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The Continuity of Change

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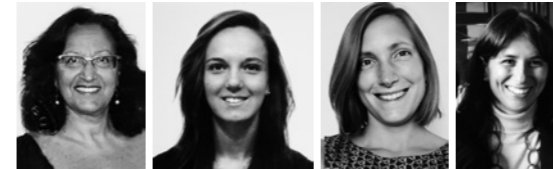
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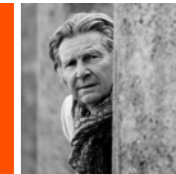
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THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF SUZANA AND DIMITRIS ANTONAKAKIS: A TRANSCULTURAL GENEALOGY OF CRITICAL REGIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1980s, Kenneth Frampton encompassed Alexander Tzonis & Liane Lefaivre's theorisations of critical regionalism in his attempt to address the crisis of modern architecture. Tzonis & Lefaivre had originally constructed critical regionalism around the architecture of Suzana & Dimitris Antonakakis. The two theorists traced a regional genealogy that combined Aris Konstantinidis's "rationalist grids" with Dimitris Pikionis's "topographically sensitive pathways" to inform the work of the Greek architectural couple. However, it was an outward-looking transcultural genealogy that historically sustained the two Antonakakis' critical regionalism. Focusing on their architectural education at the National Technical University of Athens in the late 1950s, this paper draws out the elements that conditioned the Greek architects' specific understanding of the regional in relation to the modern. While their strong biographical connection with Pikionis sustained his influence on their work, Konstantinidis's impact on their architectural outlook was limited. Apart from Pikionis's teaching, the conducive factors to their architectural formation lay in the theoretical lessons from Panayotis Michelis, the drawing and painting classes of Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika, as well as the teaching of the former disciple of Mies van der Rohe, A. James Speyer. These cosmopolitan mentors enabled the two Antonakakis to rethink the regional in terms of the modern, in the way that rendered their work significant in the critical regionalist framework. The transcultural genealogy proposed here is therefore aligned both with the programmatic aims and principles of critical regionalism, and the two architects' historical formation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980s, Kenneth Frampton (b. 1930) proposed critical regionalism as a way out of the crisis of modern architecture. In so doing, the British historian encompassed Alexander Tzonis (b. 1937) and Liane Lefaivre's earlier theorisations. In their seminal essay "The Grid and the Pathway",

Tzonis and Lefaivre had constructed critical regionalism around the work of Suzana (b. 1935) and Dimitris Antonakakis (b. 1933). Tzonis and Lefaivre identified two major design patterns in the work of the Greek architectural couple: the "grid" (defined as "the discipline which is imposed on every space element") and the "pathway" (defined as "the location of place elements in relation to a movement").¹ These two "major patterns" were in turn contextualised, albeit schematically, within the socio-political history of modern Greece. They corresponded to two different phases of Greek regionalism, exemplified in the work of Aris Konstantinidis (1913-1993) and Dimitris Pikionis (1887-1968). In their various projects, from the Archaeological Museum on Chios (in collaboration with Eleni Goussi-Dessyla, 1965) to a private house at Spata (1974-1975), Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis combined the rationalist "grids" of Konstantinidis with the topographical sensibility of Pikionis's "pathways". The historical embeddedness of these design patterns in the Greek regionalist movements rendered their architecture a cultural intervention in a specific social context. Their apartment building on 118 Benaki Street in Athens (1973-1974) exemplified Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' design principles at work (Fig. 1). In this project, the 'pathway' that traverses the structural 'grid' curates the residents' transition from the street to their apartment as a succession of intermediate meeting points (with varying degrees of privacy and publicity). In so doing, the project embodies a critique of the "anonymous" Athenian apartment building typology, and its commodified modes of production. The bespoke design of each individual apartment, and the social bonds between the four families that resided in the apartment building, were also crucial for the success of the project. It was only through the connective glue of these social relations that the resistant "traditional" ways of life could be retained in the transition from the rural to the urban environment. Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' first steps in the architectural profession coincided with the appearance of Orestis

Doumanis's (1929-2013), François Loyer's (b. 1941), and Dimitris Fatouros's (b. 1928) first histories of architecture in modern Greece.² Their inclusion in these histories situated their architectural concerns in the Greek context of the 1960s. Like their peers, the two Antonakakis also had to address the question of tradition that was central in the cultural debates of the period. In addition, these histories consistently portrayed Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis as outward-looking practitioners, strongly influenced by the work of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier.³ After the publication of "The Grid and the Pathway" in 1981, however, the interpretation of their work became increasingly inward-looking.⁴ Owing to the celebrated reception of Frampton's, and Tzonis & Lefaivre's writings, this inward-looking genealogy of critical regionalism has not been seriously challenged since. However, it both distorts the actual formation of the Antonakakis' architectural outlook, and obstructs the transcultural aspects of

critical regionalism. To redress this, this paper returns to the formative years of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis at the National Technical University of Athens in the late 1950s. In so doing, it recovers the transcultural genealogy that historically sustained their critical regionalism.

