

ACCOUNTS  
AE FOUNDATION  
FOR ARCHITECTURE  
AND EDUCATION

**EDITED DOCUMENTATION**

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## **DETAILS**

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### **Title**

Accounts

### **Output Type**

Edited Book

### **Published by**

Pelinu Books, Bucharest

### **Date of Publication**

8 November 2019

### **Details**

16.5 x 23 x 2.1 cm

248 pages, texts, coloured images

softcover

500 copies, first edition 2019

printed at Fabrik, Bucharest

ISBN 978-973-0-29787-4

### **Website**

<https://pelinubooks.com/>

## **ABSTRACT**

*Accounts* is a record of an extended conversation that took place among the members and invited guests of the AE Foundation in the first five years of its activity. It includes lectures, discussions and interviews with prominent figures, emerging architects and educators. Beginning with discussions on themes including Doubt, Authorship, Architecture, City, Buildings, History and Resistance, the conversation continued to explore the many and varied schools of thought that occupy the discipline. This book is the result of the spontaneous enthusiasm that erupts when sincere individuals meet to discuss their favourite subject seriously.

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The following is an edited documentation of the book, published as an AE Foundation project. The Foundation for Architecture and Education (AE Foundation) began in 2011 to examine the challenges facing architectural education and contemporary practice.



Figure 1 Front cover.



FIGURE 2 Back cover.

PL But it's a very popular one.

LS Very, yes, for sure. There are people who are so immodest that they talk about modesty!

PL What about doubt? You talk about the importance of making mistakes.

LS Doubt is fundamental. I remember when I was working with Vaccini and we came up against some problems, some things that were difficult to resolve, we didn't quite know how to do it. We knew that this was quite a critical moment, and we would go and drink Champagne. It was the moment in which the project moved forward. The project is always about getting over obstacles. When we don't have any obstacles we have to invent them. Because total freedom is the worst form of prison.

SAMUEL PENN I see this a lot today in our contemporary architecture scene. Many architects in Switzerland producing their own rules, defining the boundaries of their engagement. In a way what we are saying then is that they are doing this because there are no real problems. So are there no real problems in the world anymore or are these architects just avoiding the real problems?

LS There are always problems in the world.

SP But why do they have to invent these rules?

LS Because freedom is the worst form of prison for mankind.

SP In architecture?

LS In general. If you have to construct a building, a house in the desert. It's the hardest thing in the world. I prefer a place there, in the chaos of the city. It seems that there are no obstacles. It seems that everything is possible. It's a false liberty.

SP But these architects they have a context: they have a political context, they have a genuine context in terms of a place as well, and cities, they work in cities, and yet they still have to devise these rules. More rules.

LS Yes, it's true that most of the time you do have various types of obstacles but there are situations in which you sometimes find yourself when you don't have obstacles and then you have to invent them.

PL This world, is it disappointing, less than you expected?

LS In part, sure, but not completely. I don't say that the world is shit. But I would say that I don't like the direction it is going in. If you look at Europe or Italy or Greece today, that which is happening you can't be indifferent to this. At the beginning I was part of the extreme left. I was more left than the communists. I had frequent meetings with the people who later became leaders of the Red Brigade.

PL Trotskyist?

LS We decided not to leave work behind, but to continue working as architects and also do politics whereas the Italian Red Brigade leaders decided to stop working and do only politics. And that is what saved us because we were walking on a razor edge. By a millimetre we didn't turn into Red Brigades. The son of Feltrinelli (publisher) went to Turin and put bombs under the main electrical supply. And all of Turin was without light. Feltrinelli's son died doing this. It was a very delicate moment, because for a millimetre we would have equally become extreme in that sense. They were not bandits, they were incredibly sophisticated and knowledgeable intellectuals.

PL They weren't nihilists?

LS No, not nihilists.

PL So why were they taking this action?

LS They wanted to have a complete struggle against capitalism, even an armed fight and that's when we decided not to continue.

PL It is interesting to see some of the students reacting to the work that you showed, and they said: "Oh it's like Marnetti". It's got that kind of assertive, decisive, aggressive, almost violent in terms of its imposition. Do you identify with some of the work that was produced in that period. Can you talk a little bit about that tradition in terms of pre-war Italian thinking?

LS Mussolini came out of the Socialist Party, he gave out new work to young poets, writers, architects all new work to do. That's why his success came about. He seemed like a man of the left at the beginning. Then at a certain point he turned and became totally the opposite, and that's how fascism started. So there was a kind of equilibrium. At the beginning people didn't realise that Mussolini was a fascist. They thought he was a leftist.

PL But the work that comes out of that period is interesting. It suggests there is not really a connection between politics and architecture in that sense.

LS There are moments in which the two things come together, but when they do come together it's possible that art loses its value, for example in painting in particular.

PL We only have one more question about the problem of urban sprawl. You raised it yesterday several times as a problem, but you didn't explain why it is a problem.

LS My advice is that the world is round, the population keeps growing. Man needs to eat, but if we occupy all the surface of the earth there will be nothing to eat. We need to leave parts of the earth for agriculture. We need to limit the size of the cities and leave room for food production. In a way it's a very medieval solution, but it's necessary today because if we continue spreading ourselves on the territory of the earth we won't be able to survive.

PL Are you an ecologist?

LS Well then I would have a problem. I have always been an anti-green. I can't stand them!

PL But I am accusing you of being green in your thinking.

LS It's true, you are right. In my life I have never cut down a tree. I have never made a building that meant I had to cut down a tree. When I was teaching in Zürich and all the professors had to present their programmes and the students choose or we choose our students, I didn't quite know what to present, so I gave them a task. I said: "you are walking in the forest and you find this fantastic, beautiful tree. What is your reaction?" I asked them to write this down. There were almost a thousand responses. I went aside and read them. There were all sorts of things like beauty, nature, birds, and then there were some more scientific ones about providing oxygen, all the natural processes etc. And I went back into the room and said: "you see that door?" You all came in here through that door, you should all go out of that door. Because none of you will be architects." If your initial response in front of a tree is not to cut it you will never be architects, because your initial reaction should be: "ah, wonderful tree. I can make a beautiful floor, a beautiful table, a beautiful chair and so on, a beautiful roof." That should be your immediate reaction. But then afterwards you can decide: "Do I want to keep this tree or do I not want to keep it? And my personal reaction has always been not to cut the tree, but my instinctive reaction should be I am an architect, I need to cut this tree and use it. For me it is a fundamental concept. For this I like very much the aphorism of Paulo Mendes: "Nature is a place of shit." In this Mendes explains his aphorism and says that nature is the biggest gift anyone can give us. Nature advises us, and says: "please change me. Change me because my nature is not made for you. And if you change me you always have to fight against me, not with me." I like this a lot. It is in a sense the foundation of all my work. Even if you build a house in a field you have to destroy something, even if it is just taking out a layer of forty centimetres to make the foundations. So you are cutting the most important part, where you can grow carrots and potatoes and so on. If the person who is designing the house thinks that he cannot replace the value

FIGURE 3 Page spread of interview with Luigi Snozzi.





FIGURE 4 Page spread of images.

