

# (Plat)forms of Protest

*Architecture in the Age  
of Re-Activism*

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## *Architecture in the Age of Re-Activism*

Introduction p. 9

### **PART I - Frameworks**

Architecture/Architects/Architectural Culture and Protest. From The Engagé Architect to the Activist-Architect p. 19

Architectural Lexicons in Flux: A Glossary of Protest p. 59

Artivism and Architecture. Political Commitment Through Parallel Disciplines p. 97

### **PART II - Tools**

**Cooperative Designing.** Rethinking the Traditional Housing Typology through Protest p. 145

**Writing.** Assembling Politics: Architectural Publishing as Critical Practice p. 203

**Construction.** From Participation to Protest: Self-construction as a form of activism. p. 237

**Ephemerality.** Micro-Actions Architecture: Installations and Ephemeral Collective Design in Contemporary Urban Space p. 271

**Events and Cultural Platforms.** Architecture as Event, Ephemeral Activation, and Political Practice p. 347

### **PART III - Conclusion**

Building Platforms: Architecture in the Age of Hyper-Politics p. 375

## Appendix - Interviews

Maria Cristina Gamboa (Lacól, Barcelona)	p. 396
Leópolo Lambert (The Funambulist, France)	p. 420
Nasrin Mohiti Asli (Orizzontale, Italy)	p. 437
Santiago Cirugeda (Recetas Urbanas, Sevilla)	p. 460
Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius (Raumlabor, Berlin)	p. 476

Bibliography	p. 491
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# *Introduction*

Architecture is once again reflecting on itself. Similar to past social and political shifts—such as the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s or the identity-focused debates of the 1980s and 1990s—the field is reevaluating its role in a rapidly changing world. Today, increased political instability and the rise of populism reveal deep issues surrounding the meaning and control of public space. At the same time, digitalization and social media have changed how people gather, organize, and amplify their voices. These interconnected political, spatial, and technological shifts have led to increased protests and new forms of political engagement and activism, which in turn drive changes in architecture. In fact, from 2011 onward, with the global wave of protests — from the Arab Spring to Occupy Wall Street and the Indignados movement — dissent has become a central part of modern public life, and protests have spread increasingly widely. Architecture, observing these events, initially focused on their physical forms: the barricade, the encampment, the occupation, or the temporary structure that represents collective will. Studies like *Taxonomy of The Barricade* and *The Design of Protest: Choreographing Political Demonstrations in Public Space* concentrated on material and symbolic aspects. Yet, something more profound has emerged since then. Architecture has begun to redefine its role, shifting from merely documenting or interpreting spaces of dissent to actively engaging in them. Protest movements and individual political engagement inspire architecture to experiment with new methodologies and projects related to activism, which return in a renewed form. This shift marks a transformation in the architecture's agency.

Architecture has always been tied to politics. Throughout the twentieth century, it served as a tool for big social visions—modernism, socialism, fascism—each aiming to realize an idea of collective life. Although these utopian efforts were very different in ideology, they all believed in architecture's ability to shape society and represent political ideals. Over time, however, as the world's political and economic systems changed, architecture's connection to these utopias diminished. The field started to move away from totalizing ideologies, shifting from seeking universal

models to more diverse, localized, and practical approaches. Yet dissent has always been a fundamental part of this history. Moments of rupture have repeatedly transformed what architecture is and its potential, such as the Team X break from CIAM or the radical architecture of the Sixties more generally. Additionally, some architects, like Colin Ward, went even further by explicitly linking their work to political ideologies like anarchism. These experiments demonstrated that dissent has long been a creative force in architecture—a way to challenge the status quo and propose new practices.

Today, amid the global architect system – that, according to Bryony Roberts, reflects existing power structures rather than challenging them – a different movement is emerging—one that reclaims architecture’s political power through activism and collective effort. If in the Sixties/Seventies—a time clearly necessary for protest movements—architects conveyed their political commitment through intellectual efforts, today, architects engage with politics via activism. Therefore, architecture is no longer just observing politics from a distance; it is actively participating in it. The past few years have seen a rise in studios, collectives, and space practices that directly engage with social and political issues by using cooperative models, activist networks, and alternative economies. Their efforts reflect a shift from merely diagnosing problems to taking action—moving from description to intervention.

The relation between architecture and activism remains underdeveloped in architectural literature. While design, fashion, and art have already examined it, architecture has only recently started to define its own stance. Therefore, the literature is fragmented and incomplete, with a few key but isolated studies. Of course, there is a large body of architectural writing that, more broadly, addresses related issues—ethics, participation, care, sustainability, postcolonial, and feminist spatial practices—but these works seldom treat activism as a distinct mode of architectural practice. As a result, analyzing this phenomenon requires drawing from other disciplines—political philosophy, sociology, and critical theory. The writings of Michel Foucault on discipline, Judith Butler on performativity, Chantal Mouffe on agonism, and Rodrigo Nunes on organizational horizontality provide the conceptual tools to frame this emerging field. These cross-disciplinary borrowings are not a methodological weakness but a necessity: they reflect the inherently hybrid and intersectional nature of the practices themselves.

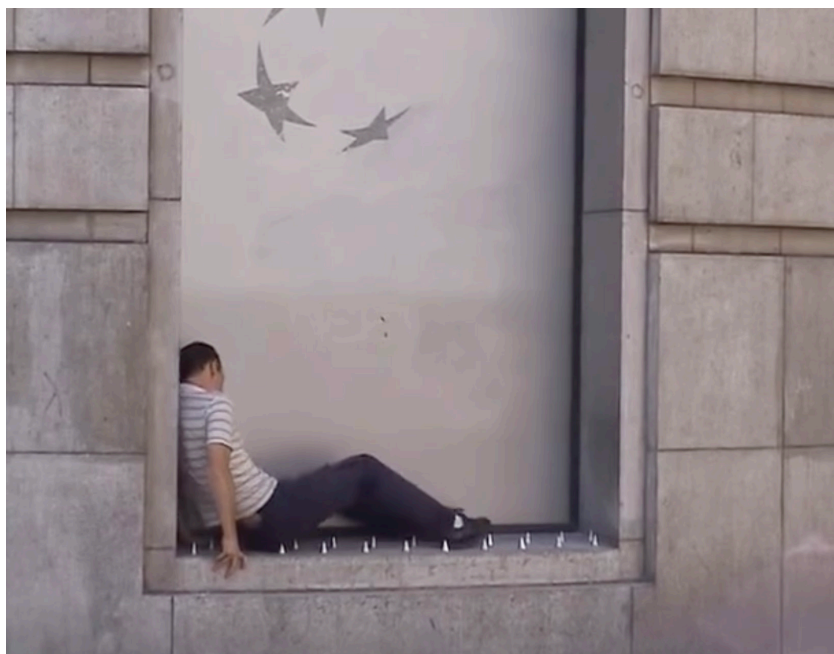
My goal in this dissertation is therefore modest. It is a small effort to bring structure to a fragmented landscape—to map the forms, actions, and platforms through which architecture interacts with activism. The central questions guiding this research are: What modes of operation define these practices? What meanings do they hold for the discipline as a whole? And ultimately, is there such a thing as an activist practice within architecture, and how does it function?

To explore these questions, I adopt a qualitative and comparative approach based on observation, analysis, and dialogue with practitioners. Whenever possible, I conducted interviews to understand the intentions and challenges behind each practice. The research is structured around five operational modes that represent various ways architecture is expressed today: designing, writing, construction, ephemeralities, and events and cultural platforms. Each mode is explored through a case study—from cooperative housing in Barcelona to the political magazine *The Funambulist*, from *Recetas Urbanas*'s self-building initiatives to *Orizzontale*'s ephemeral installations in Italy, and finally to *Raumlabor*'s performative urban actions in Berlin.

The dissertation is divided into three main sections. The first explains the theoretical and historical background, exploring the connection between architecture and protests and defining key concepts of activist practice. It creates a vocabulary to describe the phenomenon and incorporates insights from other disciplines — such as art — to understand how it functions. The second explores the contemporary field through the five instruments outlined earlier — designing, writing, construction, ephemeralities, events. The final section highlights common logics and areas of divergence and considers the broader implications of these practices for the discipline—especially how they reshape the architect's role in relation to institutions, communities, and politics. This study does not aim to offer a complete theory or to identify a specific style or wave. Instead, it seeks to observe and interpret a changing landscape, listening to emerging voices and placing them within a broader network of architectural resistance. If it succeeds in clarifying even part of the ways in which architecture engages with protest, activism and politics, it will have achieved its goal: to contribute, however modestly, to the ongoing discussion about how architects might act—critically, collectively, and responsibly—amid the uncertainties of today.



Architect Le Corbusier is on the 10-franc banknote from 1997 in Switzerland.



Stéphane Argillet and Gilles Paté, *The Fakir's Rest*, sheds light on the growing use of anti-homeless architecture in Paris (2003).



Demonstrators gathered in front of the National Congress using illuminated coat hangers as a protest symbol in defense of abortion rights, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2021.



Graphic designs denouncing the genocide in Palestine, Milan, 2025.



PART I  
*frameworks*



# *Architecture/Architects/ Architectural Culture and Protest. From The Engagé Architect to the Activist- Architect*

## **Abstract**

*This chapter investigates how the relationship between architecture and protest is evolving, emphasizing how modern social movements influence public space and architectural practice. Beginning with the wave of global protests since 2011—such as Occupy Wall Street, the Indignados, and the Arab Spring—the discussion highlights how collective actions challenge existing power structures and alter perceptions of space and time. Protest is seen not just as an event but as a performative occupation of urban areas, turning streets, squares, and buildings into tools and symbols of dissent. Drawing on philosophical and historical ideas—ranging from Arendt’s agora to Noll’s maps, and from Hobbes’ Leviathan to Foucauldian surveillance—this chapter explores how architecture mediates between public and private realms. Public space is depicted as a site of tension, simultaneously controlled, contested, and reclaimed by citizens. Architectural elements, including barricades and street art, are viewed as tools that legitimize collective claims and create temporary, politically charged environments. The chapter also discusses the rise of the “activist-architect,” a modern version of the engaged intellectual from the 20th century. Across Europe and beyond, architectural collectives, participatory projects, and institutions incorporate political and social engagement into their work, promoting horizontal collaboration, inclusivity, and civic empowerment. In conclusion, the chapter argues that protest revitalizes the political aspect of architecture, illustrating that design is inherently relational and performative, not neutral. By connecting streets and institutions, activism and tradition, theory and practice, contemporary architecture can develop new forms of publicness, resistance, and collective action. Protest architecture thus becomes a space of possibility, where opposition helps shape rather than negate, offering a blueprint for reimagining architecture’s social and political role in a rapidly changing world.*

## Architecture/Architects/Architectural Culture and Protest. From The Engagé Architect to the Activist-Architect

There is a profound interconnection between the discipline of architecture and the world in which we live. Therefore, awareness of the exhaustion of (at least) the first era of globalization plays a crucial role in defining how and in which direction architecture is changing. Beyond sustainability—a theme that has become central across various disciplines, sometimes leading to positive developments and at other times serving merely as a diversion—architects feel compelled to address contemporary social and political demands. This requires them, or at least some of them, to reconsider their position and move beyond vanity. This research aims to reflect on the impact of protest movements since 2011 as catalysts for architectural transformation. That year, the Occupy Wall Street movement, the Indignados movement, and the Arab Spring triggered a shift in perspective, to the extent that *Time* magazine declared “the protester” the most important person of the year. The crisis in the economic system—evident since the 2008 U.S. financial crisis—sparked a series of mass protests that have continued to grow, as seen in movements such as Fridays for Future (initiated by teenage activist Greta Thunberg), the *Gilets Jaunes* in France, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, Black Lives Matter, Free Palestine marches, and various feminist and LGBT+ demonstrations. It is essential to recognize that these movements differ significantly in nature and originate from distinct contexts, resulting in varied outcomes. However, this is not relevant for this research.

In fact, as Vincent Bevins highlights in *If We Burn*, 2011 was an explosive moment, and the persistence of mass protests over the past decade demonstrates the enduring resilience of this power.<sup>1</sup> While many dissent movements initially appeared successful, in Western countries, they have often fueled a crisis of representation, ultimately contributing to the rise of populist or authoritarian right-wing governments. History suggests that revolutions frequently follow cyclical patterns, leading to the reemergence of previous conditions. As Arthur Borriello and Anton

1 Cf. Bevins, V. (2023). *If we burn: The mass protest decade and the missing revolution*. WILDFIRE.

Jäger argue in *The Populist Moment*, «the flower of populism only blossoms when there is a perceived crisis of representation».<sup>2</sup>

Protest movements, rather than providing definitive outcomes, tend to raise critical questions that prompt further examination.

Paradoxically, this uncertainty benefits architecture. The renewed public awareness emerging from recent protests—akin to the societal shifts of 1968—has revived discussions that had been dormant for half a century, particularly those concerning the relationship between space, time, politics, and the human body.

Indeed, space and time, considered as measurable entities, become critical points in the phenomenon of protest.

In the indefinite number of people who choose to unite bodies and claims in political acts, the two fundamental concepts are experienced both for their symbolic role and resonance, and in a state of atavistic perception. In a certain way, they free themselves from the superstructures they have been loaded with throughout history. Time stands still, and space becomes a pure act. In the face of the ancient controversy concerning the two concepts, protest both subtracts and adds meaning to the discourse that investigates their comprehensibility and perception.

For scholars until the 17th Century, notably Newton and Descartes,<sup>3</sup> time and space were considered stable and measurable entities to be rationally understood. However, Leibniz's relational theory and Einstein's theory of relativity overturned this position.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the epistemological question regarding the definition of this binomial had to engage with the concept of relativity, broadening the understanding of space and time into a more indefinite context, in our case, strongly influenced by the collective agency of bodies and wills.

For Kant, it was only through personal perception that the two notions

2 Cf. Borriello, A., & Jäger, A. (2023). *The populist moment: The Left after the great recession* (First paperback edition). Verso.

3 Cf. Descartes, R., Monda, D., Campi, R., Frigieri, E., & Faguet, É. (2014). *Discorso sul metodo per dirigere bene la propria ragione e cercare la verità nelle scienze* (2. ed). Feltrinelli.

4 Cf. G. W. Leibniz (1979). *The Relational Theory of Space and Time*, in Problems of space and Time, Macmillan, New York 1979; A. Einstein, in M. Jammer (1954). *Concepts of Space. The History of Theories of Space in Physics*, Harvard University Press.

could be conceived and experienced.<sup>5</sup> However, as Hegel argued, perception is not purely personal but is influenced by contextual conditions.<sup>6</sup> Later, critics of idealism, who abandoned Cartesian duality by recognising being as both a physical and immaterial presence, further developed the idea that perception is an experience rooted in bodily presence. Historically, therefore, we converge toward a conception in which space is known and explored depending on who we are and the conditions in which we find ourselves. It can have infinite interpretations. However, despite philosophical and scientific research, the interpretation in the capitalist world diverges from this conclusion, relying instead on fixed and measurable points to understand the world.

The development of the Fordist system has reinforced the obligation to adhere to the time and space of production, making it increasingly difficult to engage in free perception, personal experimentation, and complex interpretations of reality. However, recent times suggest a shift in this direction. Observing media, publishing, and the vast amount of content circulating online, one gets the impression of a growing interest in themes related to geography, in all its physicality and its role in defining boundaries. Maps, borders, and narratives that focus on the particular—understood not merely as details, but as distinct from the universal—are gaining prominence. On the other hand, in the tech era, capitalism is also changing its internal protocols, progressively separating the production of profit from labor, again having an impact on the way the relation between space, time, and (social) bodies is perceived.

The result is the period of disorientation we are experiencing, marked by the rejection of a system perceived as inadequate and incapable of providing security, which has led people to seek stability by “thinking in more spatial than historical terms.” This renewed focus on how we perceive and discuss space has fostered a more systemic understanding of world events. No longer seen as isolated tragedies without connection, they are increasingly recognized as part of an identifiable and comprehensible process. This growing awareness has produced a reaction manifested in waves of protest demonstrations that have unexpectedly shaken capitals around the world.

5 Cf. Kant, I. (1957). *Critica della ragione pura*. Einaudi.

6 Cf. Siep, L. (2014). *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Cambridge University Press.

Examining the role of space during moments of protest can illuminate questions that extend beyond the phenomenon itself, opening up discussions about the design and interpretation of contemporary space. Yet, before delving into these meanings, it is crucial first to understand the very conception of space in which movements of dissent take shape.

Protest, that can take many forms and evolve in interesting ways, is commonly envisioned as something that takes place in the streets—a march moving through the city, culminating in an urban space large enough to contain it. In this sense, protest primarily engages with the public space of the city, a place designated for political expression and defined by its form and scale. This idea has continually reinvented itself, reappearing in different guises in the discourse of urban planners and architects, and has, in some ways, become a muse-like concept for political renewal—a notion both static and in perpetual motion.

Drawing on its most significant interpretations, it is interesting to reconsider Hannah Arendt's perspective, which posits that public space comprises both social and physical dimensions.<sup>7</sup> Seeking to counter the decline of Western political thought, Arendt looked to the Greek polis of Pericles' time as a conceptual reference. She saw the boundaries of the agora as an essential architectural element that defined public space—an integral dimension of the human condition, a place of plurality, and a sphere of political freedom, indispensable to human life. The agora was a designated space comprising buildings for political and civic purposes, temples, and memorials. More than that, it was the physical setting necessary for individual freedom to manifest itself—freedom that only existed when it was visible to others.

For Arendt, the distinction between public and private space was essential: in the agora, a man could be free from the obligations of productive and reproductive life, which belonged solely to the private sphere, where women and slaves were confined. In this view, 'public' encompassed all shared spaces where encounters could take place. It was not merely external space or the interior of civic buildings but the sum of both. This concept could hypothetically be represented using the same method employed by Giovanni Battista Nolli in 1748 to create his renowned map of Rome—an inevitable reference point when attempting to depict public space visually.

In Nolli's 18th-century map, public space was defined as the sum of

7 Cf. Arendt, H. (2017). *Vita activa*. Bompiani.

streets, squares, and all accessible areas within public buildings—spaces open to all citizens and subject to shared laws. His cartographic approach introduced a new method of representation, using projection, figuration, and orientation to distinguish between public and private realms. In his map, public spaces were rendered in white, while private ones were depicted in black, offering a clear and definitive contrast.

A comparison between Nolli's plan of Rome and a similarly mapped Greek polis reveals not just a difference in scale but also two distinct political philosophies. On the one hand, the polis embodies the belief, expressed by Thomas Jefferson, that democracy can only exist within defined boundaries. On the other hand, the complexity of Rome's urban fabric aligns with John Locke's idea that democracy can exist anywhere. These two hypothetical city plans reflect different political structures, both in physical and administrative terms. However, one key observation remains: the defining characteristic of public space appears to be its opposition to the private. In the end, public space emerges not as an independent entity, but as the negation of private property.

The modern notion of public space originates in relation to private property, which, in its contemporary meaning, arises as the negation of private space. While private property implies the right to control and use a portion of space, excluding or even denying the presence of others, public space can be understood as a form of double negation: it exists precisely through the suspension of individual control. This paradox reveals the intrinsic tension within its very definition, whereby public space challenges the ontological idea of space as something that can be possessed or subjected to personal authority.

A deeper understanding of this relationship between the public and private spheres, as well as their historical development, can be found in the work of Jürgen Habermas.<sup>8</sup> Reflecting on these issues, Habermas traces the birth of the modern public sphere to 17th-century England. He argues that the institution of private property and the rise of bourgeois power were key factors in making public authority necessary. As the bourgeoisie benefited from the emerging capitalist economy, which became central to civil society, they codified civil law to ensure the protection of private freedoms.

What Habermas highlights is that, in the context of seventeenth-century England, the notion of private property was not only an economic cate-

8 Cf. Habermas, J. (1999). *The Structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society* (10. print). MIT Press.

gory but also a political one. It emerged in opposition to the prevailing idea that everything—whether material or immaterial—ultimately belonged to the sovereign: land, objects, animals, and even human beings were considered under the king’s authority. In this sense, the institution of private property represented a decisive break from this all-encompassing dominion, establishing the legal and social foundations for the recognition of individual freedom. The protection of private ownership thus became inseparable from the broader development of modern civil society, where personal autonomy could be affirmed against absolute power.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s notion of the ‘social contract’ offers further insight into these themes.<sup>9</sup> Rousseau argued that being subject to common laws is a sign of freedom, not a denial of individualism. Public space, therefore, becomes a domain where citizens can act as a unified body. Upholding this agreement through one’s behavior in shared spaces, both within and outside cities, remains a fundamental principle in modern society. This tacit agreement underpins our understanding of rights and duties as participants in the modern state.

The representation of the modern state is not coincidentally captured in early depictions of the sovereign as a king, crowned and holding a sword (symbolizing temporal authority) in one hand and a bishop’s crosier (symbolizing religious authority) in the other. The image of the king, whose body is composed of countless other bodies, is famously featured on the title page of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, published in 1651. Hobbes’s illustration of the Leviathan, in the context of 17th-century England, where Habermas identified the emergence of public and private spheres, plays a key role in his political theory. Here, the Leviathan is not the biblical monster described by Job but rather a human figure composed of many individuals, whose collective unity symbolizes the formidable power of the state.

The representation of the state as anonymous bodies with unrecognizable faces would later emerge as the foundational political iconography of the modern state, symbolizing the collective power it represents. For

9 Cf. Rousseau, J. (1762). *Du contrat social: Ou principes du droit politique*. Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey.

Aristotele, the philosopher of the *polis*, man is naturally social.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Hobbes, who witnessed the decline of absolutism and the advent of modernity, viewed man as utilitarian, seeking society out of necessity.<sup>11</sup> For Aristotele, the tangible space of the *agora* corresponds to the metaphorical space of democracy, where the absence of either one negates the existence of political space itself. In Hobbes' *Leviathan*, however, in the background of the image, we see a depiction of a fortified city with military ramparts, within which stand a cathedral and an orderly series of equally sized buildings, forming broad open spaces—yet there is no sign of a civic square. This imagery recalls Ambrogio Lorenzetti's famous medieval fresco, *The Effects of Good Government*, in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, where the *urbs* and the countryside are distinctly opposed and separated. However, in Hobbes' frontispiece, created three centuries later, the countryside appears more developed, dotted with small settlements—a sign of transformation. This likely reflects the evolving relationship between land and ownership, which, according to Marx, formed the foundation of all capitalist relations of production.<sup>12</sup> It introduced a certain distance between the owner and the property, making profit the only viable connection between the two.

The master, therefore, becomes, to borrow Thorstein Veblen's term, an "absentee owner," actively involved in concealing the graft embedded within the social relations inherent in space. Public space, in modern terms, owes its very foundation to private property.<sup>13</sup> Over the centuries, it has continuously evolved and adapted in response to the development of the economic system—one that is increasingly intertwined with the social system. In the most critical interpretations, formulated at the height of capitalism in the post-World War II era, public space is understood as a domain for the circulation of capital—one subjected to a physically absent yet totalizing form of control. Michel Foucault, a foundational figure of French post-structuralism, extensively theorized

10 As the Greek philosopher Aristotele (4th century BC) wrote in his *Politics*, 'man is a social animal': he naturally tends to join with other individuals and form societies.

11 Cf. Hobbes, T., & Magri, T. (2005). *De cive: Elementi filosofici sul cittadino*. Editori riuniti.

12 Cf. Marx, K., & Hobsbawm, E. J. (2017). *Il capitale: Critica dell'economia politica*. Editori riuniti.

13 Veblen, T. (2017). *Absentee ownership: Business enterprise in recent times: the case of America*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

this notion. In *Discipline and Punish*, the philosopher employs the architectural model of the panopticon—designed in 1791 by Jeremy Bentham, a philosopher and jurist—as a reference point for his theory of invisible power.<sup>14</sup> In this ideal prison, visual oversight over inmates is maintained with minimal effort. The design features a circular layout, divided into individual cells separated by thick walls. Each cell has a window facing outward and an opening toward a central tower, ensuring that all prisoners are always under the warder’s watch. Through his research, Foucault observed that the panopticon’s principles and structure were reflected in the designs of various prisons—and beyond. It became a model of control over the social body, appearing in different forms and serving various purposes, including in so-called public spaces where bodies are subtly subjected to invisible power.

If, as the twentieth-century philosopher Simone Weil argues, participation in collective goods is «a demand of the soul»,<sup>15</sup> then in today’s reality, it’s clear how protest unites large groups of people who challenge the Foucauldian idea of control. Protesters, with their own unique ways of living together, occupy and reshape public space, which then exists in the deep paradox of being open to every citizen while simultaneously being monopolized by each of them.

A protest is a strong and energetic way of showing dissent, grounded in shared and public interests. It naturally opposes, disapproves of, criticizes, or rejects parts of the established system and authority, forming an opposite relationship that is vital to its meaning.

The connection between power, bodies, and space during protests—along with feelings of unity and democracy—raises an important question: Could this inherent clash in protest provide lessons for architecture’s study of public space?

In other words, the clash of protest seems to revive the ancient idea of public space. Within the crowd of the immortalized protest, we once again see the image of Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, rediscovering an old power defined by the rights of those who occupy the space. In protest, space becomes an act, much like in primitive forms of architecture.

In 1995, John Searle published *The Construction of Social Reality*, in

14 Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1975).s

15 Cf. *Il radicamento: Preludio ad una dichiarazione dei doveri verso l'essere umano* (with Weil, S., & Schinco, E.). (2022). Editrice Clinamen.

which he illustrates how a boundary is created by referencing an episode about «a primitive tribe building a wall around its territory».<sup>16</sup> For Searle, «the spatial form of the constructed wall becomes the material premise for the social construction of the boundary, understood as an institutional object endowed with its own right: that is, endowed with an autonomous normative power independent of the wall's presence, which, ultimately, could even 'crumble'».<sup>17</sup> The close connection between spatial form and abstract norm reappears in the protest, taking on a similarly primitive quality and gaining new meaning.

During protests, «the crowd fills the space, halting urban life. It identifies with the physical stillness of the space, using architectural symbols to create its own. The crowd claims ownership of the city's empty spaces, producing its own living space. It infiltrates surrounding buildings, occupying the facades of squares and streets, transforming them into surfaces on which it inscribes its own mauls available materials to build barricades, using the city itself to protect its ephemeral existence».<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, in this thesis, the connections between protest and architecture will be primarily discussed through five frameworks.

First, the architecture of protest can be understood as the material use of architectural elements during protest movements. A simple example, well-explained in Wolfgang Scheppe's book,<sup>19</sup> is the barricade, created using whatever materials are available. During the Paris Commune of 1871, barricades were constructed from bricks and sandbags. In the Hong Kong protests advocating for independence between 2019 and 2020, some students built structures from bamboo branches, which are commonly used for scaffolding in the region. In recent demonstrations, objects and structures are intentionally designed to make a lasting impact on the public and media during marches, as seen with Extinction Rebellion's demonstrations in London. For instance, they constructed a

16 Cf. Searle, J. R. (2011). *La costruzione della realtà sociale* (3a rist.). Einaudi.

17 Id.

18 Id.

19 Cf. Scheppe, W. (2021). *Taxonomy of the barricade: Image acts of political authority in Paris, May 1968*. Nero; Cf. Elser, O., Mayerhofer, A.-M., Hackenschmidt, S., Dyck, J., Hollein, L., Cachola Schmal, P., Deutsches Architekturmuseum, & Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst (Eds.). (2023). *Protest architecture: Barricades, camps, spatial tactics, 1830-2023*. Park Books.

large, movable pink table to invite the British government to engage in discussions about their demands. In this context, design not only facilitates civil resistance but also serves as a tool to promote dissent.

Second, architecture, by its very nature, plays a vital role in protest, functioning as both a backdrop and an active participant in public demonstrations. The design of a street, for example, can influence the outcome of a march. This is why modern cities, starting with Haussmannian Paris, feature broad main streets: to appease and control the crowds. Architecture also has the capacity to be occupied, whether for a single day or an extended period. When protest turns into occupation, it asserts the right to life, which includes access to physical space for living, sleeping, eating, gathering, and engaging in activities. Abandoned buildings often become focal points of such occupations, and their requalification becomes an act of resistance. For example, in Rome, Forte Prenestino—a 19th-century fort that was originally part of the city's defensive walls—became a social hub in the 1980s. Likewise, Occupy Wall Street was centered in Zuccotti Park, located in New York's financial district. This link between architecture, society, and power is important. Philosopher Françoise Choay emphasizes the connection between architecture—or space—and societal institutions, pointing out that urban spaces influence and shape the daily lives of their residents.

If the medieval city was characterized by the 'convivial space of contact,' the Renaissance-Baroque city by the 'scenic space,' and the Haussmannian city by the 'space of circulation,' each of these urban forms contributed to the proliferation and growth of society. In contrast, the modern city, defined by the 'space of connections,' lacks this capacity—it no longer builds society in the same way, regardless of whether people are present or absent.<sup>20</sup>

According to Choay, the urban fabric should perform the vital task of symbolizing our human nature and social existence, emphasizing the essential difference that distinguishes us as a species. She stresses that «the faculty of speaking and the faculty of building are two sides of the same competency that makes us human: the ability to symbolize».<sup>21</sup>

20 F. Choay, Presenting *Del destino della città (On the Fate of the City)*, in Vanettiello, D. (2011). *Dove va l'urbanistica? (Where is Urban Planning Headed?)*. Aión, p. 89.

21 Id.

Indeed, the square has long been the quintessential space for political demonstrations. It holds significant value in urban planning as the designated site for authorized political events, making it highly symbolic. Additionally, it provides the ample space needed to host large crowds. In recent years, large squares have become central locations for some of the most important protests in history worldwide. Two notable events stand out, each involving leaders who have used populism and classism as tools of victory: the assault on the U.S. Capitol in Washington on January 6, 2021, and the attack on the palaces of power in Brasília in January 2023.

The two incidents share a lot in common, from the extreme violence of the actions to the bizarre absurdity of the events themselves. Conspiracy, now a powerful political and cultural force, culminated in the occupation of two important monumental complexes. Supporters of former president Jair Bolsonaro stormed the Palácio do Planalto, which houses the presidential offices, the Congresso Nacional (the seat of parliament), and the Federal Supreme Court. These three buildings are situated around the Praça dos Três Poderes, forming the central axis of Brasília.

Similarly, Capitol Hill is located at the end of the grand avenue leading to National Hall, aligned with the Lincoln Memorial, the nearby reflecting pool, and the towering Washington Monument. Both areas are central to their city plans, shaping how their cities are organized. Capitol Hill divides Washington into four quadrants, while Praça dos Três Poderes is the symbolic center of the Pilot Plan in Brasília.

While Washington's city plan was inspired by Roman urban design, with *cardo* and *decumanus* streets shaping rectangular blocks and large diagonal avenues radiating from the White House and Capitol, Brasília's design, built two centuries and a hemisphere away, resulted from a specific vision by urban planner Lúcio Costa. The famous Pilot Plan was initially meant to be shaped like a cross, but the region's geography led to a design resembling an airplane, giving it a unique symbolic meaning. The size of the plan, suited to a car-focused society, highlighted the airplane shape, symbolizing progress for a nation heading toward modernization. The goal was to organize a city built from the ground up between 1956 and 1960, designed to host 500,000 residents and serve as the political capital of a large South American country. In 1891, it was decided that a new capital would be created, as Rio de Janeiro, located in the southern part of the country, was difficult to access geographically and unsuitable for such a political role. Its landscape, characterized

by tall mountains in the city center, was known for housing informal settlements.

In contrast, Washington, D.C. was built from the 18th century onward by numerous architects and urban planners in an idealized neoclassical style. This style, promoted by Thomas Jefferson, an architect and the third president of the United States, was established as the nation's official aesthetic. On one hand, the colonnades, symmetry, order, and sobriety reflected the fashion of the time. During this period, for example, Leo von Klenze was constructing the Walhalla in Germany as a massive Doric temple, John Soane was designing the elegant Regent's Park in London, and Napoleon had recently built the triumphal arch in Paris. On the other hand, the style was a deliberate tribute to ancient Greece, which was regarded as a symbol of democracy and political freedom, interpreted through the surviving remnants of the past.

Although studies confirm that 5th-century B.C. Greek architecture was once painted, the passage of time turned this erosion into a symbol of purity, and classical architecture was reimagined during the European Enlightenment as entirely white. Similarly, the Brazilian parliament is painted in the same color, although the stylistic reference is completely different. Lucio Costa, who had previously worked with Le Corbusier in Rio de Janeiro, entrusted the design of the representative palaces to Oscar Niemeyer, a prominent modernist architect.

Much like the imposing dome of the U.S. Capitol, which unites the two branches of the American Congress, Niemeyer designed two massive concrete domes for the Brazilian parliament. These domes stand against a horizontal strip of building from which two austere skyscrapers rise perpendicularly. One dome represents the Senate, while the other—flipped upside down—represents the Chamber of Deputies. In their geometric purity, they evoke a sense of order, which, in January 2023, was dramatically challenged by the presence of protesters.

The street is another essential space for protest, used in many ways. Among those who first highlighted the importance of the street beyond just its physical infrastructure were British architects Alison and Peter Smithson. During the 1956 exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* in London, they boldly positioned themselves in the middle of the road, a simple yet revolutionary act that challenged traditional views of urban space. For the Smithsons, architecture meant more than just designing buildings; it also involved the behaviors, relationships, and interactions that take place in public spaces. By occupying space in this way, they emphasized

the social role of the street and its potential as a platform for human activity, communication, and collective expression. This perspective foreshadowed later discussions about the street as a political and cultural space, highlighting its significance as a site for protest and civic engagement.

A notable example is the use of streets in some U.S. cities in 2020. During the protests following the death of George Floyd, demonstrators painted the names of African Americans killed by the police in large letters on the streets of major cities. Drone photographs of these streets prompt us to question the meaning and scale of this gesture. This act recalls primitive landscape drawings, such as the massive geoglyphs of the Nazca Desert discovered in 1939.

The Nazca lines are massive drawings carved into the dry plateau extending over eighty kilometers between the cities of Nazca and Palpa in southern Peru. More than 13,000 lines create over 800 unique figures, including stylized images of animals native to the area. Although their purpose remains uncertain, no definitive explanation has been discovered. These geoglyphs are thought to have held religious importance, probably aimed at gods in the sky.

The colorful graffiti on American streets may serve a similar purpose — to be seen and remembered. However, rather than addressing ancient deities, the intent seems to be aimed at the information-driven world, broadcasting the aerial view of protests. Writing on the streets, altering their appearance, and using the space to communicate becomes a political statement: a call to action and a demand for change.

The Black Lives Matter protests also introduced new tactics, further shaping the landscape of protest. On one hand, large-scale street art became a powerful symbol; on the other, the removal or defacement of statues honoring figures central to the country's colonial history became another form of protest.

The last three connections correspond to specific aspects of the discipline of architecture: architects — as the authors —, architectural culture — as the overall production of architecture institutions, exhibitions, festivals, museums, and so forth — and architecture itself — as the pure result of the design process or the finalized design/project. The question then becomes whether architects, or the architectural culture, or architecture itself, can be the subjects of an act of protest.

Architects, like all humans—besides being architects—can protest. What interests us in this study is how, over recent decades, an increasing number of mostly young architects tend to reject the idea of design work as a form of consumption and exploitation. Instead, they favor a more conscious practice that is sensitive to political causes. Just as consumption and exploitation are linked to both capitalist land use and the internal organization of the architecture profession, groups have been formed to protect architects from labor exploitation. For example, the Italian Riordino degli Architetti reports on labor exploitation by both well-known and lesser-known architectural firms, and the NO!SPEC platform opposes unpaid work and the system of design contests. Architects unite in global collectives to sustain political issues, like *Feminist Spatial Practices*, which is «a participatory space to highlight, promote, and share feminist practices in art, design, architecture, and activism. The project nurtures the diverse ways that creators work towards intersectional gender equity in the built environment, acknowledging and celebrating the different feminisms that have existed across geographies and time».<sup>22</sup>

There are increasing practices—especially since 2020 and the murder of George Floyd by U.S. police—that deal with anti-racist themes. *Black Space* demands «a present and future where Black people, Black spaces, and Black culture matter and thrive».<sup>23</sup> The *Black Reconstruction Collective*, meanwhile, «provides funding, design, and intellectual support to the ongoing and incomplete project of emancipation for the African Diaspora».<sup>24</sup> *Design as Protest* is a group of anti-racist designers dedicated to design justice in the built environment. They openly declare: «The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery may have sparked the most recent calls to stop killing Black people, but it is a story as old as this nation. It is often the soft power of the built environment that provides the preconditions for that dehumanization and the subsequent atrocities. Our obligation to each other, to the built environment, and in solidarity with Black lives is to hold all complicit actors in these systems accountable, including organizations, schools, industry leaders, and legislative bodies».<sup>25</sup>

22 <https://feministspatialpractices.com/about>. Accessed on 6, September, 2025.

23 <https://blackspace.org/>. Accessed on 6, September, 2025.

24 <https://www.blackreconstructioncollective.org/about>. Accessed on 6, September, 2025.

25 <https://www.dapcollective.com/demands>. Accessed on 6, September, 2025.

For them, the design industry is just as involved as any other, and for that reason, their manifesto includes a specific list of political demands.

Following up, it is worth paying attention to what's happening in the very active area of architecture institutions: political and social issues have gained more and more space in the activities of architecture institutions and cultural production. Museums, exhibitions, festivals, events, and schools tend to bring architecture closer to political demands, using it as a lens to interpret social reality. Beyond small experiments that are gradually becoming more significant—such as the Concéntrico Festival in Spain, where public space is the main theme, or the Festival des Cabanes in Rome, or the Young Architects Program designed by MAXXI museum—there are even established institutions that have recently adapted their exhibition themes to reflect on geopolitical issues. A prime example is the Venice Biennale, which has increasingly embraced more politically charged themes. Editions like *All the World's Futures* (2015), *Reporting from the Front* (2016), *May You Live in Interesting Times* (2019), *How Will We Live Together?* (2021), *The Milk of Dreams* (2022), *The Laboratory of the Future* (2023), and *Foreigners Everywhere* (2025) demonstrate diverse attention to environmental issues.

Another institution indicating a shift in the art and architecture world is the 15th edition of Documenta Kassel, curated by the Indian collective Ruangrupa. This exhibition highlighted the role of the artist as an activist. Simultaneously, Documenta 15 marked a significant move toward geopolitics by emphasizing the perspectives of the Global South. Through Ruangrupa's curatorial vision, the exhibition aimed to challenge Western-centric narratives and increase cultural visibility for regions that have historically been marginalized in the art world. This curatorial approach not only embraced collective and community-based practices but also reflected a broader reckoning with the colonial past and the guilt that still influences Western institutions. In doing so, Documenta 15 questioned the power structures embedded in cultural production and presented an alternative view where solidarity, resource-sharing, and transnational dialogue are core values.

Traditional institutions have increasingly participated in political discourse, while informal experiences such as festivals, workshops, and temporary events—where architecture is showcased and discussed rather than constructed—are growing more common.

Among both formal and informal examples, certain institutions are gaining recognition by redefining the very role of the museum. Arc en Rêve in Bordeaux, France, is one such institution, expanding the impact and perception of architecture in society. It creates a space for dialogue and critical questioning about how we inhabit and transform the world.

Similarly, the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) operates on the premise that architecture is a public concern. The CCA produces exhibitions and publications, develops and shares its collection as a resource, advances research, offers public programs, and fosters curiosity about how architecture shapes—and might reshape—contemporary life. It encourages public participation, emphasizing critical thinking over rigid definitions of architecture.

The Bauhaus Earth initiative, based in Potsdam and Berlin, focuses on sustainability. It envisions a future in which buildings, cities, and landscapes contribute to climate restoration and positively impact the planet and its inhabitants. The organization promotes systemic change through bio- and geo-based materials, circular construction, building reuse, recycling, biodiversity restoration, and cities as natural carbon sinks.

While institutions like the CCA rarely frame their work as explicitly political, the themes they choose for their exhibitions, research, and public programs often reflect urgent socio-political issues. Their curatorial approaches tend to engage with topics such as inequality, migration, ecology, and the role of public space, thereby shaping political discourse indirectly through architectural inquiry. In contrast, initiatives like Bauhaus Earth are “purpose-driven projects,” created with the clear goal of addressing a political-ecological agenda. Their mission is not only to rethink architectural practices but also to actively drive systemic change, positioning architecture as a tool in the fight against climate change and environmental damage.

Finally, the Center for Arts, Research, and Alliance (CARA), a nonprofit, research center, and publisher based in New York, aims to expand public discourse and historical records to showcase art’s diverse pasts, presents, and futures. Through publishing, exhibitions, public programs, and fellowships, CARA challenges dominant narratives and highlights the wide range of artistic and cultural expressions.

Thus, architectural culture is evolving, shifting away from traditional exhibition spaces to develop platforms for un-learning, kinship, and care, encouraging a deeper engagement with current social and environmental issues.

The last link between protest and architecture is, unexpectedly, the most traditional. The connection between the two is, in fact, often expressed through projects. Design itself can convey political messages and – this is what the research aims to explore – today there are many projects that explicitly demonstrate this effort.

After this introduction, we can probably reiterate how the aim of the research is to define the area where the architect's agency overlaps with a condition of "protest": more specifically, the main questions we'd like to answer through a selected number of case studies and our conclusive reflections are: What are the tools designers and architecture thinkers use to be part or support a condition of "protest" and opposition; How does the contemporary "activist" approach relates, in terms of differences and continuity, to the historical tradition of the "intellectual engage" typical of the XX Century; What do designers and architecture thinkers achieve from their activist approach both in political and disciplinary terms.

The starting point for research is recognizing the wide range of collectives and spatial practices that have blossomed all over the world, even though the research will mainly focus on Western countries, especially European capitals like Paris, London, Berlin, Madrid, Barcelona, Lisbon, Milan, and Rome, where the phenomenon is more evident. The economic crisis, which made it more difficult for young architecture graduates to enter the professional realm, along with the cultural environment and the digitalization of communication, forms the essential background that has led to the emergence of several architectural collectives in specific regions of the planet. Collectives and various forms of activism are present in many different geopolitical contexts (India, South America, Africa, etc.), but due to factors such as time, consistency, research tools, and access to information, my work is primarily focused on the European scenario.

Every case, like every context, is unique, but there are important common features, especially in the European scene. First and foremost, the horizontal structure of groups is essential.<sup>26</sup> These groups have no explicit hierarchies or leaders; instead, their goal is to be platforms whe-

26 In fact, one of the groups that the research will focus on is called Orrizontale. It is based in Rome and was founded in 2010.

re members can share ideas, tasks, and responsibilities. How they work is just as important as the projects they develop. Therefore, clear rules and mutual respect regulate aspects such as work schedules, salaries, parental leave, and other fundamental rights. This approach also extends to collaboration with experts from various fields, promoting interdisciplinarity. This collective approach to working also influences the design process. Participation is often essential, ensuring projects meet the needs of residents, reflect their behaviors, and explore architectural possibilities. By involving people in the design process, participation makes buildings and structures feel more personal and meaningful. For the same reason, self-construction workshops are common, allowing people to actively participate in building their own spaces. Self-building not only reduces costs but also empowers individuals by reducing reliance on specialized construction workers and bringing them closer to the design process. Aligned with these goals, many projects adopt a do-it-yourself style. Structures are simple, accessible, and built from affordable, durable materials—often recycled or easily recyclable. A key feature of these experimental methods is their focus on temporariness. Many projects are short-lived, created for festivals, public space activations, markets, or exhibitions. Because of this, cultural institutions and public authorities often serve as the main clients. This approach to the profession is largely enabled by a new form of cultural support that sustains many of these groups. Public funding, institutional backing, and grant systems help experimental practices survive and grow outside of traditional market rules. In contrast, in countries with tougher capitalism and limited welfare—such as the United States, the United Kingdom, or China—this type of architectural approach remains on the fringes or nearly impossible to maintain. The temporary nature of these structures also plays a key role in reshaping spaces, often sparking broader redevelopment efforts.

Ultimately, the desire to create change—however small or temporary—aligns with what is now called “micro-politics,” which operates outside traditional legal and political frameworks, favoring small but impactful actions. A common thread among these new architectural practices is their engagement with political struggles. Whether addressing feminism, racial justice, climate change, or other social issues, their ultimate ambition is to challenge traditional structures and reimagine the role of architecture, taking on responsibilities that were previously considered beyond its scope.

As we predicted earlier, the widespread nature of this wave—if we can call it that—highlights a fundamental shift in attitude. Since the late 1960s, the relationship between architecture and power has largely been based on intellectual speculation.<sup>27</sup> However, in our century, not only has the figure of the intellectual fallen into crisis, but especially in the period under examination, the focus of this relationship has clearly shifted toward protest and activism. Jean-Louis Cohen, in his 1984 book *La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels ou les enseignements de l'italophilie*, recounts the intellectualization of architectural practice, using Italy as a prime example. Since the Fascist era, architecture and power in Italy have leveraged culture as a platform for dialogue and engagement. This legacy, cultivated over decades, reached its peak in the 1970s, when architecture became a discipline shaped more by ideas than by buildings. This intellectual movement was enabled by several key factors: the historiographical approach of Italian architects—most notably Manfredo Tafuri—the presence of influential figures such as Quaroni, Samonà, Rossi, Zevi, De Carlo, Gregotti, and Rogers, and their prolific writings, which often focused on the city as a core reference for architectural theory. Equally important were the development of major architectural schools at universities like Venice, Rome, and Milan, along with Italy's rich tradition of architectural publications, including *Casabella*, *Domus*, *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia*, *Parametro*, *Controspazio*, *Rassegna*, *Lotus*, *Hinterland*, *Zodiac* and most of all *Contropiano*. In general, philosophers, sociologists, and political scientists were very open to dialogue with architects. Cohen describes a conceptual triangle with power, architecture, and culture at its vertices. However, this research, which focuses on contemporary developments, reveals a shift in both geography—Italy is no longer at the center—and ideology. In this evolving triangle, culture has been replaced by activism. As a result, the bond between architecture and power is now mediated through activism rather than intellectualism.

27 According to Jean-Louis Cohen, in his analysis of the “split between architects and intellectuals” (entered into in *La coupure entre architectes et intellectuels ou les enseignements de l'italophilie*, 1984), the late 1960s marked a historical rupture. Until then, architecture's relationship with power relied heavily on intellectual speculation—a discourse dominated by theory, history, and cultural dialogue. The events of 1968, however, exposed a growing disconnect between a profession steeped in theoretical inquiry and a broader intelligentsia. This intellectual groundwork—fueled by critical reflection and scholarly exchange—was the foundation upon which the architecture-power relationship rested during that period.

In conclusion, two possible paths emerge. On one hand, this image could simply be capturing a moment of a fleeting trend—a reflection of architecture’s failure to engage with politics, indicating an abandonment of the pursuit of meaningful forms. The rise of social media and modern communication, which emphasize images over words, may have led to the spread of simple, colorful, and visually appealing architecture that lacks deeper engagement. On the other hand, this phenomenon could mark a transitional phase, one that recalibrates the balance between architecture and politics, as well as the discipline’s own internal dynamics. The first scenario aligns with the deadlock of political horizontalism. While mass demonstrations signal a renewed interest in radical politics—potentially offering an alternative to neoliberal globalization—the same challenges persist, echoing those faced by protest movements since 2011. In *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal*, Brazilian philosopher Rodrigo Nunes critically examines the limitations of these movements, highlighting their inconsistency, irregularity, and, most importantly, their inability to sustain themselves over time. Having witnessed both the unfulfilled promises of the Russian Revolution and the gradual dissipation of the 1968 protests, the political left appears trapped in a cycle of nostalgia, mourning the betrayed ideals of early 20th-century communism. This has resulted in a state of paralysis, impasse, and self-doubt. Compounding this stagnation, the shifting political landscapes in the UK, US, Spain, and Greece have led Nunes to observe that “people once believed much more than we do,” prompting him to question whether we are witnessing the decline of horizontalism itself.

Acting with restraint, modesty, and within certain limits can also be a symptom of a moment of self-understanding. According to Chantal Mouffe, architecture—as art—offers society the opportunity to collectively reflect on the imaginary figures that shape its coherence and self-understanding. For Mouffe, artistic and cultural practices create spaces of resistance that disrupt the social imaginary necessary for capitalist reproduction, playing a crucial role in either sustaining or challenging a given symbolic order. For this reason, aesthetic and design practices inherently possess a political dimension. As Mouffe argues, «there is an aesthetic dimension in the political, and there is a political dimension in art».<sup>28</sup>

28 Cf. Mouffe, C., Wagner, E., & Mouffe, C. (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the world politically*. Verso. P. 91.

Within the discourse on political projects, organization takes on the meaning of “grasping the interactivity between the static objects that make up any environment around us.” This perspective offers an alternative way to address the dilemmas surrounding the political autonomy of architecture—design itself becomes a method of interweaving, of actively fostering interdependence. Every architectural intervention offers an affordance, a kind of potentiality—both psychic and physical—that interacts with others and suggests possibilities for action. However, as Carl Schmitt observed, every relationship—whether religious, economic, or political—becomes a site of antagonism.