2. PIKIONIS'S GRID UNDER THE PATHWAY

Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' contact with Konstantinidis was historically limited. His influence on the Antonakakis' architectural outlook emanated from his work, not from the deeper ties of a personal biographical connection. Suzana Antonakaki references Konstantinidis only four times in the 107 articles she wrote for her monthly column on architecture in the popular daily newspaper, *Ta Nea* (1998-2009). By contrast, her substantial references to Le Corbusier, for example, are more than fifteen. Although they did study his built work, Konstantinidis's influence in the forma-

Figure 1. Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, apartment building on 118 Benaki Street, Athens, Greece, 1973-1974.
© Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' private archive.



tion of the Antonakakis' architectural outlook was not as important as posited by Tzonis and Lefaivre. Three years before the publication of "The Grid and the Pathway" in 1981, Konstantinidis is not even mentioned as an indirect influence by the architects. In the short memorandum booklet for his candidacy at the National Technical University of Athens in 1978, Dimitris Antonakakis considers his lessons from Pikionis and A. James Speyer (1913-1986) as the defining moments of his formative years.⁵

The biographical connection was much stronger in the case of Pikionis. Tzonis and Lefaivre were therefore right to stress the significance of his work, and especially his landscaping project (1957-1958) around the Acropolis in Athens, for Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis. When their mentor guided his students to a site visit in 1958, Suzana Antonakaki witnessed the poetic world that the architect can build. She understood how this could be done through "selected viewpoints, crucial spots in the trajectory, [...] visual radii, peripheries of circles, [...] proportions... the golden section".⁶ As a student, Dimitris Antonakakis had also worked at the project. He therefore retained a living memory of the "topographically sensitive" ways in which his mentor organised "the pathway" that was to become central in Tzonis and Lefaivre's account. The space around the Acropolis was structured as "a succession of 'critical' points where extended views [we]re possible". The overall design was based on "the particularities of each of the locations [...] combined with [Pikionis's] geometrical ordering preference" (Fig. 2). This ordering preference in turn rested upon Constantinos Doxiadis's theory of viewing segments.⁷ Following Doxiadis, Pikionis used circular segments for the overall organisation of his landscaping project. These circular segments were "gridded up" in golden section divisions (3:5 and 8:13). The points of their intersections were usually denoted by the placement of an object deemed significant. Dimitris Antonakakis therefore concluded that "the entire route is derived from a series of overlaid grids offering the various possibilities and combinations eventually selected on the spot by Pikionis himself".⁸ In other words, Dimitris Antonakakis posited that Pikionis's "pathway" was also underpinned by the "grid". Even if "this type of grid on the ground was a totally different class of grid being used at the time", both the grid and the pathway could be found in Pikionis. It was only because "Pikionis never talked about the grid" that Konstantinidis had to play a part in Tzonis and Lefaivre's interpretation of the Antonakakis' work.⁹ One just had to scratch the "decorative" surface of Pikionis's architecture to

see it defined as an art of precise proportions. As Dimitris Antonakakis asserted when interviewed by Maria Dolka in 2002, in their early work he and Suzana "used the geometrical proportions of the rectangle with the proportions of the numbers to the square root of 3, 5 and of ϕ . This work with these proportions was a requirement of Pikionis's courses".¹⁰

3. REGIONAL MODERNIST TEACHINGS

Pikionis's recourse to harmonic proportions connected his teaching with prevailing modernist design strands, as exemplified in the drawing classes of Nikos Hadjikyriakos-Ghika (1906-1994). Involved in the organisation of the 4th International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) in Greece in 1933, Hadjikyriakos-Ghika was regarded as a living myth by the young students of the late 1950s. His classes started from an analysis of the key elements in a drawing. He then showed how those elements found their place in a specific system of proportions (based on the diagonals of a rectangle and their perpendiculars) and harmonic relations (especially $\sqrt{5}$ and the golden section, among others). Hadjikyriakos-Ghika claimed he had extrapolated these relations from works of art of diverse international origins. Their universal occurrence in turn validated their inner "truth". To prove his theory for themselves, Hadjikyriakos-Ghika asked his fourth-year students to uncover the same underlying proportions in Japanese art works. He also claimed that the artist's sensibility could work towards these relations in an intuitive, unconscious way.¹¹ The "unconscious" applications of the same rules reinforced his argument about the universal validity of these harmonic proportions. It also implied that the best examples of traditional architecture could be adhering to the same rules.

