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GRACE LA: From Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, this is *Talking Practice* a series asking renowned designers to provide an inside glimpse into what they do, why, and how they do it, exposing the ways in which their design imagination is articulated through practice. I'm Grace La, professor and chair of the Department of Architecture. Thank you for listening.

We're delighted to have with us today Pier Vittorio Aureli who is an architect and an educator. He teaches at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, where he directs the laboratory theory and project of domestic space. Together with Martino Tattara, he is cofounder of Dogma, an architecture and research-based practice in Brussels. Dogma focuses on the relationship between architecture and the city, with a specific interest in large-scale interventions, urban research, and the transformation of domestic space.

Pier is the author of numerous books, such as *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*, *Living and Working*, and *Architecture and Abstraction*, among others. Pier is also a painter. The first solo exhibition of his work took place at Betts Project Gallery in London in 2017. His recent lecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design presented Dogma's research on the longhouse, the linear, long, and narrow habitation typology that existed and still exists in many parts of the world. Welcome, Pier.

PIER VITTORIO Thank you for having me, Grace.

AURELI:

GRACE LA: I often like to start at the beginning to learn a bit about how you established Dogma and what your path was to architecture. How did you arrive at Dogma and at teaching?

PIER VITTORIO Dogma was founded by me and Martino, I think, around 2002, but Martino and I knew each other from the university. We were already working together since our last years of school. Martino actually helped me a lot for my diploma and I did later the same. So in a way, our thesis actually were one of the very first moments of intense collaboration.

And then, actually, after my diploma at the IUAV, the School of Architecture in Venice, I got a scholarship to study abroad. I went to the Netherlands at the Berlage Institute, and the same year Martino actually did his Erasmus program, which is a student exchange program very well known in Europe, where you have a possibility to study abroad for one year, and he was studying in Delft.

Martino is actually younger than me, I think two or three years. So he was still finishing his school. But it was exactly that moment around 2000 that we really started to work together, and we felt that we were like a duo, let's say. And then I would say, naturally, we started this very intense collaboration, which then became Dogma.

GRACE LA: So tell me about the naming of the practice, because, of course, Dogma entered English from the Latin term meaning "philosophical tenet" and the Greek word from which it is borrowed means that which one thinks is true. So, obviously, there's some thought that you put into this naming of the practice, which I think is part of the foundation.

PIER VITTORIO Well, actually, there was not really an intense thought about the name, and I think the name came from a book, **AURELI:** which I think Martino and I liked a lot. Beautiful book that I still actually advise students to read, *Poetics of Music* by Igor Stravinsky.

And in this book, Stravinsky actually is one of the few artists who think of dogma in positive terms as an essential position to produce an artwork. You need a principle. You need something that is unquestionable to produce, actually-- in his case, of course, music composition. But he was talking more in general about making arts, producing arts. And, of course, I'm now oversimplifying his thought, but that book perhaps was the inspiration for the name.

And, of course, another possible inspiration was also the *Dogma Manifesto* by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg. Very important manifesto in the history of European cinema, which was actually published in mid '90s. And I was a big fan of especially Vinterberg. And this idea of dogma actually really resonated with my and I think, also, with Martino's understanding of architecture and what position to take.

GRACE LA: If we fast forward just a bit, then, the question about finding one's own set of principles for me, I've been listening to a lot of your lectures and looking back at the archive of what you've been producing, and I was really intrigued in a lecture "Less is Enough," which you delivered I think that was 2011, maybe. You talk about the question of asceticism.

And I think that's very interesting because you use it in a very optimistic and positive sense, in the same way that dogma is sometimes perceived as a negative thing, but you are talking about it as a set of principles. So are these things related?

PIER VITTORIO Maybe there is something important I should say that I consider the work of Dogma really a collaboration **AURELI:** between me and Martino and our collaborators, while my writing sometimes are a little bit apart from the work we do together. I never wanted my writings to form a kind of unifying project or team, where everything is subsumed within it. I don't think there are really significant relationships by my essay, "Less is Enough," and the appreciation, let's say, of the idea of Dogma.

