

Paper category
A retroactive theorem for the "Caracoles"

In "Delirious New York" (1978), Koolhaas applied the idea of "theorem" to a cartoon drawing made in 1909. The intelligence of the diagram was that it could describe "the ideal performance of the Skyscraper [...] as a utopian device for the production of unlimited numbers of virgin sites on a single metropolitan location" (p.69). In 1963 in France, another theorem arose from the minds and hands of Parent and Virilio. With the name of "Oblique Function," the inclined ramp was conceptualized as a visionary device for urbanizing a new world.

In both cases, the theorem was more than a drawing. It was a place between theory and practice for exercising the social potential of architectural ideas. On the one hand, with Koolhaas, the ideological independence among floors, on the other hand, with Parent and Virilio, a new structure for the production of consciousness on single bodies. In contrast with the Skyscraper, which was reproduced around the world, the architecture of the Oblique saw fewer examples.

However, with the name of "Caracoles," part of the theorem of the Oblique took material shape in Chile between 1974 and 1982. The idea did not travel from France, instead arose from the geometric space of Chilean architect's imagination. These buildings were characterized by an atypical floor plan solution, shaped by a footpath with an ascendant spiral ramp, surrounding a central void to accommodate small shops.

The scheme was supported by the precepts of a liberal architectural education that took the economic crisis as an opportunity. The "Caracoles" was designed with a deep belief in the transformative power of the architectural project. Indeed, no large corporations that would have entered into free plan spaces were willing to invest in Chile. The "Caracoles" shaped a new business model by reorganizing the size of the capital investment and the form of the administration.

This Ph.D. redraws the geometry of singles examples of the "Caracoles" to reinvent its theorem, but not only as a drawing, rather, as an exercise that can reformulate its social implications. Today academia is increasingly dominated by the idea of practice as the primary space of knowledge within the field. Studying the "Caracoles" from the perspective of the theorem, however, can shift the logic of the project back to the nature of our own architectural thinking.