Hadjikyriakos-Ghika's teaching presented the architects with a modernist lens that was complementary to their lessons from Panayotis Michelis's (1903-1969). Michelis's comprehensive theoretical approach addressed the modern and the regional in equal measure. Led by his conviction that architects should also learn to write in academic standard, he initiated the student lecture module in the early 1950s. For Dimitris Antonakakis, these student lectures highlighted the significance of analysing architecture in typological terms.¹² This was more evident in Suzana Antonakaki's student lecture project in 1959. To present the conclusions from her study of the architecture of Makrinitisa, she devised a typological matrix (Fig. 3). Her analysis of houses extended from plan to section, and from the interior to the courtyard. This multifac-

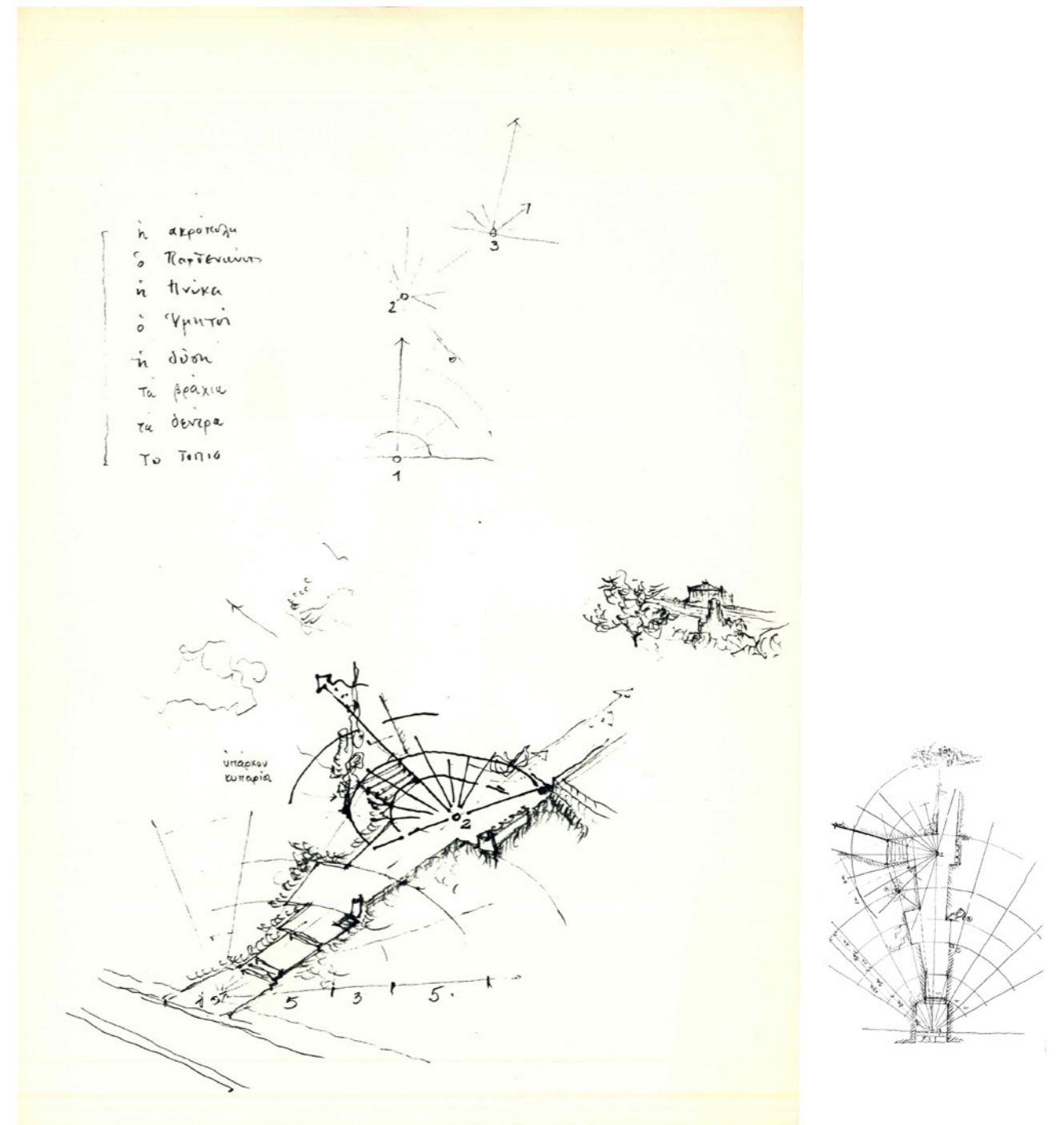


Figure 2. Dimitris Antonakakis, Interpretative sketches of the geometric relations underpinning Dimitris Pikionis's 1958 landscaping project around the Acropolis, Athens, Greece, 1989. © Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' private archive.

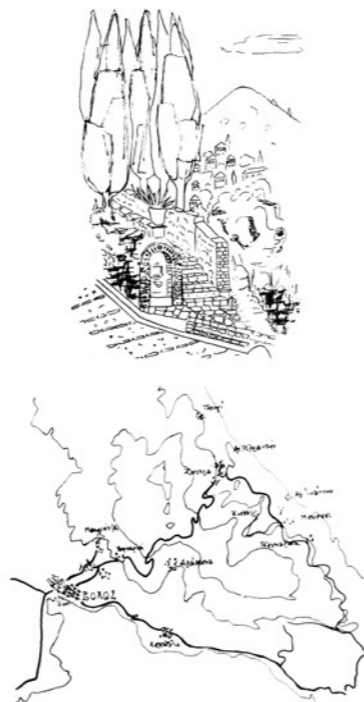
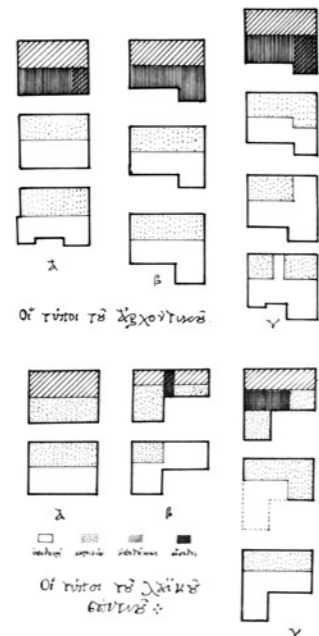
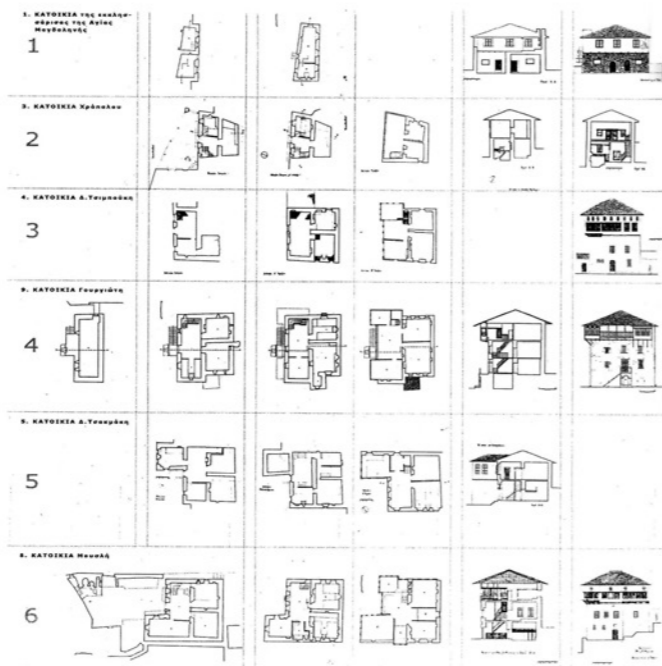
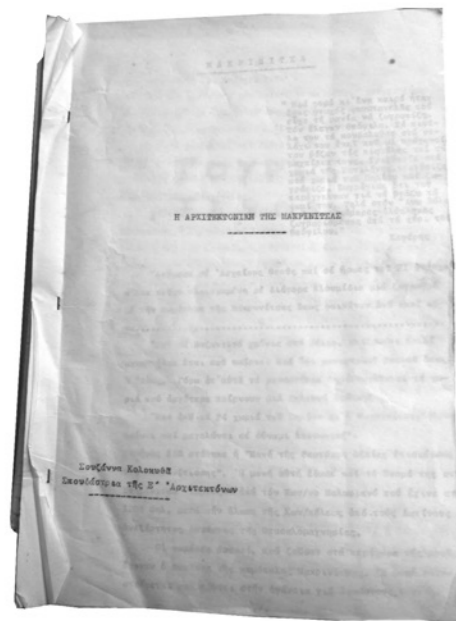