Regarding the first, I think that for us, architecture, in order to be understandable, to be a shared practice that is not just coming from one personal individual obsessions has to be very clear and legible. And for us, Dogma is really assuming a starting point that is very clear, that is very assertive, but allows actually us to work together with other people, but also to propose something that is adaptable to different conditions, but nevertheless has a core that is very strong and very defined. And that has always been our concern when we do our projects.

Whether this links to my writings, I don't know, to be honest with you. I never tried to force a relationship between these two issues, I think. My writings are more a sort of questioning of architecture, rather than a way to propose sort of a recipe of how to produce architecture. I think my writings are really interrogations, are studies about problems that not necessarily are supporting actually the practice or the work I do with Martino.

Of course, there is a proximity because I'm, at the end, the same person, but I've never tried to force to a unitary reading of all these things as one. So it's very difficult for me to make this connection that you propose, which I think might be interesting, but I've never thought of these two things as related in a way.

GRACE LA: So that's interesting because when I read the essays and listen to lectures and whatnot, but then I look at the work of Dogma-- and maybe this is my own misunderstanding-- sometimes it feels like a call and response, an interrogation, a question you're asking. But then when it's flushed out or it's created through the drawings or the medium that you are working on in Dogma, then it seems to be responding to a set of definitely questions about the city or about, let's say, alternative forms of housing, et cetera.

So if we are to understand that they are actually not-- they are remarkably consistent, actually, to me, in terms of a call and response, but maybe you can tell me a little bit about the process of making your projects.

PIER VITTORIO Yeah. I think there is what you call a relationship that you can call and response. There is a dialectical
AURELI: relationship, but it's not too direct, at least that's my intention. I've never been convinced by these architects whose research and writings are too subservient to their design. There is a tradition of architects who write about architecture, and you can immediately see that their writings are somehow a way to support their design.

I also did some of those kind of writings. There are things that I wrote which are very much somehow cultivating some design approach or design position, but I think the majority of my writings are not doing that, at least this is my intention. They are raising more general questions about architecture. And, of course, they have a consequence on the work, perhaps, but, again, these consequences are also mediated by the fact that I work with other people.

So for me, Dogma is really a special project. And that's why I don't want to force too strong relationship with my writings was actually a point of origins are my lectures and my teaching. And when I teach, I really try to not force my practice issues too much, let's say. It's inevitable, of course. We all come to the school with experience that is rooted in our practice.

But somehow, when I'm in school, I really try to open up the discussion to something more general. And that's why there is this relationship that you call and response, perhaps, yes, of course, because I'm the same person and I'm interested in certain issues or certain problems, but I try to not make it too strong.

And I know that this sometimes for people can be confusing because you always expect an architect somehow playing the role of theorist, the role of researcher, the role of architect as this role would be converged to one strong point. The architects that represent this position are Venturi and Scott Brown, Aldo Rossi. And although I respect a lot these architects and theorists, I don't think my work follow their approach.

GRACE LA: So when you are in the classroom and you're probing these general questions, tell me a little bit more about how then these arise to become some of your most forceful essays and/or questions about the city and, in fact, criticisms about how we are coping with crisis in housing, for example. How did these come about?

PIER VITTORIO All my writings are always coming from my lectures. I lecture a lot, so I give lectures almost every week. And
AURELI: actually for 10 years, when I was teaching at the AA, beside teaching studio, I was also teaching survey for first year students, which was an incredible life-changing experience.

GRACE LA: Survey of history or--

PIER VITTORIO Yes. Architectural history from prehistory to modern, from contemporary. As I said, it was a very life-changing experience because when I was hired to do that course, the school, the AA, was near desperation because they couldn't find anyone doing this kind of survey, teaching very broad section of architectural history. And they asked me to do that. And this was actually 10 years ago.

And at first, it was very difficult for me, especially because I wanted to not give a too general or generic global history, but I wanted really students to focus on specific case studies and projects. And so it took me actually a few years to learn how to lecture and how to somehow allow especially first year students, or students most of them no previous knowledge of architecture, to introduce them to architecture and to the city, and to the relationship between architecture and the city.