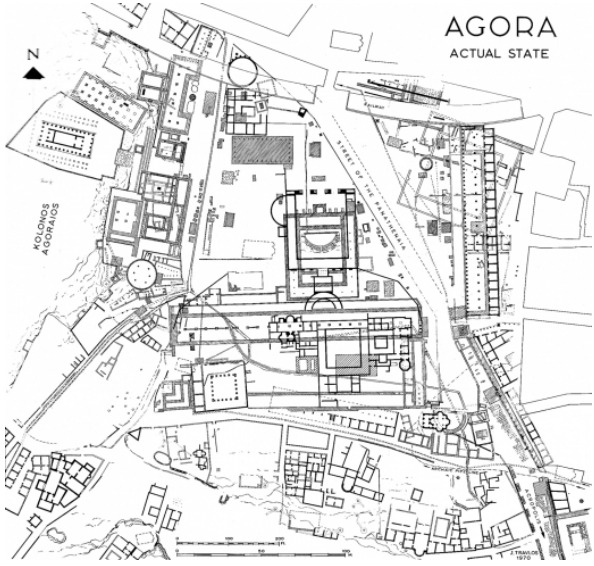
At this point, a shift in perspective is necessary: antagonism must be seen in a positive light. Following Kant’s principle that two opposing terms are not necessarily contradictory, we can understand that a point on which two equal and opposite forces act remains stationary without negating the existence of movement. Antagonism, then, can be visualized as a network of diverse and sometimes conflicting vector forces that collide and balance each other. In this view, rivals are not enemies but adversaries who exist within a framework of conflicting consensus.

From this perspective, the antagonism inherent in architectural activism—what we might call protest architecture—is not merely a reactionary form of contestation but a space of possibility. Opposition is not just negation; it is definition. Protest architecture, in this sense, challenges traditional conceptions of the public sphere as theorized by Habermas, Rousseau, and many modern philosophers. Ultimately, it proposes the construction of publicness through dissent.

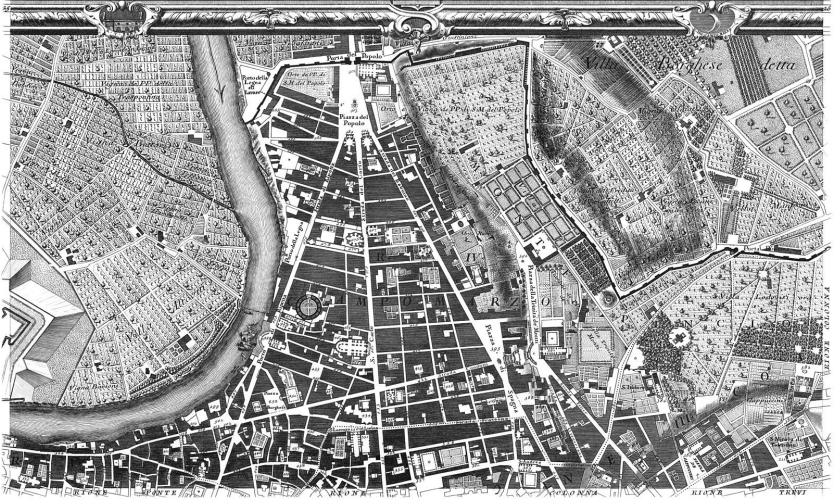
What becomes clear from this initial section is a depiction of architecture set within a tension-filled landscape: caught between the street and the institution, between tradition and activism, and between the intellectual heritage of the twentieth century and the urgent yet ambiguous practices of today. Protest has revitalized the political dimension of space and rekindled questions about architecture’s role—issues that had previously been confined to theoretical discussions. Institutions have also evolved, adopting innovative curatorial approaches and supporting practices that might otherwise struggle to survive in the market alone. At the same time, the rise of collectives and temporary initiatives shows that architecture can serve both symbolic and material purposes, providing tools for dissent and platforms for alternative lifestyles.

In this context, the idea of the “activist-architect” seems to replace that of the “engagé intellectual”. Whether this reflects a passing trend or a true change in the discipline remains an open question, but it is clear that the relationship between architecture and power is being redefined in new ways.

The upcoming chapters will aim to refine this perspective. First, by providing a vocabulary of concepts and definitions that establish the core framework for this study. Second, by examining how art (as graphic design) have historically intertwined with activism, creating precedents and setting the stage for architecture’s own emerging activist practices.



Agora of Athens, current state.



New topography of Rome by Gian Battista Nolli, 1748, detail of the Piazza del Popolo area from which the famous “trident” radiates, consisting of the streets of Ripetta, Corso, and Babuino.



Title page of *Leviathan or The Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*, an essay by Thomas Hobbes, first published in 1651.



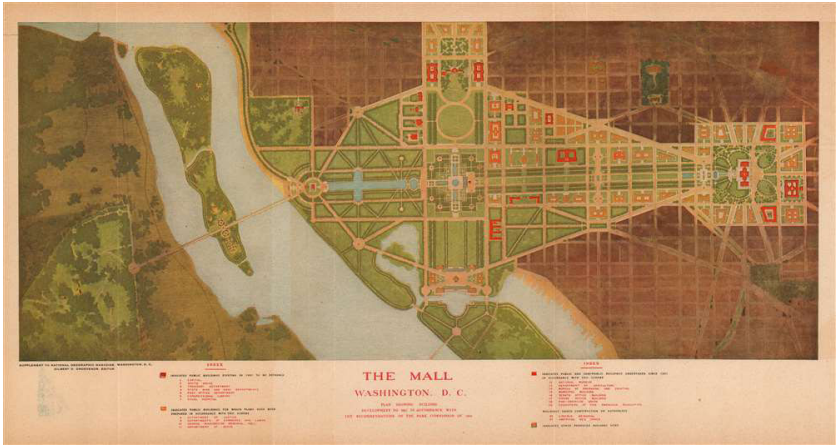
Detail from the title page of *Leviathan or The Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil*, an essay by Thomas Hobbes, first published in 1651.



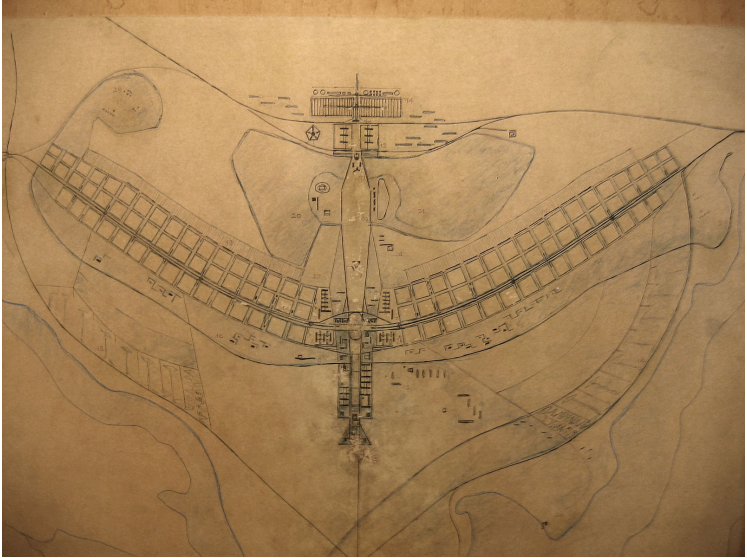
Anonymous, 1934. XII, political poster, Italy 1934.



Detail from *Allegory and Effects of Good and Bad Government*, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1338-1339, Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, Hall of the Council of Nine or Hall of Peace.



Detailed plan for the redevelopment of the National Mall and surrounding area, 1915.



One of Lúcio Costa's first designs for Brasília, 1957.



The crowd gathered in front of the Washington Monument during the 1963 civil rights march. The number of people who gathered on August 28, 1963 varies depending on the source, but estimates range between 200,000 and 300,000 demonstrators.



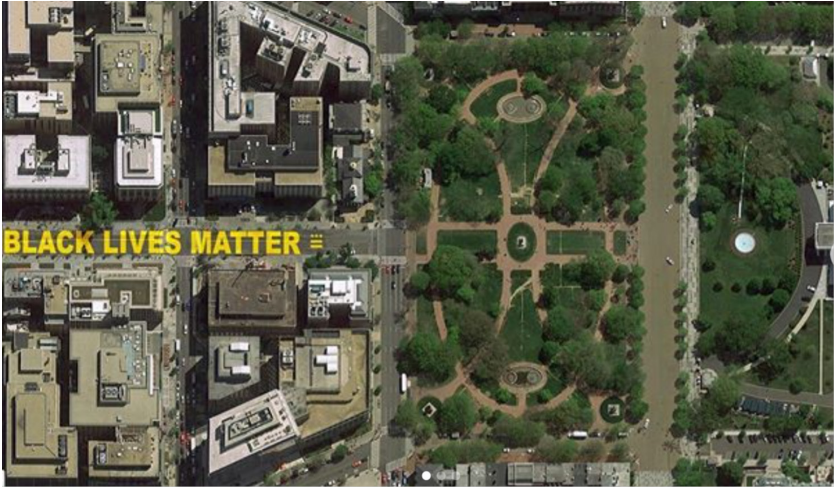
Protest on Capitol Hill, Washington, January 2021.



Protests by Bolsonaro supporters, Brasilia, January 2023.



Protests by the Gilet Jaunes on the Champs Élysées in Paris, 2020.



16th Street, heading towards the White House, Washington, D.C., Washington (USA), June 5, 2020.



Nasca Lines, Peru: Aerial view of one of the geoglyphs carved into the desert plateau, created by the Nasca culture between 200 BCE and 600 CE.



Extinction Rebellion's 'Come to the Table' protest: A 4-meter-high pink table erected in Covent Garden, London, on August 23, 2021, to demand urgent climate action and the establishment of citizens' assemblies.



A seminal moment in postwar British avant-garde culture: Peter Smithson, Eduardo Paolozzi, Alison Smithson, and photographer Nigel Henderson (left to right) in front of their collaborative installation at the 'This is Tomorrow' exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, London, August 1956. Organized by the Independent Group and curated by Theo Crosby, the exhibition aimed to demonstrate that artists and architects could work together harmoniously, challenging the notion that such collaboration was a thing of the past.



# *Architectural Lexicons in Flux: A Glossary of Protest*

## **Abstract**

*Chapter two introduces a glossary of twenty-four terms and word pairs that explore the cultural, political, and disciplinary contexts shaping protest architecture. Many of these terms originate from fields such as philosophy, politics, sociology, and activism, but gain new significance when applied to spatial practices. By pairing words, the glossary highlights the role of comparison, tension, and contrast in defining meaning. The glossary reveals three interconnected dynamics: the flow of words across disciplines, which reshapes their meanings in relation to architecture; the growth of architectural vocabulary through layered interpretations of existing terms; and the incorporation of new concepts that reflect emerging practices. The glossary serves not just as a reference but as a critical and creative tool that reworks language to both reflect on architecture and open new avenues for design and collective imagination.*

## Architectural Lexicons in Flux: A Glossary of Protest

This chapter takes the form of a glossary, composed of twenty-four entries—single terms or pairs of words—that outline the cultural and disciplinary background from which protest architecture emerges. The use of word pairs highlights the importance of comparison: placing terms side by side, even in opposition, helps to clarify their meaning.

The glossary illustrates three main dynamics: 1. Words circulate and shift in meaning when related to architecture, or architecture itself borrows terms from other fields; 2. Architectural vocabulary expands as existing words take on broader or layered interpretations; 3. New words enter the discourse, reflecting emerging practices and perspectives.

The glossary was conceived with the idea that new vocabularies do not simply describe architecture, but actively open the way to new design projects. Terms:

AUTHORITY / AUTHORSHIP  
AUTONOMY / POWER  
CAPITALISM / COOPERATIVISM  
COLLECTIVE BODY  
COMMITMENT  
COMMON / IMMUNE  
COMMUNITY  
COUNTERPROJECT  
DECOLONIZATION / EDUCATION  
DISORDER / IDEOLOGY  
ECOLOGY  
ENTERTEINEMENT / CAPITALISM  
EPHEMERAL  
FEMINISM / GENDER  
HORIZONTAL / HIERARCHICAL  
MICRO/MACRO-POLITICS  
NEGOTIATION  
PARTICIPATION / DIY (DO IT YOURSELF)  
PLATFORM  
PROTEST / INSURRECTION  
PUBLIC SPACE  
(DESIGNED) SELF-BUILDING  
SQUATTERS / COUNTERCULTURE  
VIOLENCE

Colin Ward argues that authority may manifest in three distinct ways: one may exist within a body of authorities, embody authority oneself, or exercise authority. The first form derives from an individual's position within a hierarchical structure, the second from a specialized competence, and the third from a particular kind of wisdom. Yet knowledge and wisdom are not allocated according to hierarchical rank, nor can they be exclusively possessed by a single individual in any given context.<sup>1</sup> For this research, it is essential to understand how collective architectural practices utilize authority: without any kind of hierarchy and recognizing individual capacities, without allowing them to establish supremacy. It's also important to comprehend the relation between the 'lack of authority' and the use of authorship. There is no single author; instead, it's challenging to understand the person responsible for a specific project. This is done to support the idea of the group and horizontality, and to distance itself from the modern and postmodern concept of the author as a genius architect.

The political scientist Cornelius Castoriadis, reflecting on autonomy, asks himself if one can say that he establishes his own law when he necessarily lives under the law of society.<sup>2</sup> This is the question that Cornelius Castoriadis asks himself to reflect on autonomy. For the Greek philosopher, social critic, and economist, autonomy was the key to reading reality, society, and even the history of the world. In the era of globalization, following Machiavellian power, Illuminism, and totalitarian powers, according to the author, there are only two options for understanding power: the subject's autonomy or the superiority of rational thinking. The latter, inside the wheels of capitalism, promises total individual freedom, yet inevitably involves the identity-inclusive logic of capital. For Castoriadis, the clash of these two options led to a retreat into conformity. From the point of view of architecture, one wonders whether architecture has ever been autonomous and how much it adheres to the needs—and related rules—of power. The connection between architecture and power is profound, and although the relationship between power

1 Cf. Ward, C. (2019). *Anarchia come organizzazione*. Elèuthera.

2 Cf. Castoriadis, C. (2022). *La rivoluzione democratica*. Elèuthera.

and architects is no longer as straightforward as it was, for example, with Albert Speer and Adolf Hitler, even today, the exact mechanisms at work shape and reshape metropolises.

Dejan Sudjic cites the contemporary example of the China Television skyscraper, designed by Rem Koolhaas, as a way of approaching the future masters of the world.<sup>3</sup> Power, now, is harder to identify. In the field of architecture, entertainment could be the power that commands and compels forms for lazy and overstimulated minds. Being autonomous, on the other hand, means freeing oneself from dependence on power and taking responsibility for one's own actions and projects. The no-global protests in Seattle, Genoa, and London in the late 2000s highlighted dependence on capital. This urgency has also affected architecture, and now, in fact, there is a different sensibility to the power of capital, from which one inevitably wants to detach but at the same time has to take it into account. From this, self-built architecture and other forms of ethical architecture, utilizing simple materials and forms, seek to emancipate themselves from the power of capital. The answer of Castoriadis, in fact, was that yes, one can establish his own

3 Cf. Sudjic, D. (2012). *Architettura e potere. Come i ricchi e i potenti hanno dato forma al mondo*. Laterza.

law in only one case: if he can say, reflectively and lucidly, that this law is also his own».<sup>4</sup>

## CAPITALISM / COOPERATIVISM

When Margaret Thatcher, the prime minister of the United Kingdom, said 'There is no alternative'<sup>5</sup>, loudly asserting that the neoliberal economic system was the only practical option that the country had. Not only did England live in that situation, but so did many other countries. The escalation of capitalism has led to a complete addiction to its rules, to the point that «it's easier to imagine the end of the world, instead of the end of capitalism».<sup>6</sup> This system – that is not only economical, but also social and cultural – seemed infinite, but the crisis that it has been living has to be read as 'the triumph of the crisis' capitalism, instead of the collapse of it.

4 See note 2.

5 his phrase was famously used by Margaret Thatcher in the context of promoting her economic policies of privatization and market liberalization during her tenure as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, particularly in the 1980s. It reflects her belief that neoliberal economic reforms were the only viable path for the country's economic development

6 Quote attributed to Slavoj Žižek or Fredric Jameson and reproduced in Fisher, M. (2018). *Realismo capitalista*. NERO.

People are asked to work more for less money, and creatives are expected to be more innovative, yet with fewer social welfare benefits. In 1970, Manfredo Tafuri, an Italian intellectual/architect, in the magazine *Contropiano*, wrote: «We are in the presence of a constant increase in the alienation of the intellectual from the content of his own work, which is realized all the more concretely the more the latter is characterized exactly as “work”: more exactly, indeed, as wage labour»<sup>7</sup>. From those years, the commodification of architecture has increasingly developed to such an extent that architects can mainly choose between being technicians or architects; the rest is not valuable.

Nevertheless, in the last quarter century, something has changed, and it all started with disobedience. Architects began to find a way to escape from the production-consumption cycle, positioning themselves against the dogma of profit, against the infinite growth in a finite country,<sup>8</sup> through the awareness – as Reich and Foucault highlighted – that the collective imagination itself has been colonized, through the conditioning to inter-

nalize the pleasure of obedience, so that obeying becomes nothing more than obeying to oneself. People in general are experimenting with ways to escape from state and societal control. For example, many people are now using white masks in their daily lives to avoid facial recognition, as big data, cookies, and biometric identification are perceived as a violation of their privacy. In architecture, the need to fully assert one's individual right to choose and decide for oneself led, firstly, to the union of architects, secondly, to a clash against the orders of architects themselves, such as the *Ordine degli architetti* in Italy,<sup>9</sup> and, as a third point, led to new structures of architectural firms. Studios are increasingly taking the form of collectives, associations, and cooperatives, which are autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their everyday economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. The relevant fact is that aesthetics and function in projects are not the only essential things to consider, but

7 Tafuri, M. (1970). Lavoro intellettuale e sviluppo capitalistico. *Contropiano*, 2, 241–281.

8 Cf. Comitato Invisibile. (2019). *L'insurrezione che viene: Ai nostri amici: Adesso*. Nero.

9 *Riordine degli Architetti* is an informal, anonymous collective of architects in Italy who aim to expose exploitative labor practices within the profession, particularly the widespread use of freelance contracts (*partita IVA*) for work that functions as regular employment.

how architects work together also becomes important.

### COLLECTIVE BODY

This word represents a new subject in architecture. The twentieth century controlled individual bodies to exercise power, as Foucault explained<sup>10</sup>. For the French philosopher, discipline organized an analytical space, a space that capitalized time, against the waste of time, that pursued virtues such as speed, efficiency, repetition, and regularity. Discipline wanted to control, order, and dominate, and space was one of the devices of control. It was, first and foremost, an instrumental manipulation of the bodies of individuals, who underwent perpetual characterization as a consequence of the continual measurement of deviations and levels. The individual body becomes an element that can be placed, moved, articulated over others; the body assumes importance no longer for its value or strength but for 'the place it occupies, the interval it covers, the regularity, the good order according to which it operates its movements. In the disciplinary society of which Foucault speaks, each individual is enmeshed within a precise physical space. Power is

10 Cf. Foucault, M. (1975). *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*. Gallimard.

spatialized; it is never abstract, it is always exercised here and now, within precise physical spaces. Disciplinary society functions through the fundamental paradigms of the family, the factory, the school, the barracks, and the prison, and thus also through their respective circumscribed and internalized spaces. Deleuze shows how these institutions came into crisis and thus their respective places of action. Out of this crisis came the 'society of control'<sup>11</sup>, characterized by continuous variations and determining the places of control, all of which are defined as overlapping and never ending in themselves. The twenty-first century, instead, when technology transforms the identity and agency of bodies, faces the negation of bodies through digitalization. The posthuman perspective de-emphasizes the centrality of the human body and identity, instead emphasizing information, systems, and hybrid-

11 The concept of the 'society of control' was introduced by Gilles Deleuze in his 1992 essay *Postscript on the Societies of Control* (published in *October*, no. 59), in which he describes the transition from disciplinary societies—structured around enclosed institutions such as schools, hospitals, and factories—to flexible, continuous forms of social control operating through modulation and pervasive monitoring.

ty<sup>12</sup>. It evolved into the concept of the cyborg, a hybrid entity—part human, part machine—that challenges traditional boundaries, as introduced by Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto,” an essay in *The Socialist Review*.<sup>13</sup> What we face now is the discovery of the collective body, a way of belonging together in a new way, and one that defines itself through collective action. This concept builds upon the basic communist idea that a body alone is poor, but a collective body is revolutionary. The collective body in architecture is first the association of architects that work together without hierarchy; secondly, it indicates communities that are becoming perfect clients for these kinds of collective practices, as a fertile, usually preexisting layer, in part or in whole, on which to work. Of course, one has to keep in mind that we are increasingly talking about institutionalizing bodies and accepting diverse, LGBT, and self-defining bodies.

12 Cf. Hayles, N. K. (1999). How we became posthuman: *Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. University of Chicago Press.

13 Haraway, D. (1985). *A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century*. *Socialist Review*, 80, 65–108.

## COMMITMENT

Indifference and fickleness or adherence and awe: the relationship between architecture and politics can be articulated in different facets. The distances, tangencies, intersections, and parallels between the two paths influence the practices and designs of the architectural discipline, consciously or unconsciously. «Vigilance and firmness», on the other hand, are the words used by Noberto Bobbio to describe the intellectual’s conduct concerning political events<sup>14</sup>. In 1955, he published a book entitled ‘Politics and Culture’ in which he clarifies and discusses the responsibilities and obligations in political terms of culture. He places politicized culture and apolitical culture at the two extremes, immediately announcing how both contain the same insidiousness: “that culture loses its function as the spiritual guide of society at a given historical moment, that is, the function that is its very *raison d’être*”. In the first case - politicized culture - in which architecture can be read as a cultural element, culture would assume a position of subjection to an initial political purpose, becoming nothing more than a tool; in the second - apolitical culture - on the other hand,

14 Cf. Bobbio, N., & Sbarberi, F. (2005). *Politica e cultura*. Einaudi.

it would position itself away from the social sphere, losing its communicative capacity and conforming increasingly unproductively. The author makes it clear that the man of culture must place himself in the fertile discussion between the two enunciated poles, always remembering that, in doing so, however, he should not hinder the development of culture itself. After World War II, Italy found itself precisely between these two poles, defining its refoundation. The Belpaese finds itself reconstructing its territory, its political system, and its nation, and it was precisely in those years that the debate on the labile and delicate link between culture and sociopolitical reality widened its audience and its reasons, to the point of building the Italian movements and successes of the 1960s and 1970s. In architecture, we could say that professionals' interest in political militancy and their approach to social demands constituted a relationship and a theory of the project that over time have been recognized inside and outside Italian borders and to which it makes sense to return to today to analyze not only the boundaries and rules of the architectural project, but above all its encroachments, its overrides, its denials, and the evolutions of its attitude of protest. The Sixties are a pivotal moment to understand political commitment in architecture, and comparing

that era with the first quarter of the new century highlights a significant shift in perspective. After a moment of enthusiasm, a slow but inexhaustible disinterest in political life has begun since the 1980s. The last decades of the 20th century demonstrate the inadequacy of traditional forms of politics, but the economically favourable environment makes citizens passive recipients of a political process. Even architects in those years seemed to surrender to convenience, and postmodern architecture was thus self-centered, wasteful, and unaware of political demands. Remarkable images replaced architecture critics. Instead, the new century and the growing disillusionment with a collapsing economic system reflect a new attitude. People no longer adhere to a particular party; instead, they become spokespeople for new urgencies in a cosmopolitan worldview. Climate change, the fight against patriarchy, battles for black people's rights, decolonization, and so on, became the political themes to cross, both for individual and moral working behaviour, at a time when the way of working and affiliating is getting important, beyond the products to deliver, both for architectural projects. In summary, the lack of commitment is balanced by an improvement in young mobilization.

## COMMON / IMMUNE

Roberto Esposito discusses immunity, exploring its connection to the commons and questioning whether there is a genuine conflict between the right to life and the right to liberty.<sup>15</sup> What stands out is the crisis of a system rooted in the complexity of the relationship between the public and private sectors. Commons were once considered common goods, such as forests, rivers, lakes, the atmosphere, and others, always shared, used, and enjoyed by people freely. This list is now growing longer and changing in meaning. Efforts are being made to broaden the inclusive set of what is considered a common right. In this wake, there has been increasing talk of familiar as opposed to public. The commons have, in fact, something to do with difference, rather than commonality. It involves caring and taking responsibility. Communiting is the active practice of organizing, maintaining, and distributing the common good. So, there's the presence of a community. Since 2015, numerous community gardens and public spaces have emerged in European cities to fill the voids, often linked to protests for improved services. One example is Campo de Ceba-

da in Madrid. Built on the site of a former sports facility demolished in 2010, this public space emerged from a collaborative partnership between local residents, architects, and the Madrid City Council. Sparked by a grassroots initiative from the surrounding community, the space thrived under shared management, hosting a diverse array of activities and events organized by various public and private organizations. Despite its success in promoting inclusivity, the site was closed in late 2017 to accommodate the construction of a new development. Reflecting on the rise of the concept of common as we conceive it now is helpful to understand how architects have evolved in designing these space typologies.

## COMMUNITY

From Latin 'COMMUNITAS' and 'COMMUNIS', it refers to what is familiar to many or all, what is shared. From an ecological perspective, it refers to the set of organisms that share the same geographically restricted ecosystem. This shows a bound and a common identity. The term is now used in architecture to describe both the group of stakeholders that can give rise to an architectural project centered on people. Precisely for this effort, communities became very important for projects, both a way of being/working among groups

15 Cf. Esposito, R. (2022). *Immunità comune: Biopolitica all'epoca della pandemia*. Giulio Einaudi editore.

of architects, whether they are collectives, cooperatives, or offices. The term ‘network’ is used in parallel, even if it comes from technical disciplines – like informatics- or from media communication – like television. It primarily indicates the breadth of communication, although it is more superficial and less shared. In fact, the word “community” is distinct and is used more often because it indicates a value-sharing collectivity in which individuals interface directly, without the need for bureaucratic mediation, precisely because they are highly integrated due to their shared values. Participation in a community is voluntary, and one can opt out at any time, as it is a system based on trust. These are often alternative micro-societies. Lately, architectural practices have been working extensively on the concept of community, even if they exceed the boundaries of their discipline. For example, there are many community lunch/dinner projects, such as the tables of The Decorators in London or those of Constructlab in Berlin.

### *COUNTERPROJECT*

Between the 1960s and the 1970s in Italy, groups of young architects began to propose projects that radically challenged the status quo of architecture. On the occasion of the exhibition at the MoMA Museum of New York, they were

called ‘Radical’ by the Italian critic Emilio Ambasz<sup>16</sup>. Archizoom, Superstudio, U.F.O., Gianni Pettena, Gruppo Strum, and others developed spatial responses to the crisis of the system, exploring the extreme consequences of the capitalistic system. They were questioning and creating awareness about all the ‘68 important themes, even if they designed utopian projects that were not to be built. Now there’s a kind of emergence to produce material answers to the questions that counterculture puts on the table, like that group of architects did, but with the difference that “paper projects” are not accepted anymore. There’s a need to gain genuine responses, even if they are smaller and simpler.

### *DECOLONIZATION / EDUCATION*

The idea of decolonization has pervaded architectural culture, in fact, there are more and more exhibitions – like the Leslie Lokko Venice Biennale of 2023, or her lecture at the World Architectural Festival held in Amsterdam in 2018 -, symposiums – like the one at RIBA called ‘Decolonising Architecture Symposium: Reimagining spaces and histories’ – and university courses – the DAAS:

16 Cf. Ambasz, E. (Ed.). (1972). *Italy: The new domestic landscape* [Exhibition catalog]. MoMA; Centro Di.

Decolonizing Architecture Art Studies, an advanced research educational program, or the Decolonizing Architecture Advanced Studies. Decolonization in architecture primarily refers to the examination of colonial architecture, its consequences, and its subsequent reuse. But in-depth, the significance is much wider. First, as all the events surrounding it attest, it deals with education and, specifically, with the deconstruction of the official narrative that architecture has always served. For centuries, architecture has overlooked local history and tradition in favor of a Eurocentric perspective. Modernism considered local forms of architecture/art/culture as underdeveloped; for example, Adolf Loos, in 'Ornament and Crime' (1908), spoke about tribal body art as something undignified. Awareness of the colonial past in world history and the questioning of the legacy of modernism have led to a need to reconstruct an identity, utilizing collective memory, local history, and culture. Also at Floating University<sup>17</sup> in Berlin, a public institution that hosts various cultural activities, a course was

offered on the reinterpretation of the Bauhaus. Thus, decolonization is a shift in perspective, a rejection of a hierarchical system of critique, and a rediscovery of a previously buried history. It is not only reflected in the use of certain materials and techniques, but also in the pursuit of a connection with the Earth and nature, as well as the decolonization of architectural thought and practices, while remaining aware that colonialism and propaganda persist to this day. The pro-Palestinian protests that occurred at architecture universities in 2024, starting at Columbia University, demonstrate that architecture universities have a role beyond material practices, but that thought and narrative are still at the heart of the architecture business. Another relevant example is the Black Lives Matter movement, which in 2020 started to deface and remove colonial statues. The guerrilla action led to the removal of hundreds of symbolic statues, plaques, buildings, and public parks dedicated to Confederate generals and politicians in the United States. Once again, the protests show the direction for architects' reflections on the aesthetic meaning of colonialism and how it should be utilized and designed.

17 The name of the university now always appears with a line above it and is not read, since the project has been banned by the government because it is not possible to use the term university without complying with specific and strict rules.

## DISORDER / IDEOLOGY

In 1970, Richard Sennett published *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City*, and it soon became a significant essay on the dangers inherent in the rationality through which modern metropolises have been built and governed.<sup>18</sup> At the time he wrote, he was a student at Harvard, and he was taught to have complete faith in the rationality of Modern architecture. The modernist current emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a response to rapid industrialization, new materials, and the desire to break away from traditional architectural styles, and has had an essential role in shaping cities all over the world. Its lack of sensitivity to local tradition, its imposition of minimalism – as exemplified by the famous statement ‘less is more’-and its concept of the house as a machine for living led Sennett to read its forced order as a type of control. In the 1970s, he was a witness to the long season of student protests at universities, which questioned the established truths. In the book, the American sociologist examines urban dynamics shaped by the real estate industry, the anti-democratic use of space, privatization, and formal strate-

gies to control and exclude, defining these as obvious symptoms of a rigid and predetermined design that stifles the modern city and represses people’s freedom of action. For Sennett, the city is both a *ville* and a *cit *. The former term refers to the physical form, and the latter to the way of inhabiting and experiencing urban space. The two elements are closely related and influence each other. In his career, he analysed how modern architecture – as Le Corbusier’s plan Voisin or the more recent Hudson Yard in New York – negatively affects people’s lives, and he looked for spontaneous examples that use cities freely, to show how ‘disruptions’ can counteract hyper-determination, both formal and social. Thus, for the author, the disorder is the goal to which architects must aspire while designing, abandoning the ideology of modern architecture. This concept is close to Jane Jacobs’s theory of the ‘open city’. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), Jacobs advocates for the development of innovative urban expansions and adaptations, such as locating a hospital for HIV patients in the center of a shopping street.<sup>19</sup> Thus, for Jacobs, an ‘open city’ is a place characterized by diversity, inclusiveness,

18 Cf. Sennett, R. (2021). *The uses of disorder: Personal identity and city life*. Verso.

19 Cf. Jacobs, J. (1994). *The death and life of great American cities* (Repr.). Penguin.

and urban vitality, where people can freely interact, innovate, and contribute to social and economic growth. Although Sennett admires Jacobs' strategy, he sees in it a somewhat overly romantic revival of neighbourhood life of the past, and he denounces its impossibility in the contemporary city. The sociologist asserts that, as John Locke stated, democracy can be anywhere, not just in the size of the neighbourhood or village. However, the perception of democracy in recent times is much closer to Thomas Jefferson's position, which argues that democracy is possible only in reduced fields. In *Designing Disorder. Experiment and Disruption in the City*<sup>20</sup>, he provides examples of designed disorder, such as the one on the Westway in North Kensington, London. The Westway was a 2.5-mile elevated motorway constructed in the late 1960s as part of a broader initiative to modernize London's transportation infrastructure. It cuts through North Kensington, a historically working-class and ethnically diverse area. To build it, the municipality started demolishing a massive part of the houses, so citizens decided to protest and organize themselves, and established a political party called 'Homes Before Roads'. The party was

able to block the entire motorway project.

Nevertheless, one part was already under construction, but its construction site soon became a playground for children and was occupied by various activities by the residents of the neighbourhood. The formation of the North Kensington Playspace Group led to the reclaiming of those spaces, which were eventually granted to the people. In the book, he also presents his proposal to design disorder throughout a discipline that is usually seen as a tool for order. He defines the system necessary to design disorder as a sum of components to which one does not attribute a specific function, but rather functional capabilities, which are different possibilities of co-functioning dependent on interaction with other elements.

## *ECOLOGY*

The term ecology is included here because it is essential to establish both the principle of sustainability in design and the recognition of the interaction between the natural system and the social, cultural, and political systems. Contemporary practices do not specialize solely in sustainability because it has become a cross-cutting and embedded principle.

20 Sendra, P., Sennett, R., & Hollis, L. (2020). *Designing disorder: Experiments and disruptions in the city*. Verso.

## ENTERTEINEMENT / CAPITALISM

From Guy Debord's 1967 book, the notion of the society of the spectacle has become famous, and its statement has found confirmation in the society of the 2000s.<sup>21</sup> The social organization characterized by the dominance of images and representations over real experiences, which the French intellectual discussed, is evident on the web and in the spread of social media, its most tragic manifestation. The society of the spectacle is linked to advanced capitalism, in which social life is mediated through the consumption of spectacles, images, and commodities. Contrary to the expectations of the 1960s, capitalism has not led to ever-increasing wealth; on the contrary, it has brought about significant economic crises - such as the Great Recession of 2008, which was one of the worst global financial crises since the Great Depression of 1929 and originated in the United States due to the bursting of the housing bubble and the subprime mortgage crisis. Entertainment and capitalism thus became two fundamental dimensions for describing the contemporary architectural system. Entertainment seems to be the

21 Debord, G., & Debord, G. (2006). *The society of spectacle* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trad.). Zone Books.

only model, even if it creates alienation and everything, and one's own image becomes merchandise. Images and representation are among the most important things, and they are part of this wave of values that projects like the Saudi city of Neom - a pentagon in the sea, which includes an island resort and ski facilities - are born. Therefore, in this unstable system, the representation - both of architecture and of the self - assumes a central position. Self-management and the creation of authentic relationships, however, are increasingly present as forms of resistance to capitalist drift, especially in architectural practices, and that is what this research aims to investigate.

## EPHEMERAL

According to Vitruvius, the three parameters to judge architecture are: *firmitas* - the solidity, *venustas* - the beauty, and *utilitas* - the utility. The first parameter is the one that has been challenged over the centuries and has found a new meaning with the development of society, and it is now at the centre of the architectural discourse. Nevertheless, ephemeral architecture has a long-standing tradition, and it is often used to commemorate religious or civil celebrations. The city of Venice is, for example, a witness of majestic ephemeral architectures, made up of proces-

sions – like the colonnade in San Marco square for the corpus domini of 1610 –, benedictions – like the wooden façade built for Pio VI in 1782 –, for welcoming kings and important political figures – in 1782 San Marco square was filled with a structure of pillars, arches and curtains for the Grand Duke of Russia –, for markets and fairs, and, of course, for the Venetian carnival. Pulpits and ambos were built for the carnival to play games and host shows. Even today, we can observe the legacies of this tradition in the annual Feast of the Redentore, which has been celebrated since 1577 with the construction of a votive bridge made of boats joining the Zattere to the island of Giudecca, where a church was built to commemorate the plague epidemic of 1575-1577. While architecture seeks permanence in the sign, in the construction of buildings made of stone and marble that can last for eternity, such as monuments from the classical to the modern age, it has always sought permanence in the idea. The latter is the case of ephemeral architecture, which transcends the concept of time and is defined by its connection to everyday life and by a different language, characterized by a singular expressive matrix. In fact, ephemeral architecture is much more enterprising and dynamic. It can be seen in the case of the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der

Rohe, designed for a temporary fair in 1929, which, for its success, remains in the city. Of course, ephemeral architecture deals with the *modus vivendi* of consumerism. For this, Marc Augé stated that modern architecture does not seek eternity, but focuses on the present — a present that is, nonetheless, unparalleled.<sup>22</sup> For festivals – think about Coachella in the U. S. desert –, for expos, for biennials, for galleries. Moreover, architecture now takes new forms that can only be conceived because of their temporary character. That is similar to the experience of a protest. The freedom and the possibility lived during protests relate to ephemeral architecture and the rise in recent years of self-built projects, involving the existing community, raising awareness about a specific issue rather than solving it, is not a coincidence; rather, it reflects new categories, like the one formulated by Bernard Tschumi: space, event, movement.<sup>23</sup>

### *FEMINISM / GENDER*

Feminism in architecture initially consisted mainly of the recognition of female architects of modernism: many names were rescued,

22 Cf. Augé, M. (2003). *Le temps en ruines*. Galilée.

23 Cf. Tschumi, B. (1999). *Architecture and disjunction* (Paperback ed., 5. print). MIT Press.

male architects' roles were diminished in favor of their wives, and gender discrimination was fought in architecture offices. Eileen Gray, Charlotte Perriand, Marion Mahony Griffin, Lilly Reich, Jane Drew, Lina Bo Bardi, Anne Tyng, Norma Merrick Sklarek, and Denise Scott Brown were among the forgotten architects who have benefited from the feminist rediscovery. In 1990, Jennifer Bloomer, an American architect and critic, drew parallels between the controlled and clean creation of a building and the chaos of childbirth to explore the gender of creativity. Her intuition has catalyzed the fourth wave of feminism, in which architects have been working to make the diverse approaches of female design more visible and accessible. Many feminist collectives – such as MUF, FAT, Fluid, ArchiteXX, FATALE, MYCKET, and Parlour – worked to state that the feminine can be a radical element in architecture. In 2007, Doina Petrescu, a member of the Parisian collective Atelier d'architecture autogérée (aaa), published 'Altering Practices' focusing on alteration, like the one that feminism can give. Nowadays, women are key actors in architecture, specifically in the case studies that this research focuses on, alongside men, without highlighting the importance of their gender. Sometimes, a gender perspective takes the form of lists and numbers to testi-

fy to the presence of pink quotas. Still, beyond these episodes, it is becoming much more critical and evolving into post-structuralist feminism, as Donna Haraway states. The aim, also for architecture, is to move beyond dualism, such as nature/culture, human/animal, male/female, mind/body, subject/object, and to begin thinking in terms of relationships, continuums, and networks.

### *HORIZONTAL / HIERARCHICAL*

Rodrigo Nunes, a Brazilian philosopher, in *Neither Vertical Nor Horizontal. A Theory of Political Organisation*<sup>24</sup> examines recent protest movements, explicitly addressing the horizontalism they have brought. Precisely, the book is a response to the social movements that characterized 2011, a year that remains a vivid memory of the insurrectional force. The author proposes a view whereby the 2011 protests are the 1989 counterpart to the 1960s protests. The destruction of the Berlin Wall highlighted the impossibility of enduring the contemporary situation, just as 2011 was an extended response to the 2007 economic and political crisis. That was the year of the Arab Spring in the

24 Cf. Nunes, R. G. (2021). *Neither Vertical Nor Horizontal: A theory of organization*. Verso Books.

Middle East and North Africa, as well as the Occupy movement in the United States and some European countries. Horizontalism is also a term that has been used in architecture for a long time to describe projects that prioritize horizontal volumes over vertical ones. However, in recent decades, it has assumed a completely different meaning. Approximately starting from 2010, it mainly describes the position that architects assume regarding clients, places, disciplines, and internal structures. Being horizontal means that there is no hierarchy between architects within the same studio, which leads to new forms and structures of professional offices. There are now numerous cooperatives, collectives, and associations of architects, where there is no single leader figure, but decisions are made collectively. The collective body is much more critical than individuality. Secondly, horizontalism refers to the participation process with 'clients', even if these kinds of practices usually deal with specific communities or public groups of users, rather than a singular person. Architects, in relation to others, position themselves on the side of non-architects. The pyramid of hierarchy is erased, actually, architects try to listen to clients' needs and opinions, even if they don't support them. Their work thus demonstrates the various possibilities, highlighting both

advantages and disadvantages. As the third point is essential to note, horizontalism also concerns other disciplines; in fact, interdisciplinarity is evident in the sharing of knowledge and collaboration with different professions.

Although its strengths, Nunes contends that movements are abandoning horizontalism and looking for alternatives to electoral possibilities. This is due to their lack of roots, inconsistency, and inability to sustain themselves. He, therefore, commits to reviewing the facts, forms, and forces that have limited horizontalism. He does so by exploring the theme of organisational trauma, which is interconnected with what is called 'two melancholias'. This term refers to two decisive historical moments in the leftist struggle: the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the student and workers' struggles of 1968. The two moments have been as powerful as their consequences have been disappointing over time. According to the author, the indecipherability of causes and errors led the left to a loss of confidence and to a self-torturing that became totalizing, which contributed even more to the weakening of the concept of revolution. He also tries to understand why people once seemed to believe more. Starting from its earliest deterministic and theological meaning, he examines the shift in perception of revolution and the consequent progres-

sive evasion of the organisational dimension. Revolution was initially linked to the motion of planets and a cyclical interpretation of history. However, the advent of the modern era and a rising conception of the future changed its meaning. In the nineteenth century, people believed they were living on the edge of significant events and had total confidence in the progress of humanity. Nevertheless, the publication of the second law of thermodynamics, which guaranteed the inevitable decay of all forms of energy, along with the events of World War II and fascism, severely influenced revolutionary theory and turned off hopes and energies. Regarding this social observation, this thesis aims to argue whether horizontalism in architecture is effective or if there's a need to evolve it and establish it within a proper system of relations, to understand its strengths and future developments.

### *MICRO/MACRO-POLITICS*

Politics, as an act of individual and social determination, lost its meaning in favor of the pure exercise of dominance. In fact, the last centuries have faced the gradual expropriation by ruling elites of the exercise of politics and its social and collective meaning. Many Western countries are now led by populist and charismatic leaders who support traditional

values without providing the tools for people to analyze society and the world in its contemporary complexity. Today, younger generations are less likely to join conventional political parties. Instead, they are more interested in the big themes of modern society, such as climate change and democracy. It seems that nobody wants to affiliate with a specific program and that the political structure doesn't answer to their needs. That's why populism is spreading all over the world, offering a miserable performance. On the contrary, there's another way of doing politics that positions itself outside the traditional and legal political structure. It is called micro-politics and was born out of the need for autonomy and power in response to macro-politics. French philosophers Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari highlighted the significance of micropolitics in the late 20th century as a form of political influence that shapes individual preferences, attitudes, and perceptions.<sup>25</sup> Unlike macro-politics, which relies on legal authority and institutional frameworks to regulate behaviour, micro-politics operates through the cultivation of dispositions, skills, and capacities that guide

25 Cf. Pisters, P., & Lord, C. M. (A c. Di). (2001). *Micropolitics of media culture: Reading the rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari*. Amsterdam University Press.

behaviour. By influencing desires, beliefs, tendencies, and judgments, micro-politics plays a crucial role in shaping subjectivity and has a profound impact on political processes. Activist groups rely on this approach and are now inspiring architectural practices.

## NEGOTIATION

Architecture itself is a negotiation between *árchei* – origin in Greek - and *técton* – building -, between art and technique, between forms and materials, between architects and stakeholders, between architects and nature or architects and politics, and at least, but relevant, between architecture and the building market. Negotiation is both an exchange and a form of communication. For the discourse that this thesis aims to explore, it is essential to begin with the understanding that every architect negotiates how to project and which program to join. It is necessary to ask oneself whether, nowadays, it's much more critical to decide to design a skyscraper or a cabin, rather than how they are created. Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge that the system that rewards architecture has recently recognized the importance of the architect as a mediator. The last Pritzker Prizes rewarded architects in their role as mediators – such as Lacaton&Vassal or Riken Yamamoto.

## PARTICIPATION / DIY (DO IT YOURSELF)

«When everyone intervenes equally in the management of power, or - perhaps it is clearer this way - when power no longer exists because everyone is directly and equally involved in the decision-making process».<sup>26</sup> This is the participation architecture according to Giancarlo De Carlo, an Italian architect, planner, writer, and educator who strived to join architecture and anarchism. The architecture of participation thus became a means to bring utopian projects to life, involving the inclusion of future users in the design process. That design trend emerged in northern Europe in the second half of the twentieth century as a consequence of the modern movement. From Lucien Kroll to Team X, to which De Carlo was also a member, architects were trying to find alternatives to what was taught as the only approach to architecture. One feature of Modern architecture was to distance users from their own houses; even if the contemporary world has forgotten it, ordinary people were once accustomed to building their own homes. In the 20th and 21st centuries, architects are the pieces

26 In De Carlo, G. (1972). *An architecture of participation*. Royal Australian Institute of Architects Victorian Chapter.

that connect users and their houses, but the role they assume tends to pollute what should be a direct relationship. Often, architects prioritize their own needs over those of the users. They don't provide answers to questions; instead, they pose questions that already have answers. Participating in architecture means that architects organize meetings, workshops, and discussions to understand what people need, but also to present them with possible options, providing a form of education about architecture, as they are experts. Since the sixties, another trend emerged in fashion: the 'do-it-yourself' approach, which involves not only participating in the design process but also building the architecture from scratch. This is something that is becoming increasingly popular, especially for public spaces, where projects are created using simple materials and low-tech techniques, thereby reducing the distance between the project and its users. DIY is a term originating in North America in the 1950s, although its concept has evolved over the years. As the acronym suggests, it refers to the act of performing a task without professional training. It gained fame in the 1970s, partly due to the Whole Earth Catalog, an influential alternative lifestyle periodical. Participation architecture and DIY architecture have some crucial features in com-

mon: there's always the presence of a local community, that had existed before but thanks to the project connect even more; are both user-centred designs; both require interdisciplinary experts; both are much more complex than standards approach; both foster a sense of ownership among stakeholders and empower the community to have a direct impact on their environments. Participation has been used more for complex projects and residential ones, rather than DIY projects – that is, it is much easier to succeed – for ephemeral projects.

### *PLATFORM*

The term 'platform' was introduced in the English language in the mid-16th century. It comes from the French 'plateforme', which means 'ground plan', literally 'flat shape'. It will be used in the research to describe physical and digital spaces to assemble. The 'ground' takes on the meaning of a circumscribed space for meeting, a space that sustains and promotes actions through gathering. The 'plan' indicates a horizontal space where people are equals and where there is no hierarchy. Nowadays, digital platforms are created by online magazines, blogs, social media, forums, websites, and newsletters of museums, publishers, and libraries. Therefore, platforms create architectural projects and theory.

## PROTEST / INSURRECTION

From Latin, the word ‘protest’ is composed of ‘pro’, which means ‘in front’, and ‘testàri’, which means ‘attest’, in the sense of profess/declare. It means publicly declaring one’s will or solemnly expressing one’s right against those who offend it. It is a declaration expressed with firmness and energy; in fact ‘to demonstrate’ in the Italian language can be translated with the verb ‘manifestare’, which comes from ‘MANUS’, that is ‘hand’, and ‘FEST’, that is ‘to beat’. So, there’s a concept in common: they both express that you can almost touch that action, which is something present and material. Protest is a public and collective act; the crowd or the people are a critical element in making the verb work. Without the interaction of different people, there can be no protest. In its book, the French so-called Comité Invisible reminds us that the public comes from the Latin word ‘populus’, which refers to the verb ‘populor’: to sack, to destroy, to devastate.<sup>27</sup> That etymology could serve as a reminder of the destructive actions of the people, which should not be viewed as negative; rather, it could be seen as productive. Protest is linked to opposition/disapproval/

criticism, which, especially with the Latin prefix ‘DIS’, reveals a conflict. There is a disagreement from one thing to another; therefore, a protest arises from an obstacle. Also, this indicates the presence of multiple subjects.