Figure 3. Suzana Antonakaki, typological matrix of traditional architecture, Makrinita, Greece, 1959, student lecture project at the National Technical University of Athens supervised by Panayotis Michelis. © Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' private archive.

eted three-dimensional approach made her work stand out at the time. It was distinctly architectural when compared with similar output by scholars of folk studies like Georgios Megas. Solely based on plan drawings, the crucial third spatial dimension was missing from his typological surveys of “the Greek house”.¹³ In the final instance, Michelis’s teaching offered the two Antonakakis a way to understand traditional architecture through a modern lens. Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis belonged to a young architectural generation who aspired to update their role models’ cultural contribution, in pursuit of a modern Greekness. Their aim was to combine their lessons from the native tradition with the tenets of international modernism for the post-war Greek world. Michelis’s teaching equipped them with a systematic way to look at the regional. In their individual studies of Greek island settlements, Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis combined Michelis’s lens with Hadjikyriakos-Ghika’s thesis on the “unconscious” prevalence of harmonic proportions in works of art.

4. CORBU AND MIES IN GREECE

Through their surveys of traditional settlements in their travels across Greece, the young architects tried to define the proportions of popular wisdom prevalent in vernacular architecture. In a recent interview, Kostis Gartzos, a close friend of Dimitris Antonakakis during their student years, posited that they read the Cycladic settlements with the eyes of Le Corbusier.¹⁴ They surveyed the vernacular settlements to confirm the Modulor. These settlements were built by anonymous workers whose main concern was to fulfil their immediate practical needs. Uncovering harmonic relations behind their manual work would mean that both Hadjikyriakos-Ghika and Le Corbusier were right. The vernacular tradition of Greece would be demonstrably connected with the major tenets of modernist design. And this would in turn legitimise the “unconscious” wisdom of the regional builder as a source for enriching modern architectural designs. Through their studies of the traditional built environment, Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis pursued specific archetypes of dwelling in Greece. These archetypes were in turn expected to lead to a poetic architectural expression of their modern times. It is no coincidence that many of Suzana Antonakaki’s references to Le Corbusier are followed by, and associated with, similar ideas from Pikionis.¹⁵ For the Antonakakis, the questions of the modern and the regional were intertwined. Although “The Grid and the Pathway” offered a historically

misleading account of the Antonakakis’ main influences, the major intuition of Tzonis and Lefaivre was accurate. Through their work, the Antonakakis did attempt to associate Pikionis’s poetic teaching with modernist tenets. Speyer’s teaching further promoted the Antonakakis’ critical approach to the modern and the regional. Coming from a former student of Mies van der Rohe, Speyer’s appreciation of Pikionis’s unconventional work was significant for the young architectural couple. It confirmed that Pikionis’s inspiring teaching was not incompatible with a modernist outlook, as implied by the prevailing criticism of his work at the time. It was affinities like these that enabled Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis to relate Speyer’s open approach to modernism with the lessons from their other mentors. Speyer was the only visiting professor in the School at the time (1957-1960). For students like Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, his international outlook felt like a breath of fresh air in a rather introverted school. Speyer offered his Greek students an effective way of organising their diverse, and occasionally divergent, influences into a coherent body of thinking and a systematic method of designing. Speyer’s undeniable admiration for the work of Mies, coupled with his intention to move it further forward, was attuned with the Antonakakis’ own concerns to move modernism forward. They were not interested in a static replication of their lessons from the great “masters”. Supervised by Speyer, Suzana Antonakaki’s diploma project at the National Technical University of Athens (1959) documents his teaching method (Fig. 4). This was based on exploring alternative solutions to the same brief. The method thus implied that there were no single correct answers to inherently multifarious architectural questions. Speyer encouraged his students to account for their design decisions with arguments, sketches and “working models [...] for five or six alternative propositions” for the same brief. His method enabled Suzana Antonakaki to achieve “a critical distance towards [her] own work”. This in turn meant accepting “the ‘stochastic adaptations’ – that so often arise from real conditions and specificities – with sobriety”. This “exercise” was valuable for the architects’ subsequent work. Speyer’s method stayed with the couple as a stable point of reference, discipline and control of their design and thinking. In the final instance, Speyer provided them with “this disciplined decision that allowed [them] to control what [they] do”.¹⁶ It was owing to Speyer’s teaching that the Antonakakis used the grid as the main organising mechanism of their architectural design. He helped them understand it not as a rigid