And, of course, in that kind of teaching, you can't just rely on your practice. Of course, for me, practice is a very important source to understand what are the problems of architecture, what are the problems of design. But, of course, when you do that kind of course, the problem is more general. It's wider. But that became an incredible experience that had major consequences on my writing and my teaching, to the point that when I moved to the EPFL one year ago, I decided, at least for the time being, to only teach actually lectures on history and theory, so to not teach design anymore.

GRACE LA: Interesting So you're not teaching design.

PIER VITTORIO For the first time after 20 years, since last year I've not taught design. I might come back to teach design, but I really felt the need to reinforce my teaching, which is actually also very focused on history. And I see theory more as an attempt to put together a history that can not just inspire students, but also allow them to be critical and to understand the past of our discipline.

GRACE LA: I have been, on occasion, invited to sit on some juries and studio reviews of option studios held at Yale, and I was struck by the student work. Sometimes I saw a series of renderings from different students, which was very, very strongly affiliated in my mind, visually, to some of the graphic tendencies of Dogma's work.

And I thought to myself, not knowing you and not knowing exactly what that relationship between teaching and practice might be, maybe this visual style of representation was, in fact, dogmatic. And it was really quite remarkable the consistency of some of the student renderings that were being produced at Yale that did seem to be very much motivated by some of the-- whether it was compositional strategies or whether it was choices of entourage or ways in which the architecture would sit back or serve as a foil to the life that was unfolding in the renderings.

So I thought, at that moment, that you were trying to actually connect very strongly some of the motivations, theoretically and intellectually, with the design project. Was I misreading that?

PIER VITTORIO Well, actually, several people has told me and Martino as well about these things that our graphic style or representation style has been used by there are students or sometimes even practitioners. I wouldn't say we never cared, but we always thought, well, it's beyond our responsibility or beyond our control.

But, actually, I have to say that within my studio and within my also lectures, I gave always a lot of importance to representation-- to the history of representation. So one thing is the perception of these images, maybe from outside, but, actually, at least within our office and also with students, the way they have been produced has always been within a very intense conversation with the history of representation. And that's actually what I can talk about. I mean, how this work then is appropriated, I cannot do anything about that. So it's not my responsibility.

But I think within the class, within the office, there is a strong conversation about representation because we believe that architecture is profoundly intertwined with representation, even built architecture. It's something we often experience and also in the past through representations. I always tell this story to my students that Thomas Jefferson never saw Palladio in reality. He actually visited Italy, but he didn't bother to go to Venice, and his knowledge of Palladio, which was the greatest influence on his architectural work, actually came from Palladio's four books.

And this is just an example of how representation of architecture is fundamental medium through which architecture has been produced, for better or worse, in the last four or five centuries.

GRACE LA: So very specifically, because, again, I think that we can spot a Dogma image, how are you then producing these with your collaborators, with your partner? Tell us more about how they're made.

PIER VITTORIO AURELI: Yeah. I have to say that in spite of the fact that our images might look always the same, we have experimented a lot of techniques, especially through our research, not only design. So there has been an evolution, at least from my point of view. And the way actually we produce them, sometimes by our collaborators, but we always discuss them. There is always a reference. There is always an idea. There is a painting or there is a photograph. We don't literally copy, let's say, those references, but they are there and they become like models through which we reformulate our own work.

For example, Piero della Francesca has been a very important reference for especially the flagellation, which is a painting that we have always had in mind in our making images. But we sometimes also use other reference, especially photography. Certain photographers have been very important, Guido Guido, to a certain extent Luigi Ghirri. The new topographics also have been an important reference. We always have been a strong interest in painting in two-dimensional representation. And, of course, there is a strong exchange between painting and architecture, which we have always cultivated.