The opposition could be, first, a negation, that is, a judgment that connects subject and predicate in an exclusionary relationship; otherwise, it could be an antithesis, that shows a complete aversion – white and not white – or a contradiction – white and black. Typically, a protest is directed against institutions or the established order and power. Insurrection is similar, but it brings the elements of violence and disorder. There is no organization in the insurrection, even though it nourishes its energy. Being an active part of insurrections empowered people, even more in the last twenty years, and that reaffirms people’s power over publicness and space. The use of space is the feature that all these words/elements/actions have in common. In 1996 Furio Jesi wrote «One can love a city, one can recognize its houses and its streets in one’s most remote and secret memories; but only in the hour of revolt is the city truly felt as the “haut-lieu” and at the same time as one’s own city: one’s own sense of the self and at the same time of “others”; one’s own since it is the field of a battle that one has chosen and that the collectivity

27 Comitato Invisible. (2019). *L’insurrezione che viene: Ai nostri amici: Adesso*. Nero, p. 133.

has chosen; one's own since it is a circumscribed space in which historical time is suspended and in which every act is worth in itself, in its absolutely immediate consequences. One takes possession of a city by fleeing or advancing in the alternation of attacks [...]. In the hour of revolt, one is no longer alone in the city».<sup>28</sup>

### *PUBLIC SPACE*

Public space refers to material and immaterial space, as Hannah Arendt stated in his studies about Greek society, but that statement could be considered correct until now<sup>29</sup>. The state's administration, together with experts—engineers and architects—is responsible for streets, squares, parks, gardens, and widenings. Public space can be part of a unified project or the result of a progressive transformation of the city. It must be accessible and must provide a sense of security, and mainly, it manifests a particular idea of supremacy: every person feels that public space belongs to them. Nevertheless, it is the place of power's manifestation, due to its monumental and representative functions. It is

built across decades or centuries and saves urban memory. The immateriality that distinguishes it and the life it accommodates are thus foundational features of the very concept of public space, at the same time legally open to any citizen and available to be monopolized by any citizen. Since the early 2000s, "public space" has been a sort of buzzword for political rejuvenation, and it has become an overused term in the field of architecture. Above all, architects have begun to devote themselves more and more to its immaterial aspects.<sup>30</sup> It is essential to note that architects have started to increasingly approach and design their intangible aspects, becoming practitioners and creating events and manifestations. The reason is its incremental corrosion and the urgent need to recover its role in the materialization of the concept of citizenship. Due to the fragmentation of reality, the loss of certainty, and the collapse of religious dogma and national narratives, public space is now less frequented, becoming increasingly a crossing space<sup>31</sup> or a consumption

28 Jesi, F., Cavalletti, A., & Jesi, F. (2013). *Il tempo della festa*. Nottetempo, pp. 45-46.

29 Cf. Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

30 Cf. Urbonas, G. (A. c. Di). (2017). *Public space? Lost and found*. Public Space? Lost & Found (Symposium), Cambridge, MA. SA+P Press, MIT School of Architecture + Planning.

31 Cf. Lynch, K. (2001). *Good city form* (Nachdr.). MIT Press.

space,<sup>32</sup> or even being replaced by the virtual space of the network. Private property and capitalist development – as for Marx, land property made the basis of all capitalist relations of production – have indeed turned public space into a matter of decorum and control. Protests, such as demonstrations against the G8 in Genoa in 2003, or those against the police in Paris' banlieues in 2005, or the recent Fridays for Future, feminist movements, and others, can re-activate public space in its civic aspects. In the corrosion of the public sphere, protests use dissent and the collective body to pretend publicness, as it is constructed through disagreement rather than consensus. In an era marked by the erosion of public spaces, architecture is inevitably drawn into conversations about conflict. The final question is how aesthetic and spatial practices can engage with and shape new expressions of public life today.

### (DESIGNED) SELF-BUILDING

When construction workers, builders, and architects are not or partially involved, is architecture still architecture? Nikolaus Pevsner answered this question in *Pioneers of Modern Design*, published in

1936<sup>33</sup>. The book aims to explore the aesthetic and cultural reasons that led to the development of modern architecture, from the Crystal Palace (1851) and the Red House by William Morris (1859) to the factory by Walter Gropius and the project for the Cologne Exhibition by Richard Meyer. Architect's roles, in this narration, help to make a comparison between buildings and architecture, which, in the author's opinion, are distinct. The same distinction was at the centre of Bernard Rudofsky's 1964 exhibition, held at the MoMA in New York, and of the subsequent book, entitled *Architecture Without Architects*.<sup>34</sup> Vernacular architecture was evaluated at that point, after a period of fascination with Modern architecture, as dignified. Self-building, in contemporary times, refers precisely to this exchange of meanings and to the need to build without preconceived projects.

Nowadays, protest movements demonstrate how people can occupy squares and parks, building shelters and spaces to organize and engage in dialogue. Occupy Wall Street was a crucial demonstration

33 Cf. Pevsner, N. (1991). *Pioneers of modern design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (Repr.). Penguin Books.

34 Rudofsky, B. (2009). *Architecture without architects: A short introduction to non-pedigreed architecture* (Reprint. ed. 1987, 14. print). University of New Mexico Press.

32 Bauman, Z. (2013). *Liquid love: On the frailty of human bonds*. Polity Press.

of the right to occupy public space and establish a self-built, informal settlement. It was a left-wing populist movement against economic inequality, corporate greed, big finance, and the influence of money in politics that began in Zuccotti Park, located in New York City's Financial District. It lasted for fifty-nine days - from September 17 to November 15, 2011. In that case, people used camping equipment on the park grass, but self-building could also involve adding informal materials to repurpose a preexisting building for a different application. For example, the city centre of São Paulo, in Brazil, is composed of 80% former and abandoned offices that have been appropriated and repurposed for housing. Therefore, many forms of occupation are based on self-building, and even if they are formally illegal, they are rooted in traditional behaviors and customs. Colin Ward, a British architect known for his anarchist beliefs, wrote about the history of informal land appropriation in England. With the Digger movement and the Plotlanders of southern Britain, he also describes the Welsh tradition of 'tŷ unnos', where a house is built in a single night<sup>35</sup>. Ward looked for proof of this conviction over fables and

country legends, but he failed. However, Richard Heath, in *The English Peasant*, published in 1893, wrote: «Once it was a common idea among peasants that the one who could erect a house in a single night without hindrance from manor officials would obtain the right of ownership».<sup>36</sup> In various cultures - like in the Turkish *geçekondus* or in the South American populations - the belief takes on different undertones, sometimes the roof is the final element to complete the house, and sometimes it is the fire in the chimney. The Italian film 'Il Tetto', directed by neorealist Vittorio De Sica, tells the story of a newly married couple who, due to the economic crisis, decide to build a house in one night with the help of their friends on public land near the train station. When the police officers arrive in the morning, the house is already built, so they obtain the necessary permits.

In developing countries, there are numerous examples of self-built architectures. In addition to traditional habits, architects experiment with low-cost materials and techniques, such as the so-called 'Super Adobe', which consists of construction made from sandbags. In civilized countries, self-built

36 Heath, R. (1893). *The English Peasant: Studies: Historical, Local, and Biographic*. Cambridge University Press.

35 Cf. Colin Ward. (2017). *Architettura del dissenso*. Elèuthera.

ding is a practice employed by homeless individuals who utilize all the materials they can find on the street to construct a shelter. The Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko designed in 1988 the 'Homeless Vehicle', a tool to improve everyday life and to assert the right to appear in public space. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution and the discovery of new techniques, such as the American 'Balloon Frame' made of wood, from the 1960s, architects began to experiment with different methods to enable inhabitants to build their own homes. In England, which has a strong history of occupation, from the Diggers to the London Squatters Campaign, Walter Segal used a similar technique to design self-built houses. The houses are constructed using a timber frame combined with insulating panels made of woodwool, a material composed of wood fibres and cement. The exterior features a glazed board, commonly used for industrial cladding, while the interiors are finished with plasterboard. The flat roof consists of a waterproof membrane supported by pebbles rather than being fully attached, except at the edges. This design keeps the membrane secure while allowing flexibility.

The houses stand on stilts, positioned atop slabs that are supported by deep concrete piles reaching 6 meters into the ground. Nowadays, architects also design

prefabricated buildings, such as the WikiHouse, Richard Rogers' Y:Cube, and IKEA houses. On other occasions, architects leave only part of the building to be constructed for the inhabitants, as seen in the case of the Quinta Monroy complex, built by Alejandro Aravena. Another widely adopted approach is guided self-building, exemplified by the Recetas Urbanas project in Spain, which we will explore later. Nowadays, many architecture collectives organize DIY workshops, among them are: Orizzontale in Italy, EXYZT and AAA in France, Raumlabor in Germany, and Assemble in England. It is essential to note that, although the materials and building systems remain the same, there is still a significant use of timber. At the same time, in the 1960s, the primary intent was economic, aiming to provide some self-sufficiency to citizens; today, an ethical and ecological stance is maintained. Still, the main scope is about creating, through shared work, sensitivity about the common space and highlighting urban issues.

### *SQUATTERS / COUNTERCULTURE*

The squatter's movement is an example of counterculture. Sociologist John Milton Yinger first used the term in an article published in the American Sociological Review

in 1960. The use of the term counterculture was suggested by Yinger 'wherever the normative system of a group contains, as a primary element, a theme of conflict with the values of the total society, where personality variables are directly involved in the development and maintenance of the group's values, and wherever its norms can be understood only by reference to the relationships of the group to a surrounding dominant culture.' Counterculture has fostered diverse approaches to society, the economy, politics, and space, aiming to establish a position in opposition to mainstream culture. Specifically, squatter movements are the occupation and transformation of abandoned buildings. In that case, direct action becomes a way to improve living conditions, questioning the capitalist principles of the construction market and highlighting the lack of affordable housing. It is based on the belief that occupation and use constitute a right that supersedes legal ownership. The concept of ownership has been questioned since the Diggers movement in England (17th century). It has led to different movements, like the San Francisco Diggers, that promoted direct action and free lifestyle, or the 'Land Is Ours' movement in mid-90s London, or the free city of Christiania in Copenhagen, or the Centri Sociali in Italy, during the 80s and the 90s.

Centri Sociali are self-organized spaces for urban counterculture and radical critique, based on a collective form of decision-making. They offer both living spaces and spaces for activities, such as language courses for immigrants, music concerts, art exhibitions, a radio station, and independent publishing. They can have semi-legal forms or illegal forms. Centri Sociali were widespread as squat houses above the big cities of Europe, but it is important to note that squatting can also occur in rural areas, as seen in the Brazilian movement 'Trabalhadores Sem Terra', which was founded in 1984, and the numerous informal settlements found in South America. These counterculture practices have taught architecture new ways of using space, redeveloping existing structures, and questioning the existing system.

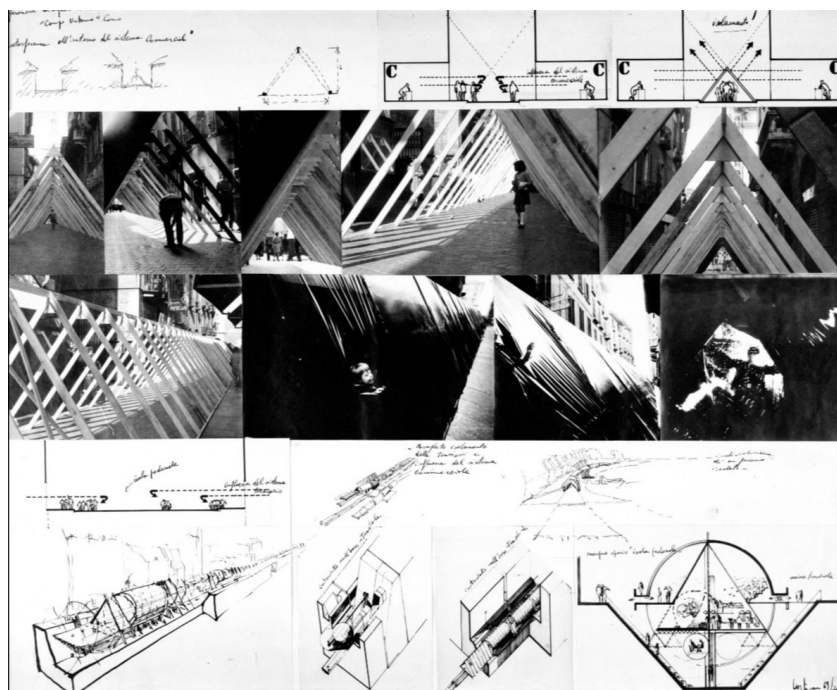
## VIOLENCE

Architecture is violence. This statement strikes every architect who reads it, and at the same time, creates a kind of embarrassment leading to a spontaneous and unconditional reflex of seeking justification or distancing oneself from it. This happens because, in opposition to this statement, every architect claims they can improve the world.<sup>37</sup> Lambert, editor-in-chief of the French magazine ‘The Funambulist’, emphasizes how this misinterpretation is at the root of contemporary misunderstandings around the role of architects and the agency of architecture, and dedicated the first issues of ‘The Funambulist’ to highlight the violence of architecture and to investigate political topics related to architecture. ‘Forensic Architecture’ is a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London. As its presentation said: «Their mandate is to develop, employ, and disseminate new techniques, methods, and concepts for investigating state and corporate violence. Their team includes architects, software developers, filmmakers, investigative journalists, scientists, and lawyers».<sup>38</sup> The

multidisciplinary research group employs architectural techniques and technologies to investigate cases of state violence and human rights violations worldwide. The work of Forensic Architecture has led to the creation of a new academic field, which involves the creation and display of architectural evidence, encompassing buildings, urban environments, and their representation in various media. These two examples are essential to clarify that architecture’s violence is acknowledged. This thesis doesn’t intend to discuss this aspect, but it is crucial to recognize that there is no inherent moral judgment in architecture. Instead, it seeks to understand how architecture in the Western world engages with politics.

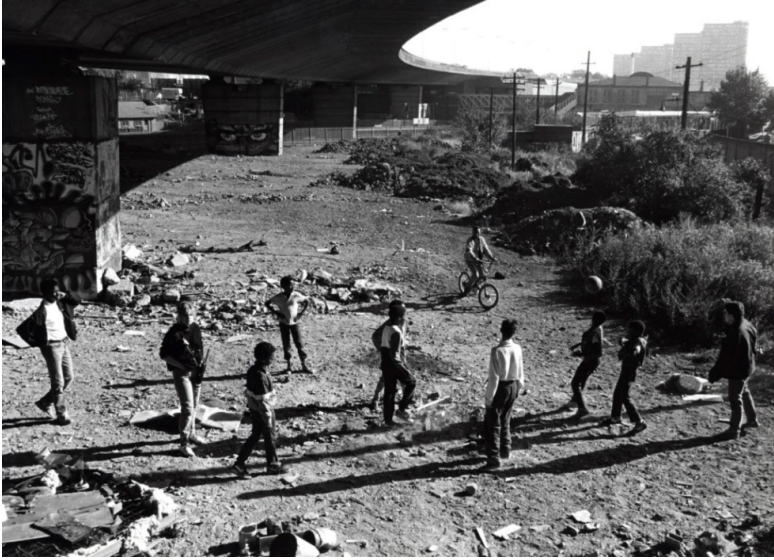
37 Cf. Rem Koolhaas. (2021). *Testi sulla (non più) città*. Quodlibet.

38 <https://forensic-architecture.org/about/agency>, consulted on 2025/08/31.

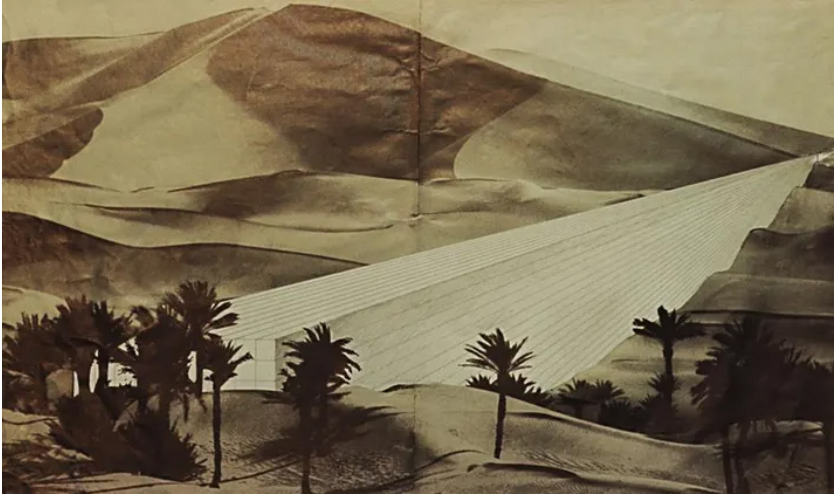


Ugo La Pietra, Gianni Pettina, Giuliano Collina, Campo Urbano — aesthetic interventions in the collective urban dimension, Como, 1969.

Ephemeral urban installation by three architects of the Italian Radical Architecture movement, exploring the relationship between art, architecture, and public space through performative interventions in the streets and squares of Como.

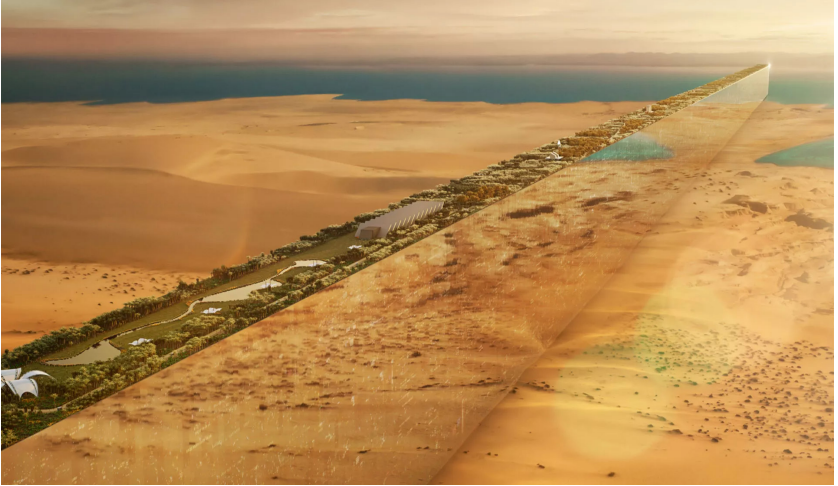


Children playing beneath the Westway elevated motorway in North Kensington, London (circa 1968). The image captures a group of children reclaiming the neglected space under the recently built Westway. Initially imposed on the community without consultation, the elevated motorway caused wide-spread disruption. In response, local residents mobilised to stop further development and successfully transformed the 23 acres beneath the structure into a network of community spaces—one of the earliest and most significant examples of grassroots urban resistance and spatial reclamation in London.



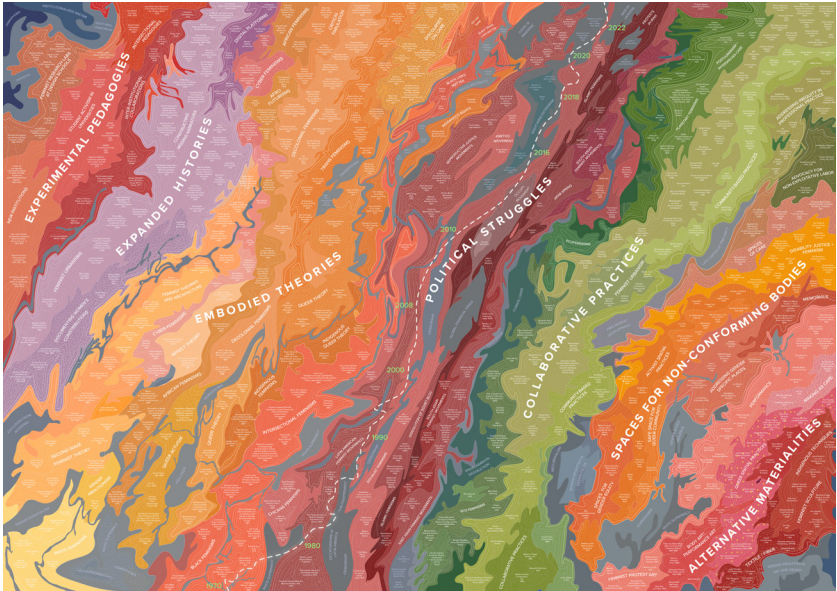
Superstudio, Monumento Continuo, conceptual photomontage, 1969 (Radical Italian Architecture).

A visionary, dystopian proposal imagining a colossal, grid-like monolith stretching seamlessly across diverse landscapes—deserts, monuments, and cities alike. Far from an architectural blueprint, it served as a critical commentary on globalization and uniformity in modern urbanism.



The Line, NEOM, Saudi Arabia, announced January 2021.

A visionary urban project within Saudi Arabia's NEOM initiative, The Line proposes a 170 km linear city designed to house 9 million residents. The city features two parallel skyscrapers, each 500 meters tall and 200 meters wide, connected by high-speed rail and powered entirely by renewable energy. With no cars or streets, all essential services are within a five-minute walk, aiming to preserve 95% of the surrounding natural environment. The project's ambitious scale and futuristic design have sparked global debate on its feasibility and implications for urban living.



Bryony Roberts and Abriannah Aiken, *Feminist Spatial Practices, Part 1*, 2023.

A conceptual diagram exploring the intersections between contemporary feminist spatial practices, political movements, and theoretical discourses. This work aims to initiate an ongoing global discussion on spatial justice and equity in the built environment.



Atelier d'Architecture Autogérée (aaa), Ecobox Garden, Paris, 2001–2006. Founded in 2001 by architects Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu, aaa is a Paris-based collective platform dedicated to collaborative research and action on urban transformations and emerging cultural, social, and political practices in contemporary cities. Operating as a network that forms around each project, aaa engages with specialists, artists, researchers, and local communities to explore alternative architectural practices. Their work focuses on the temporary reuse of underutilized urban spaces, creating enabling infrastructures that are gradually taken over and transformed by local residents into self-managed spaces. Projects like Ecobox and Passage 56 exemplify their approach, where residents actively participate in the design and management of spaces, fostering community engagement and ecological awareness. Through these initiatives, aaa challenges traditional top-down architectural practices, promoting a more inclusive and participatory model of urban development.



The Decorators, Pop-Up Restaurant, London, 2015.

A temporary dining experience designed to challenge conventional restaurant design. The Decorators, a London-based design collective, transformed a vacant space into an immersive environment that blurred the lines between dining, performance, and installation art. By reimagining the restaurant as a dynamic, participatory space, they invited guests to engage with the environment and each other in new ways, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. This project exemplifies their commitment to creating spaces that are not only functional but also provoke thought and dialogue.



Constructlab, Cooking Line, École Supérieure d'Art Annecy Alpes, Annecy, France, April 14–17, 2014.

Cooking Line is a collaborative workshop led by Constructlab at the École Supérieure d'Art Annecy Alpes, engaging 50 first-year students in a four-day culinary performance designed as an image of the industrial production chain. Participants constructed their own workstations, each tailored to their specific tasks, and prepared components of a collective meal. The process transformed the kitchen into a dynamic, interconnected system, reflecting Constructlab's ethos of participatory design and collective action. The project exemplifies Constructlab's approach to architecture as a tool for social intervention, fostering community engagement through collaborative construction practices.



April 29, 2024 – Columbia University, New York City: Palestinian flags and protest signs at the rein-stated Gaza Solidarity Encampment on the Butler Lawns. The encampment was reestablished by student protesters following the NYPD's clearance of the original site earlier that month.



Leoncavallo Social Center, Milan, April 2025.

A historic self-managed space founded in 1975, Leoncavallo has been a symbol of political activism and cultural experimentation in Milan. This photo was taken shortly before its eviction in August 2025, marking the end of an era for one of Europe's most iconic social centers.



# *Artivism and Architecture. Political Commitment Through Parallel Disciplines*

## **Abstract**

*This chapter explores the differences and similarities between art and architecture, as well as their connection to political commitment. Central to this discussion is the idea of artivism, which combines artistic expression with activism, making dissent and political engagement key elements of art. While art has always carried a political message, its move toward activism happened before that of architecture, mainly because of the material, functional, and economic issues that complicate architecture's relationship with politics activism. To better understand this dynamic, the chapter introduces four categories: activists who create art, artists who engage in activism, activists who design architecture, and architects who participate in activism. This framework showcases various forms of agency and illustrates how creative practices can influence public life. In conclusion, the chapter argues that although art often relies on immediacy and symbolic gestures, architecture is fundamentally connected to design and construction processes, which link it to systems of power and economics. Nonetheless, due to this relationship with time and materiality, architecture still has the potential to reshape reality, bridging protest with vision and envisioning alternative futures.*

## Artivism and Architecture. Political Commitment Through Parallel Disciplines

### *Reframing Dissent: The Rise of Artivism in the 21st Century*

Architecture is inherently multidisciplinary, often described as a 360-degree discipline for its ability to integrate different thought and action dimensions. A significant portion of this interdisciplinarity involves art, even if it seems that architecture somehow suffers from this recurrent comparison. However, their relationship could be significant in understanding the phenomenon of activism related to art and architecture and profoundly reflecting on architecture's ontological features. Indeed, nowadays, it appears clear that the two have a lot in common and evolve, taking, stealing, giving, and reconceptualizing each other.

The starting point for this chapter is the ever-present spread of what is now called 'artivism.' The term has gained greater recognition in Italy since Vincenzo Trione's pamphlet for Einaudi (2022), which connects art to political engagement, providing recent examples. However, even before that, artists had been investigating and theorizing about the trend's appeal in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as its new conception, which was linked to mass communication and technology. Some key projects and texts are the project *AHA: Activism-Hacking-Artivism* (mailing list and exhibition) by Tatiana Bazzichelli (2002), followed by the volume *Networking: the Network as Art*<sup>1</sup> (2006); Aldo Milohnić's first monographic essay on artivism in the Performing Arts, published in the Slovenian academic journal *Maska* (2005) and subsequently translated into several languages<sup>2</sup>; Laura Baigorri's numerous

1 Bazzichelli, T., & Kerckhove, D. de (Eds.). (2008). *Networking: The net as artwork*. Digital Aesthetics Research Center.

2 Milohnić, A. (2005). *Artivism*. *Maska*, 20(1–2), 15–25.

contributions since the 1990s on networked art and activism<sup>3</sup>; and finally Giacomo Verde's autobiographical monograph *Technological Artivism* (2007)<sup>4</sup>. Artists and scholars in the 2000s were influenced by the no-global movement, which, since the 1990s, has positioned itself against economic globalization, neoliberal policies, and the dominance of major international financial institutions. Rooted in the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, this movement gradually began to involve artists, integrating modern and high-tech forms of protest. As a result, demonstrations took on increasingly artistic and spatial dimensions, culminating in twenty-first-century movements such as the well-known Occupy Wall Street. As the ranking of the Black Lives Matter movement as one of the world's most influential groups demonstrates<sup>5</sup>, protest movements have gained increasing visibility and have influenced artists to such a level that the activist turn in art is now recognized both as a distinct movement and with a specific definition.

In 2022, Gregory Sholette published *The Art of Activism and the Activism of Art*, in which he asks what precisely defines the contemporary activist artist and answers that «the activist artist is characterized, rather than by the mere representation of political demands or social injustice, by an uncompromising focus on agitation and protest as an artistic medium».<sup>6</sup> Conversely, Giacomo Verde writes: «Artivism is such when a political action consciously accompanies an artistic creation or is conscious of the politi-

3 Laura Baigorri is a scholar and curator who has made significant contributions to the study of networked art and digital activism since the 1990s. Her work examines the intersection of art, technology, and politics, with a particular focus on net.art and artivism. Baigorri's key publications explore how artists use the internet and new media to engage in political expression and activism. Notable works include "Recapitulando: modelos de artivismo (1994–2003)" (2003), which provides a comprehensive analysis of early artivism; "Net.art: Prácticas estéticas y políticas en la Red" (2006), co-authored with Lourdes Cilleruelo, which investigates the aesthetic and political dimensions of net art; and "Cuerpos conectados. Arte, identidad y autorrepresentación en la sociedad transmedia" (2021), which explores identity construction and self-representation in the transmedia society.

4 Verde, G. (2007). *Artivismo tecnologico: Scritti e interviste su arte, politica, teatro e tecnologia*. BFS Ed.

5 In 2015, Time magazine included BLM in its list of finalists for the "Person of the Year" award, ranking it fourth among eight candidates.

6 Sholette, G. (2022). *The art of activism and the activism of art*. Lund Humphries.

cal value it brings to bear. And in any case, art, as a public action, is always political, even if it would not like to be. It is a matter of deciding which side to be on. Artivism was born in a context that recognizes itself in the collective author, in the art-life pair, and in the overcoming of the art object. This is a precise choice of field. The hybridization of art and activism should produce a double action: in the activist field, give more space to creative communication, and in the artistic field, increase the sense of political responsibility for one's choices».<sup>7</sup> Then Aldo Milohnić, author of a seminal essay on artivism, defines it as a type of 'interventionism' that uses cultural manifestation techniques to become constituted in the field of politics<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, what is Artivism? The common denominator of all the artistic experiences that may be part of the definition of activism is dissent. Nevertheless, in all cases, art takes a stand against authoritarianism, commodification, the power of the culture industry, and institutionalized models. The works of artivism, thus, aim to bring to light and lend relevance to specific problems, and to create reactions and awareness that can effect change.

### **Agency, Facilitation, and the Intersection of Art and Architecture**

The artist's political engagement has been a theme discussed since the Greek tragedies. Still, the modern era has been challenged by substantial changes in the reproducibility of art and the paradigm shift from religious to political, as Walter Benjamin's seminal text argues<sup>9</sup>. An early chapter of *The State as a Work of Art*,<sup>10</sup> written by the critic Jacob Burckhardt in 1860, highlights the struggles and competition of the independent Italian communes of the Renaissance as the beginning of modernity. The dynamism and competitiveness of the lordships are read in the book as the cause of a flourishing art that would mark the birth of the modern world. In Burckhardt's reading, as well as in Benja-

7 Verde, G. (2007). *Artivismo tecnologico: Scritti e interviste su arte, politica, teatro e tecnologie*. BFS Ed.

8 Milohnić, A. (2005). *Artivism*. *Maska*, 20(1–2), 15–25.

9 Benjamin, W. (1968). *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In H. Zohn (Ed.), *Illuminations* (pp. 217-251). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

10 Burckhardt, J. (1860). *The state as a work of art*. (Trans. W. L. G. Runciman, 1912). Princeton University Press.

min's (1934)<sup>11</sup> and Henri de Saint-Simon's (1825) works<sup>12</sup>, artists are seen as representing an advanced societal subversive force. However, this view loses its basis at the moment of maximum movement and reproducibility of art. In *Art and Anarchy* (1963), Edgar Wind denounces how the average person can visit a Picasso exhibition in London and attend a Poussin exhibition in Paris the next day without problems<sup>13</sup>. Wind says: «It is surprising that a person can fully enjoy both exhibitions» and states: «Art is so well accepted because it has lost its sting».<sup>14</sup> In other words, in the Twentieth-century art loses its connection to existence and is transferred to a safe zone, even if the expression of one's position condemning something — as well as the attempt to instill reflection in the viewer — is found in traditional and famous works such as Picasso's *Guernica*, which, through symbolism and abstraction, condemns war, violence, and fascism.

In fact, the giant oil painting was executed in 1937 for the Universal Exhibition of Paris while Picasso was in France, trying to escape the Spanish Civil War. After touring European countries with various exhibitions, it was kept at MoMA in New York until 1981, when the new Spanish democratic government requested its return, following a global wave that was starting to advocate for the return of art to its homeland and to challenge the colonial attitudes of museums. Indeed, between the 1960s and the 1970s, artists questioned the art system and interrogated museums about their staff and patrons. They were asking: Who is the owner of the artwork? Who are the owners of museums? Who do museums get their money from? They began to trace the exchanges and purchases of artworks to reflect on these questions. In 1975, for example, the Artists Meeting For Cultural Change protested against the exhibition 'Three Centuries of American Art' at the Whitney Museum of New York, which merely used the

11 Benjamin, W. (1968). *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*. In H. Zohn (Ed.), *Illuminations* (pp. 217-251). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

12 Henri de Saint-Simon in the book *The New Christianity* of 1825 argues that artists, along with scientists and industrialists, should be seen as advanced societal forces capable of promoting progress and social transformation. V. Saint-Simon, H. de. (1825). *The new Christianity*. (Trans. C. H. de Saint-Simon, 1907). Robert Schalkenbach Foundation.

13 Wind, E. (1963). *Art and anarchy*. W. W. Norton & Company.

14 Ibid. p. 26.

private Rockefeller collection to describe the whole of American art, and created in opposition an anti-catalog that included works and artists who could inclusively represent the country.

Art and its political engagement underwent profound changes during the 21st century. Due to the avant-garde movement, such as the Internationale Situationniste, art's mediums changed, taking on new forms – from paintings to performances – and new collaborations. Special mention must be made of the 'Soziale Plastik' (social sculpture) project proposed by Joseph Beuys for Documenta 7, which was curated by Rudi Fuchs and became, with that edition of 1982, an institution in the art world. In the city of Kassel, almost destroyed by World War II, the artist proposed a work intended to be both an intellectual provocation and to have real ecological benefit. By planting 7,000 oak trees, he aims to raise awareness about environmental issues and establish a green system that will continue to benefit the German city. In front of the Fredericianum, Documenta's main building, he accumulates seven thousand stones that will be used to adopt seven thousand oak trees, involving the entire citizenry of Kassel. The fifteenth edition of Documenta, which occurred forty years later, is another significant example that embraced the legacy of the 1982 edition and enacted a radical change within what had become institutionalized as a major international event by 2022. Documenta 15 is, in fact, curated by the Indonesian collective Ruangrupa, which, by referring to the concept of 'lumbung' — meaning 'rice barn' — has sought to change the art system by proposing an alternative, in opposition to the ethos of late capitalism. Collectivity, understood as a mobile element - collectivity of authors/promoters/users - is at the center of the 100-day exhibition. The invitation extended to 1,500 collectives and artists was to bring their work to their territory into the shared spaces of Documenta, where they would interact and discuss together. In an attempt to avoid perpetuating traditional forms of power, Ruangrupa sought to act not as a curator but as a facilitator. The metaphor of the 'ivory tower' promoted by German historian Erwin Panofsky<sup>15</sup> is completely abandoned in this exhibition. Panofsky's metaphor refers to the idea of art and scholarship as isolated from the practical concerns of everyday life. In his view, this detachment enables a

15 Panofsky, E. (1955). *Meaning in the visual arts*. University of Chicago Press.

purser, more contemplative approach to knowledge, although it also risks disengagement from social and political realities. Instead, Documenta 15 confirms the gradual displacement of art within life systems in general. Therefore, the fundamental change in recent years is the rooting of art in material problems, as life, social issues, and economics are put on display, which pulls the artist out of the tower and into the street, denying the artist their previous isolation and elitism.

The shifting of art into material problems – including interdisciplinarity, changes in the economic power system, and the curator as a facilitator – blurs the boundary between art and architecture, a very practical discipline from a particular perspective. Some practices make you ask: Is that art or architecture?

Marjetica Potrč, a Slovenian artist and trained architect, clearly illustrates this dilemma. She presents herself as a double figure, which is difficult to categorize. Her work is often structured in an ambivalent manner. On the one hand, we find what she defines as “architectural case studies,” which appear as a 1:1 scale reconstruction of simple buildings, such as a hut made of logs and fiber rope (*The House of Social Agreement*) or an informal building (*Caracas: Growing Houses*) in which she stages, inside the museum’s white-box, the narrative of something else happening in the outside world. Through the reproduction of architecture, which serves as a language for her, she creates a narrative that emphasizes parallel worlds, offering them visibility and protection. Protection, because the other side of the work is that of “on-site projects,” which are not strictly architectural but more cultural in nature. Potrč challenges the traditional logical and temporal sequence of architectural design, which often identifies the drawing produced by one’s studio as the profession’s pinnacle. By researching and supporting bottom-up initiatives, she claims the right for these to exist as a fundamental part of the growth of a particular place and community. She helped build, for example, the Xapuri School in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest, providing two essential elements: solar panels and a satellite dish, respectively, to guarantee energy and communication. The school was born from an invitation to participate in the 2006 São Paulo Biennale, where a full-scale model of the school was reproduced. It confirms itself as a project that develops over time, together with the community, and a museum piece capable of pointing to a much

larger vision. Marjetica Potrč doesn't define herself as an activist, but this work leads us to the second question: Is it art or activism?

This reflection can help us logically reason through the directions that art and activism create, as well as the directions that architecture and activism take, ultimately highlighting the relationship between art and architecture. To follow this path, we must delineate four categories: 1. Activists who make art; 2. Artists who do activism; 3. Activists who make architecture; 4. Architects who do activism.

### *First Category: Art, Performance, and Symbolism in Social Movements*

The first category encompasses all the artistic expressions that protests exhibit. During manifestations, people use various elements to express themselves, from the simplest – color, billboards, and flags – to more conscious uses of the body – makeup, clothing, and planning of actions. These last features have been investigated ever since 2018, taken as a reference to the year the Extinction Rebellion was founded in the UK, as activists began organizing real-world performances to gain visibility. The central word in this increasingly artistic drift of manifestations is 'impact.' The goal of social movements is to effect political change, which can only be achieved through action. The challenge then becomes raising awareness among as many people as possible about issues that are concealed or downplayed by mainstream communication, to pressure governments and institutions. Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil are two movements born in the United Kingdom. They intended to push governments to take concrete and urgent action to address the climate crisis. Specifically, the latter wants to stop the extraction and use of fossil fuels, particularly oil. Both use direct, nonviolent protest actions and are gaining an increasing following.

Just Stop Oil has gained notoriety for its actions, in which activists have thrown colored substances, such as paint or soup, on famous paintings, including Van Gogh's 'Sunflowers' and Vermeer's 'The Girl with the Pearl Earring.' These actions did not damage the actual artworks, as they were protected by glass or other security measures. Still, the symbolic intent was strong: to call attention

to the imminent threat of the climate crisis and the inadequacy of policy responses. The idea behind these performances is to draw parallels between the symbolic “destruction” of a work of art and the irreversible devastation that the use of fossil fuels is inflicting on the environment, questioning the role of art within a global crisis. Extinction Rebellion also carried out actions in which art and culture became tools of social denunciation. For example, on several occasions, group members have blocked entrances to museums or art galleries, disrupting public events and performances to draw attention to the need for urgent action against climate change<sup>16</sup>. These actions were not limited to direct protest. Still, they often included art installations and performances, aiming to use art as a means to reflect on the connection between culture and the ecological crisis.

The actions of these protest groups remind us of the performance art of the 1960s and take on a different power when they become collective performances. Femen, a feminist movement founded in Ukraine in 2008, utilizes the nude body as a tool of political protest, transforming it into a disruptive visual language. Toplessness becomes a symbolic weapon to challenge patriarchy, religion, and authoritarian institutions, as in the protest against Putin in 2013, in which activists displayed the words “Fuck Dictator” on their bodies. It claims a right — the use and display of one’s body — in the wake of feminist performance arts and draws attention. Femen’s actions are designed to be immediately filmed, photographed, and spread on mainstream media and social networks. The visual aspect is central: activists create images that function as political works of art, with composition designed to maximize communicative effectiveness. Their actions rely on a

16 Extinction Rebellion has staged several high-profile actions to draw attention to the climate crisis. Notable events include blocking entrances to major museums and art galleries, such as the Tate Modern in London, and disrupting public events to amplify their message. In 2019, the group staged a highly visible protest at the British Museum, blocking the entrance with banners and chanting demands for urgent climate action. The movement has also staged sit-ins and other disruptive actions in public spaces, often using art installations and performances as tools for social denunciation. These actions are part of their broader strategy to force governments to take immediate action against climate change and raise awareness about environmental issues through direct, nonviolent protest.

strong theatrical component: slogans painted on skin, exaggerated expressions, and provocative staging, such as Pope Benedict XVI's mock "exorcism" at Notre Dame church in Paris in 2013, to subvert symbols of power. Designed for immediate media coverage, Femen's performances combine art and activism, turning the body into a political manifesto. Despite criticism, their impact demonstrates how art can be an effective tool for social struggle.

Another important example is the performance 'Un violador en tu camino,' conceived by the Chilean feminist collective Las Tesis and premiered on November 25, 2019, in Valparaíso, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. However, its global dissemination has been mainly fostered by networks of feminist movements, such as Non Una di Meno, which have revived it in several countries. The disruptive message of the performance, combined with the synchronized choreography and the use of the body as an instrument of protest, made the action a viral phenomenon. In Spain, where feminist struggle has a long tradition, this performance has been repeated several times, becoming a symbol of resistance against gender violence and a collective cry for social justice.

These examples strategically use art as a medium to convey a political message that they consider more important than anything else. Nevertheless, it's crucial to notice that in this way, activism generates a sort of education through art. The relationship becomes much more complex and insightful when addressing the second category – artists who engage in activist work.

### *Second Category: Art as Political Activism*

There are many examples of artists who deal with politics that the word 'artivism' has now become entrenched, even though it might be seen as a superfluous label by many, since art has had a political potential since Dada and Surrealism made clear that the only true art is anti-art.

In contemporary times, many artists take a firm stance on the relationship between art and politics. The Chinese artist Ai Weiwei has stated on several occasions that art would not be art if it were not political. He is well-known for his famous photograph fea-

turing the gesture of his middle finger raised in the foreground with Tiananmen Square in the background, the site of the 1989 pro-democracy protests' repression. In 2022, a photo circulated showing Iranian schoolgirls from behind, unveiling their hair and repeating the middle finger gesture against the picture of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ruhollah Khomeini, hanging on the classroom wall. This obscene gesture, seen in the tense atmosphere of protests against Iran's morality police and the restrictions imposed on women, such as the forced wearing of the veil, strongly resembles Ai Weiwei's artistic project 'Study of Perspective,' which began in the 1990s. The artist photographs his raised middle finger in front of symbols of political and cultural power in these images. Other shots in the series show the same gesture directed at monuments like the Eiffel Tower, the Colosseum, the White House, and other architectural symbols of authority. In 2011, Ai Weiwei was arrested and detained for 81 days without formal charges due to his art. Later, his passport was revoked until 2015, when he left China to live in Germany, the UK, and Portugal, continuing his international artistic and political activity. In 2010, in London, Ai Weiwei created 'Sunflower Seeds' in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern, bringing together 100 million porcelain sunflower seeds, each handmade and painted by Chinese artisans from the city of Jingdezhen, known for imperial porcelain production. The work reflects on mass production - each seed appears identical, yet is unique - and the human condition. During Mao Zedong's era, the people were often compared to sunflower seeds following the "Sun" (Mao himself).

In 2018, Cuban artist and activist Tania Bruguera created the installation '10,143,208' in the same Turbine Hall. Like many of her works, this installation had strong political and social content, addressing migration, power, and collective empathy. It represented the number of people who had migrated across countries the previous year, with the number changing throughout the exhibition to reflect new data, emphasizing the human dimension behind the statistics. The installation included low-frequency sound, a floor resembling mud and sugarcane, and a thermal image revealed by the heat of bodies, showing the face of Yahya Ekhou, a Mauritanian refugee who had obtained asylum in the UK. The installation also encouraged political engagement, in-

ving visitors to leave their fingerprints in a register as part of a petition to change the country's immigration policy. These two works demonstrate how art has evolved into the political sphere through the use of installation and conceptual forms. Bruguera's work, however, was an actual social experiment, confronting the public with their responsibility toward migrants and refugees. Through sounds, materials, and physical interaction, '10,143,208' urged visitors to reflect on their societal role and the importance of human solidarity.

Therefore, art can take various forms to convey political messages. The most straightforward and widespread is probably graffiti. For example, the FX Collective's drawings often utilize urban and rural concrete as a means to convey their social message, reaching a large audience and gaining approval. In 2016, the collective painted 'Bambino nel carrello' (Child in the Cart) on a rural wall in Reggio Emilia, Italy, destined to become a shopping mall. To prevent its destruction and recognize the work's quality linked to its author and notoriety, in 2020, the local farmers' market received the work through a notarized deed, underlining the absurdity of the legal versus illegal interpretation. Even the more famous artist Banksy has made his art intrinsically political. His satire and humor have turned subjects like the girl with the balloon - reaching out toward a heart-shaped balloon - or the flower thrower - an image of a protester throwing flowers instead of Molotov cocktails - into social critiques. In some cases, the location where the works are executed is as important as the subject. For example, in Gaza, his works, including a kitten playing with a ball of barbed wire and a Greek goddess crying, aimed to draw attention to the atrocities taking place, even before the Israeli siege that began in October 2023 and continues.

Another category is 'hacktivism,' an art form that uses hacking techniques and digital tools to promote social or political causes, denounce abuses of power and inequalities, and engage and involve the public. In 2000, the artist duo Franco and Eva Mattes, also known as 0100101110101101.org, created a website simulating the Vatican's official site during the recurring Jubilee. The site, accidentally visited by millions, was an exact replica, except for some satirical and critical content about the Catholic Church,

such as fake news, manipulated images, and interactive elements encouraging users to reflect critically on religion and power.

A further example of controversial art sparking debate is the miniaturized reproduction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, located in Berlin, near the residence of Björn Höcke, a far-right politician from the AfD party. After referring to the Berlin memorial as a “monument of shame,” the German collective Center for Political Beauty recreated twenty-four concrete slabs. It launched a media campaign to spread its message, highlighting the need to keep the conversation on the Holocaust alive.

On the other hand, the Argentine collective Etcetera uses performance as a tool for political struggle. In 2005, on the coast of Rosario, directly under the flight path of U.S. President George Bush, who was heading to the Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, they staged an amphibious military invasion, using visual and symbolic codes borrowed from military language, such as uniforms, weapons, covering their faces, and flags, to enact a fake war among beachgoers and denounce it.

The different media — installation, graffiti, web, and performance — are ways in which art raises its voice. It is interesting to note that the main spaces for displaying these works are either the museum or the illegal. Additionally, museums have been examined for their capacity to provide space and visibility to select artists. The New York-based collective Decolonize This Place, of indigenous and non-indigenous activists, focused on the fight against colonialism and its legacies, with particular attention to museums and cultural institutions. In 2018, they led to the resignation of Warren Kandors, the owner of the company Safariland, which manufactures tear gas used at the U.S.-Mexico border as a deterrent for immigration, from the Whitney Museum of American Art. Other similar initiatives have been carried out by groups like Guerrilla Girls and Art Space Sanctuary, leading to the resignation of MoMA New York’s presidents, Leon Black and Larry Fink. Therefore, today, artists and activists are interested not only in the meaning of the works themselves but also in the system of institutions and power that defines who is inside and who is outside the museum because, as we’ve seen, the ‘artist’ outside the museum almost inevitably steps into illegality. Despi-

te this, a certain potential for illegality has been recognized. The win of the Array collective in 2019 of the prestigious Turner Prize reveals the art world's appreciation for illegal art. The collective honored the unlawful culture of the Irish pub, recreating a Belfast bar frequented by the working class, which involved various communities, giving resonance to different voices, and showing how an informal, often illegal gathering place can become a space for political discussion and action.

### *Third Category: Reclaiming and Reshaping Public Space through Protest*

For the third category, the application of activists in the field of architecture, we must precisely embrace the notion of place — with specific meaning — and illegality. The digital exhibition, 'Landslide 2024: Demonstration Grounds', explores places in the United States where protests have addressed various issues, including civil rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and urban renewal, highlighting the role of urban spaces in shaping movements. The exhibition highlights the 1964 Pike Place Market, citizen advocacy in Seattle, the "wade-ins" at Biscayne Bay in Miami that led to the creation and desegregation of African American beaches, and the 1968 "tent city" protest in Boston against urban redevelopment. American cities, therefore, are now recognizing past demonstrations with plaques and naming them, acknowledging the importance of urban visibility of history. In 2020, the Black Lives Matter protests played a crucial role in highlighting this need. Among other actions, they first demolished the statue of Christopher Columbus in Richmond, Virginia, during June 2020 protests and threw it into a nearby lake, while they covered the monument for General Robert E. Lee, who wanted to preserve slavery, with colorful graffiti. This dynamic deeply intersects with urban architecture, understood as a discipline that shapes spaces of social sharing and interaction, as the reappropriation and transformation of monuments and public places become acts of re-narrating urban space itself. If, for art, the connection with activism was natural, in this case, the word architecture vacillates. Architecture, in fact, means to design and has a temporal significance that does not seem to be involved in the actions of protest movements. Activists select public and political spaces

to exhibit their encounters and destroy architectural symbols of power, but no project exists behind them. In protests, space is utilized in the present, whereas the past is invoked only for the symbolic memory of the spaces.