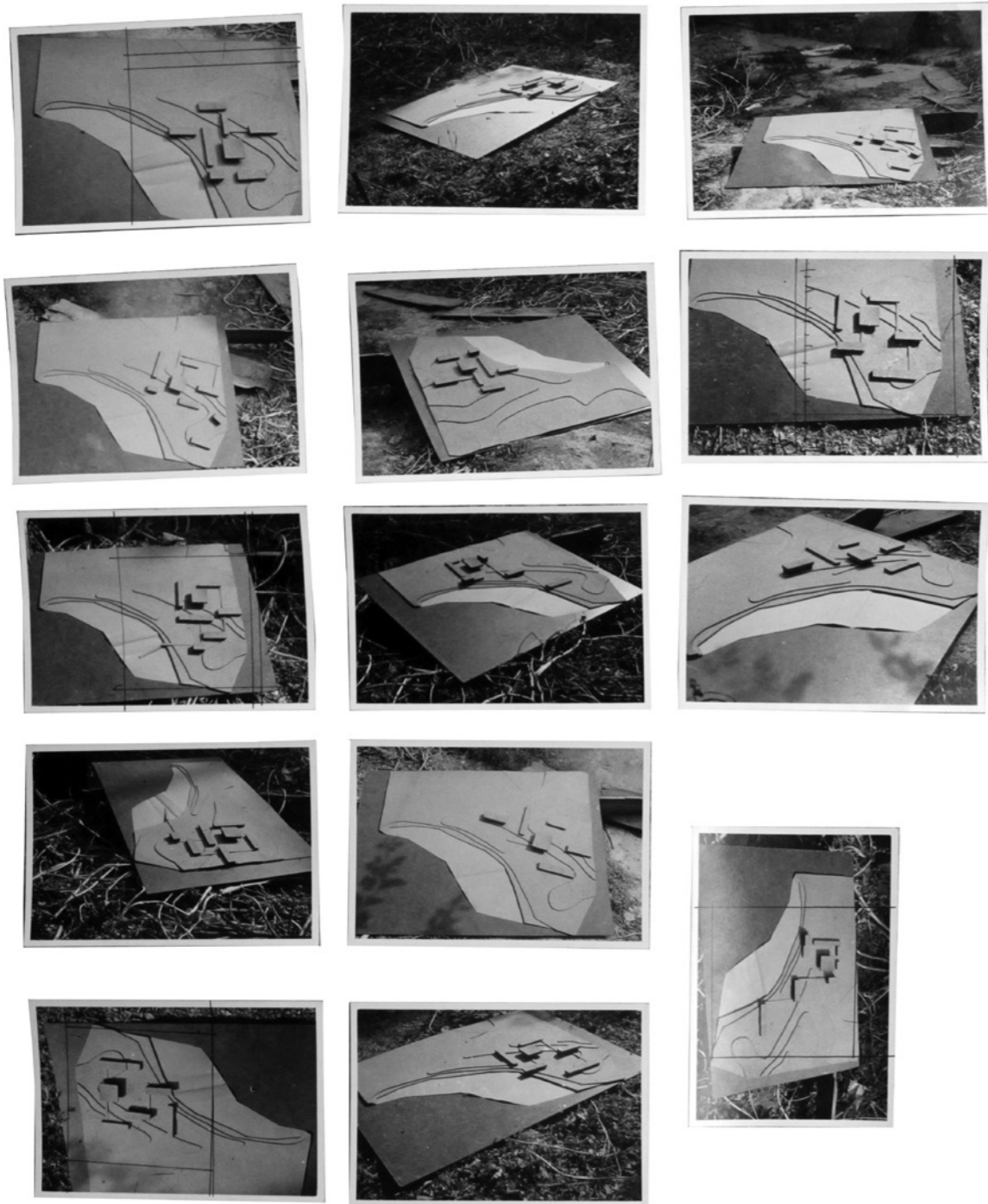


Figure 4. Suzana Antonakaki, School of Fine Arts Workshop, Skyros, Greece, 1959, diploma project at the National Technical University of Athens supervised by A. James Speyer, 1959. © Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' private archive.

straitjacket, but as an open-ended design principle. As such, it could be constantly affirmed and occasionally subverted. This enabled the Antonakakis to incorporate the “controlled transgression of given rules” that originated from their lessons from Pikionis, in their architectural designs.¹⁷

5. TRANSCULTURAL REGIONALISM

The diverse lessons from their student years conditioned Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' personal understanding of tradition. This approach was clearly removed from parochial nostalgia and ossified historicisms.¹⁸ Understanding tradition in terms of the actual everyday life of modern Greeks was an open question of the present as it moves towards an uncertain future. Tzonis and Lefaivre were right to note that the work of the Antonakakis moved away from escapist understandings of tradition.¹⁹ It was their insistence on the living and evolving aspect of tradition as an actual part of modern life that made the difference. Theirs was an all too modern way to understand the regional.

