the mechanisms of hierarchy and distance, avoiding the "Alitalia pilot" effect. These approaches enable to radically tackle problems, with that forensic approach that might sound violent, as Taller Teritorial de México does on Instagram with conflictual spaces in the latin country.

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This would not be – obviously – the only tool to make the critical process more participative. For example, in 2014 a collective of students of Politecnico di Milano at Bovisa founded Architettura Incivile (Unpolite Architecture), an anonymous students collective (led by Penzo Riano, Pio Gonti, Kem Roolhaas, Zino Cucchi), whose mission is to damage from the interior the academic system, through acts of creative terrorism. Their action was based on collective hacking of exposition feedback, for example distributing post its among visitors in order to create a personal space of comment, or promulgating the Pantero Prize, mocking the dusty Mantero prize for best design thesis, giving the possibility to all students to expose their thesis and create debate around them. This practice, radical, subversive and marginal has sparked the debate around the conditions of teaching architecture in Milano faculty. Not much, but still. There is space for subversion also in the most rigid media structures, such as San Rocco's: in the book of copies edition, Fake industry Agonistic Architecture's has published Arguably

Built by Aliens, where the graphic rigour of the magazine gets mocked and, by inserting an irony layer the architects can operate a serious criticism towards the editorial decisions of the directive board; playing with the figures, pushing the boundaries of the rules of the system, or removing them from the context helps to create distance between the critic and the system: subversion works only if it helps a clear standpoint, and opens up the participation towards practices of collective criticism, where users are both influencers and audience. Learning from Peter Fisschl, operating irony helps giving a new and clear meaning to things, criticising them “ex latere”, without being on the fluff.

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It is natural that humour and irony are an instru-

ment to reduce the usual amount of hassle of reading criticism, opening it and making it easier to reach on digital platforms. Memes are the most immediate instrument, that synthesises the imaginative tendency of the days, the exaggerate repulsion of distance between audience and critic, the necessity of keeping up with the world with a low quality product ready to be disposed after use.

From the Greek μίμημα, memes are defined as “An element of a culture or system of behaviour passed from one individual to another by imitation or other non-genetic means”. Particularly, digital meme are viral contents capable of monopolizing attention of web users. A video, drawing, image become a meme when their replicability – that de-

pends on the ability of arousing emotions – is the

highest. Therefore, the elements memes are based on are viral replicability and emotive arousal (usually fun, interest or affection) in the one who observes. The two components are strongly related. It should be noted that quality of the product is NOT a prerogative of meme production. For this reason, they are considered the trash of the cultural system, even because they are residual sub-products of uniformed consumption of cultural industry mass products. Memes are user-generated contents, and base their functioning on the fact that someone’s trash is recognised with consonance by a larger audience that shares it. The recognition of contents and its implications is fundamental, and this trash has an ontological meaning, too: as Žižek states, trash is there to mark a void, measure it, receiving meaning from context’s lack of content but capability of meaning-production. As Federico Sciemenes and Raffaele Alberto Ventura write, memification is an upcycling process: from trash to meaning. What happens with content-based memes, the one produced by qualified authors, results of creating a parallel narrative to academic life, unbound and free from technical rigidity. This case is usually referred to as dowcycling: production has a

lower quality level than what can be expected. But is this true? Lowering the quality of support does not mean refusing the quality of content. Peter Sloterdijk’s researches around cynicism (virtue that he opposes to cynism) move toward this direction. The philosopher takes as a model Diogenes, highlighting a subversive variant of low theory that pantomimically and grotesquely carries practical embodiment to an extreme. Against the idealism of Plato, Diogenes opposes an uncivil enlightenment, reverting, practicing irony and subversion, the arrows of truth against those places where lies lull themselves into security behind authorities. “Low theory” here for the first time seals a pact with poverty and satire, in a productive and pleasantly violent way against idealism. Not bad. Meme, though, is not really that much trash*. Many are the strategies and experiments for criticism with memes. For example, Alvar Aaltissimo tries to work with “two speeds” memes, both with an emotive and fun meaning, and another critical,

deep meaning; or Ryan Scavnicky’s @sssscavvvv,

that tries to tackle memes with a discursive, didactic and pedagogic gaze. Still, for many of those productive users, it is really important to take very seriously the idea that we need not be so serious. Productive process behind a critical meme is not the productive process that lies behind a trash meme. Indeed, as Scavnicky notes, “It is not just a chance to be funny. Memes open up new space of critique by forming positions legible to a larger audience than “just” architects. It isn’t only about being funny, but producing positions in faster mediums”. This way, meme becomes a productive medium, whose aim resides out of the field where it is applied, and reaches fast an ontological, gnosological and critic meaning. Plus, it’s fun.