GRACE LA: That makes a lot of sense, and it describes why I think the image production is so engaging. One can see actually a very artful hand in it. And I think that's also why it's quite magnetic. But I think, also, it's incredibly enjoyable to attempt for any student or any architect to read into the drawing too and to extract from the drawing all sorts of interpretive meanings and thoughts.

But most critically, Dogma seems to be making a political statement as well. Could you talk about that, or do you deny it?

PIER VITTORIO AURELI: No. I don't think that if there is a political statement is in one building or in one design, or in one image, or in the style of the images. I think it's more maybe on the themes and the kind of projects that we have developed, a kind of research that we have developed. I don't think you can refight political position into an image, although an image certainly has strong ideological charges.

But I think that if there is a political position in our work, I think it's more in the themes and the topics that we have worked with rather than, let's say, making politics a kind of aesthetic or a kind of image or an image of politics, let's say. We always have been trying to avoid that trap, which could be dangerous because you reduce things to simple statements.

GRACE LA: So let's take, for example, an image that relates to an alternative form of housing. Isn't it implied in that kind of an image that the nation-state needs to reimagine certain forms of housing, and that, obviously, comes from a pretty strong position about what is the responsibility--

PIER VITTORIO Of course, you are absolutely right. In that sense, the image is a harbinger of something much more complex. So
AURELI: in that sense, yes. Of course, we are very aware that as designers, as architects, there are limitations of our research, although we imply that scenario where institutions of power have to take certain kinds of decisions. This cannot be achieved only through architecture. Of course, this could only be a collective project where other people, other movements are involved.

And so although you're right to say that our projects or projects had that ambition to raise these important issues, at the same time, there is always an awareness that we are only part of a larger picture where other people, other movements are involved. So in a way, there is nothing totalizing in our project. We are not offering like a comprehensive solution to everything. I think it's only a synecdoche, it's a fragment that nevertheless aspire to be understood within this larger framework, which is actually the just reform of the city.

GRACE LA: And in that, we might also uncover some thoughts about the question of the late capitalist tendencies that our housing or even public space seem to be maybe damaged is too strong a word, but we have so many challenges in dealing with certain crisis of public space and/or of housing. It does seem to critique, on the one hand, quite squarely, but maybe also obliquely, the responsibilities and/or a need to critique our late capitalist tendencies. Maybe you could tell me more about that. Your thoughts.

PIER VITTORIO Well, yes, of course, it's clear that the main problem that we face today is this hyper-commodification of housing.
AURELI: So something that maybe in the early period of the 20th century was considered something with a use value, something that you would use because we need to be housed, since the late 20th century, there has been a major transformation of housing into a commodity, which means that housing is not for housing, but it's for valorizing capital.

At the moment, this is reaching an incredible level of intensity, where, for example, there are cities where literally housing is empty because it's just like portfolio asset for investors. If you go to London or New York, you can see that kind of housing. And cities actually, especially the public sector, has completely surrendered to this logic. And today, actually, to do public housing in many countries is almost impossible. But not because it's not possible economically, it's not possible politically because the state has renounced to that role. And on the contrary, the state often gives all kinds of benefits for more commercial development.

And in a very small, small, small scale as Dogma, we have experienced that condition, that deadlock, because we have always interested to work on housing projects where there is a possibility of what we call self-valorization, meaning a situation where housing really re-acquire this use value. We have explored different possibilities, and what we realize is that there is very little room for these kind of projects.

And for us, it was important, nevertheless, to speculate and to-- alternative forms of ownership that are not meant to transform the house into a commodity can be reflected also in a different typology, in a domestic space where, let's say, property is no longer the *nomos*. But at the same time, we also realized that in late neoliberal city, this is a very difficult condition because there are really structural and political problems. And this is what prompted us to not just use design and projects, but also research, but also writing, to address this level that you can't solve, of course, through architecture.

GRACE LA: That reminds me so much of a student who grew up in Singapore and wonderful project that was about re-envisioning a very large scale mid-century housing in Singapore. But in that scenario, the assumption for the type of family was also extremely codified. And only if you have a very conventional, typical nuclear family are you even allowed to apply for the housing. So there are, in fact, real, very tangible expressions of this kind of neoliberal response, which also has incredible social ramifications.