#### *Fourth Category: Architectural Activism: Designing Spaces for Social Change and Critical Inquiry*

In contrast, architects who engage in activism use space in a designed way. The crux of the matter is that defining this last category feels forced, perhaps because of the inherent characteristics of architecture — which we will address shortly — probably because the tendency to become rooted in the material problems of artistic expressions related to activism does not find its way into architecture. The works by architects that we can, at first, skim, define as closest to activism have the character of exhibition and research. *EXIT*, created by the firm Diller Scofidio + Renfro in collaboration with philosopher Paul Virilio and an interdisciplinary team of researchers, is an immersive multimedia work commissioned by the Fondation Cartier Pour l'Art Contemporain. First presented in 2008 and updated in 2015, this installation addresses the theme of global migration through an immersive visual and statistical language. The work consists of a 360-degree panoramic projection that envelops the audience in an incessant stream of data, dynamic maps, and visualizations documenting forced migration due to conflict, environmental disasters, economic crises, and climate change. Through advanced data processing from international organizations, *EXIT* transforms abstract information into powerful, moving images, making the complexity of migration phenomena tangible. The installation unfolds as a journey through six key themes: fleeing populations, climate refugees, economic and human flows, urban infrastructure, natural resources, and endangered languages. Each section offers a dynamic and interactive representation of the reality of migration, showing unexpected connections between seemingly distant phenomena and revealing the global impact of migration on the social and economic fabric of the planet. The heart of *EXIT* lies in its ability to combine art, science, and technology, creating a sensory and intellectual experience that challenges visitors to reflect on the future of human mobility. The pressing pace of images and

data generates a sense of urgency, underscoring how migration is a global issue that transcends national borders and policies. At a time when migration is often narrated through stereotypes or reduced to mere statistics, *EXIT* offers a new and engaging perspective, capable of giving a human face back to the numbers and stimulating critical debate on one of the most crucial phenomena of our time.

Another example is *Petrified River*, an experimental work by Ensamble Studio for the Cooper Hewitt-Smithsonian Design Museum garden in New York in 2019. The work explores the relationship between time, matter, and landscape through a process of artificial fossilization. Later presented in different editions and contexts, this installation challenges the conventions of architecture and sculpture, proposing a new interpretation of geological transformation and land memory. The work consists of a massive concrete casting that follows the natural course of a now vanished watercourse, creating a kind of mineral imprint that crystallizes the movement of water over time. Ensamble Studio translates an ephemeral phenomenon into a permanent physical presence through this radical gesture, transforming the landscape and redefining its perception. The intervention lies somewhere between sculpture and infrastructure, evoking both the power of nature and man's action in shaping the environment. The construction technique employed by the collective is based on an experimental approach that blends raw materials and spontaneous processes, letting nature itself participate in the creation of the work. The result is an organic and monumental structure that emerges directly from the ground like an urban fossil. *Petrified River* invites the public to reflect on the relationship between geological and human time, the fragility of natural resources, and the possibility of preserving traces of the past through new forms of artistic and architectural intervention. Ensamble Studio, with this work, continues to test the limits of architecture, suggesting a future in which construction merges with the landscape in a profound and timeless dialogue.

Outside museums, architects find other examples of how architecture and design can be activist tools, transforming a structure of exclusion into a space of interaction and exchange. Teeter-Tot-

ter Wall is a temporary architectural installation by Ronald Rael and Virginia San Fratello that transforms the U.S.-Mexico border into a symbol of connection and dialogue. Unveiled in 2019 along the separation wall between El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the work won Beazley Design of the Year in 2020 for its social and aesthetic impact. The installation consists of a series of bright pink swings (teeter-totters) inserted between the bars of the border wall, allowing children and adults on both sides to play together, challenging the rigidity of a barrier designed to divide. The action of swinging becomes a powerful political gesture: movement on one side directly influences that of the other, emphasizing the interdependence of communities separated by the border. The work invites reflection on the artificial nature of borders, questioning their meaning and impact on people's lives. Through playful and accessible language, Rael and San Fratello transform a political barrier into an opportunity for communication, emphasizing how art can generate new perspectives on contemporary geopolitical issues.

Contemporary architecture is transforming into an increasingly interdisciplinary discipline, not only in its disposition to decline installation and exhibition but also capable of transcending the traditional dimension of construction to become an infrastructure for research and analysis. Two significant examples of this evolution are the Forensic Architecture Research Center, based in London, and the UNA-UNLESS project, active in Antarctica. Both demonstrate how architecture can raise awareness and foster critical inquiry into issues of global significance, such as civil rights and the environment. Forensic Architecture employs architectural tools to investigate human rights violations, digitally reconstructing scenarios of violence, surveillance, and political oppression. The group, founded by Eyal Weizman, uses advanced technologies such as 3-D modeling, spatial analysis, and artificial intelligence to gather and verify evidence in conflict contexts. The interdisciplinary approach involves experts in law, journalism, activism, and technology, making architecture not just a means of physical construction but an investigative methodology in the service of justice. On the other side of the planet, the UNA-UNLESS project focuses on Antarctica as a privileged observatory to study climate change and the fragility of extreme ecosystems. The

architecture here takes the form of a mobile and adaptable infrastructure capable of collecting data on atmospheric conditions, biodiversity, and geological transformations. The goal is scientific and cultural: to raise awareness of the climate crisis and its global implications. These are not merely controllable art installations in both contexts, but rather dynamic infrastructures that generate knowledge and stimulate critical debate.

### *Art and Architecture: The Legacy of Activism and Power in Shaping Spaces*

In contemporary times, both art and architecture are heirs to a cohesive activist movement formed mainly between the 1960s and 1970s. The historical context that gave rise to the activist art of the 1960s and 1970s is characterized by a period of profound social, political, and cultural transformations on a global scale. Cold War tensions, civil rights struggles, the contestation of the Vietnam War, and the emergence of new leftist movements fueled a widespread climate of protest, which also found expression in art. Social movements exerted significant influence during that period, generating a vast production of ephemeral visual culture. From leaflets and pamphlets to graffiti, stencils, banners, and posters, as well as performances, marches, and collective experiences, each element contributed to spreading the message of a particular movement. It was during those years that the aesthetics of protest took shape. Activist artists of the 1960s and 1970s drew inspiration from historical avant-gardes, such as Dadaism and Surrealism, which had already challenged artistic and political conventions in previous decades. However, this period's novelty lies in the intersection of the counterculture: movements such as punk and hippie culture profoundly influenced the aesthetics of protest with the spread of militant graphics, murals, and self-produced fanzines. Josh MacPhee, an artist and designer known for his involvement in graphic art related to social movements, underscores this influence in 2019 by paying homage to posters created in May 1968 by the Atelier Populaire and recreating similar posters that address current issues, such as electronic surveillance and capitalist privatization.

In the radical movements of the Sixties, the distinction between

art and architecture was less rigid than it is perceived today. In a period of intense experimentation, many artists explored the language of architecture to create structures that, while not responding to traditional building functions, were, in effect, spatial constructions. These works, often made in protest or experimental social contexts, questioned disciplinary boundaries and challenged the notion of architecture as a purely functional practice. An emblematic example is the 1966 *Artists' Tower of Protest*, a collective work conceived by artist Mark di Suvero in Los Angeles as a symbol of opposition to the Vietnam War. About 17 meters high, this tower was a modular structure composed of wooden panels painted by over 400 artists, including Judy Chicago, Roy Lichtenstein, and Claes Oldenburg. Each panel represented a stand-alone work of art, but together, they formed a construction that evoked both the aesthetics of public art and the language of temporary architecture. The tower did not serve a practical function in the traditional sense, but it embodied an idea of public space as a place of dissent and collective participation. Its very existence was a political act, a visual manifestation of opposition to the war and the artists' desire to intervene directly in social debate.

Works such as the *Artists' Tower of Protest* demonstrate how, during that period, architecture could serve as a means of expression not exclusive to architects, but also to artists, who utilized it to create symbolic environments, spaces of critique, and structures of aggregation. In the 1960s and 1970s, the relationship between art, architecture, and activism was characterized by a strong collective and material dimension. The works produced in that context were both aesthetic objects and political tools, embedded in a system of physical and social relations. The very act of building — whether it was a protest tower, an occupied space, or a poster on city walls — was inseparable from the political message it was intended to convey. Today, however, the landscape has undergone a radical transformation, and one of the key factors in this shift is the reproducibility of the work of art.

As early as the 1930s, Walter Benjamin noted how the technical reproduction of works altered their value and perception. If, in the 1960s and 1970s, the artwork linked to activism existed in a concrete space and its political effectiveness depended on its

physical presence, today, the weight of the work is increasingly shifting to its documentation. Photography, online sharing, and image circulation have become essential. A work of protest does not need to exist in physical space as long as its image is disseminated widely. This shift has led to a significant dematerialization of activist art, often reducing the need for direct public involvement in physical space.

The cohesion of the 1960s and 1970s helped to build the political agency of cultural projects, although, over time, the collective dimension was lost in favor of individuality. In recent years, however, we can observe the precise rediscovery of collectivity and community, even though it is not accompanied by a cohesive movement and class struggle that characterized the last century. The lack of a superior, organized structure and the capillarization of artistic micro-politics are completely changing the way artists and architects engage in politics.

In conclusion, in the history of the relationship between art and architecture, we can say that artists have served as a reference for architects. Indeed, from a contemporary perspective, there have been numerous interferences. In fact, architecture acts in real space that cannot be ignored, despite the importance of symbolic action and image. Perhaps because of this, it is rediscovered today as a proactive tool that roots activist action in reality.

Beyond the interdependence between art and architecture, we must remember the link between the two and power. Indeed, since ancient times, power systems have used both disciplines to build their image and consolidate consensus. Specifically, Architecture has always been a tool of power, a means by which governments, regimes, and institutions shape the collective imagination and assert their dominance over public space. Deyan Sudjic in *Power. The Space of Politics* (2020)<sup>17</sup> investigates how power manifests itself in architecture through monumentality and scale, as well as through more subtle strategies of control and persuasion. From imperial palaces to government offices, stadiums, and memorials, every public building is a political manifesto that communicates authority, legitimacy, or sometimes oppression. Sudjic examines how dictators have frequently employed architecture to conso-

17 Sudjic, D. (2020). *Power: The space of politics*. Penguin Books.

lidate their image, as seen in Hitler's collaboration with Speer's neoclassical urbanism, Stalin's use of the monumentalism of Moscow's Seven Sisters, and the futuristic visions of contemporary regimes. However, power is expressed not only in significant iconic buildings but also in urban planning, control of gathering spaces, and infrastructure management.

Architecture thus becomes the stage for politics, a device that structures society and determines who has access to space and who is excluded from it. Scale is one element that differentiates art and architecture. On the one hand, art has a more controlled scale and can exist in the absolute individuality of an artist, whereas architecture involves more characters in its evolution. On the other hand, art is more easily enjoyed directly. Art can often be relocated from one museum to another, while architecture requires tools, such as drawings, models, photographs, and videos, to be exhibited in different places. In both cases, however, the countless reproductions create an effect of distance between the user and the work. The power of art, according to Marcuse<sup>18</sup>, lies not in its ideology but in its ability to create a gap from ordinary reality: the capacity to distance itself from habitual experience. Instead, this very ordinary experience is the basis on which architecture is founded, which is even said to arise from the basic need for shelter. The idea that architecture first and foremost satisfies the need for shelter is linked to the myth of the primitive hut, a concept theorized by Marc Antoine Laugier in the 18th century. Laugier, in his *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753)<sup>19</sup>, imagines a primitive hut as the origin of architecture, born of the primary need for protection and shelter, and later developed into more complex forms. This vision has deep roots in the history of architectural thought, although its cultural and aesthetic value has been considered fundamental to its definition. Unlike art, which can exist without a practical function, architecture seems to be inevitably linked to a concrete need. Ever since Laugier's myth of the primitive hut, the act of building has responded to material needs such as shelter, protection, and organization of space. Even when architecture becomes a symbolic expression or a for-

18 Marcuse, H. (1978). *The aesthetic dimension: Toward a critique of Marxist aesthetics*. Beacon Press.

19 Laugier, M.-A. (1753). *Essai sur l'architecture*. Duchesne.

mal experiment, it can never escape its utilitarian dimension; it must be inhabited, traversed, and experienced. This inescapable connection with reality makes it more closely intertwined with the market and economic mechanisms than any other art form. While art can be produced without an immediate client or purpose, architecture requires funding, materials, labor, and concrete use. There is no such thing as bottom-line architecture: every building, even the most utopian, must justify its construction in the economic and social system it fits.

For this reason, it seems complicated to read — or even conceive of — activist architecture. While art can take the form of denunciation without sacrificing its status, architecture appears to shy away from providing solutions. The question then becomes: can one denounce a situation and simultaneously construct a solution? Or, can protest only be destructive?

In conclusion, *pro-test* and *pro-ject* share a preposition of movement. ‘Pro’ means ‘forward,’ in fact, the architectural project is linked in this way to an action in time. Architecture has never possessed the “hic et nunc,” the “here and now” that distinguishes art precisely because all architecture is the outcome of a process that precedes it, a design that anticipates its existence, and a context that welcomes it. So, in conclusion, if architecture is linked to this movement through time, the next section of this thesis seeks to investigate how design can destitute and deconstruct the status quo while simultaneously creating an alternative.



TIME Magazine cover, May 11, 2015.

The powerful image shows a young Black man running ahead of a line of riot police in Baltimore during protests following the death of Freddie Gray. The headline crosses out "America, 1968" and replaces it with "2015," drawing a stark parallel between the civil unrest of the 1960s and that of the present day. Title: "What has changed. What hasn't."



Marjetica Potrč & Sydney-based collaborators, installation view at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney (2022). The work combines an architectural wooden structure with community-based narratives, mural drawings, and political storytelling. The installation reflects on collective memory, resilience, and the intersection of art, architecture, and activism.



Marjetica Potrč, Caracas: Growing House, 2012. Mixed-media installation, dimensions variable. The work reconstructs the logic of informal housing growth in Caracas, Venezuela, where dwellings expand incrementally according to the resources available. Through the assemblage of everyday construction materials and improvised architectural elements, the installation highlights the agency of inhabitants in shaping their built environment beyond formal planning systems.



Just Stop Oil activists during a protest at the National Gallery, London, July 2022. Two climate activists glued themselves to the frame of Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* (1888), using the artwork as a stage to demand an immediate halt to new oil and gas projects in the UK. The action situates the museum as a contested political arena, where cultural heritage becomes a medium for urgent ecological protest.



Topless protest by a FEMEN activist during Vladimir Putin's visit to Hannover Messe, April 2013.

The activist staged a direct action against authoritarianism and human rights violations, before being removed by security personnel.



FEMEN protest against femicide in Paris, October 2019. Activists used body paint and slogans to denounce gender-based violence and highlight the silencing of women's voices.



Documentation of the collective performance “Un violador en tu camino” (“A Rapist in Your Path”), carried out on November 25 in Santiago’s Plaza de Armas, as part of feminist protests against gender-based violence.



Ai Weiwei, Study of Perspective: Tiananmen Square, 1995. The artist uses his own hand to stage a gesture of defiance against political authority.



High school students in Iran raise their middle fingers and remove their headscarves in defiance of state authority, 2022. Image circulated widely during the women-led protests.



Tania Bruguera, 10,142,926, 2018, installation view, Turbine Hall, Tate Modern, London. Hyundai Turbine Hall commission.



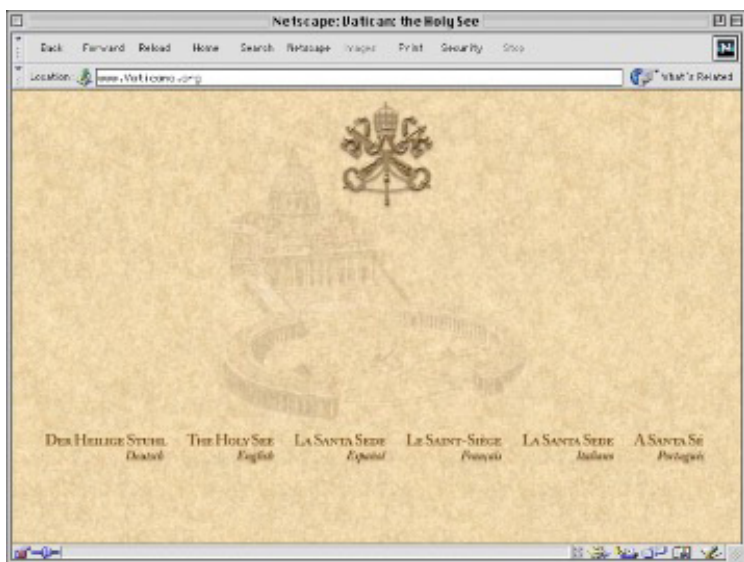
Ai Weiwei, *Sunflower Seeds*, 2010. Installation view at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, consisting of over 100 million handcrafted porcelain seeds.



Collettivo FX, Bambino, c. 2013. Mural on a rural building in Reggio Emilia, denouncing the conditions of child detention.



Banksy, *Girl with Balloon*, first stencilled in London, 2002. One of the artist's most iconic works, symbolizing fragility and hope.



0100101110101101.org (Eva & Franco Mattes), Vaticano.org, 1998. Screenshot of the artists' fake Vatican website, a pioneering example of net art and institutional critique.



Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, The Holocaust Memorial in Bornhagen, 2017.

The collective installed 24 concrete stelae, modeled on Berlin's Holocaust Memorial, next to the house of far-right politician Björn Höcke after his speech dismissing the original monument as a "monument of shame." The work confronted historical memory and contemporary right-wing extremism in Germany.



Etcétera..., Errorist Manifestation, early 2000s. Performance by the Argentine collective staging a mock-protest with the banner “ERRORISTAS,” combining political satire and activist art.



Array Collective, The Druthaib's Ball, 2021. Installation recreating a Belfast pub, winner of the Turner Prize.



Independence Mall, Philadelphia, PA, 2024. Photo by Sahar Coston-Hardy, part of the digital exhibition 'Landslide 2024: Demonstration Grounds'.



Diller Scofidio + Renfro with Laura Kurgan, Mark Hansen, and Ben Rubin, *Exit*, 2008–2015. Immersive installation mapping global migration and displacement.



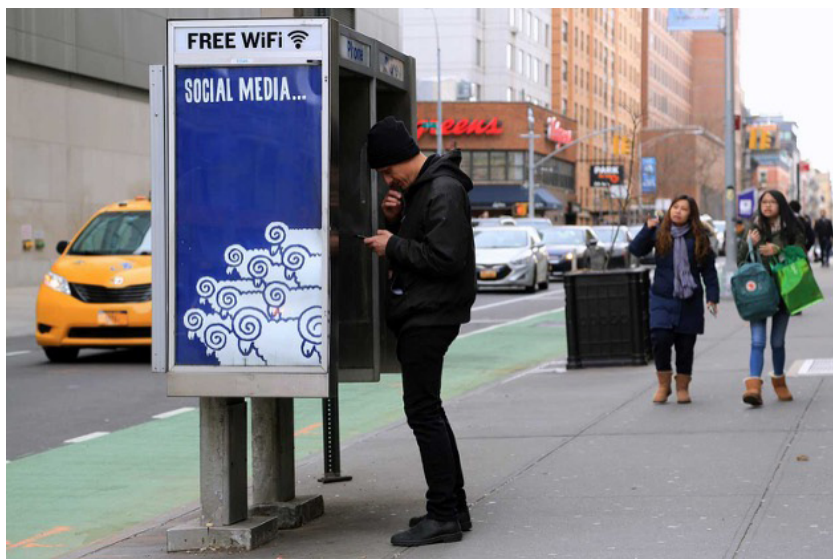
Ensamble Studio, Petrified River, 2018. Large-scale land art installation tracing the vanished flow of water through the desert landscape.



Ronald Rael + Virginia San Fratello with Colectivo Chopeke, Teeter-Totter Wall, at the border between USA and Mexico, 2019.



Ronald Rael + Virginia San Fratello with Colectivo Chopeke, Teeter-Totter Wall, at the boarder between USA and Mexico, 2019.



Josh MacPhee, *Social Media...*, 2017. Poster from the series *Atelier Populaire Reworked* for "Art in Ad Places," critiquing digital dependency and the commercialization of public space.



# PART II

## *tools*

On the opposite page: Lacol, La Borda Cooperative Housing,  
Barcelona, Spain, photograph by Martina Dussin.

COOPERATIVE DESIGN  
*Cooperative Living.*  
*Rethinking the Classic*

*Housing  
through*



*Typology  
Protest*

**Abstract**

*This chapter starts by examining protest architecture through one of its most traditional and enduring forms: the house. Because of its seeming ordinariness and its key role in modern architectural discussions, the domestic sphere becomes a vital space for exploring how dissent can be expressed spatially and how even the most classic forms can be reimagined as tools of resistance. In this context, cooperative housing has grown as a typology that challenges capitalist housing models and seeks alternative ways of living together. The discussion places the rise of cooperative housing within wider social and political settings, from the neoliberal changes to the city and the housing crisis of the early 21st century to the ongoing influence of collective visions rooted in utopian history, squatting movements, and communal living traditions. Examples such as La Borda cooperative housing in Barcelona are not just isolated experiments but part of a larger cultural and political movement where architecture becomes a means to redefine domesticity, blur the lines between public and private, and suggest new forms of urban coexistence. Overall, cooperative housing is seen as both an architectural practice and a political act—an expanding realm that shows how dissent can inspire innovative, workable models for living.*

## Cooperative Living. Rethinking the Traditional Housing Typology through Protest

Approaching the architecture of protest by starting with a house might seem paradoxical. Instead of focusing on the design of public space, the choice was made to select a space considered in the discipline's classic categories as one of the most individual, as well as one of the most approached by the Modern movement, so much so that it became a battleground for the affirmation of its dogmas. The La Borda cooperative housing challenges these first impressions, beginning with its very identity. The honor of bearing a name is usually granted to prestigious architecture, which for centuries has been the object of design experimentation. This category includes the homes of noble families but excludes the residences of ordinary people, which are usually identified, as anonymous devices, by the name of a street and a number indicating their location.<sup>1</sup> La Borda, on the other hand, is a proper name, signifying the cooperative and the building itself, openly announcing the uniqueness of this housing project and ironically asserting its right to recognition—thereby elevating the theme of cooperative housing.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, this cooperative housing near the center of Barcelona seeks to surpass a traditional typology; in fact, as the architects themselves state, it aims to break the conventional concept of home and does so mainly by redefining the idea of publicness, making it one of the core elements of the project. This initiative, driven by a cooperative of people united both by their belonging to the same working-class neighborhood and shared political views, is fundamentally based on the idea of a good traditionally considered private in contemporary times, and on organizing inter-individual distance—here transformed into a critical distance. Living together is viewed not as a loss of privacy but as a new interpretation of the levels of permeability of publicness, which remains

1 Coccia, E. (2021). *Philosophy of the home: Domestic space and happiness*. Einaudi. p. 9.

2 In Barcelona there are currently eleven Cooperative Housing, all with a specific name: La Balma, La Xarxaire, La Morada, Cireres Florits, La Tartana, La Diversa, Llar Jove, Sotrac, Princesa, Sunnydale Barcelona and La Borda.

a key theme of community living.<sup>3</sup> In this case, it is not architecture that unites people and dictates a way of life or an ideology, but the opposite. The roles are reversed. The architectural cooperative Lacol, formed around La Borda's project shortly after graduating from the University of Architecture, is highly aware of this hierarchy and, indeed, makes it one of the pillars of its activity. On their website, a well-established tool for presentation, they write, strictly in Catalan, explicitly stating their political position on the question of Catalonia—that they work for «the sustainability of life as a key tool for ecosocial transition, through architecture, cooperativism, and participation». They openly declare their interests without any doubt, echoing the definition of protest and its characteristic of being firmly expressed. Just as protest is negation and antithesis, all of Lacol's work implies a rejection of current practices in housing development and in approaching the discipline itself. Just as protest involves the masses and the public, Lacol employs participation tools. Just as protest focuses more on the method than on the content, Lacol does not identify a specific object but rather an ideological stance on shaping architecture. Lacol's architecture carries a certain political sense, emphasizing architecture's important role as a tool for building the public good through deconstructing established notions. When questioned about this, the architects state, «We really understood the cooperatives sector as a counter proposal to capitalism,» and they affirm that, yes, theirs is political architecture.<sup>4</sup>

Viewing their practice within the context of the current economic crisis can help identify a growing trend that redefines the traditional view of domestic space.

### *The house between individualism and unfulfilled promises*

The first point that must be clarified is the paradigm shift affecting the Millennial generation (Generation Y)—young people in their thirties who face a gap between their expectations, closely linked to their parents' backgrounds, and the economic reality in which they find themselves. This means they are unable to afford a mortgage to own a home. The home, as it has been depicted over the past sixty years starting with

3 Cfr. Barthes, R. (2010). How to live together. In M. Consolini & G. Marrone (Eds.), *Roland Barthes: The image, the visible*. Marcos y Marcos.

4 Interview between Martina Dussin and Cristina Gamboa, architect and founder of Lacol, which took place in Barcelona on August 29, 2023.

the economic boom, remains in the modern imagination as a house with a garden and a white picket fence—like those built in the Sims, one of the most popular and best-selling video games of the early 2000s. The Sims was the first true life simulator in gaming history that closely resembled reality. In the game, you create characters, choosing their physical traits and clothing, and bring them into the world of The Sims, where they have their own currency—simoleons. The first thing you do is freeze time—the only aspect completely different from the real world—and build their house based on the money they have. A widespread feature was a code available online to obtain unlimited money, turning the game into an endless project where, like in many 3D software used in architecture, you could build walls, roofs, swimming pools, select kitchens, and furnish the house. This exemplifies neoliberal culture; The Sims is just one example of how many factors have contributed to the myth of homeownership. The shift in imagination we are witnessing today is connected to this unfulfilled promise, prompting us to ask how the home is viewed and what it means in today's liquid society—just as Zygmunt Bauman describes our fragile modernity, whose foundations are under attack by increasingly extreme subjectivism.<sup>5</sup> Humanity, in essence, has chosen the city as a safe space to live together,<sup>6</sup> «underneath, inside, behind the city there is always a house that allows us to live there».<sup>7</sup> The home thus fulfills a crucial material function—primarily protection, both physically and from society. This point brings us back to today's extreme individualism, which is a rampant phenomenon. Artist Jamie Diamond describes loneliness as an epidemic for modern society, even before the 2020 pandemic. Her recent work, titled *Skin Hunger*, borrows the psychological term to describe the human pain of contact with others. It includes reports on so-called cuddle parties—meetings between strangers and professionals where they embrace—to highlight the paradox of turning intimacy into a booming industry. These practices aim to eliminate sexual pressure from contact, emphasizing consent, clear communication, and boundaries—timely themes—creating a safe environment where people can reconnect with others, even strangers, within a community they choose. The project reflects Diamond's interest in how neoliberalism influences emotions, which she

5 Cfr. Bauman, Z. (2020). *Desire for community*. Laterza.

6 Cfr. Sennet, R. (2018). *Building and dwelling: Ethics for the city*. Feltrinelli.

7 Coccia, E. (2021). *Philosophy of the home: Domestic space and happiness*. Einaudi, p. 6.

also explored in her previous work about the Family Rental Business in Japan—a system where people are paid to act as family members, like a loving grandmother, or to grieve with them or go shopping. In a society where intimate relationships are fleeting and encounters often cause stress, the home symbolizes a different space-time—controllable, like in *The Sims*—»it is above all the insertion, the addition, the arbitrary addition of a different space-time.” Whether it’s a cabin, a camper, an apartment, or a villa, the home is where people and architecture come closest, as a matter of personal choice. The home becomes a space for personal expression—a form of writing—created with lived-in objects that take on the value each person assigns to them. A 2008 Ikea campaign with posters saying “Welcome to the Independent Republic of your Home” plays on the individualistic idea of the home as one’s own kingdom, disconnected from society, where politics are suspended. Despite this, one of the main aspects of modernity—beyond technological advances—is its pervasive influence on daily life, with ongoing efforts to control everyday aspects like love, work, and living.

### *Barcelona: The Real Estate Crisis and the Birth of a Protest Movement*

The role of housing today and its associated meanings, however, conflict with the reality of the real estate market crisis that erupted in 2008 after ten years of speculation. The market bubble from 1997 to 2007 had forced families to take out long-term mortgages to cover the rising costs of housing, which increased despite stable average incomes. In Spain, the system’s collapse had a devastating impact on unemployment, which rose from 6.5% in 2007 to a peak of 26.20% in 2013 and then gradually decreased to 13.65% in 2022.<sup>8</sup> However, it hit the housing market much harder, which the current mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, elected in 2015 following thirty-five years of center-left (PSC) and center-right (CIU) governments, based her campaign on. Colau, born to two parents involved in activism, has been participating in protests since she was fifteen. Over the years, she has taken part in demonstrations against war, the housing crisis, and gentrification, in the wake of the anti-globalization movement that swept across European countries, remembered for the tragic events of the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001. It was during these events that the mayor recognized the roots of active poli-

<sup>8</sup> Eurostat data 2022.

tical interest among the population and the origin of the new Spanish left-wing politics, which, in addition to Barcelona, also involved other cities such as Zaragoza, Valencia, and Madrid. Colau co-founded PAH (Platform for Homeless People) in 2009, a cross-national organization that provides assistance to individuals and families facing mortgage difficulties or, worse, eviction notices, whether by collecting donations or by occupying mortgaged homes. The PAH operates in contrast to the government's policy by recognizing housing as one of the most urgent problems, because «en realidad, todas we are affected by the living». <sup>9</sup> In 2013, the future mayor personally brought up the issue at a public hearing in parliament, reporting that in the last five years, four hundred thousand homes had been foreclosed and 3.4 million properties had been left vacant. On this occasion, she accused the deputy secretary general of the Spanish banks' association of being a criminal. Ada Colau, in fact, started from a very radical position but built her support within a much larger network of activists whose face she claims to be. In the same years, a peaceful grassroots protest movement had also developed, known as 15-M, which emerged in opposition to the government at the time and against the unchecked power of global finance and the subjugation of politics to the economy. The Indignados, as they were more commonly known<sup>10</sup>, mobilized significant numbers of participants, staging large-scale protests, such as the occupation of Puerta del Sol in Madrid in May 2011, for which restrooms, kitchens, children's spaces, a library, an infirmary, and various meeting and discussion points were set up, open to spontaneous citizen participation. The protest spread quickly from Madrid to other Spanish cities, such as Barcelona, and soon reached other continents. The September 2011 occupation of Zuccotti Park on Wall Street in New York, which lasted about two months, was inspired directly by Puerta del Sol and, like it, asserted its rights against financial power. The occupiers chanted, «We are the 99%,» condemning the gap between the top 1% of the wealthiest citizens in the United States and the rest of the population. Occupy Wall Street expanded to other American cities, and across the world, people began taking to the streets, from Sydney to Rome, to voice their dissent. So much so

9 From the Plataforma de afectados por la hipoteca website, <https://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/que-es-la-pah/>, accessed on November 20, 2023.

10 The name indignados is inspired by the book *Indignez vous!* (it. transl. *Indignatevi!*) by the writer and fighter in the French Resistance during the Second World War, Stéphane Hessel.

that on October 15, 2011, a simultaneous peaceful protest was organized in 790 cities worldwide. In this sense, Colau sees herself as the voice for a much larger movement without formal leaders, aiming to respond with concrete strategies that reflect the demands of all those who have voiced their concerns. Ada Colau roots her politics in twentieth-century Barcelona, known for its riots, protests, clashes with police, and demands for Catalan identity—the Barcelona where the anarchist trade union organization, the Confederación, was founded. The National Labor Union, which in 1919 had 250,000 members in Barcelona alone, and where that same year a forty-four-day strike demanded the world's first national law for an eight-hour workday. Colau traces its roots to the Rosa de Foc (Rose of Fire), as the city was nicknamed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

### *Barcelona: From Port City to Tourist Capital*

This image of a combative Barcelona is today contrasted by the city's tourism scene, which is now seen as another critical issue to address, deeply connected to an exploitative relationship with the real estate market. While in 1990 there were 1.7 million tourists in Barcelona, by 2022, that number had risen to 14 million. Although this figure isn't among the highest in European capitals, the key difference is that, compared to London or Paris, Barcelona is smaller and less equipped to manage such volumes. The main problem revolves around properties used for tourist accommodations, particularly in the historic center. Although hotel occupancy rates have stayed relatively low over the years, apartments designated for Airbnb rentals reached 21,110 within the city limits in 2023.<sup>11</sup>

Houses and apartments that would normally be rented to families and residents are being put on the tourism market, offering a 174% higher profit,<sup>12</sup> making the possibility of decent accommodation a luxury reserved for the few and driving residents away from the city center. The increase in tourists has been accompanied by a decline in business travel. While business arrivals accounted for 70% of the total in the 1980s, they had fallen to 21% in 2017, remaining virtually stable in the following years. The data reflect a trend that follows the city's evolution after the 1992 Olympics, which brought the largest urban transforma-

11 Data collected through research on the Airbnb platform in October 2023.

12 Data provided by the Euromq real estate agency .

tion in seventy-five years. Since the city was chosen by the Olympic Committee to host the next games, the urban environment has undergone a major makeover. The city's layout until then had been defined by Cerdà's 1860 urban planning reform, which envisioned a checkerboard plan with a grid of blocks—places for rest—called manzanas, and streets—places for movement—each twenty meters wide, except for the five main thoroughfares, each 60/80 meters wide. Each manzana was a square measuring 113 meters on each side, with rounded corners to facilitate circulation on adjacent streets and to help create public squares. Although it was originally intended that only two of the four sides could be built on, ensuring 65% of the area remained green, by the late 19th century, building permission had been granted on all sides, greatly increasing the population density of the original plan. The city was strictly divided into blocks, which formed neighborhoods, which grouped into four blocks forming districts, and when grouped into four blocks, formed sectors, with the exception of the historic Gothic Quarter, the adjacent Raval, and the entire area designated as a commercial port. The Olympic plan was developed precisely on this latter area, transforming Barcelona from a port city to a European metropolis. This ongoing transformation has mixed aspects: it saw the construction of schools, sports facilities, health centers, and parks, and on the other hand, it allowed a real opening to the Mediterranean, rediscovering the neighborhoods overlooking the sea that had been forgotten. Barceloneta was rebuilt specifically for the Games: several buildings and sports facilities were built near the sea, partly amid controversy over the destruction of old wooden kiosks. The Hospital del Mar was constructed, and most notably, tons of sand were transported to create an urban beach. Mayor Pasqual Maragall, along with architect Oriol Bohigas, replaced fields, factories, and shacks with new buildings named after Catalan fighters and arranged in four main Olympic zones: Montjuïc, Pobleneu Olympic Village, Vall d'Hebron, and Diagonal. The myth of the '92 Olympics was a source of pride for Catalans, but time has revealed its slow decline. From that year on, Barcelona began to sell its Mediterranean lifestyle as an experience made up of Art Nouveau architecture, music, siestas, sun, and food. The long-lasting hangover of '92 shows how the city shifted from trading its own products, with a rich network of industries, to marketing itself as the only product for sale. In Barcelona's streets, posters and graffiti on walls openly express disdain for tourists, such as «Tourists, go home, you're destroying our neighborhood,» or the widespread «cap pis turistic» or «no to tourist apartments,» which

clearly show the city's intolerance and, in a way, the unity of the Catalan people. The local community appears united in its disdain for mass tourism and capable of building community despite the modern trend of seeking individual salvation from shared problems. Zygmunt Bauman, in «The Desire for Community,» explains precisely this shift in mindset following the urban revolution. The move during the Industrial Revolution from the less productive village to the city—offering factories and attractive salaries—led to the devaluation of the local dimension. Just think of another group despised by residents and targeted by similar graffiti: digital nomads, who boast about working with just a computer and an internet connection, moving from city to city without forming ties to the local area.

### *Living together: a rediscovered tradition*

Citizen collaboration stems from a conscious choice, though it is driven by the need to address a concerning phenomenon affecting cities worldwide. From Venice to New York, tourism has become a problem closely linked to housing. The city of Barcelona has devised a unique solution based precisely on this solidarity among citizens of the *rosa do foc*: living together. From a certain perspective, this isn't new, but rather a return to the prehistoric origins of housing, when living was more about survival and home meant refuge. Being together and sharing material resources with a certain circle of people was the most practical way to ensure survival. For this reason, blood ties first, and later belonging to the same gens, tribe, clan, and family, became the norm for defining living, transforming the home from a refuge into a true center of production. The development of civilization, from Greek *poleis* to the Roman, Persian, Chinese, and Islamic empires, has maintained social organization within family groups, and architecture has continued to reflect and protect this structure. Villages first, then cities, mirrored the levels of intimacy between the perimeters of different houses, satisfying humans' territorial instincts. This is why we see exemplary cases like the Chinese *tolou*—sixteenth-century residential complexes that, grouped in twos or threes, formed villages. The *tolou* has a circular or rectangular shape, appearing almost completely enclosed from the outside but hiding within a series of concentric levels where residences are located—up to two hundred and fifty rooms of minimum size—and all necessary spaces for community life, culminating in a central open area. This pattern recurs in various types of communal residences, such as the

classic Italian courtyard, and is also reflected in the structure of the La Borda building. The emergence of the concept of citizen, a member of a state rather than a family, around the year 1000, overshadowed the traditional family social structure, leading to a shift in relationships among individuals, who no longer lived within the immediate family space. From that point forward, the home became an opportunity to showcase different values, such as wealth, and gained independence from a solely productive role. The advancement of scientific and technological development corresponded to a progressive liberation from the economic rationale of living together; in fact, following the industrial revolution, this increasingly became a conscious and political choice,<sup>13</sup> capable of relieving social pressure. The home, from a means of sustenance, became a space of rest and regeneration, an intimate space where even the most recent forms of housework sought to be avoided.

Shared living has a long history, with different types emerging over time. The way space and time are shared in monastic communities is different from late 19th-century hotels for single women, and the communist blocs differ from itinerant gypsy camps. However, all these examples raise questions about why people choose to live together, what they share through cohabitation, and especially, how living together can serve as a political statement.

### *Shared housing as illegal housing: squatting as a key urban phenomenon*

Developed from the late 1960s and early 1970s, squatting, among the various types of shared housing, openly declares its political position. As Miguel Martinez Lopez points out, the occupation of buildings and the establishment of an autonomous community represents both an attack on the unjust distribution of goods and the expression of the need to connect collective living to non-institutional urban policies.<sup>14</sup> Squats are, in fact, spaces for redefining authority, for creating a habitus of difference, places to express anger, solidarity, and new feelings. Essentially, they aim to imagine alternative worlds by carving out a space for collective world-making. They first developed in Denmark, Germany,

13 Cf. Schmid, S., Eberle, D., & Hugentobler, M. (Eds.). (2019). *A history of collective living*. Birkhäuser.

14 Cf. Martinez Lopez, M. A. (2018). *The urban politics of squatters' movements*. Palgrave Macmillan.

the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, and Italy, before arriving in Spain, Greece, and Poland, constituting, as various scholars have defined it, a «new urban movement» that challenges urban speculation.<sup>15</sup> In the preface to a seminal text by John Turner, *Housing by People. Towards In Autonomy in Building Environments*,<sup>16</sup> Colin Ward clarifies that the most important thing about housing is not so much what it is for people but what it does, emphasizing how housing is a way to stimulate individual and social well-being. Within this discussion, squatting serves as an effort to expand and re-establish the idea of residential autonomy by pursuing those ideals connected to the right to the city that have transformed various fields of knowledge and design since the publication of Henry Lefebvre's book in 1967, on the centennial of Karl Marx's *Capital*. For the author, the right to the city is a right to habitation, appropriation, and participation, and has been interpreted over time as the occupation and reimagining of public space,<sup>17</sup> as housing,<sup>18</sup> as a right to transportation,<sup>19</sup> and as a right to natural resources.<sup>20</sup> The different interpretations share a common belief in rejecting passive acceptance of imposed living conditions and in the need to change how we produce and use space.

15 Cf. Bieri, S. (2012). *Vom Häuserkampf zu neuen urbanen Lebensformen: Städtischen Bewegungen der 1980er Jahre aus einer raumtheoretischen Perspektive*. Transcript Verlag; Mikkelsen, F., & Karpantschov, R. (2001). *Youth as a political movement: Development of the squatters' and autonomous movement in Copenhagen, 1981–1995*. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25(number); SqEK. (2013). *Squatting in Europe: Radical spaces, urban struggles*. Minor Compositions; Vasudevan, A. (2023). *The autonomous city: A history of urban squatting*. Verso; Waits, N., & Wolmar, C. (1980). *Squatting: The real story*. Bay Leaf Books.

16 Cf. Turner, J. F. C. (1976). *Housing by people: Towards autonomy in building environments*. Boyars.

17 Cf. Mitchell, D. (2003). *The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space*. Guildford Press.

18 Cf. Holm, A. (2010). *Wir bleiben alle! Gentrifizierung - Städtische Konflikte um Aufwertung und Verdrängung*. Unrast Verlag.

19 Bickl, M. (2005). *What if you're too young to drive? Locational disadvantage in the automobile city*. In D. Wastl-Walter, L. Staeheli, & L. Dowler (Eds.), *Rights to the city* (pp. 187–207). Geographical Society Italiana.

20 Phillips, C., & Gilbert, L. (2005). *Political natures: Reappropriation of home and water rights in Toronto*. In D. Wastl-Walter, L. Staeheli, & L. Dowler (Eds.), *Rights to the city* (pp. 65–75). Geographical Society Italiana.

## The utopia of living together: previous experiences between social criticism and spatial form

Squats specifically embody this effort by anti-capitalist, anti-globalization activists, which quickly spread widely. Squatters in England, krakers in the Netherlands, hausbesetzer in Germany and Switzerland, and social centers in Italy—each with its own name—responded to the housing crisis by occupying empty buildings and developing support strategies for working-class and migrant communities. In 1983, Hans Widmer, known by the pseudonym PM, published a novel considered crucial to the movement's growth. Titled *Bolo'bolo*, it describes the eponymous utopia, an alternative to a life dominated by the capitalist economy, emerging from its cracks through the clever subversion by those seeking to free themselves from the planetary work machine, gaining a growing following until establishing autonomous communities. Bolo is a word from an imaginary language built of thirty words—the minimum for universal communication—to facilitate exchange and avoid reliance on money or law enforcement as mediators. A bolo is a basic autonomous community of 300 or 500 people, a number that appears often in history because it allows everyone to know each other to some degree. It's divided into micro-units that form its material base, each with its own culture, all living together without hierarchies or authority, in a sustainable way. The book includes drawings that depict the architectural look of the bolos; one axonometric sketch shows diverse architectural styles inspired by traditional designs, with no traces of modern architecture, simplicity, or order, despite all functions being labeled with writing and arrows. From porticos to minarets, different examples combine with hanging gardens, trees, and wind turbines, totally excluding cars. The limited plan drawings show the conversion of driveways into pedestrian streets and the assembly of homes to foster connection and proximity. P.m. doesn't include an architect in the utopian story; instead, spontaneous architecture seems to act as a form of rebellion and subversion against the real world. Bolo-bolo is a fairly recent example in the history of utopian novels, which first appeared in the 15th century as concrete responses to a deep ideological and religious crisis, coinciding with the fall of feudalism and the rise of powerful states. Unlike later tales, these early narratives use architecture to moralize and reform society, aiming for the perfection of the ideal city, as shown in Alberti's 1480 Urbino panel. Thomas More's utopia, Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun*, and Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis* all envision a peaceful society where

culture rules. More's 1516 Latin text gave us the word "utopia," influenced by its ambiguous Greek roots. Utopia, the island city in the story, can be a Latinized form of Εὐτοπία, a word meaning "good place," made from the Greek prefix εὖ- ("good") and τόπος ("place"), or Οὐτοπία, meaning "non-place" or "impossible place," as described in the sailor's detailed account. In More's Utopia, all cities look the same; the land, vital for a farming-based civilization, and the goods produced only for local use, were shared; all buildings were identical. Christianopolis, described by Andreae in 1619, and the City of the Sun, by Campanella in 1602, show structures with concentric levels: the first with a square layout, with four-sided buildings and corner towers mimicking external military walls; the second with a circular pattern, representing cosmological ideas. All three books highlight a central tower to control city life, reflecting the belief in an enlightened ruler to guide society. Two other influential books later shaped ideas about shared living, leading to tangible architectural expressions. In 1808, Charles Fourier, a French socialist theorist and reformer, released *Théorie des quatre mouvements*, and in 1813, English entrepreneur Robert Owen published *A New View of Society*. As Bolo-bolo grew from a strong rejection of liberal systems, so too in the 19th century, focus turned to finding alternatives to city life after the Industrial Revolution. By mid-19th-century London, most people lived in cities that drew more workers but struggled to provide adequate housing. The mismatch between supply and demand caused prices to soar and forced residents into terrible conditions. On one side, ideas from Engels and Marx about justice and shared property fueled demands for rights and better living conditions; on the other, people wanted to participate in social and technological progress. The working class itself was the main audience for 19th-century utopias and the architects of the social and architectural theories that followed. Robert Owen, owner of a productive cotton mill in New Lanark, Scotland, since 1799, conceived an idea to systematize the factory's cooperative production and to provide housing for his workers, in the belief that man is a product of the environment and that by changing the environment, man can also be changed<sup>21</sup>. The village plan for 1,200 inhabitants was divided into a quadrilateral with separate living quarters and public services, such as meeting rooms, a library, a school, a gymnasium, a hospital, a dining room, and a kitchen. This shared space played a fundamental role in women's emancipation from domestic chores. He first

21 Cfr. Owen, R. (2019). *A new view of society and other writings*. Origami Books.

tested its operation, partly in New Lanark, England, which was widely visited by intellectuals, scientists, and politicians, before finally establishing his own village in New Harmony, Indiana, in the United States. Although the citizens were considered the fundamental basis for the project's success, these—artists, academics, idealists, performers, and vagabonds from all over America—were unable to support it due to a lack of relevant industrial skills, and the enterprise's failure a few years after its founding was blamed on Owen's absence and lack of control.

A few years later, Charles Fourier conceptualized the phalanstery, a large building designed to house 1,620 people within an agricultural area, emphasizing the need for a command tower. The phalanstery challenged monarchy and aimed to dismantle the traditional family model. Inside, there were no apartments; instead, individual rooms—on the ground floor for the elderly and on the mezzanine for children—along with collective spaces for social, cultural, and material support. The dwellings and shared rooms were connected by what Fourier called *rues-galleries*, covered walkways meant to serve as communal spaces for proximity and sharing. Fourier did not realize his project, but it was revived years later by French industrialist Jean-Baptiste Godin with the construction of the familistery, notably retaining the family as the primary support unit. Each family had its own two- or three-room apartment, without a kitchen or bathroom, centralizing all household chores. Women were relieved of cooking burdens and could rely on nurseries and schools for child care. The familistery also included shops, a theater, and a swimming pool. This time, the project was successful; about twenty years after its construction in 1859, the Guise familistery became a cooperative run by its residents, remaining self-sustaining until the late 20th century, when the factory was closed and the complex privatized, turning into a museum and cultural center. A third influential work was published in 1898: Ebenezer Howard's *Tomorrow, a Peaceful Path to Reform*, republished in 1902 as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. It amplified the conflict between city and country, depicting it as a metaphor for class struggle and proposing a new residential model where gardens are central. Each garden city could house 30,000 residents on 1,000 acres designated as the urban core, with 2,000 additional residents on 5,000 acres of surrounding farmland, forming an agricultural belt. Beyond this population, new cities would need to be founded and connected via railway. Howard envisioned the city as radiocentric, divided into neighborhoods by 36-meter boulevards. At its center was a large garden, surrounded by public services like the town hall, library, museu-

ms, hospital, theaters, and a large glass gallery serving as a community gathering spot. Surrounding these were five rings of housing, each with its own garden. The garden city concept embraced industrial growth but aimed to restore a more traditional way of life, fostering harmony with nature—perhaps why it has had lasting appeal. The influence of Howard's ideas is demonstrated through the development of thirteen English New Towns and in broader urban planning, where the garden has become integrated into private homes.

*The realized utopias of the Modern: the acceleration of shared living and the definition of the minimum repeatable unit*

Architectural utopias will continue to take various forms throughout modernity, sometimes praising technology—such as Tony Garnier's Cité Industrielle or Archigram's Plug-In City—while at other times emphasizing linear development, like Soria y Mará's Ciudad Linear; vertical designs, like Hilbersaimer's vertical city or Le Corbusier's Plain Voisin; or maintaining the relationship between city and countryside, as seen in Wright's Broadacre City. These visions consistently propose repeatable and superimposable urban aggregations. While they continually aim to address every human need, considering private spaces and shared services, the utopian project loses its critical stance regarding actual modern conditions. For example, in Le Corbusier's plan for three million inhabitants, we see not necessarily an alternative proposal but rather an acceleration of existing circumstances. The Unité d'Habitation, built in 1953 by the Swiss architect and later replicated elsewhere, was dubbed "Marseille's Folly" by the New York press, illustrating the project's innovative yet somewhat extravagant nature.<sup>22</sup> Seventeen floors and 337 apartments, capable of housing 1,600 people, formed the massive monolithic structure of the residential building, which included every necessary service, from a gym to a doctor, and even an internal road with a hotel. For the architect, the contact with clean air and sunlight provided by the skyscraper design represented his effort to ensure a better quality of life. In 1930, he visited a dom-kommuna in Moscow, which was meant to be the first attempt by the new society, based on

<sup>22</sup>See Ginori, A. (2015, June 14). *Marseille, the house of the mad*. La Repubblica, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2015/06/14/casa-mialha-fattale-corbusier32.html?ref=search>.

communion, association, and the abolition of private property, to develop a communist architectural style. In the Soviet Union, Stroikom, the state construction committee established a research department for minimal housing units in 1928. Five types of duplex apartments emerged, showing a progression toward eliminating bathroom and kitchen spaces, which were to be shared. Shortly after its completion, Le Corbusier visited the Narkomfin communal house, designed by architect Moisei Ginzburg, as an experimental typology to test research on minimal units, and as a transitional design, since it still served the needs of the family unit, which would eventually be dismantled. These housing units were also distinguished by how many people they could accommodate: the type F unit covered 40 square meters over three levels and included an entrance hall, a small kitchenette, and a sleeping area. The type K unit, spread over two floors, was 85 square meters and included a bathroom and a living room. In his 1930 comments, Le Corbusier noted that «the internal layout and the general architectural concept are so cold and impassive... that one is overcome by an immense sense of sadness, not only at the thought of living there ourselves, but also at the thought that several hundred individuals have simply been deprived of the joys of architecture.» Despite features like the green roof, pilotis base, and reinforced concrete structure—all hallmarks of the rational architecture he championed—his opinion was negative, primarily criticizing the architectural composition. The Narkomfin would not be considered a success, mainly due to several construction issues—the planned canteen and nursery were never built—and the difficulties residents faced living there. However, during the same period, communism proposed projects that thrived for many years, such as the famous Karl-Marx-Hof, a building over a kilometer long, composed of closed or semi-closed blocks, part of Vienna's new policies under Red Vienna aimed at solving the city's housing shortage following the sharp population increase after World War I.

