

# Introduction

People, not their eyes, see. Cameras, and eyeballs, are blind.<sup>1</sup>

Norwood Russell Hanson

In 1936, Constantinos A. Doxiadis defended his PhD dissertation at the Berlin-Charlottenburg University. In his research, Doxiadis analysed the spatial arrangement of ancient Greek temples and sacred spaces, proposing a new theory that related their setting and design to a finely tuned geometrical system of visual angles. This ground-breaking theory has, since then, had a huge impact all over Europe and is still today, over 80 years later, a reference point for many courses and programmes on ancient Greek architecture and planning internationally.

My book has dual simultaneous objectives: the first is to dislocate Doxiadis' dissertation from an archaeological discourse on ancient architecture, arguing that it can only be understood as a design theory reflecting the impact of antiquity in modernity. Doxiadis' theory did not reveal a 'lost secret' of antiquity, as was believed, but did offer an alternative design tool for modern architects. In other words, his theory was less about the aesthetic ideals of ancient Greek architecture and more about ancient Greek architecture as an aesthetic ideal for modern architecture. The second objective is to relocate Doxiadis' theory in relation to the work of Dimitris Pikionis, one of the most controversial and at the same time influential Greek architects of the twentieth century. Pikionis is directly linked to Doxiadis since Pikionis was the only architect to use Doxiadis' well-tempered system of visual angles in the design of all his projects from 1937 onwards. This detail becomes even more interesting when we realize that Doxiadis was a student of Pikionis at the National Technical University of Athens School of Architecture. In other words, Doxiadis' discovery in Berlin seems likely to be hidden somewhere in Pikionis' teaching in Athens.

Pikionis as well as other important architects, artists, poets, writers, philo-sophers all over the world were sharing common ideas which favoured tradition over progress, intuition over reason, myth over history, continuity over innovation, universalism over globalism. Doxiadis, in contrast, appeared

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to be an innovative rationalist, a fanatic believer in technology and scientific progress. Both his post-war theory and applied work seem to be polar opposites of those of Pikionis. Thus, a narrative linking Doxiadis, one of the most important modern planners of the twentieth century, to Pikionis, one of the most interesting modern architects of the twentieth century, not only brings to light unpublished archival material but suggests an entirely new reading on a latent chapter of the *history and theory of modern architecture*.

This parallel investigation of the philosophical content of Doxiadis' theory and the design principles of Pikionis' work establishes a frame of reference while at the same time performing as a valuable interpretive key. Although the book focuses on a very specific, historically located subject, it revisits and reconceptualizes the relationship of architecture to multiple theoretical areas. During a journey in time through the European interwar period, underground philosophical references and cross-cultural influences are exposed, alternate representations of antiquity and tradition are highlighted, invisible theories on vision, geometry and representation resurface, ideological resistances against modernity are detected, constant shifts between local architectural idioms and international formal expressions are mapped.

Using cross-disciplinary tools and methods which attempt to extend the established interpretive boundaries of architectural modernism, the book restructures the ground of an alternative modernity that looks towards the future through a mirror that reflects the ancient past. This alternative modernity, kept alive through a broad cultural network during the interwar period, is now forgotten, since its atypical characteristics resist classification.

At the beginning of this book, Doxiadis' theory is presented and the impact it had is commented upon, while its visible and invisible theoretical origins are also sought. Through this search, it seems that this theory rapidly distanced itself from the documentation of ancient architecture, to approach the pursuits of modern architecture. This point signals the first link to Pikionis, and an explanation is given as to how Pikionis' pursuits were very close, if not identical, to those the theory of his student attempted to answer. An attempt to gradually restore the intellectual network of Pikionis contributes to this; a complex network of intellectuals, architects and artists who shared the same concerns, references, interests and ways of expression. A brief glance at the personal library of Pikionis reconstructs this network and documents it historically.

Subsequently, certain thematic areas are introduced through a review of selected small- and large-scale projects and studies by both Doxiadis and Pikionis, in which the idealized reference to antiquity played a preponderant role. The aim is not so much to present a detailed description but to interpret the different ways in which the revival of antiquity in modern times was planned and theoretically framed. From the primary philosophical foundations to the final construction expressions, both the visible and the

hidden aspects of this creative process are analysed at every stage. Finally, a number of broader theoretical issues arising from the above are discussed, confirming or revising, as appropriate, previous interpretations and readings regarding the history of modern architecture.

Although Pikionis and Doxiadis are two important figures in twentieth-century architecture, their thought and work is rather undervalued in terms of the international bibliography. It has been almost twenty years since Alberto Ferlenga's book on Pikionis was published<sup>2</sup> while a book on Doxiadis is yet to be published outside Greece. At the same time, and with the exception of some recent research papers on Doxiadis, most of the texts related to Modern Greek architecture are more descriptive than interpretive. A broader view reveals the historiography of Greek architecture seemingly to be stuck in the 1980s regionalist approach.

However, it becomes increasingly apparent that critical regionalism, on the basis of its centre-periphery distinction, does not seem as relevant today as it was a few decades earlier. Fortunately, recent archival research has already revealed a much richer and more multifaceted local identity. A promising younger generation of architectural scholars already seems capable of overcoming the established limits and categorizations. Moreover, recent advances in interdisciplinary research have provided us with many new theoretical tools that allow us to reconsider traditional methods and classifications and propose unconventional, thorough analyses, novel views and interpretations which can displace, question and transform established historiographical schemes and ideas.

If Doxiadis' theory seeks the mathematical laws that exist behind the buildings, this study seeks the theoretical concepts that correlate buildings, drawings, photographs and texts with each other. If the former unfolds the geometric threads connecting the structures of ancient architecture to each other, the latter unfolds the theoretical threads connecting the structures of ancient architecture to those of modern architecture. An initial retro-looking movement is common to both studies. Researching the historico-theoretical depth of the phenomena, a retrogressive move from whatever pre-existed to whatever follows is attempted, with the aim of detailing a creative course and forming a convincing narrative. The contemporary interpretation as a precondition for understanding what has been permanently lost, the pre-occupation with the then for better understanding of the now, defines the beginning of every attempt at organizing a theory.

This is because a theory initially concerns the configuration of a specific viewpoint, a post-view which will allow the researcher to better supervise their subject and enable them to develop their personal vision. The word theory (from the Greek verb *θεωρεῖν*) means, in principle, a way of seeing things. Thus, in architecture, too, every time prior to the design there is a theoretical structure behind the built structure; namely, a visual structure, a structure of vision.

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#### Notes

- 1 Hanson, Norwood Russell. *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958, p. 6.
- 2 Ferlenga, Alberto. *Dimitris Pikionis, 1887-1968*. Milan: Electa, 1999.