I'm curious to ask you more about some of the alternative forms of housing that you are thinking of and that some of your projects are proposing, because I think that's, again, on the horizon. It clearly reflects the condition or *zeitgeist* at this moment, but we don't find a parallel in our housing options.

PIER VITTORIO AURELI: Yeah. Many European countries have a strong tradition where the state would either sponsor or directly build social housing. This situation in the '90s changed dramatically. Since the '90s, actually, the kind of housing that has replaced-- let's say, social housing is what we call affordable housing. Affordable housing is actually a house that is private. It's in the market. It's just supposed to cost less. But in cities where real estate is premium, of course, affordable is very expensive, which means that exclude a lot of people that need housing.

And you can say that parallel to that, there has been an interesting movement to promote alternative forms of housing which are not meant to become financial assets. Like co-operative housing, like community land trust, these are all experiments to decommodify, to withdraw housing from the market. It's like you rent or buying a share of a house, and if you decide to leave, you will not buy it for a market price. You will simply get what you put actually, which means that *de facto* housing is no longer financial asset.

The problem of these experiments is that the scale is very small. It's not the same scale of what used to be public housing, for example. And for me, the biggest challenge for the future is how to put together these two things, to put together this way of producing housing where you decommodify, you withdraw housing from the market, but where there is a scale that is actually comparable to the provision of housing in the early 20th century. So that's for me, the challenge.

GRACE LA: And in that way, some of the large-scale projects that Dogma is pursuing, many of them are currently unbuilt. And so how do you see that trajectory? What would you like to happen?

PIER VITTORIO AURELI: There are two aspects of our work. There are what I would call theoretical projects, which for us have always been very important because there is always this idea that when you do a theoretical project, you are escaping reality. You are doing something utopian. But I don't think that is correct. You can do a theoretical project that really questions very structural, political, and economic aspects of the way architecture and housing is produced.

And this has always been our goal to make theoretical projects that are, of course, challenging the status quo, but at the same time, they are also addressing real conditions. They are addressing how changing certain political and economic aspects-- housing could really be produced in ways that it's not a commodity.

But, of course, because the problems I mentioned before, we think only as a theoretical project, you can make this proposition. But then recently, parallel to that, we are also trying to use maybe more pragmatic opportunities to see if there is a possibility to build or to realize some of these propositions, perhaps not in their purest form, but at least as attempts to deal with what is possible to do today. So we are interested in that.

We've never tried to use these theoretical projects as a sort of escape or refuge from the possibility to eventually realize. But, of course, the question is how much you will give up to realize these projects. And that's an interesting question. And I think for us, a certain kind of hope that those propositions can be realized should remain.

GRACE LA: So you're making a distinction between something that is utopic versus theoretical, because in your mind, the utopic is maybe overly idealistic.

PIER VITTORIO I've never been a fan of utopian projects.

AURELI:

GRACE LA: That's so interesting because most people would say that Dogma produces but in the best way, because sometimes the utopic project at least forces a reconciliation between an idea and the notion of an ideal state. And then that way, it's not a negative or pejorative condition. It's actually very optimistic, at least that's how I've read it.

PIER VITTORIO You're right. And I don't want to sound too harsh on the tradition of utopian thinking. I also think I'm speaking on behalf of Martino. I think both of us have never been interested in framing our work as utopian. Never. It's a reading that has been done for the simple fact that many of our projects have never been built. And there is this understanding that if you are not building these projects, they remain paper. But this has never been our interest.

I would even say that all our projects are perfectly buildable, if certain social and political conditions would be there that are implied in our projects, but we are never trying to make unbuilt status of our project a kind of utopian aura through which we say, well, we are not building them. People are free to make their own interpretation, of course, of our work. I don't really mind that. But if you ask me, I would say no.

GRACE LA: That's such a helpful way to think about it as well, because when somebody refers to the work as being utopian, maybe it's really pressing on the condition in which the social aspiration is somehow very difficult to achieve because we are encumbered by the commodification of housing and all of those other concerns that you just raised.