### *Evolutions of the modern: control, service, participation*

In general, when applying modernist functionalism to housing themes, it is important to acknowledge the value of designing the layout of living spaces, but it is also crucial to recognize that many positive examples are matched by equally problematic ones. Notably, within the Modern movement, starting with the ninth CIAM in 1953, a group emerged that was the first to question the strict application of modern standards. After

the CIAM meeting in Otterlo in 1959, Team 10 developed independently. Its members included Jacob B. Bakema, Giancarlo De Carlo, Georges Candilis, Aldo van Eyck, Peter and Alison Smithson, and Shadrach Woods, along with many other international figures over time. Team 10 aimed to connect architecture with society and improve quality of life. They explored human needs through dynamic concepts like the street, relationships, exchanges, and the home. Driven by a revolutionary spirit against the dominance of modern architecture, they sought to break away from standardization that resulted in identical buildings across continents, and to design while considering both the environment and the inhabitants. An example of this effort is Alison and Peter Smithson's Robin Hood Gardens, a complex of two contrasting buildings, ranging from seven to ten stories on a 1.5-hectare site. At its center, protected by two buildings from busy roads, was a park known as a stress-free zone. The architects recognized the need to shield residents from noise, air pollution, traffic, and vandalism, but years after completion, they were accused of increasing crime with the project. The buildings followed an irregular grid, and the apartments, facing the central green space, were separated by what they called «streets in the air» or elevated walkways. These later created major problems, becoming sites of crime, likely because they lacked what Jane Jacobs described in her book *\*The Death and Life of Great American Cities\** as the «eyes of the street».<sup>23</sup> The streets in the sky were desolate and dangerous, inhabited only by drug dealers and other criminals. In this public housing project, the architect couple tested theories they had previously developed, including an in-depth interpretation of the context. The project's failure, despite their good intentions—common to all architects—perhaps shows that the problem they faced was not so much the architect's stance but the hierarchy imposed by the discipline itself, which had always aimed to understand and anticipate the client's needs.

Another member of Team 10, Giancarlo De Carlo, even before witnessing the disastrous results of Robin Hood Gardens, had tried to integrate the architect's work into the participatory process through the redevelopment of the Italo Balbo village, the future Matteotti village, built for workers of the nearby steelworks. Alongside architect Cesare De Seta and sociologist Domenico De Masi, he held meetings with future residents, including all the workers, their unions, and local government. De Carlo did not follow a set process, arguing that planning, dealing with

23 J. Jacobs (1992). *The death and life of great American cities*. Vintage Books.

people who could differ greatly in each case, could not be structured by pre-established systems and standards. He first sought to understand the kind of life that would take place in the complex, using models as tools, which were easier to grasp than drawings. He organized meetings with small groups of workers during working hours and without management present, but the initial interviews were disappointing. The workers merely described what they were used to, so the architect decided to show other built projects to broaden the scope of possible ideas. The result was 45 different housing types, grouped into three main categories, from which individuals could make various modifications. They were crisscrossed by pedestrian paths and green spaces, allowing residents to reconnect with nature.

The series of examples from history, including those illustrated here, demonstrate architecture's deep concern with social housing and the dedicated efforts of architects to find formal solutions to social needs. The top-down approach, where architects dictate the form of housing units, though a quick response to housing shortages, often led to its downfall. The basic concept degraded, and the minimal units became a problem at urban edges in the second half of the twentieth century, resulting in many low-quality apartment buildings and abandoned or demolished properties. Conversely, the bottom-up approach shows how easily it can be misguided and emphasizes the importance of structuring an multidisciplinary management process to truly understand the needs of tenants. It's also vital to acknowledge the gap between designing for ideal tenants and real tenants—highlighting how the latter can be a luxury under capitalism—and how such understanding demands a strong network of professionals. Overall, these examples serve as tests of different methods and inevitably pose the question of the benefits and costs of architectural experimentation. They reveal the delicate balance in design, where even a small detail can make a difference.

Interestingly, the floor plans of individual housing units—such as Narkofim, *Unité d'Habitation*, Karl-Marx-Hof, Robin Hood Gardens, and Matteotti Village—are quite similar. Although some are smaller and others larger, the layouts remain comparable. The most varied element is the kitchen, which, however, remains a separate room. Over the next fifty years, kitchens increasingly integrated into open plan spaces alongside the living and dining areas. La Borda units are not vastly different from 20th-century examples; only the bedroom is larger, and the open space is smaller. Lacol, whose approach aligns more with Team X architects, aimed to focus on shared spaces with this small change, intending

to challenge the traditional concept of home.

*Cooperation as a daily practice with a long tradition*

One structure that prevents residents from being subjected to the architect's design, and which is part of an increasingly widespread phenomenon, is that of housing cooperatives, of which La Borda is a member. The earliest forms date back to the utopias of the nineteenth century, during the rapid industrialization at the turn of the century, as mentioned above. However, since then, cooperatives have experienced significant changes, as has the social context in which they operate. The home's role has also evolved, with hyper-connected virtuality ensuring that people are never truly alone. Technology allows them to quickly order food, watch movies without going to the theater, and work out at home with a virtual coach, leading to ever-deeper solitude. Living together has thus become a less common choice today than two hundred years ago, driven, yes, by market forces but primarily by a political desire to reclaim social references. Sociologist Richard Sennett defines cooperation as an exchange where each participant benefits from the encounter, but its modern definition in the housing sector took shape in Denmark in the 1960s, when fifty families joined forces to help each other and share spaces, reducing living costs. The system, in place since the late 19th century, founded the ICA in 1895—the International Cooperative Alliance—but it was the 1960s that saw its widespread adoption, often in urban environments, shaping the growth of city neighborhoods. Cooperative housing has since spread in a distinctive way, always adhering to certain common principles: forming an intentional community through a grassroots effort; having a single shared building or multiple connected units; providing shared services such as a nursery, kitchen, laundry, garden, and terrace; and defining the project through active participation. Cooperatives can have various financing methods; in Northern Europe, property cooperatives are more common, whereas in the South, building cooperatives predominate. In Switzerland, for example, building cooperatives make up 60% of rental properties and have been a stable tool for over a century. To celebrate its centennial, between 2007 and 2015, Duplex Architects built what is now considered one of the finest examples of contemporary cooperative housing. It's a neighborhood comprising 13 buildings, with 370 apartments for 1,200 residents, along with shops, restaurants, commercial spaces, schools, and other amenities, located in an industrial area of

Zurich, which hosts 20% of the housing cooperatives. The innovative aspects of this typology lie in its central location, smaller size, and diverse occupant composition, including both working and middle classes in Switzerland. The trend appears to be shifting toward smaller developments, as large-scale successful precedents are rare. Among these, the Vienna Gemeindebauten system, previously mentioned in connection with the Karl-Marx Hof, stands out. Developed between 1923 and 1934 by the Democratic Party, it created 64,000 new apartments, increasing the city's housing supply by 10%. Most importantly, Red Vienna's policies have sustained to this day. At the start of the twentieth century, 80% of Viennese residents had access to social housing, with rents legally capped at 8% of individual income or 3.6% for couples, adjusted based on income increases. Those eligible for housing retained their rights even if their financial situation improved. As a result, today's Gemeindebauten house residents from various economic backgrounds, and this diversity has been a key factor in the project's success. Another critical element was the creation of the organization Wohnpartner, which helps foster and safeguard community within the complexes. In the iconic 27-story Alt-Erlaa building, built between 1973 and 1986, Wohnpartner distributes a biannual magazine to each of the 3,181 apartments. The emphasis on networking needed for quality of life in these residences brings together professionals from many fields and raises the question of whether certain policies and cooperative approaches are essential to the success of residential projects. What might have happened if the same measures had been implemented at Robin Hood Gardens? What if rents at the Unité d'Habitation had been frozen?

### *Cooperative Housing: Large-Scale Implementation and a Modern Model*

A more recent model has been adopted in various South American countries, with Uruguay standing out due to its successful outcomes. After a progressive government was elected in 2005, Uruguay created a legislative framework to formalize the ideas of self-construction and cooperation in housing, which had gained popularity since the 1960s, rooted in the indigenous concept of ayni—cooperation and work-sharing. The government has introduced two methods for developing cooperative housing. The first, called ahorso previo, targets the middle class, capable of repaying 15% of the loan and hiring a construction

company. The second, *ayuda mutua*, enables the most marginalized populations to contribute initially through manual labor in a process of self-construction and design. In 2012, Uruguay received the World Habitat Award for its outstanding cooperative housing program, which has resulted in the construction of 3,653 homes. Each municipality supports two projects annually, each with a budget of three million pesos, or \$90,000. Community participation is encouraged through a voting system, where each citizen has two votes: one for a proposal within their district and one for an initiative beyond their own.

### *La Borda: A Model for a Renewed Spanish Housing System*

Building on the Uruguayan model and inspired by Denmark's *Andel* system, Spain has experienced significant growth in cooperative housing in recent years. Among these developments, *La Borda*, designed by the *Lacol* architectural cooperative, is a contemporary example whose innovative approach to communal living earned it the 2022 Mies van der Rohe Award in the Best Emerging Architects category. This cooperative housing scheme includes 28 units of three different sizes—40, 60, and 75 square meters—including a compact kitchen with a sink, two burners, a living area, bedrooms, and a bathroom with a shower. While private tubs are absent, there is a communal one. Shared spaces encompass an 80-square-meter communal kitchen, a large 100-square-meter multipurpose room, and additional areas such as a dining room, guest accommodations like a room for visitors, and several rooms bookable via an app, along with storage, a laundry room on the top floor, outdoor or semi-outdoor spaces like the patio and roof, galleries, and a large central courtyard. The building is organized around a courtyard inspired by the *corrallas*, a traditional architectural form from central and southern Spain, alternating private zones that safeguard residents' privacy with common areas that make up 25% of the total space. This contrasts with traditional residences, where shared corridors or circulation spaces typically constitute about 10% of the building, challenging the conventional definition of residential housing as merely the sum of individual units. The new design embodies a fresh approach to communal living, where privacy levels are flexible. For instance, residents can opt-in for a community dinner every Wednesday, where cooking and eating together is voluntary but frequently attended by around two-thirds of residents. Other communal responsibilities include cleaning shared areas, which is divided among residents on a monthly basis—per

person, not per unit—and participation in a cooperative assembly held every two months.

### *Can Battlò: Activism as a Shared Background*

The context within which this project developed can be summarized in three points. The first key point is the strength of the neighborhood's activist movements. It is located in Sants, within Can Battlò, where the community is actively involved in fighting for citizens' rights. The former Can Battlò factory, after being exploited and then left to decay, was the subject of demands by residents wanting the 1976 post-Franco master plan to be implemented, which designated the property for public use. Thanks to their protests, in 2009 they managed to secure a use agreement with the Barcelona city council. La Borda was born from this community effort, with the specific goal of helping families in need. Can Battlò in Catalan literally means the house of Battlò, a wealthy industrialist from one of Barcelona's most prominent families—the same family that commissioned Antoni Gaudí to design the famous house at number 43 on Passeig de Gràcia. In 1878, he bought land in La Bordeta, near Sants, a working-class neighborhood not far from the city center, to build his textile factory. Raw cotton entered the complex and was processed by thousands of workers, leaving only after the production, including final dyeing, was complete. The complex thrived during the Industrial Revolution and the rise of Spain's bourgeoisie and proletariat. At the start of the Civil War, the Battlò family abandoned the village and their factory, which was quickly taken over by the workers, who collectively owned it—though the project failed when the owners returned a few years later at the end of the conflict. In 1943, they sold it to Julio Muñoz Ramonet, who, along with his brother, took advantage of abuses under the Franco regime, acquiring about forty textile factories, which greatly enriched him until the early 1960s when the sector began to decline. The decision was made to repurpose the spaces, shifting away from their industrial roots, fragmenting the property, and renting out the units—since real estate income exceeded the profits from fabric production. Within a few years, over two hundred tenants occupied the area. Alongside the decline of Franco's regime, union activities grew in the neighborhood, exposing exploitation and continuing a tradition from the 1940s, when the parish of Sant Medir became a cornerstone of democratic resistance. A cultural center was formed to actively highlight neighborhood issues. Lacking schools, gyms, or healthcare facilities,

the area was exploited for economic gain at residents' expense. Under pressure from protests, Can Battlò was designated as a green and public space for community services in the 1976 post-Franco urban plan. However, on paper, this decision was constrained by political balances beyond the City Council's control, leaving the plan stalled. Meanwhile, wealthy families who historically offered jobs continued to profit from real estate, until 1992 when the city prepared for the Olympics by launching redevelopment projects. Ramonet's heir saw that selling part of the complex for public use and green spaces could boost the value of neighboring properties, which were still governed by the 1976 regulations. Nearly twenty years later, the public and private sectors finally reached an agreement, exchanging increased building capacity for part of Can Battlò's space to meet the community's needs. The 2008 crisis and the housing bubble halted construction, and the site suffered further from economic downturn and stalled public projects. To escape their subordinate position to the exploitative neoliberal market, the community organized and launched a campaign in March 2009, issuing an ultimatum: if construction did not start by June 11, 2011, residents would occupy and manage the factory themselves. The countdown intensified as the deadline approached, with associations and social movements from Bordeta, Sants, and across the city participating in protests, which contributed to the tense environment that included peaceful demonstrations by the Indignados. Just four days before the deadline, the city council approved a self-managed use of one of the buildings, Bloque 11, which was redeveloped and put into use over two years. A public library was built immediately, along with meeting spaces, a bar, a carpentry shop, a climbing wall, and other community facilities, plus gardens and orchards. Community groups and residents continued to work on revitalizing not just individual spaces but the entire neighborhood. In April 2013, they successfully campaigned to demolish part of the perimeter wall to open a new road, making the area more accessible, inclusive, and safe. Every project at Can Battlò follows specific principles of economic, community, and socio-political sustainability. These are self-managed, sustainable initiatives aimed at transforming the community space. Currently, there are forty-two projects, 39 of which are mobile and do not have permanent locations, except for two: CantinaLab and La Borda. The nine hectares of the former industrial complex host markets, concerts, workshops, and various community initiatives. CantinaLab is a small bar and restaurant in the southwest corner, while La Borda is on the opposite side, overlooking Carrer de

la Constitució and engaged with a dense network of affordable housing and ongoing redevelopment projects by associations. Lacol, a cooperative of twelve architects and collaborators, offers transparency about their work and credits everyone involved. Unlike traditional large-scale architecture driven by individual architects, Lacol adopts a horizontal structure, valuing every contribution as if crediting a film's cast. Since 2012, they have been part of Balanç Social, measuring their social and environmental impact, with reports available online. The latest data from 2021 shows their employee income (€436,701.83), funding, involved social enterprises, expenses—including salaries and training—and profits (€37,691.84). They also report on gender balance, inclusiveness, work-life balance, work environment quality, and conditions like working while sick. Despite employees rating their jobs highly—8.86 out of 10—their salaries are modest, around €1,600–1,800 annually. They actively participate in political and social campaigns, supporting networks like Xarxa d'Economia Solidària, Batec, and Arquitecturas Colectivas, which foster participatory urban development. These ties brought Lacol many clients, especially for the La Borda project, which started in 2009 when recent graduates Pol Massoni, Arnau Andrés, and Lali Daví chose the site for their thesis. Through informal activism, they continued working on Can Battlò after graduation, observing and engaging with the community for a year before formally supporting the project. La Borda became a valuable learning experience for them, with initial years of unpaid research, only later gaining funding and better working conditions—an issue still relevant today.

### *La Borda and the Production of Money*

The second key factor is the context in which Spain faced the severe housing crisis following the 2008 financial crisis. Today, fewer than one social housing unit is available for every 100 people, compared to 12.5 in the Netherlands. Additionally, 75.8% of the population owns their home, one of the highest rates in Europe, showing the inefficiency of other, more accessible systems or the complete lack of viable alternatives. Architect Cristina Gamboa, a member of Lacol, explained in an August 2023 interview that until recent years, social housing made up just 1.52% of Barcelona's housing supply, and her firm aims to increase this to 15%. At the same time, there has been a rise in building occupations across the country, seen as an alternative way to tackle the housing crisis. In Catalonia, which includes Barcelona, there are 6,650

occupied buildings. The current left-wing government is taking steps to address this issue, with La Borda participating in these efforts, including a significant reduction in documentation and property transfer fees for cooperative housing. Support from the government has promoted a cooperative housing model that avoids final privatization, favoring a right-of-use system. The City of Barcelona granted La Borda land for building through a system that is neither strictly a purchase nor a lease, requiring an annual fee for a 75-year lease. Residents, either individuals or families, are part of a group entitled to housing assistance, with low incomes and no private property, and participate by paying a monthly fee. If a tenant wishes to leave, they are reimbursed for their investment, and a new tenant is found through mutual agreement. This approach mirrors a method popular in 1970s Spain, where a cooperative bought a property, divided it, and then dissolved so tenants could own their apartments—except now, this final step is skipped to prevent speculation. The rent for a high-quality building is €7/m<sup>2</sup>, compared to €12.63/m<sup>2</sup> for standard low-end housing, with no fixed contract duration. The project was designed from the start under specific socioeconomic constraints that guided the technological, procedural, and design choices. Affordability, or keeping costs low, is central, as Gamboa highlights that architecture accounts for 80% of new residence costs. The total project cost was €2,460,000, or €841/m<sup>2</sup>, less than the typical €1,100/m<sup>2</sup> for similar housing. As a cooperative, La Borda seeks to serve working-class needs through mutual support and to prevent neighborhood speculation. Therefore, fees are based on actual costs and are unaffected by market speculation. Gamboa, who is also a tenant, explains that for a 60-m<sup>2</sup> unit with access to shared spaces, she pays €500 monthly, which includes bills, a solidarity tax set by the cooperative, and management fees. An additional €80 monthly covers individual bills. She also notes that there is an initial €18,000 fee to join the cooperative that owns the building. Though it appears similar to renting, the payments do not go to third parties but help build the cooperative's assets. A key aspect of La Borda is its ability to generate income. After 30 years, all costs will be covered, and the cooperative will start generating revenue until year 75. The model recognizes the importance of combining social and economic factors in urban cooperatives. This approach echoes the courtyard houses before the Industrial Revolution, where space productivity was key. Gamboa emphasizes that La Borda was never meant just as a residence but as a way to bring urban diversity into its core and reflect the neighborhood's working-class spirit. The architects had to lobby city

officials for this kind of agreement, and despite the success—including the contract to plan cooperative housing across Barcelona—they are now seeking independence from government mediation. They plan to enter the private market and work on redeveloping existing buildings, believing that land use and sustainability are crucial. Lacol continues to face challenges and risks to build a stronger foundation for the future.

### *The Social Network and the Relationship Between Lacol and La Borda for the Definition of the Project*

The third favorable element, already mentioned earlier, is the emergence of the social economy. It constitutes a third sector alongside the private and public sectors, and according to Law 5/2011, it includes non-profit organizations, social enterprises, charitable entities, and cooperatives. Sostre Civic is a cooperative operating in Catalonia, formed in 2004, which now has a thousand members, seventeen projects, and 86 houses in use. Its goal is to coordinate the various projects in the region, even though each operates independently. Along with XES, the Xarxa of Solidarity Economy, and La Dinamo, they are part of a large network that promotes cooperative housing in Spain. The latter, Dinamo, is a foundation created alongside the La Borda project, Ciutat de Barcelona, and the Ciutat de Barcelona. INvisible and the Lacol architecture firm. It also works in intercooperation, model development, and public policy, focusing on dissemination, training, and research related to cooperative housing, and supports projects on a technical and financial level. Architect Gamboa described the cohesion between Lacol and La Dinamo and how the architecture firm and the foundation collaborate, sharing their studio and staff, who, depending on their needs, make their work available to one or the other entity, while maintaining distinct profiles. Gamboa states that architects from Lacol work almost entirely at La Dinamo, specializing in regulations rather than architecture, because the structure and operations required to establish cooperative housing are very complicated on a bureaucratic level. Since 2012, Lacol has worked extensively with Ciutat Invisible, a «cooperative and self-management project that aims to build alternatives to the salaried and precarious work imposed by the capitalist economic system,» which is currently located along with its own bookshop on the floor below Lacol's office. At that time, I was investigating the creation of a cooperative neighborhood. Gamboa emphasizes how relations with Ciutat Invisible, the support of the squatters' movement, the presence of Coopolis, a large social eco-

nomy incubator, the interest of Coop57—which essentially provided the funding—and the establishment of La Borda as a cooperative before the residency, all created the fertile ground and fundamental prerequisites for the project's success. The architects were in contact with activists, anthropologists, sociologists, journalists, and philosophers, engaging in discussions where they contributed their knowledge to the debate on cooperative living. This sharing of knowledge is a theme Gamboa frequently returns to during the interview, highlighting the value of design expertise within broader conversations.

The informal discussion about Can Battlò became more formal when the first meeting with forty people was held, followed by the formation of the cooperative. A key point to remember is La Borda's role as a cooperative. La Borda is both the name of the cooperative housing and the cooperative itself, of which all tenants are members. It is the cooperative that selects Lacol based on a proposal, and it maintains control throughout the building's design. In La Borda's project, we see for the first time the architect's almost total subservience to the client. Gamboa describes this relationship by outlining different types of interactions where the hierarchy varies. Sometimes Lacol presents several proposals and La Borda chooses, such as with the main construction material. Although initially considering renovating an industrial building, which would have needed a change to the General Metropolitan Plan, the final decision was to build a new structure from CLT (cross-laminated timber). This timber guarantees light weight and high durability, and its «closed» cycle ensures low energy consumption during production. Since this technology is still relatively new, La Borda, with its six 3-meter floors, is the tallest wooden building in Spain. Other times, for certain technical decisions, Lacol simply communicated the option it thought best, assuming there was no need to discuss with the tenants. La Borda created an «architecture» committee, later renamed “maintenance,” consisting initially of five people (later expanded to eight) who, along with the architects, closely monitored the building's design. Gamboa emphasizes that, on one hand, there was an important process of delegation from the cooperative to the committee, and on the other, a high level of trust based on shared values, without which collaboration wouldn't have been so successful. Every design choice was discussed and approved by the La Borda community, which actively participated throughout the decision-making process, especially during construction. To foster participation, the cooperative established what they called the conviviality model, which Lacol used to define not

just the necessary spaces but also the primary needs and visions of future residents. In short, they aimed to identify shared values with the community and then translate these into physical forms independently. Like Giancarlo De Carlo, they started with workshops presenting various architectural images to spark ideas and develop a shared vocabulary. For Lacol, making architecture accessible was a way to uphold their political ideals. The selection process for those involved in construction was based on three main criteria: first, technical competence; second, prioritizing those connected to the social economy network; and third, favoring co-op members themselves. Construction happened in two phases: the first included the essential work needed for tenants to move in, and the second involved tenants completing parts of the build using low-tech methods. The design favors simplicity, allowing residents to assemble and disassemble parts as needed. Meetings with future tenants highlighted the importance of their ability to work on the building and revealed a preference for a traditional aesthetic. Gamboa noted that the final look is especially appreciated inside, likely due to the use of wood, and on the south facade, which features a more traditional look with shutters and balconies. Conversely, the north facade, which has a more industrial and experimental style—using affordable materials to explore different architectural languages—is less favored. Overall, style was never the main focus. Gamboa states that there are no aesthetic choices at La Borda. The primary concern was comfort, which tenants expressed repeatedly, explaining why the building often looks «bare» and under ongoing development. Community members were interviewed about their habits, customs, and energy needs. They participated in workshops and meetings, and helped make decisions about design, construction, and upkeep until the project was finalized. Every first Saturday of the month, members and volunteers worked on finishing shared spaces or learned basic skills for home renovation, like installing electrical systems or building interior walls. Tenants admit it was initially hard to accept the idea of working on their apartments, such as finding a kitchen setup or painting walls, especially given reservations about the small size of units. While some, particularly elderly tenants, were happy to reduce their space, for others it was a challenge. Today, La Borda hosts a diverse group of residents in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s, including retirees. Forty percent are families, followed by two single-parent households and groups living together without romantic ties. Initially, many were young singles who later formed couples, and now there's a group of five retirees living together. This reflects the need

for elderly residents to live communally for care, and also shows how the community evolves over time, a factor the architects considered during planning. They conducted interviews to understand future tenants' identities and needs beforehand, which helped with smarter planning and cost efficiency. The building, however, remains flexible and adaptable for different residents over the years. In fact, it was designed so that units can't be inherited, challenging the idea of private ownership and leading to some changes in tenant composition. Unlike larger, modern developments, it's not aimed at typical families but is built to support various group arrangements without preconceptions. Still, the cooperative admits it mainly comprises Europeans from similar cultural backgrounds; Gamboa mentioned concerns about cultural gentrification. Although La Borda is located in a working-class neighborhood, its residents tend to be highly educated, which somewhat excludes the original population of Sants.

Lacol not only ensured excellent spatial quality but also managed to save money and create a building that will consume little and be cost-effective to maintain. The economic aspect is therefore tied to multiple factors: in addition to shared spaces—which are seen here not as sacrifices but as social opportunities—technological choices were made that, instead of focusing on low material costs, emphasize climate performance and long-term economics. A key decision that resulted in significant savings in both construction and sustainability was the elimination of underground parking, partly because it was not deemed essential for low-income families who often cannot afford a car, partly to promote the use of more sustainable transportation options, and partly because the municipality plans to build a nearby parking garage. Instead, a passageway on the ground floor was chosen to facilitate future access and make the fabric more permeable and open to neighborhood passersby. However, the results of these efforts are not yet visible, as the adjacent area is still under development. Above all, the entire building follows the Passive House strategy: materials were selected to ensure good thermal inertia, windows and doors were chosen for airtightness, solar panels were installed, a centralized water and air conditioning system uses a biomass boiler, and the central patio is covered by a greenhouse that captures solar radiation in winter and utilizes the chimney effect in summer, maximizing natural ventilation.

## *Similar Protests and Similar Results*

The La Borda residence is, therefore, a complex network of strategies from diverse backgrounds, all ethically aimed at the same goal, which appears simple on the surface. It's important to remember that throughout the entire project, La Borda, as a cooperative, held the control, while Lacol was hired by La Borda and always maintained a respectful stance toward it. Authorship, in this example, fades into the background behind the cooperative's collective will. Thanks to a participatory design process and sustainable technological choices, they have developed an architectural-economic model that keeps costs low and aligns with an urban discourse that seeks to shield city space from capitalist priorities. This serves as a contemporary example of acting boldly in the challenging field of housing—an area where few similar examples exist, with some comparisons to projects by the young studio Assemble, which shares many similarities with Lacol. In the same year that La Borda's story began, the English studio was invited by Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt in Berlin to propose a model for shared, self-determined living for older adults. That project also emerged from a protest: a middle-class house built in 1927 had been used as a social center for seniors since 1999. The house needed extensive and costly repairs, and the municipality decided, without consulting the 29 groups who met daily to sing, learn English, or play the traditional game of Skat, to relocate them. In June 2012, forty people over 60 occupied the building to reclaim its significance. With help from external activists, the occupation lasted four months, during which events, readings, and shared dinners were organized to raise awareness about the issue. An agreement was reached on new management for the center and the construction of a residential facility next door. Assemble interviewed future tenants to understand some key points—some purely architectural, like the need to pay particular attention to thresholds, and others more conceptual: the residence was meant to enable people, not just the elderly, to participate in society, as they did in East Germany. For this residence, Assemble proposed dividing each unit into two parts: a first, privately owned building designed like a traditional home, with all components that could be moved or assembled through self-build workshops; and a second, more minimalist, rented collective building that could be adapted to individual needs—such as expanding the first part, making it accessible to the community, or avoiding rent as the family unit shrinks. The shared spaces mirror those of La Borda, although in this case, social interaction

is even more prominent. It has been shown that nutrition, physical activity, and social interaction are key ingredients for longevity—and, in this sense, this type of design can serve as a useful policy tool.

Based in London, Assemble is one of the most interesting and diverse practices working today. Its sixteen members, most of whom studied architecture at Cambridge University, have expertise spanning history, literature, art, philosophy, architecture, and planning. Their work primarily focuses on thoughtful regeneration, often partnering with grassroots community groups, local governments, arts organizations, and universities to create non-hierarchical social spaces. For example, in Granby, a working-class neighborhood in Liverpool's port city built in the early 20th century, the architects collaborated with a community protest that started in 2005 to save four streets of abandoned Victorian terraced houses slated for demolition by the local government. The community association and other groups had spent years opposing the council's decision, planting vegetables, flowers, and fruit trees in the deserted streets. Assemble worked with the Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust and the Steinbeck Studios investment group on a long-term plan to secure funding, restore abandoned homes, and make them available for sale. The group also aimed to improve the social life of the streets. One house, deemed uninhabitable, was transformed into the Granby Winter Garden, a community space for meetings, socializing, and craft workshops. Assemble received the Turner Prize in 2015 for this project—marking a significant step in rethinking the concept of home, a theme fully echoed in La Borda's project.

### *Five Key Characteristics*

The story of La Borda's project finally highlights five distinctive features. The first is its connection to activism. Lacol has grown from a group of friends interested in activism into a formal architecture collective that sees rethinking housing as its political goal. Although Can Battlò is a unique case—a convergence of energies built over many years—the studio is working on other cooperative housing projects like Sotrac, La Balma, La Raval, and La Morada, aiming to go beyond the building scale and create change at the urban level. For them, La Borda isn't a repeatable model but a code that must be redefined each time based on the changing context. Lacol's activism manifests not just in its projects but also in its way of working. For example, the studio avoids spending too much time on models and claims that «detail is political» to prevent

increasing billable hours charged to the client. The second characteristic is the unique network within which the project operates—whether through grants and municipal policies or considering the social economy as a true network that, as the interview reveals, functions through mutual aid. Neighborhood protests and social movements have been key to the project's success. In this context, Lacol often emphasizes its subservience to the client, removing the notion of the architect as an author. Most of Lacol's commissions come from the City of Barcelona, and beyond actual projects, it creates reference tools for cooperative housing and organizes exhibitions to promote them. The third trait is its focus on technological innovation and sustainability, along with architecture as a practical tool for living, which strengthens their efforts on all levels. You can't fight for decent housing without fighting for environmental sustainability. The penultimate key feature is the pervasive interdisciplinarity involving cooperatives, architects, tenants, businesses, and specialists of all kinds. The history of Lacol's relationships with La Borda or La Dinamo shows the importance of developing hybrid professional figures and how interdisciplinarity has become essential. The fifth key element is the shared approach among all project participants. Unlike modern architecture, which aimed to educate people about living, in the Barcelona residence, it is the diverse community that educates the architects. It's important to remember that the architects approached this project as recent graduates and, in part, became tenants. The architecture doesn't promote a specific ideology but demonstrates the need to present new options, to suggest, to inspire dreams. Lacol talks about empowering people—giving agency—to challenge mainstream architectural practices. Drawing from modernist influences, De Carlo's involvement, the Uruguayan model, and newer examples like Assemble, La Borda is a form of protest or, as Gamboa calls it, a Trojan horse for rethinking our way of living together.



House from Heidi, cartoon from 1974.



House from Desperate Housewife, tv show 2004-2010.



The Sims' house, videogame, 2000.

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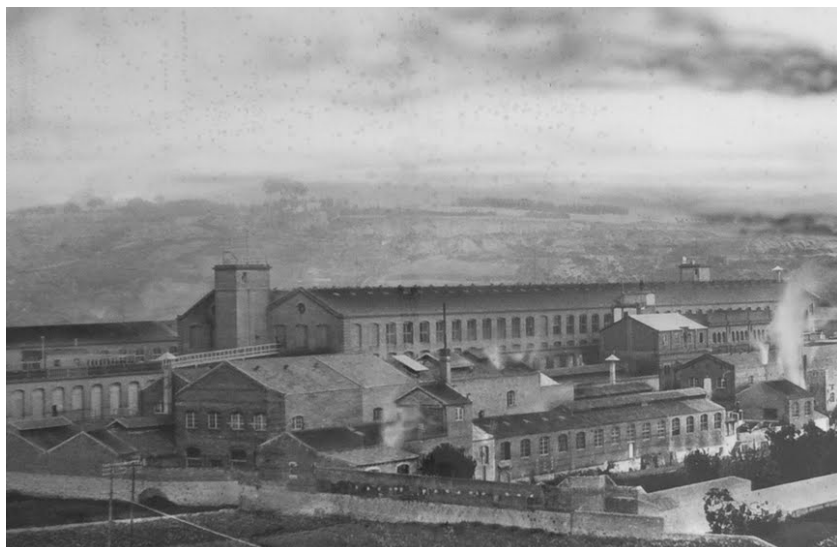
IKEA advertising, 2008.



IKEA advertising, 2008.



Sants neighbourhood and the city center of Barcelona, Spain.



Joan Batlló cotton Factory in the late 19th century.



Protest at Can Battlò, march 2009.



Can Battlò neighbourhood in 2023, photograph by Martina Dussin.



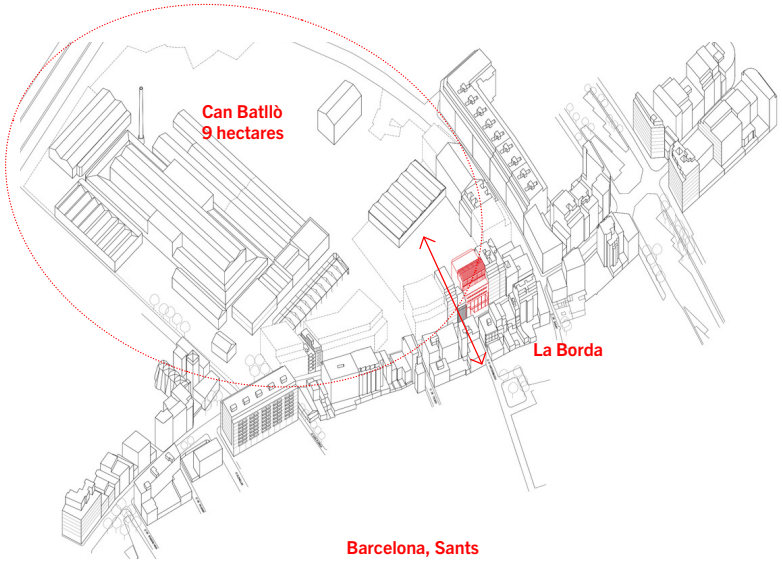
Can Battlò neighbourhood under restoration in 2023, photograph by Martina Dussin.



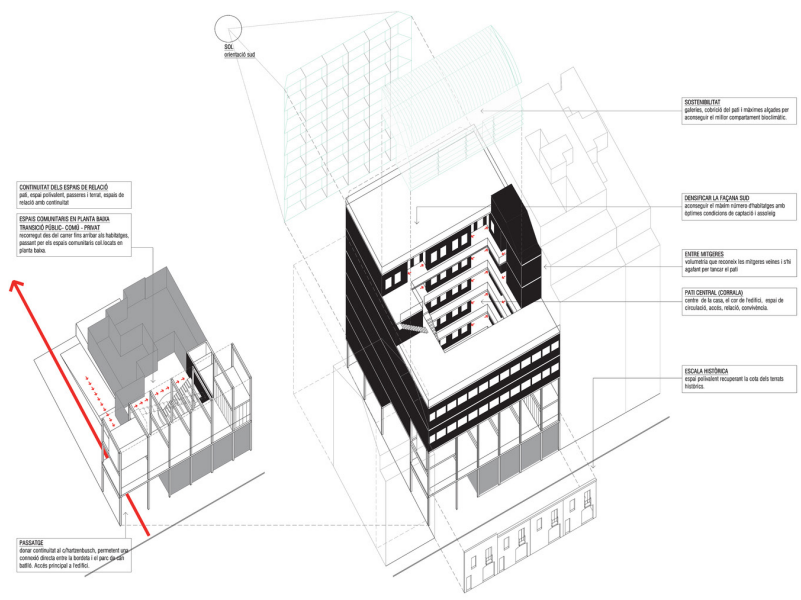
Community lunch at Can Battlò.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, internal facade, photograph by Martina Dussin.



Can Batllò and La Borda Cooperative Housing, drawing by Lacol.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, drawing by Lacol.



La Borda Cooperative HOusing, facade by Carrer de la Constitucio, photograph by Lluç Miralles.



La Borda Cooperative HOusing, facade by Carrer de la Constitucio, photograph by Martina Dussin.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, main common space during a meeting, photograph by Lluç Miralles.



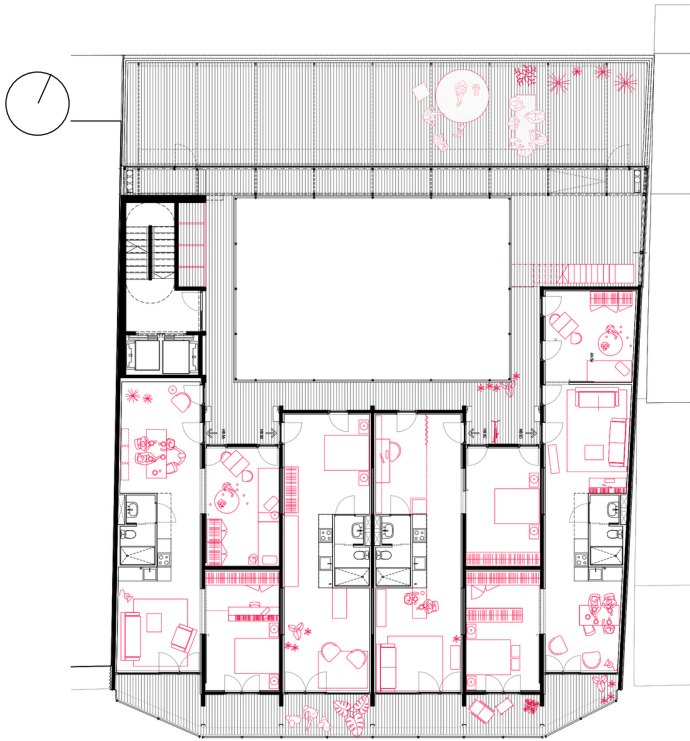
La Borda Cooperative Housing, main common space, photograph by Lluç Miralles.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, entrance of the building - bike park, photograph by Lluç Miralles.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, courtyard - patio, photograph by Lluç Miralles.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, plan of the sixth floor - common balcony, drawing by Lacol.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, plan of the third floor - units system, drawing by Lacol.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, walkways, photograph by Lluç Miralles.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, internal space of one of one of the living units of the housing, photograph by Lluç Miralles.



La Borda Cooperative Housing, internal stair in CLT: cross laminated timber wood, photograph by Lacol.

On the opposite page: Cover of The Funambulist, issue 48,  
July-August 2023.

WRITING

*Assembling Politics:  
Architectural Publishing as a  
Critical Practice*



**Abstract**

*This chapter explores architectural publishing as a space where architecture intersects with politics, examining how journals have historically facilitated dialogue between the discipline and broader cultural debates. From postwar Italy's militant magazines to the radical fanzines of the 1960s and 1970s, publishing has not only documented projects but also fostered critical discourse, political engagement, and collective imagination. The chapter then focuses on *The Funambulist*, a contemporary French magazine that reclaims the political potential of architectural publishing. Through its editorial choices, the magazine positions architecture as a spatial practice intertwined with power, colonialism, race, gender, and resistance, highlighting issues of positionality, solidarity, and critical internationalism. More broadly, the chapter argues that publishing has become an essential platform for architecture—one that supports, connects, and amplifies activist ideas.*

## Writing. Assembling Politics: Architectural Publishing As Critical Practice

Architectural journals have traditionally been one of the main ways the discipline connects with society, culture, and especially politics. They are not merely repositories of ideas or projects but active tools for shaping architecture's theoretical and critical framework. It is within this publishing realm that architecture finds an outlet to express, debate, and sometimes redefine its disciplinary role and position in the world.

Early architectural publications were mostly used for internal communication among architects, especially before the twentieth century. Rather than trying for a bigger public audience, they were places where specialists debated technological solutions, discussed developing trends inside the industry, and exchanged ideas. The scope of these books started to grow with the arrival of Modernism, though. Like movements such as *Esprit Nouveau*, magazines began engaging not just with other creative spheres but also with a bigger and progressively politicized audience. This development follows the slow change of architectural periodicals from internal expert forums into tools able to shape cultural debate and public perceptions of architecture.

This chapter uses architectural publishing—specifically magazines—as a lens to examine the relationship between architecture and politics, observing how this relationship is portrayed, challenged, or renewed through publishing practices. In particular, we analyze the case of *The Funambulist*. This contemporary French magazine suggests a significant paradigm shift: moving away from the self-referential nature of traditional architectural representation, it reexplores and reclaims architecture's fundamental ability to engage in political discourse from its very origins. *The Funambulist* does not merely discuss political issues; it demonstrates how space, bodies, and architectural elements are inherently linked to the logic of power and conflict. This is achieved through a specific editorial approach, which will be the focus of our analysis: a collective, context-aware, and intentional practice capable of turning architectural writing into a critical and political instrument.

## *Foreword: Writing as Architectural Practice*

Architecture, in its challenge to express itself, often depends on written language to reveal and communicate its essence.<sup>1</sup> From the theoretical treatises of Vitruvius, Palladius, and Durand to the programmatic manifestos of Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, the written word has always played a central role in defining, shaping, and narrating the discipline. In his 1996 collection of essays, titled *\*Architecture and Disjunction\**, Bernard Tschumi states that «architecture would not exist without drawings, in the same way, it would not exist without texts»,<sup>2</sup> recognizing that writing is not just an auxiliary element but a fundamental aspect of design. Indeed, for Tschumi, language can surpass architecture itself, adding meaning, expanding its boundaries, and contributing to its theoretical and creative development. Architecture, in this perspective, «resembles a masked figure» that «cannot be easily revealed. It is constantly hiding behind ties, behind words, behind precepts, behind customs, behind technical constraints». Thus, language does more than simply describe architecture; it becomes an integral part of it, a tool capable of generating both physical and virtual spaces. Writing, therefore, is not only a way to tell a story or communicate but also a design instrument.

## *Second Premise: Architecture After Certainty: Space, Language, and Political Critique*

The second premise addresses the transformation of the concept of architecture itself since the second half of the twentieth century. With the decline of the Modern Movement and growing disillusionment with functionalism, technological expressionism, and neo-Corbusianism, the discipline enters a critical phase, questioning its theoretical foundations. In this crisis, architecture loses its 'innocence' and begins to radically question its nature. Consequently, there is a continuous dematerialization of architecture, which no longer equals construction or form but instead opens up to a more fluid and immaterial idea of space: space

1 Cf. Tschumi, B. (2005) *Architecture and Disjunction*, Pendragon, p. 77. In which Bernard Tschumi referring to architecture writes that: «its disjunction is part of the pleasure of architecture». Or. ed. *Architecture and Disjunction*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA), 1996.

2 Ibid., p. 77.

experienced, excluded, traversed, and imposed.<sup>3</sup> Architecture becomes synonymous with spatial experience in all its social and political implications. The clear one-to-one relationship between building, function, and meaning no longer exists: space and its use are shaped as unstable concepts filled with ambiguity and potential.

In this context, architectural publishing shifts away from the prophetic and celebratory tone seen in previous decades, taking on a more critical role. Magazines no longer serve as tools for ideological proselytizing or self-promotion; instead, they become platforms for questioning society and politics, which are now more central themes—approached not with authoritative claims but with openness and dialogue. This change reflects broader shifts in the medium: architectural magazines move from documenting architectural work or theoretical debates to becoming responsive to current cultural, social, and political issues. Unlike books, which circulate slowly and are often tied to fixed ideas, magazines engage with the immediacy of contemporary life. Their periodic nature allows them to respond to ongoing debates, follow trends in art and society, and connect with both professionals and the interested public, bridging disciplinary discourse and everyday experience. Moreover, it makes sense to talk about this today because there has been a clear paradigm shift compared to magazines from the 2000s.

In fact, the space within the magazine may be where a new kind of commitment emerges. No longer solely tied to traditional disciplines, architectural journals begin to challenge the very essence of architecture: what is it? What should it focus on? Who is it for? However, this intellectual activity is uneven. In non-academic outlets, social or political involvement often replaces rigorous analysis, while deeper critical thinking mostly remains in academic journals - like the Italian *Vesper*<sup>4</sup>. This raises an important question: if activism replaces analytical and theoretical work, can these publications truly be called “architectural criticism”? The tension between rapid social involvement and ongoing intellectual debate makes magazines a particularly revealing medium

3 Cf. Tafuri, M. (1973). *Progetto e utopia: Architettura e sviluppo capitalistico*. Laterza.

4 *Vesper* is a biannual, Class A scientific journal published by the Iuav University of Venice. It features a multidisciplinary and bilingual (Italian and English) approach, focusing on the relationships between design practices and theoretical reflection. The journal serves as a critical platform for exploring contemporary issues, privileging a plurality of narrative modes, visual intelligence, and cross-disciplinary exchanges.

for understanding architecture's changing role in modern culture. Writing thus becomes a fertile ground for engaging in the realm of ideas, which emancipates itself from merely illustrating the project to become a project space in itself: a space of thought, discontinuity, and possibility.

### *Militant Publishing in Postwar Italy: Journals as Sites of Intellectual Engagement*

In the second half of the twentieth century, in Italy, a country scarred by the rubble of fascism and the need for reconstruction—physical, political, and cultural—architectural journals emerged as places of debate, confrontation, and militancy. Intellectuals find themselves coming to terms with their position and role in society. A critical consciousness is awakened, prompting them to question the link between culture and politics and the responsibility of culture to reality. There is a need to renew a commitment that restores culture to an active and participatory role in the country's democratic construction.

Noberto Bobbio, to describe the conduct of the intellectual concerning political events, uses the words "Vigilance and firmness." In 1955, he published a book entitled *Politics and Culture*, in which he clarified and discussed the responsibilities and obligations of culture in political terms. He places politicized culture and apolitical culture at the two extremes, immediately announcing how both contain the same insidiousness: "that culture loses its function as the spiritual guide of society at a given historical moment, that is, the function that is its very *raison d'être*."<sup>5</sup> In the first case - politicized culture - in which architecture can be read as a cultural element, culture would assume a position of subjection to a first political purpose, becoming nothing more than a tool; in the second - apolitical culture - on the other hand, it would position itself away from the social sphere, losing its communicative capacity and conforming increasingly unproductively. The author makes it clear that the man of culture must position himself in the fertile discussion between the two enunciated poles, always remembering that, in doing so, he must not hinder the development of culture itself.

After World War II, Italy found itself precisely between these two ends, defining its refoundation. The Belpaese finds itself rebuilding its territory, its political system, and its nation, and it was precisely in those

5 Ibid., p. 35.

years that the debate on the labile and delicate link between culture and sociopolitical reality widened its audience and its reasons to the point of building the Italian movements and successes of the 1960s and 1970s. In architecture, we could say that the interest of professionals in political militancy and their approach to social demands constituted a relationship and a theory of the project that, over time, have been recognized within and beyond Italian borders and to which it makes sense to return to today to analyze not only the limits and rules of the architectural project, but above all its encroachments, its overrides, its denials, and the evolutions of its attitude of protest.

Journals such as *Metron*, *Casabella* *Continuità*, *Architettura Cronache e Storia*, *Controspazio*, *Contropiano*, and *Spazio e società* demonstrate a desire to turn publishing into an active critical space that helps shape a new architectural culture. It's no longer just about describing buildings or publishing projects but about developing ideas. These journals see themselves as connectors to politics, universities, the working world, and civil society.