In the work of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, the modern was used as a critical tool to study the regional. The two architects thus kept their clear distance from the conservative traditionalists of the period. Despite their admiration for the work of the modernist “masters”, however, they were also critical of the placeless architecture of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier.²⁰ In the Antonakakis' work, the regional also became the vehicle for a critical approach of the modern. In other words, the architects' inquiry moved both ways. It constituted both a critique of the regional through the modern, and a critique of the modern through the regional. The questions of the modern and the regional were intertwined. In the final instance, it was this specific regional aspect that enabled the Greek architects to address the prolonged impasse of modern architecture. For Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, the study of tradition was meant to confirm the connection of the international (critical) modernist orientation of their work with the Greek (regional) vernacular. It was this dual conciliatory relation of the local with the international that endowed their work with the qualities appreciated by the critical regionalist discourse. For the Antonakakis, the question of the regional became a question of continuity. They pursued the ways in which the architectural lessons from the past and the bold visions for the future could be appropriately reconciled and responsibly adjusted to the needs of a changing world. Owing to the nuanced genealogy of their architectural formation, their critical regionalism was therefore primarily transcultural.

NOTES

- 1 Alexander Tzonis & Liane Lefaivre, “The Grid and the Pathway: An Introduction to the Work of Dimitris and Suzana Antonakakis, with Prolegomena to a History of the Culture of Modern Greek Architecture”, *Architecture in Greece* 15, 1981, 164-178; 164.
- 2 See Orestis Doumanis, “Εισαγωγή στην ελληνική μεταπολεμική αρχιτεκτονική”, *Αρχιτεκτονική* 48, 1964, 1-11; François Loyer, *L'Architecture de la Grèce Contemporaine*. Unpublished thesis (PhD), Université de Paris, 1966; Dimitris Fatouros, “Greek Art and Architecture 1945-1967: A Brief Survey”, *Balkan Studies* 8(2), 1967, 421-435.
- 3 See, for instance, Antonis Antoniadis, *Σύγχρονη ελληνική αρχιτεκτονική*, Athens, Karagounis, 1979, 122-127.
- 4 See, for example, Dimitris Philippidis, *Νεοελληνική αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική θεωρία και πράξη (1830-1980) σαν αντανάκλαση των ιδεολογικών επιλογών της νεοελληνικής κουλτούρας*, Athens, Melissa, 1984, 374-376.
- 5 Dimitris Antonakakis, Βιογραφικό Υπόμνημα, National Technical University of Athens School of Architecture, 1978, 7, and 66-67.
- 6 Suzana Antonakaki, *Κατώφλια: 100 + 7 Χωρογραφήματα*, Athens, futura, 2010, 33.
- 7 See Kostas Tsiambaos, *From Doxiadis' Theory to Pikionis' Work: Reflections of Antiquity in Modern Architecture*, London, Routledge, 2017.
- 8 Dimitris Antonakakis, “Landscaping the Athens Acropolis”, *Mega XI, Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887-1968: A Sentimental Topography*, London, Architectural Association, 1989, 90.
- 9 Dimitris Antonakakis cited in Maria Dolka, “The Grid in Pefkakia Elementary School by Pikionis and the Grid in the Rethimno Faculty of Humanities. Are They so Related as They Appear?”, Unpublished thesis (International Baccalaureate extended essay in higher level visual arts), I. M. Panagiotopoulos School, 2002, 5.
- 10 Antonakakis cited in Dolka, “The Grid in Pefkakia”, 2002, 2.
- 11 In class, he illustrated his theory through selected examples from modern Western and Japanese art. Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, interviewed by Stylianos Giamarelos, 27 May 2014.
- 12 Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, interviewed by Stylianos Giamarelos, 27 May 2014.
- 13 Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, interviewed by Stylianos Giamarelos, 27 May 2014.
- 14 See Georgios Megas, *The Greek House, its Evolution and its Relation to the Houses of the other Balkan States*, Athens, Ministry of Reconstruction, 1951.
- 15 Kostis Gartzos, interviewed by Stylianos Giamarelos, 2 July 2014.
- 16 See Suzana Antonakaki, *Κατώφλια*, 2010, 149-150.
- 17 Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, interviewed by Stylianos Giamarelos, 23 June 2013.
- 18 Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, “Acknowledgements”, *Atelier 66: The Architecture of Dimitris and Suzana Antonakakis*, Athens, futura, 2007, 10-19; 17.
- 19 See Dimitris Antonakakis, “Προβληματισμοί σχεδιασμού”, *The Journal of the Association of Greek Architects* 21-22, 1989, 65-66, and 77; 65.
- 20 Tzonis and Lefaivre, “The Grid and the Pathway”, 1981, 178.
- 21 Dimitris Antonakakis, “Το μοντέρνο και ο τόπος”, *Architecture in Greece* 30, 1996, 134.