And so in that regard, the social proposition feels so unattainable that it feels that even though the architecture which might support that is absolutely buildable, the social structure that it implies is impossible to realize. Maybe that's what we're talking about when somebody says it's utopic.

PIER VITTORIO Yes, of course, that in political theory, utopia is a very specific chapter, a very specific project. But in architectural history, for me, utopia has always been a very vague format, if you want, for architecture. For example, there are a lot of cases where certainly projects were not done with a utopian ambition, but nevertheless, they are defined as utopian just because they have never been built or because they have this major totalizing aspiration to change.

So it's very unclear to me what is a utopian project, to be honest with you, and that's why I've never tried to use that framework to present our work. And also, I have to say, our work is more fragmentary. It's much more a series of attempts, a series of experiments, which often have been prompted by very specific problems, very specific opportunities.

Don't forget that some of these projects have been done as research that was also commissioned by certain institutions, and so we had to respond to very specific questions that we couldn't actually just go there and present whatever we wanted. So although our projects might look like utopian projects because they have a large-scale scope, nevertheless, often they have been also commissioned and we had to, let's say, address very specific problems and issues. And for us, this is very important, very crucial. We don't have any interest in proposing our projects as a sort of limitless speculations about everything.

GRACE LA: So tell me a little bit more about the commissions. How do they come about? Who is it that's commissioning, and how are you responding to that?

PIER VITTORIO Yes, for example, we have worked for a few years on a project that focuses on the urban transformation of a region in Flanders, and this was actually a commission by the Institute of Planning of Flanders. So they sponsored us and they asked us to produce a series of scenarios of how to retrofit and transform certain sprawling regions that are very crucial in the urban geography of Flanders.

AURELI:

And, of course, there was a first a long conversation of what these scenarios were supposed to be and also gathering of data, gathering of all kinds of social and economic information about these regions, and then a proposal of a series of scenarios which were constantly debated with them.

So when you work in this way, you have to also be very pragmatic because also you don't have much time. You have a budget. You can't continue these projects forever. And also, you have to make them understandable because at the end, these projects have to be readable to many people who are not architects, and eventually can have an impact also on policy making. And so you have to make them very legible, very clear.

So for us, this is a very important work because allow us to somehow pursue our ambition to question if you want the status quo, but we always want to have this edge where we confront institutions, where we confront someone who is there and hands-on with problems that they ask us to reflect on.

GRACE LA: So have you been approached at all by a developer, a housing developer?

PIER VITTORIO No. Private developers, never.

AURELI:

GRACE LA: But that would be a very interesting moment if it were to happen.

PIER VITTORIO It never happened. We have never been approached by a private developer. We have been approached only proactively by public institutions.

AURELI:

GRACE LA: Institutions.

PIER VITTORIO Yeah. And we have also worked a lot on regulatory planning, which is a very difficult thing because you have to
AURELI: compose a very large cohort of specialists. You're not working by yourself. And this has been a very important part of our work, from which we have learned a lot. And it's a kind of work that has informed even the most radical aspects of our design or projects, and that's why we feel these projects have never been utopian.

GRACE LA: That makes sense and I like that distinction because I also think that maybe it tells us a little bit about why we look at projects that you do so carefully. And I think this audience is particularly attuned to looking at your work because you can feel the essence of it as being something that indeed could be realizable. And so maybe that's also why it feels very magnetic.

PIER VITTORIO We really hope to have the opportunity to realize some of our ideas. Definitely you don't want to shy away from
AURELI: that opportunity. And we look forward, actually-- but, of course, we really hope it can happen in the terms that we have cultivated until now. But definitely, of course, I think it's a prospect that we wouldn't exclude from our work.

GRACE LA: Because you are somebody who has had such a long relationship with the academy, both in the United States, as well as now EPFL, and prior to that, the AA, what do you feel are some of the most pressing concerns for architectural education? I must ask you this since, again, have this unique relationship with the academy.