Bruno Zevi was among the first to radically reinterpret this vocation, turning writing and popularization into tools of activism. With *Metron* first and *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia* later, although the two magazines are quite different, Zevi established an editorial discourse aimed at restoring the centrality of the project as a social and political practice. In *Metron*, the titles and content suggest a tendency to describe and discuss phenomena rather than showcase individual design projects, making them valuable for sparking comparisons that can foster dialogue among Italian architects, who are seen as a group in conversation with society. Indeed, in the first issue, we read this self-presentation: «New men, who have been fighting their own battles for years, against academia and sterile formalism take the places of responsibility in a society that wants to renew itself».<sup>6</sup> In the editorial of the first issue of *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia*, however, he writes that the magazine «is the result of an act of optimism»<sup>7</sup> and that its goal is the integration of Italian architectural culture, which already in the first lines seems to contain a militant force capable of changing not only the country's appearance and spatial dynamics but also its social policies. Despite this optimistic statement, the opening remarks seem quite the oppo-

6 Formwork, "Metron. Rivista internazionale di architettura", no. 1, 1945, p. 1.

7 Ibid.

site, quoting Albert Camus<sup>8</sup>, listing «the data of our social and artistic drama», including uncontrolled urban growth that favors concrete over green, the significant problem of speculation, and concerns about housing. However, these are almost used as a pretext to urge a favorable «fate of intellectuals».<sup>9</sup> Each article is accompanied by a translation or summary in English, French, German, and Spanish, clearly indicating the intended audience. The principle of translation supports the desire to share information and reflections, as is evident from the title of the editorial, “Colloquio aperto.” Bruno Zevi seeks dynamism; he writes that «everyone can collaborate» on shaping the magazine without, among other things, needing to be an architect. For Zevi, it’s not just a matter of choice; collaboration becomes a political attitude, especially as he criticizes those who retreat into individualism. In fact, he admonishes architects by saying that «each of us is determined to save Italy on the condition, however, that we save it alone».<sup>10</sup>

Zevi was an architect closely connected to institutional politics. After beginning his studies at the University of Architecture in Rome, racial laws forced him to leave Italy, first moving to London to attend the Architectural Association School and later to Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. He intentionally chose Harvard to learn from masters like Walter Gropius and Frank Lloyd Wright. Once back in Italy, he quickly showed his dedication to his principles by founding the APAO in 1945 with Luigi Piccinato and Silvio Rediconcini. The organization aimed to teach Wrightian design as «a social, technical, and artistic activity focused on creating the environment for a new democratic civilization».<sup>11</sup> In 1946, APAO participated in the Rome municipal elections, reflecting Zevi’s active political engagement. Over time, he joined the Action Party and Popular Unity, and decades later, as a Radical Party member, he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies.

Casabella, under Ernesto Nathan Rogers’s editorship, also moves in the same direction. The discussion on the relationship between politics and

8 B. Zevi quotes Albert Camus writing, “The European intelligentsia, insofar as it has detached itself from any eternal coalition, sees itself compelled under thought of an absolute nihilism to realize happiness on earth. If we have nothing but this earth, justice takes the place of charity.” in B. Zevi, editorial *Colloquio aperto*, in *L’Architettura cronache e storia*, no. 1, 1955, p. 3.

9 Ibid.

10 B. Zevi, editorial *Colloquio aperto*, in *L’Architettura cronache e storia*, no. 1, 1955, p. 9.

11 Statement published in issue no. 2 of *Metron*.

architecture becomes clear, as seen in the famous editorial *Politics and Architecture* (1957), where Rogers uses the document from the central committee of the PCUS and the USSR's Council of Ministers about removing excess in projects and constructions as a pretext. He repeats that «no society can endure oblivious to art»<sup>12</sup> and emphasizes that it is the government's role to create conditions for architects to meet community needs. Rogers acknowledges the importance of socially responsible architecture but also defends the cultural dignity of the discipline, rejecting simplistic instrumental approaches.

Contemporary socio-political events of the time, from communism promoted by Rogers to capitalism as a system of operation, are repeatedly discussed in the journals of the period. Amid the rise of student protests, the journal emphasizes the urgency of understanding the dynamics that govern architecture, with defining its language as a key issue. They argue that the architectural problem is also — and primarily — a linguistic problem, requiring not only technical solutions but a “mythopoetic component” capable of generating new meaning. The challenge then becomes to give architecture an autonomous voice that can interpret and critically respond to the changes of its era.

During the same years, Casabella increasingly took on an active role in giving voice to the social and cultural tensions within the university world. Issue 278 is entirely dedicated to student protests in Italian architecture schools and begins with a provocative question: «What does this have to do with architecture? [...] But how can one understand architecture if one does not project it against the background of the society from which the spirit of the works emanates?»<sup>13</sup> The dossier aims to describe the changes in the relationship between education and society, highlighting how students adopted protest strategies borrowed from the working-class world. By mapping occupations geographically, from Turin to Palermo, Casabella collects the voices of teachers, professionals, and especially students, creating a mixed and participatory picture. This is not a top-down analysis: the magazine takes a side, «with the students», recognizing that many teachers experienced their professorship «as a kind of command bridge from which they could dispose of a passive and irresponsible crew of their rights».<sup>14</sup> In the editorial, Rogers stron-

12 Ibid., p. 4.

13 Rogers, E. N. (1964, May). *Esperienza nella continuità*. Casabella continuità. *Rivista internazionale di architettura e di urbanistica*, (287), 4.

14 Ibid.

gly emphasizes the need for architecture to accurately represent the historical reality it exists within. He argues that architecture is at risk of being reduced to a commodity, just an immediate response to practical needs, losing its cultural mission. «Why do we manifest so much love and concern for architecture in an age [...] pharisaical, mercantile and aimed at the immediate satisfaction of the practical world?»<sup>15</sup> he asks, sharply criticizing a technocratic and productivity-focused view of design. The university's role is not only to train technicians but to foster critical awareness. Therefore, it is appropriate for students to rebel “when the robe becomes an ampoule disguise,” citing Galileo Galilei's poem as a symbol of intellectual resistance.

The acknowledgment of politics' importance here is not seen as a restriction but as an opportunity for renewing architectural thinking. Issue 326 uses a collaborative editorial approach, a “team journal,” that aims to go beyond traditional hierarchies. The editorial even questions the very role of the profession: «Does the future society, which it will be, still need a category of people called ‘architects’?». <sup>16</sup> This radical stance is influenced by the context: design is viewed as a tool that can heal the divisions between teachers and students, between theory and practice, and between culture and activism. If politically motivated, the project can become a transformative practice: «The more convincing and precise it is, the better it can later translate - by political means - into direct action».<sup>17</sup>

This period also saw the birth of journals explicitly oriented toward radical criticism, such as *Contropiano* and *Controspazio*. Already, the titles declare an oppositional intention: to go “against,” to overthrow perspectives, and to propose new spaces of thought.

In *Contropiano*, a Marxist journal edited by Asor Rosa, Cacciari, and Negri, Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co present a deep critique of modern architectural ideology, condemning the discipline's integration into the mechanisms of capital's reproduction. They argue that architecture has lost its independence, and the project has been reduced to a purely technical and productive tool. The failure of this approach destroys the illusion of social transformation through form. The intel-

15 E. N. Rogers, *Elogio all'architettura, Casabella continuità. Rivista internazionale di architettura e di urbanistica*, no. 287 (May 1964): 1. In the article, Rogers cites Galileo Galilei, *Contra il portar la toga*.

16 AA. VV. (n.d.). Editorial: *Crisi metodica. Casabella progettazione*, (326).

17 Koenig, K. (1968). *La rivoluzione a ottobre. Casabella progettazione*, (328), 4.

lectual can no longer just focus on design but must also engage in a historical and political critique of their own operating conditions.

This pessimistic reading is flanked by experiences such as *Controspazio*, directed by Paolo Portoghesi, which, despite being aware of the crisis, proposes a different attitude. The magazine is open to dialogue with the user, with society, and with other disciplines. Architecture is observed from the point of view of those who live it, and each project is analyzed for its social cost. Writing becomes an instrument of denunciation but also of proposal: a place of information, theoretical experimentation, and openness.

Another emblematic example is *Space and Society*, founded by Giancarlo De Carlo in 1978. It explores the very meaning of the word “space” and its connections to power, living, and design. The magazine features an innovative format with columns, commentaries, essays, and graphic interventions woven together to foster complex, open, and participatory discussion. The social issue is at the heart of its focus: the housing crisis, housing speculation, and urban marginality are examined with critical rigor and a desire for transformation.

In conclusion, within this context, post-World War II Italian journals serve as true cultural laboratories, capable of critically analyzing the present and outlining alternatives. Their strength lies in their ability to forge connections: with the international community through ongoing exchange; with the university, a hub of innovation and activism; and with society, examined through its most pressing needs—living, work, and the city. These journals are no longer solely interested in describing architecture but in understanding it as a collective and political practice rooted in specific contexts. Moving away from the rigidity of modernism, they open the design space to new languages, methods, and subjectivities. In this way, architectural publishing becomes not just a tool for dissemination but a field of design itself: a space where architecture is documented as it evolves.

### *Margins of Expression: Fanzines, Politics, and Radical Imagination*

Between the 1960s and 1970s, architecture magazines increasingly followed the spirit of the times and the subversive changes of the long Sixties. Beatriz Colomina, in the introduction to *Clic Stamp Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazine*, explains that in those years, architecture magazines experienced a “moment of smallness,” which generated an extensive production of fanzines and led to changes in even

the most established magazines. Casabella, under the editorship of Alessandro Mendini, underwent a transformation of over sixty-four issues between 1970 and 1976, adopting the aesthetics of the so-called Italian Radical Architecture. There were essentially three reasons for this apparent change of direction: the first was the need to reflect the changed times and adapt to an increasingly popular culture; the second was the economic market within which the magazines, as they had existed up to that time, could not find their livelihood. Monica Pidgeon, editor of *Architectural Digest* since 1970, due to low revenues based on the sale of advertising space, chose to change AD's structure by relying more on subscriptions. This decision led to the creation of an economic model that would be emulated by other magazines internationally. The third reason is purely technological: the spread of cheap, portable mimeograph machines had both made printing accessible to a much larger and more democratic group, which could be accessed without the need for titles or formations and had introduced a much less formal and controlled aesthetic and layout.

The main difference between the magazines recounted in the previous paragraph and the small magazines is the change in attitude in response to socio-political change: they are more popular and informal, more imaginative and playful, manifesting themselves in creative layouts, the use of photomontages, drawings, and comics, and no longer targeting only insiders. Socio-political themes then persist and evolve, positioning themselves, however, against the institution and the concept of the nation. This period witnessed a radical transformation of independent architectural publishing. Self-produced magazines and fanzines move away from traditional forms to experiment with new visual and textual languages, reflecting a design culture that interweaves criticism, pedagogy, and political activism.

The material characteristics of these publications already reveal a stance: often printed on inexpensive paper, they appear as mixed assemblages with typed or handwritten text, drawings, photographs, and collages. Formats, posters, and sometimes postcards and binding are often absent or temporary. However, as the decade progresses, even amid poverty, a special care for the handmade stroke emerges. The Dutch magazine *Provo*, for example, shifts from simple A4 sheets to a vertical format obtained by folding sheets of newspaper, with covers printed on metallic paper and alternative distribution: it was slipped into right-hand newspapers or tossed into boats from canal banks.

In this panorama, drawing and photography assume a central role. Drawing abandons the technical dimension to become an autonomous means of communication. The Japanese magazine *Architext*, for example, in its first issue of 1970, leverages the evocative power of a sequence of white pen diagrams on a black background. Photography, too, is used narratively: in *Fotoromanzo*, a publication by the radical Turin-based group Strum, an Italian response to the exhibition *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape* (MoMA, 1972), stories are constructed in images about architectural utopias and working-class life in Turin. The use of photomontage and comics becomes a subversive and ironic tool. In London, *ARSe—the* magazine of David Wilde and Tom Woolley, professors at the Architectural Association—parodies the *Architectural Review* and changes its meaning with each issue: *Architects For A Really Socialist Environment*, *Architectural Radicals*, *Students & Educators*, etc. Even the third issue, from May 1970, includes a game: readers are invited to cut out an architect in a suit and tie and match it to comic strips with modernist phrases. On the cover, a photomontage depicts a crowd of identical architects, white men in ties, among whom lattice structures and an individual holding an architectural section are visible. Cartoon narrative also comes into play to deconstruct architectural language. Warren Chalk, a member of Archigram, publishes a magazine of the same name where a superhero guides the reader into a utopian reality, seeking to redefine education through fantasy. In contrast, the *Street Farmer* group, also linked to AA, uses essential graphics: in small blue boxes, a city consumed by nature is told in an ironic and sexualized key. Humor, in these publications, is not escapism but a critical strategy: solutions are not proposed, but the very certainties of the architectural discipline are subverted.

In parallel, many magazines address political and social issues explicitly. Some, such as *La Vide Sanitaire*, *Megascope*, and *Architectura Autogobierno*, explore new pedagogical forms. Others, such as *AD*, *Arquitectos de Mexico*, *Architecture Mouvement Continuité*, *Casabella*, *Le Carré Bleu*, and *Perspecta*, anticipate reflections on civil rights, educational reform, class inequalities, antiwar movements, and anticolonialism. Magazines such as *Whole Earth Catalog*, *Shelter*, or *Domebook 2*, on the other hand, promote an ecological lifestyle and architecture in harmony with nature.

The value of these publications also lies in their collective and identity dimension. Publishing groups present themselves through collective portraits or manifesto images. An emblematic example is the cover of

*Casabella* issue 377 (May 1973), dedicated to the *Global Tools* group. The photo, in black and white, shows an uneven crowd superimposed on an aerial view of Florence. On the next page, the protagonists are redrawn, numbered, and named: the visual identity of the magazine coincides with that of the group, which experiments with radical, multidisciplinary education.

In general, these magazines are distinguished by their freedom of language and the interplay between artistic expressions, including poems, posters, collages, and programmatic statements. *The form* includes poetic compositions; *Bau* publishes Hans Hollein's iconic poster "Alles ist Architektur," where a giant lipstick becomes architecture. In all, imagination and graphics are tools of political and cultural critique, capable of proposing rather than solutions to ways of thinking. Quidni, just as letterpress printing in the 15th century had revolutionized the dissemination of ideas, so too the mimeograph in the 1970s had emerged as a fundamental tool for a new generation of publishing. Self-published publications, thanks to the format itself - cheap, immediate, easily replicable - aspired to act politically, rejecting institutional mediations. With the advent of the World Wide Web (1991), a radical new transformation occurred in the way architectural content was produced and disseminated.

### *Writing Back: The Funambulist and the Return of Political Architecture*

Digital has democratized access and multiplied communication platforms, but it has also fostered an increasing aestheticization of architecture. This technological change and the political drift of the lead years led the critical and political thinking that ran through militant magazines to slowly give way to a visual, immediate, and simplified narrative that would find its fortune in the 2000s. The crisis of militant publishing and the end of the political utopia of the 1970s thus gave way to a new narrative of architecture: one that was aestheticized, simplified, and designed for rapid consumption.

Starting in the 1990s, many magazines, both print and online, began to favor visual storytelling. Architecture is communicated through glossy photographs, spectacular renderings, and eye-catching headlines in a race for attention that often sacrifices theoretical complexity. As Marco Biraghi has observed, «the architect has progressively abdicated the role of intellectual to assume that of the author, a figure who expres-

ses himself primarily through image and not through thought»<sup>18</sup> It is precisely this transition from the word to the visual, from the political to the entertaining, that marks a break. The success of magazines such as *PIN-UP* (which openly calls itself a “Magazine for Architectural Entertainment”) or more ironic experiences, such as *Camezind* or *Evil People in Modernist Homes in Popular Films*, reveals a climate in which architecture is consumed by images, without the need for in-depth study. These magazines, while varying in format and ambition, share an approach in which the image is central, and the content tends to be drained of its political dimension. It is precisely this generalized aestheticization of architecture, transformed into an object for entertainment, that paves the way for the critical reaction of publishing projects such as *The Funambulist*.

Indeed, within this landscape, dissident voices emerge. One of them is *The Funambulist*, founded in 2007 as a university blog, which arises with the stated goal of opposing the «spam architecture»<sup>19</sup> that digital media are filled with. Léopold Lambert, the magazine’s editor and founder, cites platforms like Dezeen and ArchDaily as key examples he opposes and as the main reason for his project. Blogs, created in the wake of this visual culture, have actually amplified its effects. Agile and free tools have rapidly multiplied, often mimicking the mechanisms of online magazines: headlines, images, rankings, and “top 10s.” These daily updates showcase dozens of projects with a direct and visual language: architecture becomes quick cultural consumption, an endless stream of objects, rather than a practice capable of questioning space and the social relations within it. In contrast, Lambert rejects the dominance of the image as the only form of architectural communication, stating that he aims to bring text, thought, and political commitment back to the center. For *The Funambulist*, architecture is not only construction but also—and above all—a spatial practice connected to power, identity, and oppression. The magazine becomes a tool for the elaboration of a counter-narrative, challenging the aestheticization of architecture and restoring dignity to words as a critical tool.

Lambert does not create an entirely new stance; instead, he revitalizes a critical perspective that was already clearly developed in the second half of the twentieth century—such as Manfredo Tafuri’s *Progetto e Utopia*. What is important, however, is the significance of reclaiming

18 Biraghi, M. (2013). *L'architetto come intellettuale*. Einaudi. (p. 15)

19 Léopold Lambert, in conversation with the author, Paris, April 2024.

such a stance today, in a world flooded with images and fleeting consumption. The very popularity and spread of *The Funambulist*, especially among younger audiences, indicate a demand for alternatives: a craving for types of architectural publishing that can resist aestheticization and bring back theory, politics, and critical discussion to the center of the discipline. In this way, the magazine does not just replicate an earlier intellectual model, but shows that there is still room—and even a pressing need—for publishing projects that oppose the mainstream media landscape of architecture.

The dissident and more politically engaged element thus emerges in the second decade of the twenty-first century as a response to the more flamboyant trend in architectural journals and the commodification of architecture. The architect's estrangement from the architecture he produces has developed alongside the intense commodification of the discipline and craft. Just as «design, representation, construction, commercialization, are all moments in the production process of architecture that in various ways are subjected to a more or less blatant and intense commodification»<sup>20</sup>, publishing also suffers from this logic: to enslave itself to visibility is to abandon political direction. In this landscape, *The Funambulist* offers an alternative view of architecture as an intellectual and political practice.

Within the contemporary publishing scene, *The Funambulist* stands out for a radical choice: to reject conventional architectural representation to restore centrality to the written word. Each issue of the magazine consists exclusively of texts: essays, interviews, short stories, and theoretical reflections. The photographs featured do not serve to “show” architecture in the canonical sense of the term but to illustrate the material, social, historical, and political conditions of spaces. Architectural drawings, understood as plans, sections, axonometries, or renderings, are absent. In this context, the only significant exception is maps. *The Funambulist* systematically employs cartography as a tool of analysis and denunciation, utilizing maps of colonial borders, surveillance networks, spatial distributions of inequalities, and traces of resistance. The map is never neutral, and in this journal, it assumes the function of a political act and a spatial project. As Léopold Lambert himself states, “For me, an architectural project is a map and a map is an architectural project.”<sup>21</sup> . The magazine's approach is condensed in this statement: designing means

20 See note 18.

21 See note 19.

reading and critically intervening in the spatial devices of power. The map, as a tool of decoding and construction, becomes the privileged place to exercise this critique.

Through the absence of represented architecture and the constant presence of language and cartography, *The Funambulist* overturns the codes of traditional architectural publishing. The magazine does not show architecture; it interrogates it, connects it to forms of domination, and restores it to its political potential.

*The Funambulist* exemplifies a clear tendency to move beyond the analysis of architectural works alone and adopt a critical gaze directed at the experience of lived space. The magazine's subtitle, "*Politics of Bodies and Spaces*," already makes this perspective clear. Its founder, architect Léopold Lambert, investigates the negotiating relationship between bodies—bearers of different rights—and the architectures that, by their mere existence, exert a definite influence on those bodies.

The titles of the early issues of the bimonthly journal - *Militarized Cities*, *Suburban Geographies*, *Clothing Politics*, *Carceral Environments*, *Design and Racism*, *Object Politics*, *Health Struggles*, *Police*, *Islands*, *Architecture and Colonialism*, *Designed Destructions*, *Racialized Incarcerations*, *Queers*, *Feminists & Interiors*, *Weaponized Infrastructures*, *Cartography and Power* - make clear the intent to read spaces and, more generally, anything that can be considered design - including objects and clothing - through the architect's gaze. However, Léopold Lambert superimposes an additional filter on this reading: political consciousness, which, as he states, emerges "organically" from his training in architecture. It is precisely this convergence that makes *The Funambulist* an emblematic example of how architecture, understood as a discipline, can express unprecedented potential, capable of crossing its traditional boundaries. Contamination with external knowledge and themes - often perceived with suspicion by the discipline - is here enhanced as a design tool, offering designers additional critical insights to reflect on. As Lambert states in a conversation with the author<sup>22</sup>, the first twenty issues of the journal focus on how colonialism, racism, misogyny, heteronormativity, and other oppressive systems shape the contemporary world. While covering topics such as anticolonialism, anti-racism, queer and feminist instances, the selection of content does not respond to systematic programming but follows a logic that the editor calls "organic." In the interview, Lambert clarifies that the absence of a predetermined editorial

22 Id.

strategy is a conscious choice linked to the nature of the target audience: architects, urban planners, designers, and students with a strong interest in political engagement.

There is no intention to propagandize or convince anyone to embrace a particular point of view. Although it is common in political debate to question which strategies are most effective in unmasking power relations, *The Funambulist* positions itself differently. As Lambert notes, “The magazine does architects a great favor because it does not address them.”<sup>23</sup> . The fact that there is no issue-by-issue outline nor any claim to encyclopedic coverage of topics considered essential to the architect’s education first indicates a critical departure from architecture’s traditional pedagogical ambitions. Second, it constitutes an interpretive challenge to the professionals themselves. Lambert, having trained as an architect, is well aware of the sensitivities and reading skills peculiar to those who practice the discipline. He believes that they can understand and interpret the journal even if it does not explicitly address them, even if it does not adopt a purely architectural language or deal with the usual themes of design. There is, as he says, no effort to prepare the content for the architect’s form of reasoning and interpretation. Indeed, for Lambert, “it’s almost a favor not to pre-chew the food that we’re giving them.”<sup>24</sup> .

At the same time, it is crucial to recognize what *The Funambulist* tends to omit. Topics traditionally central to architectural publications—such as welfare, housing policies, construction methods, materials, and sustainability—rarely appear in its pages. This omission seems unintentional, stemming from a strong emphasis on political critique that may overlook the more technical and project-specific aspects of architecture. Consequently, the journal shows a certain imbalance: it effectively exposes spatial mechanisms of domination but is less focused on how these critiques can inspire constructive alternatives. Lambert appears somewhat aware of this limitation, which highlights the broader challenge of integrating critique and design within such a complex field. Nevertheless, *The Funambulist* represents a positive step forward: by collecting reflections and fostering discourse on urgent political themes, it may gradually lay the groundwork for new architectural approaches that link critique with project development.

The choice of topics for each issue is made six to eight months in ad-

23 Id.

24 Id.

vance, relatively spontaneously, without chasing the urgencies imposed by current events. For example, issue 47, which was published between May and June 2023 and dedicated to forests, arose because a group of authors with specific expertise on the topic had gathered around the journal at that time, not because it was particularly relevant to discuss at that time. The exploitation of forests, the link to climate change, and colonial dynamics related to forest territories have long been central issues in political and environmental debate. In other cases, as with the July-August 2023 issue, “Fifty Shades of Whiteness,” the content reflects contemporary events. There, it was intended to highlight how the concept of “whiteness,” referring to skin color, takes on multiple nuances, visible, for example, in the different and more favorable treatment of Ukrainian refugees welcomed into Europe after the Russian invasion of 2022. Issue 48 of the journal thus investigates the construction and mutability of the concept of “whiteness,” linked to the interests and historical contexts of those who use it. It highlights its conceptual absurdity, as demonstrated by the use of the term “Caucasian” in the United States, even though it refers to an ethnic group historically located in East Asia. Among the 55 issues published so far, other notable titles include: *Spaces of Labor*, *The Desert*, *The Subcontinent*, *Above and Below Nation-States*, *Questioning Our Solidarities*, *Forest Struggles*, *Fifty Shades of White(ness)*, *Schools of the Revolution*, *Redefining Our Terms*, *Decolonial*, *Blackness*, *Banlieues*, *Intifada*, *Genocide*, *Violence*, *Indigenous*, *Queer*, *Ubuntu*, *Undocumented International*, *Prison Uprising*, *Thread of Translation*, *Colonial Continuums*, *Asian Imperialism*. Over time, through the selection of topics covered, one can perceive an evolution in the editorial approach. Lambert states that beginning with issue 21, he began to place more emphasis on positive political and social efforts rather than focusing exclusively on the negative aspects. Aware that architecture is the discipline that organizes bodies in space, Lambert recognizes how much easier it is to chronicle the multiple forms of political violence it can convey than to articulate a tactical and constructive discourse on the architectures of resistance. Therefore, he says that writing criticism is often “easier than designing.”<sup>25</sup>

The origins of *The Funambulist* were rooted in the blog format, which later evolved into a comprehensive system that now includes a printed magazine, an online site, and a podcast. In 2007, Léopold Lambert, along with two fellow students at the University of Architecture in Pa-

25 Léopold Lambert, in conversation with the author, Paris, April 2024.

ris—Martin Lebourgeois and Marcel Marquet—started a small collective blog. While his two colleagues work as university assistants, Lambert, still a student, is employed at an architectural firm. For him, that blog is the only way to engage in dialogue with younger students, a chance that his professional position prevents unlike the other two. From the first posts, the blog’s audience proved to be larger than the three authors initially expected. Thanks to international travel for study and a growing command of English, they decide to stop writing in French and start writing directly in English. This choice significantly broadens the readership and makes the content more accessible to a global audience. The birth of the blog was also part of a deliberate oppositional stance: to deliver a clear and political message, counteracting the dominant trend of online architecture blogs. The aim was to raise awareness among the younger generation about the political implications of architecture, especially in a context where universities seemed to neglect this kind of reflection altogether. As Lambert recalls, architectural education at the time was much closer to the approach seen on platforms like *Dezeen* or *ArchDaily*, which focused more on the aesthetics of images rather than critical thinking. In this sense, the blog was designed as a crucial breakthrough tool. According to Lambert, most online architecture blogs consisted of a series of images that promoted a superficial, visual focus, encouraging students to prioritize the appearance of buildings over the deeper implications of design. That initial experiment can therefore be seen as a rebellious act against the academy and the architectural world, which continued to celebrate the cult of the author and the archistar. In 2010, Lambert decided to start his own personal blog. Around the same time, he graduated from college and began working at a traditional architectural firm in New York, initially pursuing a conventional career as an architect. Despite the predictable path ahead, he recalls that, at least then, he wanted to try his hand in the “real world.” A sudden layoff, however, marked a turning point, opening a period during which he dedicated more and more time to writing on a wide range of subjects. Production after production, Lambert published hundreds of articles. Despite his initial self-deprecation, his audience steadily grew, and with it came the awareness of being in a position of privilege: being able to study, interview, write, and “learn by doing.” Lambert acknowledges that he learned a great deal from the people he interviewed over the years. The blog became, for him, a tool of restitution—a way to share the knowledge he had access to, democratizing content that, in the United States, often remained confined within university circles, reserved

only for those who could afford it. Back in France, Lambert began to envision his own architectural practice in Paris, this time centered on a specific theme and guided by an explicit political agenda. By 2014, the idea had matured: the community of readers formed over seven years of writing—through blogs, magazines, and personal publications—could serve as the foundation for an independent publishing project. A project that would no longer involve the compromises of the architectural profession but could become a full-time career. Thus was born the idea of a business model capable of supporting *The Funambulist* magazine, eventually transforming it into a profitable venture for him as both author and publisher. It was a way to continue engaging with the issues that had fascinated him since his undergraduate years, driven more by the urgency of contemporary events than by academic influences.

The *Funambulist* identifies two key moments in his journey of politicization: the riots that erupted in the Parisian banlieues in 2005 and his first visits to Palestine, which helped him understand the colonial aspect of spatial planning. From that point, his aim was to incorporate politics into architecture. However, it was only after moving to New York that this approach shifted. Engaging in discussion groups and political circles, Lambert found himself at tables where political theory and philosophy were being debated. There, he begins to present his perspective as an architect, providing a new way to connect spatial concepts with theoretical discussions. Recognizing the unique value of his viewpoint, he chooses to steer architecture toward a more political focus instead of the other way around.

It is precisely from this awareness that *The Funambulist* was created. The magazine does not aim to draw on political knowledge to strengthen architectural discourse nor to appropriate militant arguments for aesthetic or disciplinary reasons. It is not about “borrowing” content, nor is it about a narrative strategy. Instead, the publishing project seeks to engage with a new field with which most contemporary architects still feel uneasy. In this sense, Lambert encourages his colleagues to step outside their disciplinary bubble, asserting that *The Funambulist* is not only a bridge between knowledge but also an exercise in epistemological dislocation.

Another important aspect of *The Funambulist* concerns its fundamental approach, which is tied to the desire to challenge a Eurocentric view of cultures and territories. When focusing on a specific theme or space, it aims to involve authors who have a genuine connection to that place, not necessarily by birth or direct experience, but by a deep awareness

of their position when they write. The journal takes an approach that recognizes the importance of positionality, or understanding one's perspective, in the production of knowledge. As Donna Haraway states, «There is no view from nowhere»;<sup>26</sup> each perspective is situated, and because of that, it must be acknowledged as such, avoiding any assumption of neutrality or complete objectivity. For *The Funambulist*, then, it is not about applying an external gaze to complex geopolitical issues but rather about giving voice to those who live in, move through, or study these contexts with a critical awareness. In this way, even choosing to publish in English is not just a strategic move to reach a broader audience but also an effort to create a truly international space where the voices—and not just the content—are global. Indeed, the articles explore spatial issues from various regions, authored by those who speak from those same conditions. The core of the editorial team consists of individuals who already embody a cultural crossing: alongside Léopold Lambert, the chief editor, is Shivangi Mariam Raj, communications manager, a writer raised between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, with an interest in visual cultures and the language of violence in South Asia. The advisory board is entirely composed of women from diverse disciplines, including Margarida Waco, Caroline Honorien, Nadia El Hakim, Flora Hergon, and Geller Noelle, who come from fields ranging from architecture to sociology, literature, and art. The journal's community of regular contributors, mainly from France and the United States, spans fields such as economics, geography, pedagogy, political science, history, and visual arts. Lambert himself recognizes his own privileged position, having grown up in a French bourgeois family with opportunities to travel and study internationally (Hong Kong, Bombay, New York). He is aware that this privilege also carries a responsibility in how he engages with others, narratives, and places. As he explains, even through someone else's words and imagery, one can begin to foster a sense of solidarity. The magazine is thus shaped as a form of “political friendship,” a communal bond that, in Lambert's words, “we sort of think together, we think with each other, we learn from each other. We care for each other.” It is this collective sense of care that sets apart the editorial approach of *The Funambulist*, where writing and publishing serve as part of a mutual learning process.

A salient dimension of *The Funambulist's* editorial practice can be de-

26 Haraway, D. J. (1988). *Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective*. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), p. 575–599.

scribed as a form of **critical internationalism**. Rather than equating “international” with mere geographic expansion, the journal treats internationalism as an epistemic stance: an attempt to interrogate and disarticulate the privileges embedded in writing from—or for—the usual centres of cultural authority. In my reading, this posture translates into two interrelated moves. First, an editorial inclination to foreground territories and experiences that are frequently marginalised in dominant anglophone and Western architectural media (Palestine, Kurdistan, and other under-represented geographies). Second, a reflexive effort to render visible the journal’s own positionality—that is, to acknowledge and monitor where attention is directed and where it is absent.

This reflexivity becomes tangible through editorial tools that are both methodological and rhetorical. Using a spreadsheet to record articles by region and combine measures of frequency and recency functions as a form of quantitative self-assessment: it transforms editorial judgment into a metric that can be examined and adjusted. Equally important is the graphic redesign of the table of contents into a planisphere, with a intentionally inverted projection and an explicitly scaled-down Europe. These cartographic choices are not purely decorative: they stage a critique of traditional symbolic geographies and present an alternative way of organizing attention. From the perspective of critical cartography and decolonial scholarship, these strategies serve both as analysis tools (mapping forms of domination) and as rhetorical devices that reshape the reader’s spatial imagination.

At the same time, comparing *The Funambulist* to more mainstream architectural outlets highlights ongoing tensions. Many widely circulated platforms reproduce dominant geographies—favoring contexts already familiar within the global professional landscape—while *The Funambulist* emphasizes a deliberate diversity of voices. However, editorial pluralism raises challenging questions about depth versus breadth, tokenism, and the inequalities of authorship and language. Including marginalized regions is an important correction, but without sustained partnerships, translation infrastructure, and long-term engagement, it may remain episodic. The journal’s practices thus reveal the structural work needed to make internationalism meaningful rather than merely performative. In summary, my analysis indicates that *The Funambulist* provides an effective model for rethinking internationalism in architectural publishing: one that combines specific editorial methods (data-driven reflexivity, counter-cartography, and curated networks of authorship) with a clear political goal of decentralizing knowledge creation. Howe-

ver, this model is not a final solution; it should be regarded as an experimental and adaptable practice that points toward additional institutional efforts—such as translation, reciprocal editorial exchanges, and resource sharing—necessary to turn representational corrections into lasting epistemic change.

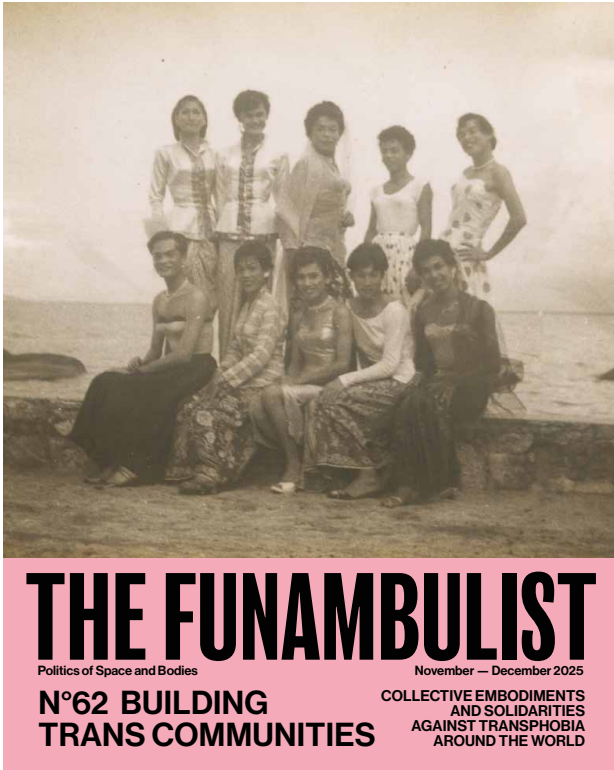
### *Decentering the Discipline: Toward a Situated and Political Architecture*

To conclude this chapter, it is helpful to return to what architecture represents for Léopold Lambert: a form of violence. In his words, architecture cannot be inherently emancipatory or liberating, but it can undoubtedly become an instrument of protest. In closing the conversation mentioned above, Lambert provides two emblematic examples of resistance architecture: barricades, which return cyclically in history as improvised infrastructures of opposition, and the Algerian city of Casbah, whose intricate urban fabric allowed the oppressed to prevail over the colonists. The architect-editor then questions the possibility of designing protest through architecture and asserts that this is possible only if one accepts a fundamental condition: the architect's contribution may be modest, non-resolutive, unable to control the future, or unable to give it a definitive shape. But that does not make it any less necessary. Through its interdisciplinary approach, *The Funambulist* redirects attention from architecture alone, emphasizing political agency not just in design outcomes but also in the compromises and programmatic choices that shape practice.

Born as a tool to critically examine the conditions of the built environment, *The Funambulist* has gradually evolved into a platform that actively promotes political struggles and collective organizing. As Lambert himself states, the magazine's goals are mainly threefold: "to bring the idea of space and the built environment within the political discourse," to promote "solidarity at the international level," and finally, to foster "the multiplication of collective political thought."

From these intentions, *The Funambulist* demonstrates how editorial production can both critique and foster a community of mutual learning, a global network of voices, and a platform of solidarity. Lambert himself questions whether acting proactively remains a form of protest or if it is already the next step. The conclusion that emerges from analyzing his project is clear: the value of *The Funambulist* lies not only in its ability to expose issues but also in proposing a new, open, and political

language for an increasingly inclusive, aware, and contextually grounded architecture. In this sense, more than just a magazine, *The Funambulist* functions as a “flat-form” for protest: a critical space that not only discusses transformation but actively practices it.



Cover of *The Funambulist*, issue 62, November-December 2025.





# THE FUNAMBULIST

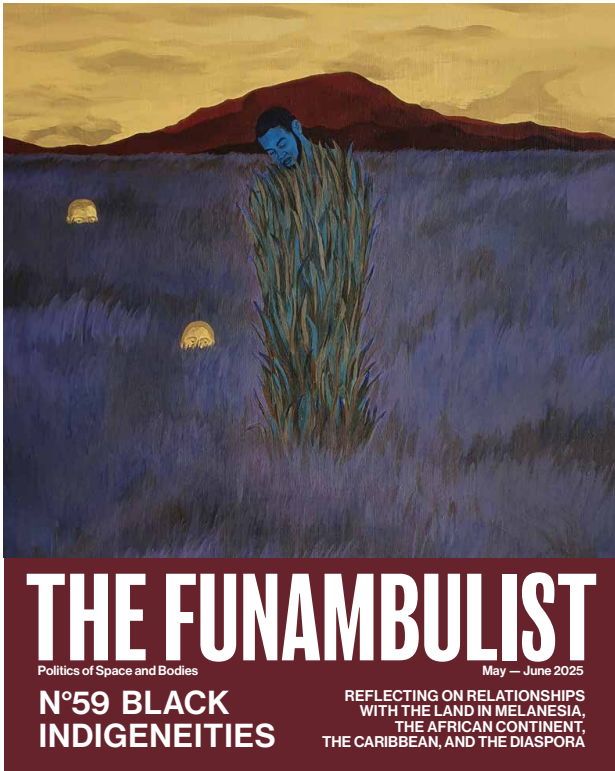
Politics of Space and Bodies

July — August 2025

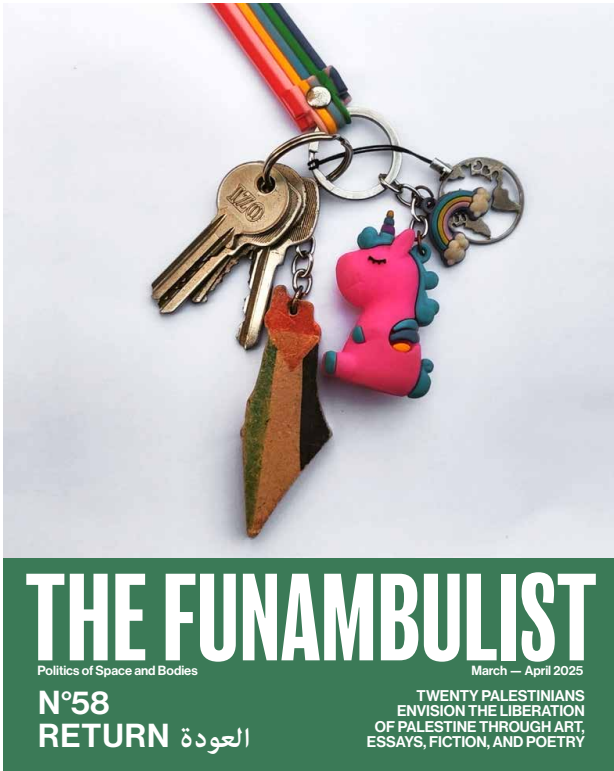
**N°60 THE COLONIZED  
& THE ATOMIC BOMB**

**80 YEARS AFTER  
HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI,  
INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES  
ON INTERCONNECTEDNESS**

Cover of The Funambulist, issue 60, July-August 2025.



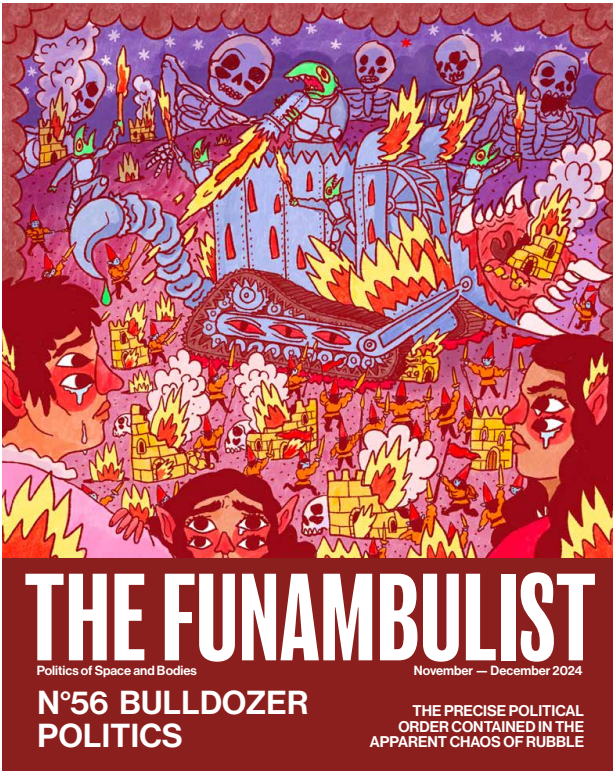
Cover of The Funambulist, issue 59, May-June 2025.



Cover of The Funambulist, issue 58, March-April 2025.



Cover of The Funambulist, issue 57, January-February 2025.



Cover of The Funambulist, issue 56, November-December 2024.



# THE FUNAMBULIST

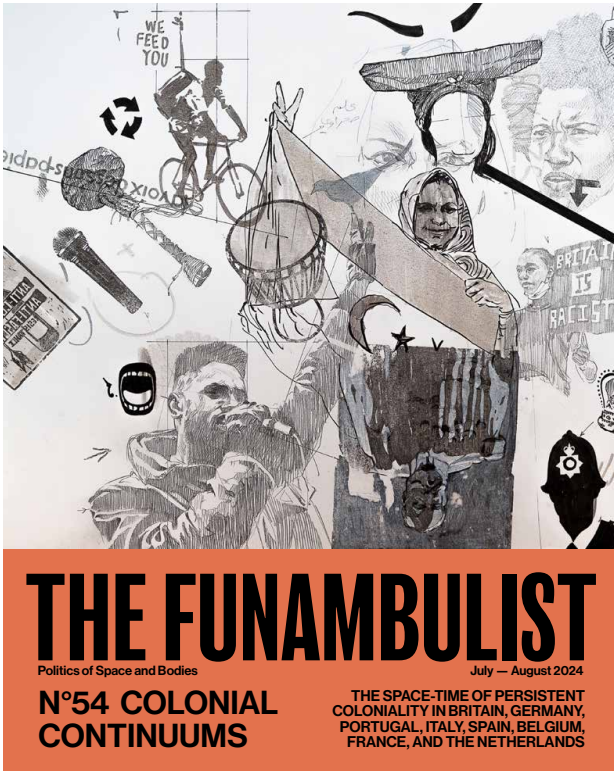
Politics of Space and Bodies

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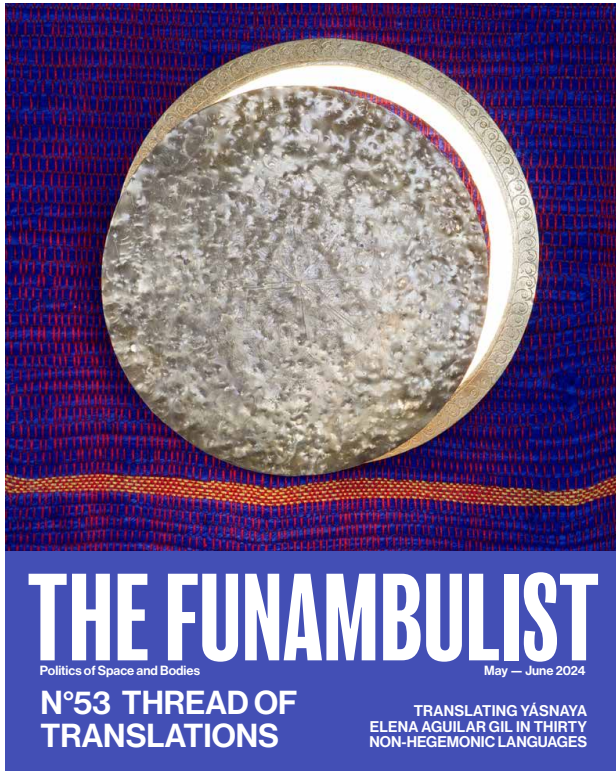
**N°55 ASIAN  
IMPERIALISMS**

**EXAMINING JAPANESE, CHINESE,  
RUSSIAN, INDIAN, PAKISTANI,  
IRANIAN, AND TURKISH IMPERIAL  
AND COLONIAL FORMATIONS**

Cover of The Funambulist, issue 55, September-October 2024.



Cover of The Funambulist, issue 54, July-August 2024.



Cover of The Funambulist, issue 53, May-June 2024.

On the opposite page: Constructlab, The Arch, Halle (Saale),  
Germany, 2012.

# CONSTRUCTION

## *From Participation to Protest: Self-construction as Form of Activism*



**Abstract**

*This chapter examines protest architecture through the lens of self-construction, a practice often linked to informality or necessity, but here reframed as a deliberate and collective form of dissent. By emphasizing building as both a material and political act, the discussion shows how self-construction defies traditional architectural systems, redefines the relationship between architects, citizens, and institutions, and turns participation into an activist stance. The analysis places self-construction within a broader history of participatory practices, contrasting the functional involvement of the Modern Movement with the rise of conflict-driven and emancipatory collective building efforts. This trajectory highlights how self-construction is more than a fringe technique; it is a form of spatial protest that reclaims decision-making power and the right to shape the urban landscape. Through the work of Recetas Urbanas and Santiago Cirugeda, the chapter demonstrates how self-construction becomes a systematic and repeatable method that energizes communities, exploits legal gray areas, and fosters new forms of urban citizenship. Ultimately, self-construction is seen as a platform for protest architecture—an arena where material creation, social empowerment, and political imagination merge, revealing architecture’s transformative potential when practiced as dissent.*

## **Construction. From Participation to Protest: Self-construction as a form of activism.**

### *Reframing Self-Building: From Marginal Practice to Urban Activism*

Self-construction is usually linked to situations of necessity, informality, and resource scarcity, often viewed as a practical response to limited access to formal housing, infrastructure, or expert knowledge. However, this chapter aims to change this view by exploring self-construction not just as a result of necessity but as an important practice that challenges established architectural and urban norms. Viewed through this lens, self-construction emerges as a form of dissent, where the act of building goes beyond its practical purpose to become a way of resisting norms, exposing strict regulations, and reclaiming control over the process of creating space. This dual nature—addressing material needs while also serving as a political statement—is what makes self-construction different from other practices. By challenging dominant narratives, it reshapes the connections between architecture, community involvement, and governance. Within this conceptual framework, the work of Recetas Urbanas and Santiago Cirugeda takes on particular importance. Their projects show how self-construction can be turned into a systematic and transferable method that goes beyond situations of pure necessity. As both critique and activism, these initiatives actively engage communities while challenging the limits of institutional legality and control.

Therefore, self-building is viewed as a modern, urban, conscious, collective, and localized practice. It challenges the current architectural system that we recognize as the only option. This system—whether for houses or collective buildings—creates a certain separation between the builder and the resident. This opposition to the status quo is carried out collectively through collaboration among architects, other professionals, and citizens themselves. For these reasons, it can be understood as a form of protest and, as an action that promotes change on behalf

of a harmed and excluded group, as a form of activism.<sup>1</sup> It is not just a basic construction technique or a residual method of spatial creation, but a tool for social engagement that challenges design hierarchies, the architect's role, and the boundaries of urban citizenship. To clarify the uniqueness of self-building, it is essential to clearly distinguish it from what architectural history labels as a form of pre-modern architecture, described with various terms: local (Giovannoni, 1925),<sup>2</sup> spontaneous (Pagano, 1936),<sup>3</sup> minor architecture (Tomei, 1942),<sup>4</sup> architect-less architecture (Rudofsky, 1964),<sup>5</sup> popular (Guidoni, 1980),<sup>6</sup> and vernacular (Vallinga, 2015).<sup>7</sup> What we aim to explore is not a nostalgic return to local techniques or rural models, even though these approaches also oppose the mainstream system.