BIOGRAPHY

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Session 06 DOUBTS ON AUTHENTICITY

Session Chair: **Henrieta Moravčíková** (Slovak Republic)



Ever since the Nara Document of 1994, authenticity has been the central argument in the protection of heritage. And it is no different even in relation to the architectural legacy of modernity. Yet the idea behind the concept has changed over time and across cultures, making it thus somewhat complex and unclear. Most explicitly, this sense is expressed in Paragraph 11 of the Document, where it states that “it is not possible to base judgements of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong”.¹ Vice versa, we could equally assert that our method of treating historic built heritage is always an image of our immediate context. Heritage is always a reflection of the current preferences of society, it is an “exponent of the era’s desires (*Zeitwollen*) in the field of art”, as noted as early as 1925 by Hans Tietze.² Similarly, what is authentic is not given a fixed value, but changes under the influence of social discourse. As late as the 1980s, authenticity in the Western cultural sphere was defined most strongly by the physical substance of built heritage. More recently, the sense of a spiritual essence is gaining much greater influence. “If we now acknowledge five different authenticities – form, material, technology, function and place – in itself this implies a certain liberation from the physical basis of authenticity. Yet still it does not imply a major shift from the exclusive binding of authenticity to original substance, which is relatively arbitrarily anchored in the social-cultural historical process and which is contradicted even by the conception of authenticity in other sciences or in modern art”, notes cultural anthropologist Wolfgang Seidenspinner.³ Heritage is founded in a social agreement. Hence authenticity will take a different form when linked to a certain social situation. For instance, if at the end of the 20th century, the source of authenticity for the Brutalist architecture of the social state was seen as the authenticity of its material rendering, what is now much more significant is indeed the social dimension of this architecture. “Authenticity and identity are

subject to change. Each era, each region, each culture and each individual have their own conceptions of history. There is no authentic history, only an authentic desire for it. Built heritage is the location of authentic desires”, notes Seidenspinner.⁴ Hence we could say that the most authentic aspect, in the current context of the neoliberal order, is essentially the socialist aim of the architecture of the postwar European social state. And a specific standpoint towards architectural authenticity is even found in the Nara Document, where paragraph 13 literally states that authenticity can be judged on the basis of a wide range of sources that reflect “form and design; materials and substance; use and function; traditions and techniques; location and setting; spirit and feeling; and other internal and external factors”.⁵

Under such a conception, authenticity on one hand allows for a targeted and locally specific approach to built landmarks, yet also it creates a space for the deliberate modification of universal rules. Many critics of the Nara Document have, for this reason, noted that it could lead to completely arbitrary treatment of architectural heritage, without any need to provide arguments or assume responsibility in a local cultural context for what this document de facto legitimises.⁶ Experience with similarly “arbitrary” treatment of heritage has been a constant since the 1990s in the countries of the former Communist bloc.⁷ Ensuing from the argument of rectifying the wrongs committed by Communist states, it has legitimated the liquidation of entire historic layers of architecture from the 1960s and 1970s.⁸ Yet it is not simply a matter of post-communist countries or post-war Modernism alone. An unclear conception of the idea of authenticity has meant that on one side we find replications of historic structures, intended to serve as a source of patriotism, and the obliteration of other structures that have problematic ideological links. In Bratislava, the Slovak capitol, work has been underway since 2008 on restoration of the city’s castle, to restore it to its lost Baroque form. In this process, the Castle lost an entire layer of its Modernist remodelling from the 1960s. During the restoration of the

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is a non-profit organization dedicated to the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement chaired by **Ana Tostões**, architect and full professor at Técnico - University of Lisbon, where the headquarters are based. It was established 30 years ago at the School of Architecture at the Technical University in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, by **Hubert-Jan Henket** and **Wessel de Jonge**, architects and professors.

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