PIER VITTORIO Yes, I love teaching. I always wanted to teach since I was a student, and Martino as well. Actually, we both had
AURELI: always an interest in academia, was never like a side job, let's say, or a way to maintain myself, let's say. We always have a strong interest in studying. In a way, for me, being a teacher is also a way to remain a student because you have to study, you have to continue to study. You can't just be content with what you have learned.

And, of course, every family, also academia has its unhappy moments. And for me, the most unhappy moment, of course, is the fact that students and teachers as well, we are constantly overproducing, overworking, and we very seldom have the time to focus, to read. For example, I always insist with students to find the time of reading. And reading a book from cover to cover, not just like piece and bits.

And, of course, this is difficult because universities are often like social condensers where anything happen, and there is this formal situation where you just want to look at everything and attend every event. And I feel this, of course, important on one hand, but also dangerous because it's this crucial moment in schools, which is also to focus and to study and to be concentrated on something, let's say, which is really a unique situation that in practice you might not have the time to have. So I feel that the university should offer that moment to students especially.

GRACE LA: And as faculty member, how are you structuring this because, in fact, you are a prolific writer and you are balancing the tensions between thinking and writing, producing design work that sees the potential of certain kinds of cities. So how are you managing this, especially the ability to carve this time to do this other very important piece? I think you're right-- we are overworking.

PIER VITTORIO This is always a pressure. In a way, writing for me is a natural thing. It comes out of teaching. When I read the
AURELI: books, I constantly take notes. So there is a natural, I don't even feel it that I'm, at the end, producing a book or an essay. The crucial thing for me, and I think for Martino as well, is the combination of practicing. It's a very choral kind of work, where a lot of people are involved, where most of the time you are really putting things together, and then the moment of preparing ourselves, which requires actually a lot of concentration.

And I think that's always the most difficult part. How you allow yourself to be present in the practice, but at the same time, also being focused and not let teaching just rely on what you know but nurturing it and cultivate it. And this requires a lot of discipline, a lot of attention to not let one of the things to completely collapse.

GRACE LA: I am curious, though, it seems to me that architecture student today has an ever widening array of bodies of knowledge that need to be mastered. And just in the realm of software, in the realm of history in all areas, it's simply getting larger and larger and larger. And the requirements for what we are asking our students to do seem to simply just be expanding.

And so in light of that ever expanding menu of things that we are requiring of our students, where do you think we need to refocus and essentialize?

PIER VITTORIO AURELI: I'm not a big fan of complexification of curriculum, just like a fragmentation, an explosion of all kinds of things that it looks to me a bit out of control at the moment. And this is actually a problem not only for students, but also for us as faculty. And I think that more and more, there is a necessity to unify things rather than fragmenting them, rather than diversifying them.

And often, I feel that this kind of diversification is driven more by specialization, which, of course, on the market of academia is something that is very valued. If you specialize yourself, somehow you have more chances to make your work visible and useful or, let's say, important. Overspecialization is also fragmenting our profession and our know-how, especially the relationship between the planning, technology, history, design, things that would be fantastic to think of as a unitary way of learning. But at the moment, they all go in completely different directions and we all suffer to make a synthesis of them.

And I think this is really a problem because it looks that when we discuss technological or technical problems of architecture, we completely forget about the history of architecture, we forget about political problems. Or, when we discuss about political problems, we completely forget that architecture is also made by technical problems. And so we are somehow failing in this overfragmentation. And I think schools should be careful to not let this process to go into a situation that then is beneficial only to the market and not to our own knowledge.

GRACE LA: What you describe seems to suggest that there is a disciplinary core. I know there's been a lot of discussion about the fact that architecture doesn't have a disciplinary core at the moment because of the fragmentation to which you refer. So I'm curious if you would be brave enough to articulate what that is.

PIER VITTORIO AURELI: I would say that the core of architecture, in my opinion, is construction, is building basically. Architecture can be produced through drawings, can be produced through text, could be produced by all kinds of things as long as it addresses the problem of building. I'm not a big fan of this idea that architecture is everything. The famous statement by, I think, Hans Hollein said that, and I disagree with this idea that architecture is about-- architecture concerns the problem of building.