At the same time, there is no mention of the informal architecture typical of favelas or informal settlements—mainly found in Latin America and Asia, but also in European cities like Rome or Paris—even though these examples, in terms of scale and spread, clearly demonstrate the spread of self-building and its global impact. This can challenge the idea of Western construction practices, where building one's own home from scratch is usually limited to buying an existing building and adapting it or relying on a professional (architect or surveyor) and a construction company. Both vernacular and informal architecture are spontaneous forms not discussed in this chapter due to the absence of a deliberate political stance.

Beyond romanticism and emergency, we pay attention to who and how, rather than where and what. It is essential to ask who builds because it is precisely in the subjectivity of the inhabitant-builder that self-construction reveals its critical potential: those who live there are also those

1 Cf. Tilly C., *Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1843*, in *Repertoires & Cycles of Collective Action*, ed. Mark Traugott (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

2 Giovannoni, G. (1925). *Questioni di architettura nella storia e nella vita: edilizia, estetica architettonica, restauri, ambiente dei monumenti*. Società Editrice d'Arte Illustrata.

3 Pagano, G., & Daniel, G. (1936). *Architettura rurale italiana*. Ulrico Hoepli.

4 Tomei, P. (1942). *L'architettura a Roma nel Quattrocento*. Multigrafica Editrice.

5 Rudofsky, B. (1964). *Architecture without Architects*. Albuquerque.

6 Guidoni, E. (1980). *L'architettura popolare italiana*. Laterza.

7 Vellinga, M. (2015). *Vernacular architecture and sustainability: Two or three lessons*. In C. Mileto, F. Vegas, L. García Soriano & V. Cristini (Eds.), *Vernacular Architecture: Towards a Sustainable Future* (pp. 3–8). Boca Raton: CRC Press / Taylor & Francis.

who build, and this generates a clear affirmation of self-determination. The construction thus becomes a tool for speaking out, expressing needs, and fighting for spatial legitimacy. The how becomes important when it becomes a collective and community dimension, thus distinguishing self-construction as an activist practice from other forms of spatial production. Building together and cooperating in the creation of a common space means producing not only walls and roofs but also bonds, shared knowledge, and political awareness. In this sense, self-construction is a form of relational architecture: a process that unites material transformation and subjective transformation, space and society, design, and participation.

A prime example of this approach, which this chapter will examine, is the work of Recetas Urbanas, a Spanish collective founded by architect Santiago Cirugeda. The group operates not in marginal or rural settings but within complex urban environments, questioning the rules that govern space use and directly addressing the boundary between legality and illegality. The name itself, urban recipes, suggests an idea of accessibility and ease of replication: like the popular IKEA furniture, Cirugeda's architectures are made of prefabricated components that are simple to assemble, and the architect designs and teaches people how to put them together. His role is not that of a creator but of a facilitator: he provides the tools to build and guides the process, but it is the people who develop their own spaces, whether homes, cultural centers, or schools. Initially parasitic, often unbound by urban planning regulations, Santiago Cirugeda's architecture embodies a concrete act of protest: it stands against a system. In this way, self-construction is not only a response to exclusion but an active affirmation of another way of inhabiting the world.

### *From Passive User to Political Subject: A Critical History of Participation*

Self-building, understood as a conscious and collective practice, emphasizes two key factors: self-determination and participation. Both are forms of empowerment, not seen as concessions from above but as processes of recognition and gaining power by those directly involved. As Paulo Freire states in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970),<sup>8</sup> authentic

8 Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.; M. B. Ramos, Trans.). Continuum. (Original work published 1970).

emancipation is not granted through delegated or granted power but emerges from critical action that allows individuals to “take the floor” and transform reality. In this way, creating one’s own space becomes a political act through which citizens not only participate but actively reclaim the ability to decide and modify the environment they live in. Even Sherry Arnstein, in her famous Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), stresses that genuine participation in the urban sphere only exists when it results in real decision-making power, not just consultation.<sup>9</sup> Self-building, then, as described by Recetas Urbanas (and in this chapter’s approach), is more than a construction process; it is a form of radical and conflict-based appropriation of space and the right to the city, where empowerment involves recognizing and activating one’s own transformative potential rather than receiving pre-established solutions. The two terms—self-determination and participation—are now being rediscovered and reinterpreted in light of a new concept of empowerment, based no longer on top-down concessions but on the bottom-up construction of shared and transformative power. However, this was not always the case. In the Modern Movement, self-determination was effectively absent, while participation, where it existed, had a highly functional and subordinate character. It is, therefore, necessary to dwell briefly on this genealogy to understand the conceptual and practical leap from the idea of a planned and regulated participation, oriented toward user adaptability, to conflictual participation, understood as an active form of contrast and transformation of reality. A conflict that is not disruption but generation: only through disagreement, questioning of the system, and self-organization does space open up for a truly collective architecture based on subjectivity and the ability to directly affect one’s living environment.

While representing a great season of theoretical innovation, the Modern Movement was characterized by extreme simplification in understanding human and social behavior. Architecture was often evaluated according to formal and aesthetic criteria and exhibited in publications that deliberately decoupled it from everyday life, omitting the presence of the user. The design process involved reducing the complexity of possible behaviors to a range deemed functionally necessary, based on which the dimensions and characteristics of the spaces were determined.

9 Arnstein, S. R. (1969). *A ladder of citizen participation*. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>.

While representing a significant period of theoretical innovation, the Modern Movement was marked by a drastic oversimplification of understanding human and social behavior. Architecture was often judged using formal and aesthetic standards and showcased in publications that intentionally separated it from daily life, excluding the presence of the user. The design process involved narrowing down the complexity of possible behaviors to a set considered functionally necessary, which then determined the dimensions and features of the spaces.

In many cases, the masters of Modernism envisioned not only the design of the house but also that of its inhabitant, who was expected to embody and aspire to a “modern lifestyle.” The avant-gardes, however, cannot be judged solely through the lens of the present: their radicalism lay precisely in positioning themselves at the forefront of a collective mass movement. Their interlocutors were not individual users but social masses, and within this political horizon, it seemed difficult—or even reactionary—to accommodate singular, subjective needs.

Self-construction, by contrast, often highlights individual initiative and personal autonomy. However, in the work of *Recetas Urbanas*, this focus on individualism is intentionally replaced with collective efforts: construction becomes a shared activity that brings groups together, mobilizes communities, and redefines building as a cooperative and participatory process.

This approach reversed the central role of the subject: the user was no longer at the core of the project but became an idealized type, shaped to fit a specific and predefined use of space. The standardization of living and the typification of the user, along with the rigid functional specialization of environments, caused an increasing disconnect between architecture and the real context in which it was situated. The primary building efforts after World War II, aimed at addressing the housing emergency, resulted in homogeneous, repetitive, and forced environments. Inhabitants were excluded from decision-making and relegated to passive users of their living space.

The late 1950s marked a rupture. With the dissolution of CIAM and the emergence of Team 10, a new approach to design developed that rejected the abstraction of the Modern Movement in favor of an architecture grounded in social and environmental contexts. Among its exponents, Giancarlo De Carlo introduced a vision in which architecture could not disregard the concrete experience of living. De Carlo observed how users reinterpreted spaces in unexpected ways: loggias were transformed into drying rooms, and common spaces were utili-

zed differently from the design intentions. These “infractions” revealed real needs that were being ignored by architects and indicated an implicit and inevitable form of participation. He recognized that use is always an act of transformation and appropriation and that architecture cannot be conceived without taking this process into account. For De Carlo, building “with” users rather than “for” them became an ethical and political imperative.<sup>10</sup> The project had to be transformed into a process: no longer a concluded object but an open system of relationships, recognizing the user as co-author of the space. Habraken and Hertzberger’s interventions, with the distinction between structure and infill (Habraken)<sup>11</sup> or the concept of multipurpose space (Hertzberger)<sup>12</sup>, also reiterated the desire to make architecture more adaptable, flexible, and open to user transformation. It was, in essence, about functional participation, in which self-determination was expressed in the margin left for individual interpretation and adaptation of space.

The next phase is characterized by the rise of confrontational participation, typical of modern activist architectural practices. This type of participation doesn’t merely respond to predefined options but actively works to reshape the very conditions of the project. As Andres Lepik observes, “false participation,” where the urban planner offers limited choices, remains common.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, conflictual participation is a stance, a gesture that asserts the right to act, decide, and build. In this context, conflict is productive: it creates space, community, and a sense of political identity. Self-building illustrates this shift. It aims not to be a poor technique but a practice of reclaiming ownership. Building collectively involves making shared decisions, exchanging both technical and local knowledge, and exposing what institutional urbanism often conceals. It represents a complete form of self-determination because it empowers people to truly influence their environment, transforming

10 Cf. De Carlo, G. (2015). *L’architettura della partecipazione* (S. Marini, Ed.). Quodlibet; De Carlo, G. (2005). *Architecture’s public*. In P. Blundell Jones, D. Petrescu, & J. Till (Eds.), *Architecture and Participation* (pp. 3-22). Spon Press.

11 Cf. Habraken, N. (1986, July). *Towards a new professional role*. *Design Studies*, 7(3), 139-143; Habraken, N. J., Valkenburg, B., & Teicher, J. (1999). *Supports: An alternative to mass housing* (2nd ed.). Urban International Press.

12 Hertzberger, H. (2005). *Lessons for Students in Architecture*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers. Retrieved from [https://www.academia.edu/29637531/Herman\\_Hertzberger\\_Lessons\\_For\\_Students\\_Of\\_Architecture](https://www.academia.edu/29637531/Herman_Hertzberger_Lessons_For_Students_Of_Architecture).

13 Lepik, A., & Potrč, M. (2013). *Cities in Transition*. In G. Knapstein, & M. Felix (Eds.), *Architektonika* (pp. 155-63). Nuremberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst.

professional roles, regulations, and hierarchies. As early as 1970, De Carlo criticized architecture “in the service of power” driven by economic interests and social exclusion. His vision of “liberatory” design, centered on collective action, anticipates today’s practices. From this perspective, self-construction is much more than just a housing strategy; it is an act of political and spatial existence. To build is not only to create space but also to claim the right to exist in the world—together, confrontationally, and creatively.

### *Legal Loopholes and Urban Resistance: The Beginnings of Recetas Urbanas*

After reconstructing the theoretical and genealogical framework that situates self-construction as an activist practice, it is now possible to analyze its implications through a case study. If conflictual participation today represents a radical form of reclaiming the right to the city, it directly challenges the role of the architect and their stance toward the community. As Andrés Lepik points out, in a time when terms like ‘participation’ risk losing their meaning due to rhetorical abuse, it is essential to recover their political and transformative significance. Participating, in fact, means making informed decisions through collective and shared processes regarding the fate of the inhabited space. In this sense, participatory architecture is not just a set of techniques but a specific approach to managing the relationship between the architect and the community. According to García (2012), there are three models: the first, authoritarian, where the architect decides everything unilaterally; the second, subordinate, where the architect merely assembles requests and images; and finally, a third, interpretative, based on dialogue and mutual recognition. In this last model, the architect becomes a facilitator: listening, translating, and guiding.<sup>14</sup> This is exemplified by Recetas Urbanas, a Spanish collective led by Santiago Cirugeda, which has been practicing a radical form of participatory and self-built architecture for over twenty years, grounded in shared knowledge and collective responsibility. Their work represents a form of spatial activism that questions rules, professional roles, and the very concept of design. Santiago Cirugeda exemplifies what we might call the “activist subjecti-

14 García, W. (2012). *Arquitectura participativa: las formas de lo esencial*. *Revista de Arquitectura*, 14, 4-11. Retrieved from <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/1251/125125877002.pdf>.

city of the architect.” In an interview with the author, Cirugeda emphasizes: «I am first and foremost a citizen, before being a student of architecture and now an architect».<sup>15</sup> This statement challenges the traditional sequence of professional training and highlights his radical approach: his practice arises from civic responsibility rather than a disciplinary vocation. From the beginning, his goal has been clear: to change the city for the people, intervening and protecting their rights to use the rules—or their loopholes—as a means of transforming urban space. It’s not about ‘granted’ participation but about spatial reclamation. Cirugeda’s approach is surprisingly pragmatic: he simply asks, «how do you install a swing in an urban space?»<sup>16</sup> and to answer this, he begins studying building and urban planning regulations in depth. His strategy is precise: he operates within legal boundaries to create alternative uses—often temporary and hidden—that can destabilize the system. Architecture, in this sense, becomes an instrument of civil disobedience, a form of critique, and, at the same time, a tool for actual construction. His early projects—Kuvás S. C. (1997), Andamio (1998), Desobediencia Civil (2000), Casa Insecto (2001), and Casa Rompecabezas (2002)—illustrate this tendency.

The first project in 1997, marking the start of Cirugeda’s public work, was Kuvás S.C., an intervention that perfectly captures his style: ironic, subversive, pragmatic, and inclusive. The approach is simple: apply to the City of Seville for a permit to temporarily occupy the street, justified by the need to clear debris from a building. Once approved, Cirugeda uses the container to install a swing, turning it into a self-managed playground. The action is legally sound: the container meets regulations, does not block traffic, and displays the owner’s details. When a neighbor complained, police could only verify that rules had been followed. For four months, the container was moved to different spots around the city, becoming a multifunctional platform—a playground, a flamenco stage, a civic space, even a theater for children who suggested its use. Its temporary status enables experiments with creating public spaces outside bureaucratic constraints. Kuvás shows that self-built projects can be playful, ironic, and easy to copy. Most importantly, it proves they can start within the law and subvert it without breaking it.

The following year, Cirugeda implemented an even more advanced

15 Interview, Martina Dussin and Alejandro Cirugeda, Palma de Majorca, march 2024.

16 Id.

strategy. With the Andamio project—which means ‘scaffolding’—he built a temporary micro-dwelling on scaffolding in the middle of Seville’s historic district, within a protected building. Again, the request was formally approved: he received a temporary license to restore the façade. But instead of doing simple repairs, he created a genuine urban shelter that was visible and livable, publicly claiming his action as a legitimate extension of his own home. The provocation here is twofold: on one side, he criticizes the regulatory stagnation that blocks any urban change in historic districts; on the other, he proposes a practical solution (*receta urbana*) to address the housing crisis through the innovative use of space and regulations. Cirugeda aims to generate ‘false positives’ in legality: it initiates real procedures for alternative uses, highlighting the hypocrisy and rigidity of the regulatory system.

In 2000, with his manifesto *Desobediencia Civil*, Cirugeda developed both a theoretical and practical commentary on the legal and ideological implications of building in cities. Here, self-construction becomes an explicit political act: it is presented as a legitimate response to a regulatory system that stagnates the city, turning it into a “dead postcard.” The text describes specific strategies—such as double facades, hidden anchors, and fake renovations—used to bypass regulatory control without abandoning transformation. What Cirugeda advocates is a concept of spatial emancipation, understood as the right of every citizen to modify their environment based on genuine, emotional, and functional needs. His “illegal architectures” are not acts of destruction but critical exercises: they expose the gap between law and reality, between norms and life. In 2001, in collaboration with the Alameda Viva collective, Cirugeda helped create a resistance camp against an urban project imposed from above. *La Casa Insecto*—a small housing unit built on a tree—became a visible symbol of protest and media attention. Carefully designed to avoid damaging the tree, the house has spaces for sleeping and resistance. It is part of an aerial camp called “*Villa Ardilla*” that combines activism, ecology, and participation. Here, self-construction becomes a way of creatively occupying public space, directly challenging urban authority and attempting to slow down (and make visible) exclusionary decision-making processes. Although the construction is dismantled, it leaves a mark: the protest is temporary but effective.

The final example among the initial projects is *Casa Rompecabezas*, a modular and demountable house placed on unused land in the heart of Seville. Constructed through a temporary agreement with the landowner and powered by a 200-meter electric cable from a neighbor,

this micro-architecture is based on a clear legal argument. Since it is not anchored to the ground, it can be considered a “movable asset” and is therefore outside standard building regulations. La Rompecabezas represents a bold exercise in regulatory and spatial flexibility: a mobile structure that adapts to the urban environment like a lightweight, legal, yet unexpected prosthesis. The aim is twofold: to challenge the law and to provide a model that can be easily replicated. Architecture transforms into a temporary installation, serving as a tactic of resistance and a reflection on urban living conditions. These early works by Cirugeda showcase a form of architecture that is deeply relational, subversive, contextual, and akin to artistic performance. Self-construction is never an end in itself but a way to raise political, legal, and existential questions. Building becomes a gesture of personal affirmation, an act of active citizenship, and a method to make spatial injustices visible. His hybrid identity—citizen, architect, and activist—embodies a new model of urban professionalism, where the project is no longer an object but a collective process, an action situated between legality and desire. What emerges with particular force is the centrality of public space as a field of possibility and conflict. As Don Mitchell argues, it is not a neutral or guaranteed resource, but a product of social struggles, a place where citizenship is concretely exercised and the right to presence is negotiated.<sup>17</sup> As early as 1968, Henri Lefebvre claimed the ‘right to the city’ as a right not only to access, but to the collective transformation of urban space.<sup>18</sup> Cirugeda’s actions fit into this line of thinking: not as simple architectural projects, but as spatial acts that challenge the established order, creating breaches where citizens can express their needs, desires, and imaginations. In this sense, public space becomes the place where the city is remade from the bottom up, through disobedience, invention, and solidarity.

*Recetas Urbanas: more than a collective, a mode of action.*  
*Architecture as a Platform for Collective Action*

After seven years of solitary practice, during which Santiago Cirugeda developed a methodology based on ephemeral architecture, material reuse, urban prostheses, and citizen participation in decision-making,

17 Cf. Mitchell, D. (2003). *The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space*. The Guilford Press.

18 Lefebvre, H. (1968). *Le droit à la ville*. Éditions Anthropos.

Recetas Urbanas was officially founded in 2003. However, defining it as a traditional collective would be misleading: Recetas Urbanas is primarily a mode of action. It is an operational and political tool that combines design, self-construction, and activism, characterized by several key features: direct community involvement, the use of recycled materials, the employment of prefabricated modules specially designed by Cirugeda—easily assembled and recognizable by their yellow and red colors—and the blending of legitimacy and civil disobedience.

The structure of Recetas Urbanas is deliberately small and unstable, «lábil»<sup>19</sup> as Cirugeda himself describes it. The core team, which includes him and Alice Attout—an architect who has worked closely with him since 2008—is supported by an open network of collaborators, friends, volunteers, students, migrants, parents, teachers, residents, and professionals. This forms a constellation of temporary participants activated on a project-by-project basis, depending on the needs and energy of each situation. In this approach, the architect's role isn't based on being the sole author or achieving formal excellence but on nurturing relationships, developing processes, and adhering to a clear ethic: using architecture as a tool for collective transformation.

A core aspect of the practice is its emphasis on legal issues. Attout and Cirugeda has spent years working to create new public protocols, aiming to deconstruct the regulatory system from within. Each project also functions as a legal experiment: challenging the institutional control exercised by municipalities and superintendents, who, according to the collective, hold a monopoly on the urban image and hinder its transformation from below. This criticism is clear: what is considered “legitimate” in urban space is a product of arbitrary construction, designed to uphold power rather than meet citizens' real needs. Recetas Urbanas positions itself outside this system, seeking to build an alternative based on the creative use of norms, direct negotiation, and the independence of local communities.

This radical stance is also reflected in their economic and design choices. Cirugeda and Attout have intentionally given up personal profit in favor of an ethic of commitment and spatial justice. They live simply and choose projects not for visibility or pay, but for how well they align with their principles. They do not enter architecture competitions, which they see as exclusionary and often corrupt selection methods, nor do

19 Interview, Martina Dussin and Alejandro Cirugeda, Palma de Majorca, march 2024.

they accept commissions that go against the collective's values. When asked to expand Barcelona's MACBA into a historic gathering space for skaters, they declined the project to avoid contributing to the removal of a spontaneous urban practice. Likewise, they openly state that many architecture awards are bought, exposing a skewed system where merit is secondary to capital.

Even their clients follow a logic that differs from that of the market. Often, citizens, informal groups, or associations contact *Recetas Urbanas* seeking support for social or educational projects. The collective's response is never immediate: before taking action, they verify the genuine will and strength of the local community. As Cirugeda recounts, when a group of mothers asked to build an extension for a school, the response was: «Find more mothers».<sup>20</sup> In other words, the project begins before the architecture: it starts with activating collective desire and creating the political subject who can realize it.

In short, *Recetas Urbanas* is not just a collective but a dynamic, situated alliance rooted in mutual trust, direct action, and a vision of architecture as a platform for conflict, care, and change. It serves as a space of resistance and imagination where the architect abandons protagonism to become part of a shared process.

One of the most innovative aspects of *Recetas Urbanas*' approach is the development of a prefabricated construction system, specifically designed for assembly by volunteers, even without technical skills. This method aligns closely with the collective's participatory vision: making every stage of the project understandable and accessible to turn construction into an educational and democratic experience. The materials used are affordable and simple: OSB panels combined with straw-yellow wooden beams form the supporting structure. The panels are pre-drilled, and the entire system is assembled with screws and screwdrivers, reducing the need for specialized tools or skilled labor. Each component is modular, reusable, and easy to transport, offering a flexible and repeatable construction language that is ideally suited to collective self-construction.

But what truly makes this system effective is the communication structure that supports it. In each project, *Recetas Urbanas* provides simple yet highly functional A4 sheets, which serve both to explain materials and to organize the work. Volunteers are asked to complete a visual questionnaire indicating their confidence level with tools like the screwdriver.

20 Id.

ver, the circular saw, the brush, and scaffolding. Alongside these, there are unexpected symbols that reveal the group's inclusive approach: a potato tortilla to show willingness to cook for the team; a camera to document the process; and a little man carrying loads to assess physical ability. The organization of the construction site thus becomes an exercise in self-reflection and collective care, where every skill is appreciated and no one is left out.

The technical drawings also reflect this approach. The distributed sheets contain sections and elevations that are drawn clearly and schematically, populated by stylized figures: adults in black, children in red, all wearing the characteristic yellow hard hat. The tables show the assembly step by step, like a visual recipe: the beams are lifted, moved, and screwed together by the people themselves, suggesting a chronological and collective process. This is the deeper meaning of the name *Recetas Urbanas*: it is not just about projects, but about shared instructions, accessible to everyone, that enable diverse communities to build their own spaces. Architecture thus becomes a widespread, horizontal practice, where the act of building is also a gesture of learning, connection, and social transformation.

This methodology has deep roots in the early phase of Cirugeda's work, focusing on 'parasitic' architecture: temporary grafts, ephemeral structures, urban prostheses. A key project during this transition is *Araña*, first created in Seville in 2008 and later replicated in several cities, including Rome at MAXXI, as an example of temporary occupation and lightweight architecture. *Arañas* are independent, raised-off-the-ground structures that do not consume soil and allow circulation underneath. They can serve as extensions of existing buildings or as autonomous entities, capable of adapting to internal or external, public or private contexts. The first prototype resulted from a collaboration with engineer Julio Barba, who was experimenting with a system initially designed to stabilize buildings during restoration. Their collaboration led to a scalable, modular construction model that combines technical expertise and political ambition: building without occupying, acting without consuming, transforming without erasing.

The *Arañas* foresee many principles that will later become key to *Recetas Urbanas*' school and community projects: modularity, reversibility, energy independence, lightness, and most importantly, the ability to build collectively outside traditional institutional construction methods. In this way, the structure isn't just an architectural object but a mobile tool of resistance and adaptation, capable of infiltrating urban voids to

create new forms of sociality and ownership.

Recetas Urbanas' construction system is based on an architectural philosophy that views architecture as an ecological practice, capable of integrating environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and technical innovation. Besides utilizing prefabricated wooden components—such as pre-drilled panels and modular beams assembled with simple screwdrivers—their distinctive approach primarily involves extensive use of waste materials.

This principle is reflected in all the projects carried out by the studio: for Aula Abierta in Granada (2005), 90% of the materials used were recycled, with the help of 280 volunteers; for Project Lab in Benicàssim (2010), 75% was achieved, with 35 volunteers; for Escuela Grece in Madrid (2016), 85% was recycled, with 366 volunteers; finally, for the Cañada Real Community Center (Madrid, 2019), 60% of the materials were recycled, assembled thanks to the efforts of over 1,200 volunteers.<sup>21</sup>

But the use of waste materials in Spain is not an invention of the studio: Recetas Urbanas fits into and enhances an already existing, informal practice carried out by networks of poor people, migrants, squatters, and precarious workers, who for decades have been building, adapting, and maintaining living and working spaces with what the system discards. Cirugeda simply recognizes the latent value of this material intelligence and amplifies it through architecture, providing it with tools, visibility, and legitimacy, and promoting connections between disparate realities.

At the same time, however, the potential to develop a system for reusing materials on a national level has also been supported by public policies promoting the circular economy. In Spain, both at the national and regional levels, there are action plans for reuse, as well as regulations governing the exchange, transport, safety, and recirculation of construction materials. Municipalities, in particular, play a crucial role: they can authorize recovery from demolitions, provide temporary storage, and issue permits and logistical support. Without these institutional collaborations, many of Recetas Urbanas' projects would not have been possible.

Through a combination of grassroots networks, municipal support, and an alternative architectural vision, the studio has built a national network for exchanging materials, which today connects cities, villages,

21 Cf. <https://youtu.be/j61Jhl7jCzM>. Accessed on april 2025.

schools, social centers, and cultural festivals. It spans Spain from south to north, moving materials, people, and skills. In this system, what is waste elsewhere becomes a resource: a discarded window in Barcelona can become part of a library in Almería, a disused beam in Seville is used to build a school in Madrid. Every element has a second life, and every project is a node in this material, social, and political infrastructure, which redefines architecture as a form of mutual care and collective renewal. However, despite the apparent success of the system—the national material exchange network, voluntary participation, and support from some municipalities—things are not always so simple. The case of the Community Center, built in 2019 in Cañada Real Galiana, Madrid, is a typical example. Cañada Real is a marginalized and complicated area that started along an old cattle trail and has, over time, become one of the largest informal settlements in Europe, with over 8,000 residents, many of whom lack access to basic services, including about 2,500 minors. After decades of government neglect, a Regional Pact was signed in 2017, acknowledging the area's vulnerability and making the construction of a community center one of the main priorities for social cohesion. The project, which initially failed twice due to a lack of bids, was finally awarded to Recetas Urbanas on the third try. However, the public contract only covers the physical assembly of the structure through an agreement designed for supplying prefabricated modules. All the preliminary work—the involvement of five local schools, door-to-door visits to every family in Sector 5, listening to and coordinating with existing and emerging associations, and even setting up a workshop inside the Soto del Real prison for manufacturing building components—went unpaid. Cirugeda himself said, «They paid us for the pavilion, but not to talk to people».<sup>22</sup>

Yet, it is precisely within this invisible work that the pedagogical strength of Recetas Urbanas resides. Construction is always preceded by a process of technical, organizational, and emotional literacy that involves children, families, prisoners, and ordinary citizens. The goal is not only to do things together but also to learn how to do things collectively, share tools and skills, appreciate non-academic abilities, and ultimately encourage active citizenship through shared space. Their projects are not limited to addressing an architectural need; they become educational, social, and political tools capable of transforming those who participate in them.

22 See note 19.

The construction site sign, in this sense, is clear: 'Access permitted to all persons not involved in the work.' A straightforward and counterintuitive message that challenges the idea of the construction site as a closed, masculine, and specialized space, transforming it into a public, open area where architecture becomes a collective, educational, and inclusive act. Another type of interlocutor that Recetas Urbanas often interacts with is cultural and artistic institutions, especially those involved in organizing international exhibitions or festivals. However, unlike many artistic and architectural practices working in the exhibition field, Santiago Cirugeda has always maintained a critical stance toward the idea of architecture as mere representation. For Recetas Urbanas, art is never the ultimate goal but rather a tool. Even when participating in high-profile events like Documenta 15 in Kassel, it does so with the clear aim of producing real and tangible, not symbolic, changes. The intervention created for Documenta, the "Puente Todo" (Jumping in Hanoi), exemplifies this approach. Invited by the Off Biennale collective, based on a proposal from Ruangrupa, the curators of the 2022 edition, Recetas Urbanas designed a bridge game connecting two public schools in the city. The project involved active participation from students and their families and was conceived from the beginning to be dismantled and repurposed as a permanent educational structure. As is often the case with their projects, participation occurred on multiple levels: from co-design with children and teachers to collective construction involving volunteers, families, and even universities. There were challenges, though: some educational institutions declined to collaborate. Despite this, the process fostered affection, created new networks, and resulted in a genuinely valuable piece of architecture built to endure beyond the event itself. For Cirugeda, aesthetics is never the main focus. He describes architecture as that «amigo feo» – that ugly friend, as they say in Spanish – whom you like regardless, who works and is helpful. This disenchanting view of form and representation is a core part of his critique of architecture's spectacle and the art system overall. Recetas Urbanas aims not to be built just for photos or awards, but to meet real needs, change relationships, and create shared spaces through inclusive methods. Even when working "within" an artistic institution, like Documenta, he manages to change the focus: from an exhibition project to a social intervention, from a work of art to a community infrastructure.

## *A Grammar of Action: Education, Care, and Collective Empowerment*

The experience of *Recetas Urbanas* aims to demonstrate how it is possible to develop a coherent, radical, and yet adaptable architectural practice. The clarity with which they position themselves regarding the project, the client, legal constraints, communities, and cultural institutions is arguably one of their key strengths. Their operating mode, refined over time through self-construction, participation, and strategic use of rules, functions as a grammar of intervention capable of responding, each time, to different contexts with practical tools, while also carrying a strong symbolic and political significance. The goal is never to showcase architecture, but to build it collaboratively, to genuinely transform places and the relationships within them. Whether it involves an institutional commission, a collective self-build, or an invitation from a museum or biennial, their approach remains consistent: to intervene in real space, create tangible change, forge alliances, and most importantly, initiate lasting processes of awareness and shared care.

Among the various elements that emerged in the analysis, three key axes can be identified that shape the political and social identity of their work. The first is the importance of education, information, and mediation. Each project includes detailed explanations, engagement, and training. Whether through flyers, spontaneous neighborhood meetings, simplified visual materials, or public gatherings with residents, *Recetas Urbanas* practices a genuine architectural pedagogy. Much of this work—often not officially part of the contract and unpaid—is still considered essential. For them, building a structure is never separate from building everyday awareness. The second focus is on the importance of marginalized groups and community development. Participation isn't just a slogan or a tool for the project; it is the project itself. *Recetas Urbanas* engages children, prisoners, migrants, families facing hardships, women excluded from construction sites, activists, and regular citizens in processes that turn self-construction into a means of collective self-determination. In this way, self-construction also becomes a political act because it reassigns the power to act, know, and decide.

The third is the practice of care as an alternative to control. In a time when regulatory logic and security measures often limit freedom, *Recetas Urbanas* suggests an architecture rooted in care. Care here is not paternalism or assistance, but awareness of our involvement in the world and its ongoing processes. As María Puig de la Bellacasa states in *Matters of Care*, «it is not a question of introducing care into the world, but of

recognizing that we are already always within a network of relationships that involve us». <sup>23</sup> And as Jeremy Till notes in *Architecture Depends*, it is essential to resist the rhetoric of problem solving and acknowledge that architecture is dependent, fragile, uncertain, and relational. This is where Recetas Urbanas steps in: it does not offer definitive solutions but instead encourages a culture of attention, listening, and collective responsibility— a practice that creates fewer objects and more possibilities. The Recetas Urbanas experience shows how architecture can serve as a powerful political tool, capable of shaping reality by taking a clear and radical stance. In this sense, Santiago Cirugeda never presents himself merely as an architect, but primarily as a citizen: a citizen who assumes social responsibility for his practice, who chooses to engage with urban conflicts, to intervene where institutions often remain silent or withdraw, and to do so using the tools of design, mediation, and care. This stance has fostered a specific mode of action that runs through all the studio's projects and is based on a form of normative creativity: that is, an ability to read and interpret the law not as an unchangeable constraint, but as a space to be explored and, if necessary, challenged. From its initial parasitic architectures to its major collaborations with public and cultural institutions, Recetas Urbanas has continuously operated on the edges of the rules, finding in the complexities of bureaucracy an opportunity to experiment, to make the invisible visible, and to build concrete alternatives. And it has always achieved this with minimal resources: waste materials, informal networks, inexperienced volunteers, limited budgets, and tight deadlines. However, it is precisely in this scarcity that one of the practice's strengths lies: the ability to deliver maximum impact, not just in physical space but especially in social, educational, and relational areas. Recetas Urbanas' projects do more than transform places; they raise awareness, empower communities, and foster alliances. Ultimately, they show that another kind of architecture is possible—and that to practice it, one must first decide which side to take.

23 Puig de la Bellacasa, M. (2017). *Matters of care: Speculative ethics in more than human worlds*. University of Minnesota Press.



Santiago Cirugeda, Kuvas S. C., Sevilla, 1997.

# Recobrar la calle

Santiago Cirugeda imparte en el Instituto del Teatro de Sevilla un curso sobre 'Arte público'

MAUEL CASTRO Sevilla

Santiago Cirugeda es el encargado de impartir el curso que el Instituto del Teatro de Sevilla está dedicando a Situaciones artísticas

en el espacio público, en el que se matricularon un momento quienes abrense. A lo largo de las sesiones de trabajo, Cirugeda intenta mostrar a los participantes algunas de las posibilidades que tiene el artista contem-

poráneo para incidir en la sociedad a través de intervenciones en espacios públicos o medios de comunicación. Además, ha puesto una cinta en la calle San Luis que se ha convertido en una singular parcela de reflexión.

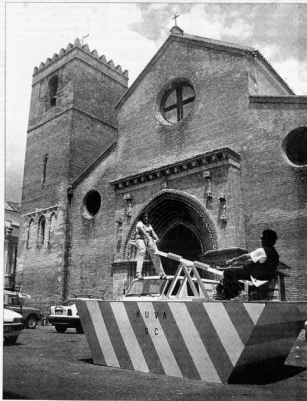
El curso que está impartiendo Santiago Cirugeda en el Instituto del Teatro de Sevilla tiene un doble objetivo. Por una parte, mostrar a los alumnos matriculados algunos ejemplos de intervenciones llevadas a cabo en espacios públicos, incluso en espacios de comunicación de masas y movimientos burocráticos. Por otra, intentar a lo largo de la posibilidad de mostrar y proponer sus propias ideas para una supuesta intervención. El curso cuenta con un total de once horas, que se han distribuido durante casi tres meses para que los matriculados culmen sus propuestas.

El tiempo siempre para pensar con calma es la intención que el artista quiere recuperar los espacios públicos como campo de trabajo para los artistas. Durante siglos, el arte fue algo que ocurría a lo que de todos los embargos en la actualidad, buena parte de los artistas trabajan de espaldas a la sociedad en la que viven y crean obras que, generalmente, resultan desconocidas para el público.

La intervención artística que define Santiago Cirugeda - dice el crítico Rogelio López Castejón - es una serie de actuaciones necesariamente críticas. Las acciones deben estar orientadas a una actitud ética y deben estar estrechamente vinculadas a los problemas.

Una crítica de la creación artística, en cierta forma próxima al mundo de los profesionales, con un fin no objetivo contribuir a una nueva democratización del fenómeno artístico. Esta obra debe tener una mayor incidencia sobre la sociedad en la que se produce.

Una obra  
Cirugeda ha aprovechado un cierto vacío legal en los ordenamientos municipales para llevar a cabo una actividad que puede ser calificada como pública, con relación al curso antes referido. La actividad consiste en el diseño de una



Santiago Cirugeda ha instalado una singular... a la junta de obras de la iglesia sevillana de Santa María.

## Los ministros de Cultura, partidarios de agilizar la libre circulación de libros

Por Madrid

Los ministros de Cultura de Dinamarca acordaron ayer en Madrid recientemente a sus Gabinetes que estudien la forma de renovar los derechos que dificultan la libre circulación del libro. Los responsables de Cultura danesa, sueca y finlandesa, que durante dos días han participado en Madrid en una reunión informal, consideran, asimismo, necesaria la creación del Fondo Berenson, a fin de impulsar la distribución de productos audiovisuales. La conferencia, a la que han asistido todos los países que participan en los debates de cooperación de parte de Ginebra y de Ginebra, excepto Nicaragua, fue calificada de "rápida" por la titular española del departamento de Cultura, Esperanza Aguirre.

El intercambio artístico es el estímulo que es imprescindible seguir dando para impulsar el Ministerio Común del Libro Benetton. La libre circulación de textos, que requiere la eliminación de gravámenes arancelarios y políticos de abastecimiento de libros, es una antigua propuesta defendida por el ex presidente de Colombia Beltramo Boscán, que intervino en el foro.

En ese sentido, la misma entidad, que preside los trabajos de la comisión, afirma que el VII Consejo Interamericano adopte una resolución sobre la libre circulación del libro "dada en apoyo a los ministros de Cultura, para facilitar la libre circulación en cada uno de nuestros países de productos audiovisuales procedentes de los países socios".

Los ministros interamericanos han validado el proyecto que Boscán planteó como base para la elaboración de un "programa de trabajo" por llevarse a cabo, en una primera fase y en Portugal en una segunda.

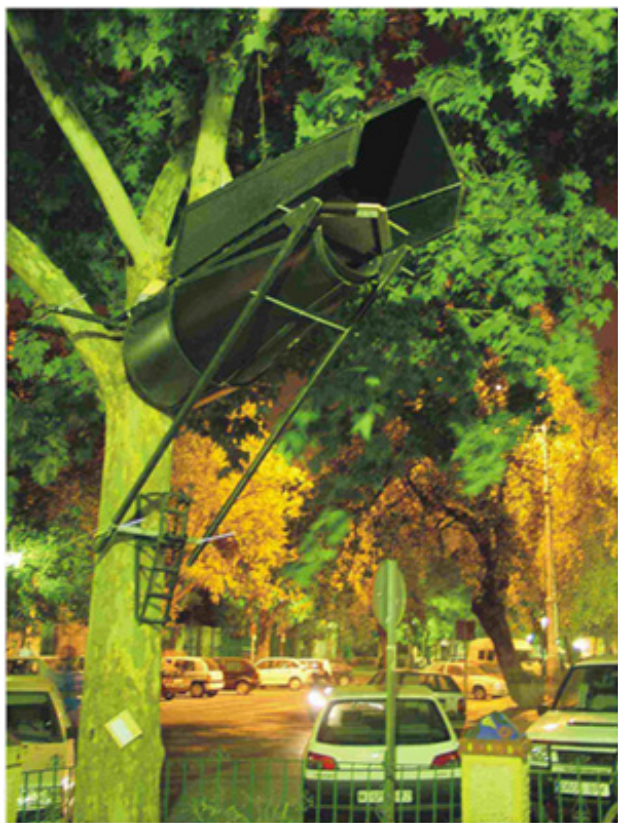
## El Cabildo desconoce nuevas técnicas para restaurar el Giraldillo

An article about Kuvas S. C. project on a newspaper.



Santiago Cirugeda, Andamio, Sevilla, 1998.





Santiago Cirugeda, Casa Insecto, Sevilla, 2001.



#### ■ REIVINDICACIÓN

### Una protesta en los árboles de la Alameda

La plataforma Alameda-Viva colocó ayer unas garitas en las copas de los plataneros de la explanada norte del barrio en señal de protesta por la supuesta tala de árboles que provocarán las obras de reurbanización de la Alameda y la construcción de un aparcamiento subterráneo. La jornada reivindicativa se inauguró ayer con un desayuno aéreo que abre varios días de movilizaciones en los árboles de la Alameda. La plataforma realizó el pasado mes unas jornadas de debate sobre las obras que la Gerencia de Urbanismo proyecta en la barriada a las que se invitó a los delegados municipales de Obras Públicas y Transportes, Isabel Guerra-Librero y Blas Ballesteros, pero ninguno de los dos políticos comparecieron a la cita. Tampoco el delegado de Urbanismo, Rafael Carmona, ha ofrecido los datos requeridos sobre las obras a diez días de su inicio.

An article about the Casa Insecto on a newspaper.



Lam voluptum quis quat. Anditium velessuntio eventus mos milique excestis ipsa si suntio.



Recetas Urbanas, Araña, Maxxi, Rome, 2011.



Recetas Urbanas instructions about the self-construction for a school in Palma de Majorca, Spain, 2024.



Recetas Urbanas instructions about the self-construction for a school in Palma de Majorca, Spain, 2024.



Recetas Urbanas, materials for the self-construction of a school in Palma de Majorca, Spain, 2024.



Recetas Urbanas, people building a school in Palma de Majorca, Spain, 2024.



Recetas Urbanas, people building a school in Palma de Majorca, Spain, 2024.



Recetas Urbanas, people building a school in Palma de Majorca, Spain, 2024.

On the opposite page: Zuloark, Mobile Meeting Point for the Huerto del Retiro Community Garden, Madrid, Spain, 2022.

## EPHEMERALITIES

# *Micro-Actions Architecture: Installations and Ephemeral Collective in Contemporary Urban Design porary Space*



### Abstract

*Ephemeral and collective practices show how protest architecture can emerge from small-scale, temporary, and collaborative interventions that activate public space. What might seem fragile or marginal are instead seen as micro-activist architectures: tactical actions that mobilize communities, foster dissent, and redefine architectural boundaries.*

*Their history links radical avant-garde movements with recent structural changes: the 2008 financial crisis, the ecological emergency, the spread of digital infrastructure, and the growth of democratic ideas. In this context, young architectural collectives have redefined authorship, adopted horizontality, and made design both a relational and political act.*

*Manifestos, workshops, and temporary installations serve as platforms for dissent, creating both aesthetic forms and political impact. By reclaiming public space, exploring alternative economies, and challenging institutional inertia, ephemeral practices demonstrate how architecture can act through dissent—producing not just objects but processes, encounters, and new forms of urban citizenship.*

## Ephemerality. Micro-Actions Architecture: Installations and Ephemeral Collective Design in Contemporary Urban Space

This chapter begins with two facts that are now obvious to anyone who carefully observes contemporary architectural practices: on the one hand, the widespread emergence of architectural collectives, and on the other, the increasing presence of temporary architecture, often grouped under the general term of ephemeral architecture.

Both of these phenomena—collectives and ephemeral architecture—are now recognizable and increasingly essential elements in today's design landscape. As Natalie Donat-Cattin mentions in her book *Collective Processes, Counter-Practices in European Architecture*,<sup>1</sup> the term "collective" has become common in European architectural language, reflecting a significant shift in how design work is understood: no longer based on a single creator, but on shared action, autonomy, and collaboration.

At the same time, the term ephemeral architecture has gained a new meaning within the disciplinary discourse. It no longer refers only to installations or scenography but also to concrete urban design, often linked to activating public space. As Federica Fava states, «the presence of temporary architectural devices has grown significantly in Europe, especially within urban public space. This is a trend that has established itself as a recognized mode of intervention in the territory».<sup>2</sup> The ephemeral, she further notes, is not limited to symbolic value but «becomes a tool for activating processes of real transformation in urban space».<sup>3</sup> This dual trajectory—collective and fleeting—no longer signifies a fragile response, but instead tends to create a new kind of planning that is becoming more concrete and, in addition to building architecture, fosters relationships, tensions, alliances, and sometimes even new institutions.

This chapter aims to define the architecture created by examining its political nature. I want to call this form of architecture micro-actions ar-

1 Donat-Cattin, N. (2021). *Collective Processes: Counterpractices in European Architecture*. Birkhäuser.

2 Fava, F. (2015). *Architettura a tempo determinato* (Doctoral dissertation, Sapienza Università di Roma), p. 14.

3 Id., p. 23.

chitecture because it is based on the political activation of space through small-scale interventions that can take a stand, design alternative scenarios, and create concrete change. Micro-actions architecture is therefore the result of the meeting between two forces—the collective and the ephemeral—that come together in a design deeply connected to activism.

Before analyzing its characteristics and implications, however, it is essential to understand the conditions under which this phenomenon arose: its origins, the causes of its emergence, and the environments in which it has been found to exist.

*The Conditions of Emergence: Radical Legacies, Digital Infrastructures, Democratic Paradigms, and Crises as Catalysts for Micro-Actions Architecture*

Micro-actions architecture did not emerge out of nowhere. It is the layered result of cultural, political, economic, and environmental changes that have significantly transformed the field of architecture over the past decade and a half. Among the key factors that enabled its rise, three main driving forces can be identified: the legacy of radical architecture, technological and communicative advancements, and the expansion of the democratic paradigm in Western societies

The legacy of the radical avant-garde—especially from the 1960s and 1970s—left a series of unanswered questions that still matter today: Who can practice architecture? For whom? How can we engage in urban space without building? The collective imagination, temporality as a language, and institutional critique are all tools being revisited and reactivated now, although it's essential to note that the context has changed significantly. Practices that were a choice in the 1960s and 1970s might now appear mainly due to a lack of alternatives, which we will see shortly.

Another key point is technological transformation, which has contributed significantly to the spread of these practices. The ability to communicate and collaborate remotely has allowed the rise of international and distributed groups, where designers living in different cities can start shared projects, build horizontal networks, and exchange tools and ideas. Digital platforms (open calls, social networks, crowdfunding systems) have become vital operational infrastructures for these forms of architectural activism.

Simultaneously, the expansion of the democratic paradigm in Western

societies has encouraged the rise of new actors involved in transforming space. An increasing number of citizens feel entitled to participate, intervene, and claim urban rights: from involvement in neighborhood assemblies to self-management of spaces and participatory design. This framework also helps to geographically define the phenomenon: micro-actions architecture finds fertile ground in Western democratic contexts, where the culture of rights, dissent, and co-production is more deeply rooted in history.

However, the strongest push for these practices comes from a common condition that can be summarized as a crisis. Forms of micro-actions architecture are emerging as creative and political responses to four interconnected crises: financial, urban, climatic, and systemic.

The 2008 financial crisis had a severe impact on the architectural profession, significantly reducing job opportunities, particularly for the younger generation. This depletion of the market forced many young designers to find alternative ways to practice their craft, creating opportunities outside traditional institutional channels. It's no coincidence that many collectives formed during that period reject conventional commissioning and view themselves as designers, authors, and producers, capable of directly engaging with their contexts.

Furthermore, there was an urban crisis characterized by fragmented, abandoned European cities made unequal through decades of neoliberal policies. Traditional urban design appears unable to address these new challenges. As Federica Fava states, these «light and temporary architectures» have become tools capable of «activating processes of real transformation in urban space»,<sup>4</sup> especially when institutional urban planning is paralyzed. Therefore, public space turns into a blank canvas for political and design action, where architecture's role is to activate rather than build.

Alongside these two dimensions, the climate crisis is becoming increasingly evident. The ecological emergency calls for a radical rethink of architecture's role: building less, reusing, regenerating, and reducing environmental impact. The ephemeral and the temporary are thus seen not only as expressive forms but also as ethical and ecological necessities. Micro-actions practices experiment with recycled materials, lightweight structures, and reversible assemblies, aiming to strike a balance between space and sustainability.

Finally, on a deeper level, we confront what could be called the crisis of

4 Id., p. 23.

capitalism. As the French Invisible Committee notes, this is also the absurdity of «infinite growth on a finite planet».<sup>5</sup> It is within this context that the crisis of the very notion of authorship in architecture emerges: the figure of the archistar as a sole genius is increasingly being questioned. The collective and cooperative ideals stand in symbolic contrast to the neoliberal narrative of individual success and profit-driven rhetoric. As Mark Fisher states in *Capitalist Realism* «it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism».<sup>6</sup> This perception of an invincible system, which feeds off the crises it creates, is pushing many contemporary practices to avoid confrontation. Instead of fighting abstractly, micro-actions architecture chooses to operate within its gaps, creating small actual shifts, precise positioning, and new potential uses.

### *The Actors Behind Micro-Actions Architecture: Young Collectives and Their Operational Models*

Who are the actors of what we call micro-actions architecture? It's not easy to draw clear boundaries: it's a vast and ever-changing network composed of collectives, informal groups, and temporary alliances that are often hard to categorize. However, by examining the practices and manifestos of those involved in this movement, some common traits emerge that can help map out this ecosystem.

First of all, these are young realities. The groups are often composed of people between the ages of 20 and 40, and many form immediately after graduation in response to a saturated and uninviting job market. Even for collectives that have been active for longer, the core remains a generational drive—a vision of the project as collective action rooted in the present.

Another notable aspect is their location: most are concentrated in major European and US cities, but many operate in multiple locations simultaneously. Some are explicitly 'nomadic,' basing their identity on travel, movement, and ongoing engagement with different places. Two main factors have driven this type of diffusion: on one hand, the ease of communication provided by digital technologies, which makes remote collaboration simple; and on the other, international educational networks—such as the Erasmus program—which have increased opportunities

5 Cf. Comitato Invisible. (2019). *L'insurrezione che viene. Ai nostri amici. Adesso. Nero.*

6 Cfr. Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* Zero Books.

for students and young designers from various countries to connect. It's common for a collective to have members spread across different cities who meet periodically to start shared projects.