And, of course, it can be producing all kinds of different ways. But at the end, the real problem we should talk about is building and, of course, building include also nonbuilding or undoing buildings. I'm not saying that we only do architecture by designing or imagining or projecting a building. It's also about demolishing or recycling or rethinking how the built environment is produced. But building is, for me, the core. And when we lose that, I think architecture loses a fundamental component of its culture.

And actually, even think that perhaps building sometimes is even more important than architecture because architecture implies a division of knowledge between the manual aspect of building and the thinking. And we know that is a very specific tradition that arose already in antiquity and was reinforced in the Renaissance, where architects really became people who think, who design rather than build. But at the end is building is the very problem of architecture.

GRACE LA: And so does that segue into actually the most recent book that I have just received *Architecture and Abstraction*? And I have read only three or four pages, but I'm intrigued because in this book, it seems to suggest that you are advocating for what you refer to as the ground level of material practice. Is that the impetus for this book? Maybe you can tell us more about it, since it's literally hot off the press.

PIER VITTORIO Well, in a way, you could say that the book uses a team of abstraction as an excuse to make a history of design.

AURELI: It's a history of the architectural project, and especially of that decisive moment where there is a split between intellectual and manual aspects of architecture, which now we take for granted to the point that students during their studies, they never visit a building site, which could be a very interesting side of learning because we take for granted that to do architecture is simply to produce an idea and to design that idea.

But for me, actually, the decisive moment in the history of architecture as a discipline is when there is this split. I think that's the original scene, if you want, of architecture. And, in fact, abstraction play a very important role because in a way, everything we say and we do about building is, in fact, an abstraction. It's drawing, it's language. And so what I'm saying we should reconsider also the technical, the material aspects.

I'm not saying that we should go back to the phenomenology of the materials or the physicality of architecture, I'm saying we should reconsider the concrete terms in which architecture is produced. Because often in especially theoretical discourse, in theory and history, we completely deny that.

There are a lot of discussions about architecture that often completely deny that architecture is produced by a multitude of actors that are, at the end, very hidden, away from the idea that we still cultivated architecture is designed by one person who is the architect. And I'm really trying to criticize that reading of architecture, which often is also somehow produced by those that wants to be very critical to the way in which this split happened.

GRACE LA: I think it's a very timely argument to be made, particularly at this moment where we seem to be suffering from architectural histories and/or the teaching of architectural histories, which, in fact, sidestep or avoid the question of buildings in the built world.

PIER VITTORIO Absolutely.

AURELI:

GRACE LA: So it's a very strange moment where the act of the making or the construction of the building, the actual thing itself, as you say, it is produced. But somehow, the histories at the moment, are sidestepping that and for other concerns, certainly, promoting other concerns, but somehow are not recognizing this real relationship.

PIER VITTORIO Absolutely. We know that from antiquity, architecture has always been labor intensive and capital intensive. You

AURELI: cannot do architecture without having a lot of resources, both material and financial. And that actually has a strong consequence also in our own imagination of what architecture can be. So that's what I try to address in my book.

An abstraction for me is a topic that allowed me to understand this sort of dialectic, if you want, between the project and the reality in which the project operates, which is a very material condition.

GRACE LA: Yes, great. So thank you so much, Pier, for taking this time to speak with us about Dogma, about the books, and all of your thinking about architecture. It's actually a real significant contribution to the academy and to the discipline. Thank you.

PIER VITTORIO Thank you, Grace, for this opportunity to talk to you.

AURELI:

GRACE LA: I'm Grace La, and you've been listening to *Talking Practice* from the Practice Forum of Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. Today's episode was produced and edited by Maggie Janik. Platform support and research was provided by Victor Ohene and Ian Erickson, sound engineering by P.J. Goodwin at the Harvard Media Production Center. To find out more about programs and events at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, visit us online at GSD.Harvard.edu. Thanks for listening.

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