Despite the mobile and connected nature of these projects, they almost always have a strong connection to their context. The *genius loci* – that is now called “site-specific isn't just an aesthetic or storytelling element; it's the real starting point for every intervention. Installations, temporary structures, and workshops emerge from listening to places, understanding neighborhoods, and engaging with communities. It's not merely about designing within a context but designing with those who live there daily. The connection to one's city, or even neighborhood, is essential in developing various projects and is nearly always the initial step for these groups. The *genius loci* remains a core design principle in projects elsewhere, and it's essential to note that it involves not only the physical reading of the environment—natural and built—but also an understanding of the social setting.

Attention to context and community reflects a spatial reading skill that adds a new dimension to traditional practice. The ability to read expands. This skill manifests in various forms, including temporary installations, workshops, self-building moments, radical education, occupations, small mobile architectures, and artistic practices. All are designed to activate, through a gesture, movement, or action, which the local community is often invited to contribute to using their own hands. In this way, many interventions can be seen as tactical proposals: small gestures, sometimes temporary, but with a profound impact. They are not meant to be permanent solutions. Instead, they serve as tools to create new possibilities, test different configurations, and reveal hidden tensions or desires. In complex urban settings, often impacted by institutional inertia, tactical actions become practical methods for intervention and change.

The internal structure of the collectives also reflects this attitude: none of them has a hierarchical organization. There are no leaders or single signatories; work is organized horizontally, with distributed roles and shared decision-making. This approach challenges the traditional idea of authorship. It's no longer about an individual signing the work, but a group of voices identified by a collective name. Authorship becomes a form of cooperation and a political act.

This does not mean, however, that identity is ignored; quite the opposite. Collectives carefully manage their public image: their websites are clear and well-designed, and their social media profiles—mainly Insta-

gram and Facebook—are active and current. Every project is documented, as if building a narrative were an essential aspect of the project itself, because it allows them to share a position and a possibility, and, of course, to grow an increasingly larger network.

Finally, there is a common thread running through almost all these experiences: the concept of interdisciplinarity. Collectives rarely see themselves solely as “groups of architects”. The terms they use to describe themselves are diverse and often combine elements from different fields. Some mention architecture, design, and scenography; others bring together architecture, research, and community; and some combine landscape, interior design, and psychology. Still others include terms like publishing, criticism, and curating, or define themselves through actions such as explorations, constructions, and political practices. This diversity of definitions reflects the complexity of their practices and their aim to transcend the rigid boundaries of the architectural discipline. Architecture thus becomes an open field, filled with many voices and influenced by other forms of knowledge.

### *Positioning, Critique, and Action: The Role of Manifestos*

In addition to their practical activities, there’s one aspect that makes these collectives particularly interesting from a theoretical and political perspective: their manifestos. Many collectives create declarative texts, often published on their websites or read publicly, which take the form of a manifesto. This is not just a communication tactic: the manifesto becomes a way of positioning oneself, a tool for expressing visions, values, and antagonisms. It’s a means of speaking out in the disciplinary and political arena, of declaring who you are and where you’re speaking from.

These manifestos vary significantly in form—some are written as lists, others as poems, and some as a series of assertive statements—but they share a common urgency: to redefine what architecture can be today. Among the biographies of different collectives, where the manifestos are found, recurring themes emerge that outline a shared critical outlook. The first, and perhaps most universal, is the declared desire to move beyond traditional practice. The manifestos openly discuss the need to surpass the limits of the discipline as we have known it: not just building structures, but engaging in social, political, and cultural practice. The goal is to go beyond negotiations and stereotypes, break established codes, and reject compromises that often sterilize the project. Architecture

is reimagined as an open field, where disobedience, reformulation, and reimagination are not only possible but also encouraged.

Another central theme is public space: nearly all the manifestos highlight the urgent need to strengthen and expand it, aiming to “maximize and protect public space” as a shared, accessible area that fosters rights and relationships. This clearly contradicts the logic of privatization and gentrification that has transformed cities into tools for capitalist exploitation. For these groups, public space is a common good to defend, but also to reinvent through ephemeral, inclusive, radical practices.

This opposition to the capitalist model is apparent in many texts. The manifestos criticize the role that architecture has played—and continues to play—in perpetuating inequalities and physically shaping power. They discuss capitalist space, dominant narratives, and exploitation. They reject the idea that design is just a product to be sold and instead offer alternative visions of building.

Alongside these criticisms, the issue of the climate crisis becomes very prominent. Many groups emphasize the need for radical ecological change, advocate for a post-carbon future, and question the reuse of materials, the revival of local knowledge, and an architecture that not only shapes but also cares for the environment. Ecology is often linked to a broader view of justice, encompassing communities and the land.

Some manifestos—particularly those from the United States—directly address issues of blackness and the emancipation of the African diaspora. This stance has been strengthened by the Black Lives Matter protests, leading many groups to question the racial aspects of architecture: who designs it? For whom? From what perspective? These texts challenge the perceived neutrality of space, asserting the right to build and inhabit for those who have been historically marginalized.

Similarly, we find many references to feminist thought, often connected to ecological and community issues. Architecture becomes a practice of care, attention, and listening, but also a space for dismantling roles, languages, and hierarchical structures inherited from a long patriarchal history.

Another common theme is the social responsibility of architecture. Many manifestos explicitly describe design as a social practice. The architect is not a neutral technician but an active participant in social processes who bears responsibility for the decisions made.

This vision also reveals a strong desire for independence. The collectives express their wish to break free from systems of exploitation, including the exploitation of creative labor and the appropriation by institutions.

They aim to create autonomous design spaces where value is based on relationships rather than profit. In this way, they are part of a tradition that seeks to challenge privilege—whether related to class, race, gender, or other factors—that has historically influenced the field of architecture. Finally, many manifestos emphasize the need to represent previously unacknowledged resources and to center on what has been marginalized. This aligns with Bell Hooks’ famous statement: «put the margin at the center».<sup>7</sup> It is an invitation to rewrite the geographies of design, to give voice to those who have never had one, and to recognize knowledge, materials, and practices that have been exploited, forgotten, or excluded.

### *From Radical Experimentation to Institutional Collaboration: Orizzontale in Rome*

Starting from these common issues shared by many international groups, it is helpful to briefly examine an Italian case that reflects some of the tensions and possibilities discussed so far. The Orizzontale collective, active in Rome since 2010, is a notable example of how architecture can serve as a tool for political and social action, beginning from a specific context and material conditions of marginality.

The experience of the Roman collective Orizzontale is rooted in a strongly defined context, both geographically, culturally, and politically. The group was formed at the university but immediately took a stand against the dominant architectural culture conveyed in academic circles. A culture that, in their view, continued to produce an elitist architectural imagery, focused on bourgeois housing, museums, and large projects designed by star architects. In this way, their training occurred within the university but developed in opposition to it.

Rome, the city where the collective was formed and operates, plays a key role in shaping their approach. It is a city that, in the early 2000s, was heavily defined by signature projects—from Zaha Hadid’s MAXXI to Renzo Piano’s Auditorium and Richard Meier’s Ara Pacis—but also retains an informal urban space filled with political and social tensions. Rome is a city “without rules,” crossed by acts of political activism and social centers, and it faces an ongoing problem with urban waste mana-

7 Hooks, B. (1990). *Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness. In Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics* (pp. 145–153). Boston, MA: South End Press. P. 149.

gement. It is from this complex reality that Orizzontale derives inspiration and meaning for its projects: the reuse of abandoned materials—long before it becomes an ecological gesture—serves as a response to a necessity, driven by limited budget and experience.

This initial condition – no budget, no experience – pushes the group to experiment with forms of radical self-construction. This approach not only challenges the traditional role of the architect but also rejects the logic of exploiting creative labor, which is common among professional studios. Instead of joining a system that undervalues and underpays them, they decide to build with their own hands, using what they find, and turn participation into a tangible design practice. In this view, participation is not just a tool for action, but a political gesture—a way to promote diversity as democratization, standing in opposition to capitalism, which tends to categorize and exploit diversity as a commercial asset. As they themselves note, “the more you categorize, the more identifiable groups there are—and the easier it is to sell them something.” Their focus is therefore on non-productive spaces, temporary environments, “naïve” and self-made architectures that are highly metaphorical but foster direct communication with local communities. This approach aligns with a broader critical stance that rejects capitalist thinking and highlights the social and collective aspects of the project.

Another important element is their legal structure. Originally established as a cultural association, Orizzontale later added a professional association but was unable to find an entirely suitable setup. The Italian legal system, in fact, has significant gaps when it comes to regulating collective work and allowing the formation of hybrid practices that stably combine activism and profession. This challenge highlights a structural gap compared to other European countries and is one reason why collective architecture struggles to establish itself in Italy. Bureaucracy, particularly in relation to material reuse, hinders innovation and impedes the creative process.

The case of Orizzontale clearly demonstrates the connection between urban space, local political conditions, design experimentation, and the decline of traditional professional roles. The transient nature, participation, rejection of exploitation, and focus on public space become not only architectural practices but also political tools for redefining the very meaning of design.

Orizzontale is one of the most interesting examples in Italy of collectives dedicated to ephemeral architecture and practices for activating public spaces, with a clearly micro-political approach. We are interested in it

because, through a series of significant projects, it effectively navigates a balance between radical experimentation and collaboration with cultural institutions, creating interventions that not only exist for a limited time but also challenge the architectural and urban systems as a whole. The collective works across different project formats, shifting between research, construction, activation, and design. Their output is highly diverse but always driven by an idea of architecture as a relational and context-dependent practice. In research, with *Sexy Assemblage*—presented at the 2023 Venice Biennale—they explore the meaning of assemblage as a political and collective gesture, capable of establishing an aesthetic and design approach. With projects like *Eterotopia*, they investigate the potential for creating mobile, modular objects that act as tools for subtly activating spaces. In interior projects, such as *CivicoCivico* within URT, they use simple, self-made devices to transform everyday living into a shared experience. Through workshops like *Cittadella*, they foster collective processes that leave lasting marks in public space, demonstrating that even temporary interventions can lead to significant change. Installations like *Luogo* are open systems designed to be traversed, used, and experienced: minimal architectures that only exist in relation to those who engage with them. Finally, in public spaces, *Le Orecchie di Giussano* (*The Ears of Giussano*)—one of their earliest projects, created in their own neighborhood—demonstrates how even a simple gesture, made with modest materials, can create a new place for gathering and listening within the city.

These examples not only illustrate the challenge of categorizing them but also demonstrate how Orizzontale positions itself within a ‘micro-political architecture’ that is not limited to creating temporary objects but actively involves criticism, engagement, and a relationship with the surrounding context.

A notable example is Orizzontale’s participation in YAP MAXXI 2014. Orizzontale won the museum’s open call with the project *8 1/2*, created in the public space of Piazza Alighiero Boetti inside MAXXI in Rome. This installation is especially significant because it shows how the collective can also work ‘within’ the architectural and cultural system, using official tools and institutional funding to pursue a critical and active vision while keeping its independence and innovation intact. The *8 1/2* project includes a machine for inhabiting public space, made up of two complementary elements: an eight-and-a-half-meter-high mural constructed with modular wooden structures and covered with old recycled beer barrels that become translucent lamps, and a covered

arena composed of a series of relational objects and a large tent serving as a stage and temporary square.

The construction process was democratic and participatory: in four weeks, the area transformed into an open construction site, featuring a two-week workshop with students from across assembling wooden structures and creatively reusing materials. During the day, 8 1/2 served as an “urban room,” providing a relaxing and livable space; at night, the translucent wall was transformed into a luminous screen capable of displaying graphics and visual messages, seamlessly blending into the life of the MAXXI and the surrounding square.

This example demonstrates how Orizzontale expertly balances the tension between radical autonomy and institutional collaboration: 8 1/2 functions both as a work of art and a political act, a relational device and a cultural event, an experimental project that coexists with museum dynamics without being a subservient tool. It perfectly illustrates how micro-actions architecture can operate “from within” to influence the system from the inside, while maintaining a critical and transformative stance.

From here, we can highlight how micro-actions architecture takes different stances with respect to the architectural system: it can oppose it, often through clear and even conflictual actions, frequently involving unauthorized or illegal activities that challenge market and institutional norms; it can operate within it, using spaces and opportunities like open calls, collaborations, and public funding to pursue projects that remain critically engaged but function within established rules; or it can act as an actual magnet, not only leveraging the opportunities the system offers but also generating new ones, drawing interest, funds, and the public to alternative forms of architecture, thus broadening the range of design possibilities.

### *From Gesture to Impact: The Effects and Meaning of Micro-Actions Practices and Ephemeral Projects*

After reconstructing the conditions that have encouraged the rise of micro-actions architecture and outlining its operational and aesthetic features through direct comparison with the statements in the collectives’ manifestos, we can start to identify some recurring effects. While not claiming to give a definitive definition, it is more about sketching an initial map of what this practice produces, its more profound implications, and what it reveals—even indirectly—about the current state of

architecture.

Micro-actions architecture is primarily generative. Its strength often comes from dissent, rejecting dominant logics, and responding to marginality or stagnation. It isn't always "against," but opposition—in many forms—initially drives it and links it to protest. It is through this friction with the system that the practice finds the motivation to build, activate, and propose concrete alternatives. This architecture doesn't wait; it takes the initiative.

A second important theme is the definition of a recognizable aesthetic, characterized by inexpensive wood, prefabricated elements, assemblable structures, and often vibrant colors. It is a humble and light aesthetic but capable of conveying an image of care and closeness. The third theme relates to commissioning and the reproductive system of architecture. In these cases, it is often not the client who approaches the architect; instead, it is the architect who creates their own opportunities and seeks out their ideal clients.

Micro-actions architecture questions established roles and potentially holds a subversive power. It destabilizes existing structures, yet it is gradually establishing itself and consistently taking shape.

Ultimately, we aim to highlight this trend and foster the active, creative, and innovative aspects of life. As the word 'activism' indicates, micro-actions architecture is based on an ethical concept rooted in the idea of prioritizing the highest value of expressing vital activity, the will to live, and power.

If this chapter opened with the verb 'to activate,' a symbol of temporary architecture, it is because that is where everything begins: a gesture, a tension, a setting in motion. But if 'to activate' is the starting point, perhaps 'to act' is the verb that best describes what happens in these practices. Because what defines them, more than anything else, is action: concrete, situated, transformative. Through action—the heart of protest—architecture comes back to life.



Orizzontale, Le Orecchie di Giussano, Rome (Pigneto), Italy, 2010.



Orizzontale, Perestrello 2.0, Rome (Pigneto), Italy, May 2011.



Orizzontale, LuOgo, Lugo (RA), Italy, June-December 2022.



Orizzontale, 8 ½, Rome, Italy, 2014 — installation for the YAP (Young Architects Program) at MAXXI.



Orizzontale, Cittadella, spazio pubblico temporaneo, Bielefeld, Denmark, 2022.

# We Manifest Black Futures.


BlackSpace demands a present and future where Black people, Black spaces, and Black culture matter and thrive.

## BLACKSPACE

- 👤 Create circles, not lines.
- 👥 Choose critical connections over critical mass.
- 👂 Move at the speed of trust.
- 🎧 Be humble learners who practice deep listening.
- 🎉 Celebrate, Catalyze, and amplify Black joy.
- 🏗️ Plan with, design with.
- 👏 Center lived experience.
- 👤 Seek people at the margins.
- 👥 Reckon with the past to build the future.
- 👥 Protect and strengthen culture.
- 🌿 Cultivate wealth.
- 👤 Foster personal and communal evolution.
- 👏 Promote excellence.
- 👥 Manifest the future.

**Manifestos**  
BLACKSPACE, NEW YORK CITY

# FAF

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Future Architects Front are an informal organisation of young architectural practitioners and students. We are a fully independent group, and exist beyond the pressures and interests of architectural practice, education, and media. We operate in a number of different capacities, from research to activism to quasi-political campaigning.

## **Future Architects Front**

Organising to end exploitation in architecture.

Longer tables not taller fences.

[🔗 linktr.ee/future\\_architects\\_front](https://linktr.ee/future_architects_front)

**Manifestos**  
FAF FUTURE  
ARCHITECTURE FRONT, ENGLAND



RESOLVE is an interdisciplinary design collective that combines architecture, engineering, technology and art to address social challenges. They have delivered numerous projects, workshops, publications, and talks in the UK and across the world, all of which look toward realising just and equitable visions of change in our built environment.

**Manifestos**  
**RESOLVE, ENGLAND**

**MOULD is a research collective working at the intersection of spatial practice and climate breakdown.**

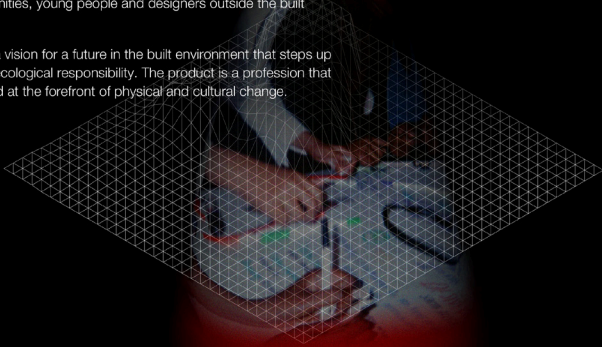
**This website collects various outputs from our work including conversations, writings, talks, and interactions.**

**The website for our current research project *Architecture is Climate* is **now live**.**

Manifestos  
MOULD, GERMANY-ENGLAND

We are interested in the under-represented and under-resourced ideas that have been neglected due to the profession's lack of diversity. We look to explore these beyond the dimension of traditional practice, and instead amongst communities, young people and designers outside the built environment.

We're driven by a vision for a future in the built environment that steps up to its social and ecological responsibility. The product is a profession that is just, radical and at the forefront of physical and cultural change.



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## **Manifestos** **BLACKSPACE, DENMARK**

Menu

OFFICE, last updated (...)

*Custom, Default*

OFFICE is a not-for-profit multidisciplinary design and research practice based in Melbourne. Our projects span the intersections of built form, research, discourse and education. As a registered charity, the studio's operations, processes and outputs are bound by a constitution to make projects for the public good.

**Manifestos**  
OFFICE, AUSTRALIA

We approach design as a social practice, collaborating with community groups, institutions, and local governments to create immersive and participatory environments in the public realm.

**Manifestos**  
**BRYONY ROBERTS**  
**STUDIO, NEW YORK CITY**

## **SURFACETOTALE** DESIGN GRAPHIC

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Le travail de Laure et Gonzague est complémentaire au sein de **SURFACE TOTALE**. Gonzague apporte l'univers de l'abstraction à travers les formes, le rythme et les couleurs. Laure amène une dimension figurative tout en ayant un regard de plasticienne. Ils composent en fonction du support qu'est le lieu d'intervention. Lorsque le contexte le permet, ils souhaitent avoir une utilité sociale à travers la démarche participative.

**Manifestos**  
SURFACE TOTALE, FRANCE

## EXYZT



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**EXYZT** is a design collective that works to activate empty plots and spaces within cities. As Independent Developers we have tried to champion meanwhile projects and have actively commissioned projects on our site on **Union Street** that was empty for many years. We have had an ongoing collaboration with EXYZT to activate this site and have together created the Southwark lido, the Lake and The Reunion.

## Manifestos EXYZT, LONDON

# ZULOARK

mad-ber-ath-ams-lgc-blq-spc



VIII International Congress of Zuloark, Santa Cruz de la Palma, Canary Islands, 2020 |  
Photography by Lourdes Cabrera

Zuloark Collective is a distributed office specializing in architecture, urbanism and culture, founded in 2001 in Madrid, with branches in Madrid, Berlin, Coruña, Bologna, Amsterdam, Athens, and La Palma.

Thanks to the diversity of its members, Zuloark engages in a wide range of activities, including architectural design, tactical urbanism and participation, cultural heritage projects, festival design, and construction workshops, among others. In 2007, Zuloark co-founded the Zoohaus cooperative, launching the international practical research project "Collective Intelligences."

## Manifestos ZULOARK, MADRID-BERLIN

WE  
WERE

Lungomare is a platform for design and cultural production.



We carry out commissions and initiate artistic projects. In collaboration with clients, artists and other experts we develop strategies and concepts that focus on finding the appropriate form for the content to be conveyed.

Our work encompasses communication, exhibition design, spatial concepts and curatorial projects. We create meeting places and experiential spaces in the urban context and we invite artists to work with us to develop thematic and site specific projects.

Lungomare operates in a variety of different spaces: public and private, virtual and print, urban and curated.

WE  
ARE

**Manifestos**  
LUNGOMARE, ITALY



We're a group of five people working in the fields of architecture, urbanism, art and design. We aim to experiment alternative ways of producing space for people working in the fields of social and climate change. Actions and constructions, with both roles of designers and builders, put the art of making at the heart of our practice. Our projects are grounded and directed toward communities, and on everyone you would see us on the field with tools in hand. Changing things is more and more urgent, especially

« Collectif Etc » is a non-profit organisation since 2010 and now based in Marseille city since 2014. As employees, we're four architects-builders and one chief administrator, though we regularly work with some twenty other partners. We try out self-management methods and autonomous ways of working together since the very beginning. That way, we hope to prove that democratic and horizontal mode of operation is both possible and accessible.

## Manifestos COLLECTIF ETC, FRANCE

## STUDIO



*umschichten* is an artistic practice based in Stuttgart, Hamburg and Berlin. The studio uses temporary architecture as an approach for immediate action and creates built interventions in order to display local needs, ideas or passion. *umschichten* visualizes theories, problems or a constellation of men and material by thinking about urban identities and the representation of different social and cultural groups in a city. They work fiercely on the borders of love and fear in the urban space.

**Manifestos**  
UMSCHICHTEN, GERMANY

## What is spec work?

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Spec work is any kind of creative work, either partial or completed, submitted by designers to prospective clients before designers secure both their work and equitable fees. Under these conditions, designers will often be asked to submit work in the guise of a contest or an entry exam on existing jobs as a “test” of their skill. In addition, designers normally lose all rights to their creative work because they failed to protect themselves with a contract or agreement. The clients often use this freely-gained work as they see fit without fear of legal repercussion.

## About us

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SolidSpace is an architect-developer making carefully crafted homes, and unlocking the potential of small sites that others may overlook.

Founded by Roger Zogolovitch in 2003, the **SolidSpace team** all have an architectural background, and share a passion for crafting new homes that enhance the local area. All our developments employ our unique split level configuration – the **SolidSpace DNA** – that allows spaces for living, eating and sleeping to flow through a series of interconnected half-levels. Thanks to double-height spaces, all our homes benefit from high windows bringing in lots of natural light.

**Manifestos**  
**SOLID SPACE, LONDON**

## **Mission**

The Black Reconstruction Collective (BRC) provides funding, design, and intellectual support to the ongoing and incomplete project of emancipation for the African Diaspora. The BRC is committed to multi-scalar and multi-disciplinary work dedicated to dismantling systemic white supremacy and hegemonic whiteness within art, design, and academia. Founded by a group of Black architects, artists, designers, and scholars, the BRC aims to amplify knowledge production and spatial practices by individuals and organizations that further the reconstruction project.

The BRC engages the public through an annual process of reviewing proposals and providing critical and financial support to projects that have been selected by the committee. This work will manifest in built commissions, research funding, exhibitions, events, and publications, that will collectively imagine transformations to the built environment in the Black Radical Tradition.

**Manifestos**  
**BLACK RECONSTRUCTION**  
**COLLECTIVE, THE U. S.**

Smarter Than Car is an advocacy, research and design group for postcarbon mobility and socio-ecological transformation.

We see mobility as a key factor for prosperous urban transformation in light of climate chaos and related sustainability crises.

Our work includes research, design, and communication across various urban scales and contexts.

**Manifestos**  
SMARTER THAN CAR, GLOBAL

# ECÒL

WORK OFFICE

## A new domain of expression



ECÒL è uno studio di architettura fondato nel 2015 e diretto da Emanuele Barili e Olivia Gori. Sviluppiamo strategie ed estetiche non convenzionali in risposta a problemi ed esigenze della città. I nostri progetti nascono dall'osservazione e dallo studio di contesti specifici e dal desiderio di creare nuovi domini di espressione interattivi e sorprendenti.

**Manifestos**  
ECOL, ITALY



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[HOME](#)[WORKS](#)[ABOUT](#)[MEDIA](#)[CONTACT](#)

UrbanTank is meant to support community-based entrepreneurial enablement in urban environments by intervening through research projects. Within the wide spectrum of urban initiatives, UrbanTank interrogates for experimenting **PARTICIPATORY DESIGN** tools and methods. By ultimately bringing human-centered solutions for urban life, its goal is to explore how people relate to cities and public spaces relate to people today.

UrbanTank is a not-for-profit organisation addressing varying topics on different scales and contexts of urban environment. Based on the nature of each project and availability of participants, the platform forms teams of academics, design students, architects and planners.



**TUBA DOĞU**  
CO-FOUNDER & COORDINATOR



**MELİS VARKAL**  
CO-FOUNDER & COORDINATOR

## **Manifestos** **URBAN TANK, TURKEY**

T  
TAK  
K



BÜRO

DE

TAKTAK ist ein Büro für räumliche Gestaltung im Spannungsfeld von Architektur und Szenografie. Seit 2017 realisieren die beiden Architekten Robert Ilgen und Rasa Patlauskaitė in ihrer Bürogemeinschaft mit Sitz in Schwallungen und Vinius europaweit Projekte, die die Grenzen beider Disziplinen verschwimmen lassen. Ihre Arbeiten wie Pop-up-Installationen, klassische Hochbauten, Ausstellungsdesigns, Upcycling-Projekte oder nachhaltig gestaltete Architektur, vereinen soziale Komponenten, Umweltschutz, neue Lebens- und Arbeitswelten sowie das Einbeziehen der Menschen vor Ort in den kreativen Prozess.

IT

## Manifestos

### TAKTAK, GERMANY-LITHUANIA

## **About us**

### **TWIMC**

→ [hallo@twimc.info](mailto:hallo@twimc.info)

We are TWIMC — a group of planners and designers from the fields of architecture, design, art, cultural studies and urban research. Together we develop participation formats and instruments for the design of living environments. On our own initiative or on commission, we create social spaces and situations that provide a basis for further planning.

With our participatory design approach, we want to enable people to better understand the conditions in which they live and to perceive them as collectively and democratically shapeable and changeable. We see participation not only as a powerful method but also as an urgently needed practice for a profound examination of the present and for exploring our expectations of the future.

Our practice is process-oriented and open in regards to the outcome. It can result in concrete objects, interventions, exhibition projects, publications or discourse.

**Manifestos**  
**TWIMC, GERMANY**

## ABOUT space



We are a critical international platform and an interdisciplinary network of architects, urbanists and artists, that questions the contemporary built environment in terms of its representation and collective imaginary. We believe that any contemporary place is equipotential of meaning and interpretation in its multiple layers of time, history, spaces and agents.

We are focused in pushing the stabilized notion of Architecture into other artistic and scientific fields, expanding it in order to develop and explore new tools to act within the built environment. Towards the experimentation of these tools, we intend not only to strengthen our capacities of reading and interpreting common places, but also to make visible its specificities.

Our methodology is based on immersive *in-situ* fieldwork/mediation and on socio-spatial practices within the communities and the places that we act on, in a constant quest of contents, interactions and data surveys that can be transcribed into structured and

transcribers

Manifestos  
SPACE TRANSCRIBER, PORTUGAL



## About

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### **ateliermob**

Multidisciplinary platform for the development of ideas, research and projects in the areas of architecture, city and territory. The limited liability company was established in 2005, in Lisbon, as a result of several works carried out jointly with its founding partners. Currently, the company is made up of two partners, Andreia Salavessa and Tiago Mota Saraiva, and a team of around a dozen qualified professionals, associating themselves, whenever necessary, with other entities and technicians in order to enrich and expand the multidisciplinary spectrum of their services.

### **working with the 99%**

Architectural cooperative practising interventions, development of participatory and cooperative processes, design and production of public policies and strategic development. Established in 2016, following several works that were being developed within the ateliermob, it is a non-profit organisation made up of people and organisations. It is part of the European network ReKrestora, DLBC Lisbon and Placemaking Europe, having actively participated in the discussion around the creation of the European Urban Agenda – Amsterdam Pact (2016) and the Basic Housing Law (2019).

## Manifestos ATELIER MOB, PORTUGAL

## **Il lavoro di Amigdala attiva diversi livelli: creazioni artistiche originali, public history e antropologia, educazione alla cittadinanza attiva, attraversamenti urbani e paesaggio.**

Amigdala è un'associazione di promozione sociale e un collettivo artistico con sede a Modena. Opera nell'ambito delle arti contemporanee e performative, con un forte interesse per la rigenerazione urbana e l'innovazione civica.

Il collettivo realizza produzioni artistiche multidisciplinari, con una precisa vocazione per metodologie di creazione site-specific e community-specific. Le produzioni di Amigdala prendono la forma di performance, progetti di arte pubblica, installazioni, soundscapes e hanno sempre un forte legame con il luogo che le ospita. Si tratta di opere che vengono presentate in Italia e all'estero in festival, rassegne e iniziative culturali.

Inoltre, dal 2008 Amigdala cura progetti performativi e culturali, soprattutto focalizzati sulle pratiche site-specific e sull'arte pubblica, specialmente in aree urbane periferiche o in forte trasformazione.

Il festival **Periferico** è uno dei principali progetti ed è dedicato alle connessioni tra arti performative, comunità locali e tessuto urbano. Il festival coinvolge artisti, curatori, teorici italiani e stranieri in un progetto che intende rileggere le modalità di programmazione culturale in un'ottica di co-creazione e la relazione tra curatela e produzione artistica.

Dal 2017 Amigdala dirige **OvestLab** (in collaborazione con il Comune di Modena e insieme all'associazione Archivio Architetto Cesare Leonardi), un centro culturale multidisciplinare che opera come fabbrica civica a supporto di processi di re-immaginazione collettiva della città. Amigdala ha maturato una lunga esperienza nella realizzazione di **processi di attivazione di comunità e rigenerazione urbana** e ha sviluppato una specifica metodologia anche grazie all'implementazione di diversi progetti partecipativi come la rivista collettiva **Fienda** e l'**archivio digitale di storia orale Afor**.

**Manifestos**  
**AMIGDALA, ITALY**

## SO?

news

civic

urban

private

dwelling

installation

research

exhibitions

publications

writings / interviews

lectures and talks

recognition

about

contact

instagram

twitter



When Sevinç Bayrak and Oral Göktaş founded SO? in 2007 in Istanbul, the city was rapidly gaining popularity on the international scene fueled by a construction boom. When SO? secured its first research project in 2009, Istanbul was chosen as the host for one of the most important events in urbanism, Urban Age. A couple of years later, in 2013, the Young Architects Program by MoMA PS1 took place in Istanbul for the first time, and SO? emerged as the winner of the competition. In 2015, their installation depicting public life in Istanbul was acquired for the permanent collection of the MAXXI Museum, coinciding with a tumultuous period in Istanbul marked by riots, conflicts, and rapid development. It was the 20th anniversary of the big earthquake in Marmara when their project on post-earthquake housing was exhibited in Denmark, the UK, France, and Italy. In 2019, a few months after the opening of their first large-scale public project, the city underwent a change in administration after 20 years of being ruled by the same party. In 2021, they transformed a private swimming pool built for the residential use of former mayors, into a public event hall at the request of the new local government. In 2023, amidst an economic crisis and the aftermath of earthquakes, they wrote a theory on reusing existing buildings, inspired by the pool project, exhibiting it at the Venice Architecture Biennale.

## Manifestos SO? TURKEY



Bellastock est une **COOPÉRATIVE** engagée depuis plus de 10 ans dans la transition écologique et sociale appliquée aux secteurs de l'architecture, de la construction et de l'aménagement. Pour cela, notre **ÉQUIPE** développe une expertise pionnière en France sur le **RÉEMPLOI** de matériaux de construction. Un travail guidé par la nécessité de réduire les déchets du BTP, de **FORMER** les professionnels, mais aussi de permettre le développement d'une culture architecturale plus durable. Cela s'accompagne par la nécessité de guider les territoires vers plus de solidarité et de mixité à travers des projets d'**URBANISME DE TRANSITION**. Nous sommes déterminés à accompagner et soutenir les actrices et acteurs du secteur public ou privé, les collectivités, les maîtrises d'ouvrage et maîtrises d'œuvres prêtes à s'engager pour des projets écologiques, innovants et solidaires. La coopérative initie et porte également ses propres projets à l'instar de son **FESTIVAL** annuel d'architecture.

## Manifestos BELLASTOCK, FRANCE

## ASSEMBLE

### About

Assemble is a multi-disciplinary collective working across architecture, design and art.

Founded in 2010 to undertake a single self-built project, Assemble has since delivered a diverse and award-winning body of work, whilst retaining a democratic and co-operative working method that enables built, social and research-based work at a variety of scales, both making things and making things happen.

This website is a catalogue of projects and a description of the studio, which serves as an introduction to Assemble's working practice.

Projects [Workspace](#) [About](#) [Contact](#)



**Manifestos**  
ASSEMBLE, LONDON



[Home](#) [Espacio Público](#) [Arte & Cultura](#) [Educación](#) [Vivienda](#) [Videos](#) [Publicaciones](#) [Oficina](#)

## BIO

Santiago Cirugeda creó en 2003 la oficina de arquitectura Recetas Urbanas después de 7 años de trabajo en solitario abordando temas como la arquitectura efímera, la reutilización de materiales, las estrategias de ocupación y la intervención urbana, la incorporación de prótesis construidas, la educación o la participación de ciudadanos en el proceso de toma de decisiones.

Alice Attout se unió al equipo en 2008 y juntos siguieron buscando nuevos protocolos para proyectos públicos negociando entre legalidad e ilegalidad y recordando el exceso de control que nos intentan imponer desde las instituciones públicas.

El trabajo del equipo de Recetas Urbanas se caracteriza por su continúa experimentación utilizando la ciudad como un laboratorio y un espacio de resolución de conflictos.

PREMIOS

CONTACTO

**Manifestos**  
RECETAS URBANAS, SPAIN



orizzontale è un collettivo di architetti con base a Roma, il cui lavoro attraversa architettura, paesaggio, arte pubblica e autocostruzione. orizzontale promuove dal 2010 progetti di spazi pubblici relazionali, dando forma ad immagini di città dismesse o inedite. Questi progetti sono stati terreno di sperimentazione per nuove forme di interazione tra gli abitanti e i beni comuni urbani e al tempo stesso occasione per mettere alla prova i limiti del processo di creazione architettonica.

orizzontale ha costruito e sviluppato progetti in Italia, Spagna, Germania, Austria, Grecia, Ucraina, Portogallo, Olanda, "B. 1/2", il teatro mobile costruito da orizzontale nel 2014, è risultato vincitore del premio internazionale Young Architects Program ("YAP MAXXI 2014") indetto dal Museo MAXXI e dal MoMA PSX. Nel 2016 orizzontale vince il concorso per la rigenerazione di Piazza della Comunità Europea ad Aprilia, indetto da MIBACT e CNAPPCC. Il progetto è realizzato ed è stato premiato nel 2020 con il Premio Urbanistica dall'INEL. Nel 2018 alla Biennale di Venezia orizzontale riceve dal CNAPPCC il riconoscimento "Giovane Talento dell'Architettura Italiana 2018" che premia il migliore studio under 35 italiano. Dal 2020 orizzontale fonda e cura VUOTO, uno spazio transmediale di riflessione e dibattito sulla città e lo spazio pubblico. Il lavoro di orizzontale è stato esposto in mostre internazionali, tra cui la Biennale di Architettura di Venezia, la Biennale di Vienna e la Triennale di architettura di Oslo. Nel 2023 è presente alla 18. Mostra Internazionale di Architettura all'interno dell'esposizione *The Laboratory of the Future*, curata da Lesley Lokko presso le Corderie dell'Arsenale, e nel Padiglione Italia, nella mostra *Spaziare. Ognuno appartiene a tutti gli altri* curata da Fosbury Architecture.

orizzontale è composto da: Jacopo Ammendola, Juan López Cano, Giuseppe Grant, Margherita Manfrà, Navin Mohili Asli, Roberto Pantaleoni, Stefano Ragazzo

## Manifestos ORIZZONTALE, ITALY

New South is an international office of architecture, urbanism and anthropology based in Paris and Brussels. To paraphrase bell hooks, we put the margin at the centre. Through our projects we question the social, political and economic dynamics that act upon territories and form their architecture.

New South develops tactical proposals adapted to various scales. Our architecture is an opportunity to reveal what is already there and to give voice to invisible narratives.



## Nosaltres

Ens trobareu a La Comunal de dilluns a divendres de 9 a 18h.

Riera d'Escuder, 38, nau 2 planta 1  
08028 Barcelona

Metro Plaça de Sants (L1 i L5) i Sants Estació (Renfe, L3 i L5).

93 172 06 77

[info@lacol.coop](mailto:info@lacol.coop)

**Lacol som una cooperativa d'arquitectes** establerta el 2009 al barri de Sants de Barcelona. Treballem per generar infraestructures comunitàries per a la sostenibilitat de la vida, com a eina clau per la transició ecosocial, mitjançant l'arquitectura, el cooperativisme i la participació.

Lacol som les sòcies treballadores Eliseu Arrufat, Ari Artigas, Carles Baiges, Lali Daví, Cristina Gamboa, Ernest Garriga, Mirko Gegundez, Laura Lluch, Lluç Hernández, Pol Massoni i Jordi Miró, i les sòcies col·laboradores Arnau Andrés i Anna Clemente.

**Manifestos**  
LACOL, SPAIN

# STATEMENT

raumlaborberlin

yes we do love the great ideas  
of the 60s 70s and the optimism  
which is inherent in changing  
the world at the stroke of a  
pen to the better. but we  
strongly believe that  
complexity is real and good  
and our society today does  
need a more substantial  
approach. therefore our  
spacial proposals are small  
scale and deeply rooted in the  
local condition... BYE BYE  
UTOPIA!  
more

Manifestos  
RAUMLABOR, GERMANY

## **ABOUT**

ON/OFF is an interdisciplinary design studio based in Berlin. We work collaboratively, drawing on the diverse range of skills within our group to realise projects that combine strategies from across fields and formats; including mobile structures, film and projection, building workshops and writing. Our practice explores the in-betweens and overlaps of the urban experience to engage citizens in an immediate relationship with their environment. Experimenting with disparate technologies and tools, we aim to challenge conventional ideas of inhabiting and sharing space.

[facebook](#) | [instagram](#)

**Manifestos**  
ON/OFF, GERMANY

**atelier d'architecture autogérée / studio for self-managed architecture (aaa)** is a collective platform which conducts explorations, actions and research concerning urban mutations and cultural, social and political emerging practices in the contemporary city.

aaa acts through '**urban tactics**', encouraging the participation of inhabitants at the self-management of disused urban spaces, overpassing contradictions and stereotypes by proposing nomad and reversible projects, initiating interstitial practices which explore the potential of contemporary city (in terms of population, mobility, temporality).

It is by micro-political acting that we want to participate in making the city more ecological and more democratic, to make the space of proximity less dependent on top-down processes and more accessible to its users. The 'self-managed architecture' is an architecture of relationships, processes and agencies of persons, desires, skills and know-hows. Such an architecture does not correspond to a liberal practice but asks for new forms of association and collaboration, based on exchange and reciprocity and involving all those interested (individuals, organisations, institutions), whatever is their scale.

Our architecture is at the same time political and poetic as it aims above all to 'create relationships between worlds'.

**Manifestos**  
**ATELIER**  
**D'ARCHITECTURE AUTOGÉRÉE, FRANCE**

# Constructlab

**What do you describe when you talk about yourself? How to chronologise the comprehensiveness of different perspectives? This section is an attempt to make Constructlab's roots and visions more clear, more connectable - a process that will remain equally unfinished and important.**

Constructlab is a transdisciplinary design-build network that brings together architectural concepts and construction. While breaking with traditional divisions of labor, the organization engages a team of multi-talented designer-builders – as well as sociologists, urban planners, graphic designers, curators, educators and web developers – who carry the creative process from the drawing board to the field. Their shared vision of a collaborative way of working combines the creative with the practical, the thinking with the doing.

**Manifestos**  
**CONSTRUCTLAB, GERMANY**

# **Anti-Racist designers dedicated to Design Justice in the built environment.**

**Design as Protest is a collective of designers mobilizing strategy to dismantle the privilege and power structures that use architecture and design as tools of oppression.**

Co-organized by BIPOC designers, we exist to hold our profession accountable in reversing the violence and injustice that architecture, design, and urban planning practices have inflicted upon Black people and communities. Design as Protest champions the radical vision of racial, social, and cultural reparation through the process and outcomes of design.

**Manifestos**  
**DESIGN AS PROTEST, THE U. S.**

## GRANDEZA STUDIO

Based between Madrid and Sydney, GRANDEZA STUDIO (Amaia Sánchez-Velasco, Jorge Valiente Oriol and Gonzalo Valiente Oriol) is a collective of architects and artists founded in Madrid in 2011. Their work studies late-capitalist spaces and narratives to identify –through critical analysis– and challenge –through political imagination– the mechanisms that veil and normalize structural forms of violence against bodies and territories.

GRANDEZA STUDIO's work hybridizes methodologies that entangle with research, critical spatial practice, writing, performance, design, filmmaking and pedagogy.

Their work 'Pilbara Interregnum: Seven Political Allegories' was recently exhibited at the 18th Biennale Architettura 2023 in Venice (titled 'The Laboratory of the Future' and curated by architect and writer Lesley Lokko). Their film 'Strata Incognita' (co-directed along with Locument) was exhibited in 'Foodscapes', the Spanish pavilion of the same edition of the Biennale di Venezia.

## Index

## About



## Manifestos GRANDEZA, MADRID-SIDNEY

#### **WHAT ABOUT WAI?**

*WAI Architecture Think Tank* is a planetary studio practicing by questioning the political, historical, and material legacy and imperatives of architecture and urbanism through a panoramic and critical approach. Founded in Brussels during the financial crisis of 2008 by Puerto Rican architect, artist, curator, educator, author and theorist Cruz Garcia and French architect, artist, curator, educator, author and poet, Nathalie Frankowski, WAI is one of their several platforms of public engagement that include Beijing-based anti-profit art space Intelligentsia Gallery, and the free and alternative education platform and trade-school Loudreaders.

**Manifestos**  
WAI THINK THANK, BELGIUM

# Who Builds Your Architecture? (WBYA?)

Exhibitions  
Workshops  
Panels  
Publications

About  
Contact  
Announcements  
External Media & Reports

---

## About

*WBYA?* is a coalition of architects, activists, scholars, and educators that tackles the pressing question: *who builds your architecture?* to examine the links between labor, architecture and the global networks that form around building buildings. As major architectural projects unfold in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and around the globe, and as architects from the US increasingly work abroad, we explore the ethical, social and political questions that emerge under these relatively new circumstances. From workers' rights to construction practices to design processes to new technologies *WBYA?* investigates the role of architecture and architects: what it is and what it could be.

We name our group in the form of a question in order to jumpstart a discussion amongst our colleagues in architecture as well as collaborators in related disciplines. For us this one question sparks many other enquiries where we need to rethink ethics, new technologies, professional practice, activism and education. Ultimately, our aim is to investigate contemporary forms of globalization where architecture takes central stage, and to address critical questions, such as:

What are the architects' ethical responsibilities toward those who erect their buildings around the world?  
Where do these construction workers come from and what does architecture demand from them?  
How do new technologies transform construction methods as well as communication?  
Addressing labor-intensive manual labor?  
Or workers' rights?  
Or site oversight?  
If low-cost labor enables architects' uninhibited creative expression, what is the human cost?

**WBYA? Team:**

Manifestos  
WHO BUILDS YOUR  
ARCHITECTURE?, GLOBAL



TAKK is an architecture and design studio based in Barcelona. Founded by Mireia Luzárraga and Alejandro Muño, their projects investigate how architecture can catalyze the development of more democratic lives through the incorporation of feminist thought, ecology, and politics into spatial practices.

Their work has received recognition such as the COAM award, the “Temps de les Arts” award, and the FAD award.

Their work takes place in both the public and private spheres. TAKK's clients include FRAC-Centre Val de Loire, IVAM (Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno), Barcelona City Council, FAD (Foment de les Arts i el Disseny), FITUR (Feria de Turismo), or CA2M (Centro de Arte 2 de Mayo), and for international brands such as Vitra, Swatch, Hermès, or Moncler.

Their reference art and design galleries for their furniture work are Side Gallery Barcelona and Camp Design Milan.

TAKK's work belongs to the permanent collection of the FRAC-Centre Val de Loire and has been exhibited at the Oslo Triennale, and the Venice, San Sebastián, Tallinn, Maia, and Rabat Biennales, among others. Likewise, TAKK has participated in exhibitions at Matadero-Madrid, Center d'Arts Santa Mónica, CCCB (Centro de Cultura Contemporánea de Barcelona), MAK Vienna, TCDC Bangkok, or Alcova Milano.

Mireia Luzárraga is currently a professor at the IAAC (Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia), and La Salle, and together with Alejandro Muño at Columbia GSAPP. Previously TAKK has participated as a professor and lecturer in institutions such as the University of Alicante, ETSAM, IED (Istituto Europeo di Design), ELISAVA, RMIT, Floating University Berlin, or ILEK Stuttgart.

## Manifestos TAKK, SPAIN

## **SPACE CAVIAR**

Space Caviar is an architecture and research studio operating at the intersection of design, technology, politics and the public realm.

Founded in 2013, the office uses built work, exhibitions, publishing, writing and film to investigate and document contemporary modes of habitation and the spatialisation of social and political practice. Space Caviar's work has been shown at the Venice Biennale, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Biennale Interieur, Vitra Design Museum and Nilufar Gallery, among others.

### **Manifestos**

SPACE CAVIAR, LONDON - MILAN

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**dpr-barcelona** is an architectural research practice based in Barcelona, dealing with three main lines: publishing, criticism and curating. Their work explore how architecture as discipline reacts in the intersection with politics, technology, economy and social issues. Their publications, both digital and printed, transcend the boundaries of conventional publications, approaching to those which are probably the titles of architecture in the future, exploring the limits between printed matters and new media, transforming traditional publishing practice [as we know it] into a live exchange of knowledge. Their [net]work is a real hub linking several publications and actors on architecture and theory.

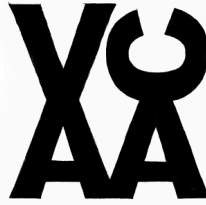
**Manifestos**  
DPR, SPAIN

Parasite 2.0 is a design and research agency based in Milan. Founded in 2010 by Stefano Colombo, Eugenio Cosentino and Luca Marullo, they investigate the status of human habitats, acting within a hybrid of architecture, design, and scenography.

Manifestos  
PARASITE 2.0, ITALY

Girls Garage is a nonprofit design and construction school for girls and gender-expansive youth ages 9-18. Founded in 2013, Girls Garage is the first-ever design and building workshop for female, nonbinary, and gender-expansive youth in the United States.

**Manifestos**  
GIRLS GARAGE, THE U. S.



## PROGRAMA VACA A.C.

**Plataforma de construcción comunitaria** sustentable con materiales naturales para el combate a la pobreza habitacional en zonas rurales y territorios indígenas a través del diseño **participativo e incluyente**.



Somos un grupo multidisciplinario de diseñadores comprometidos con la recuperación de técnicas vernáculas de construcción sustentable para la conservación y mejoramiento de comunidades rurales e indígenas. Utilizamos un modelo de construcción y diseño participativo con una visión de inclusión de género para el empoderamiento constructivo.

Llevamos nuestras capacidades de diseño, técnicas y de edificación a espacios que necesitan de soluciones de hábitat ecológicas, sustentables y socialmente responsables.

Creemos en la cooperación como modelo de desarrollo humano y en el uso eficiente de todos los recursos para la búsqueda de modelos asequibles para llevar la arquitectura a servir a las personas.

A la par de nuestro trabajo de campo realizamos investigaciones activas de mejoramiento de procesos constructivos e hibridación de técnicas para encontrar soluciones que permitan autodefinir, autoconstruir y embellecer el hábitat de grupos humanos en armonía con su entorno.

**Manifiesto**  
PROGRAMA VACA, MEXICO

OFL è uno studio di architettura interdisciplinare fondato nel 2009 da Francesco Lipari e focalizzato su processi di design emergenti che lavorano nell'intersezione fra architettura, ricerca e comunità. OFL ha ricevuto diversi premi internazionali tra cui il The Plan Award con il parco sensoriale Zighizaghi, l'Oscar Green Coldiretti, le Maker Faire Europe merit e gli Architizer People Choice Award con il giardino interattivo Sainthorto e il padiglione per insetti ed esseri umani Wunderbugs.

**Manifestos**  
OFL ARCHITECTURE, ITALY



## Quem Somos

Somos uma equipe de mulheres que acredita no poder transformador do conhecimento e das trocas, por meio de ações colaborativas que visam o protagonismo feminino. Atuamos de forma independente desde 2014, a partir da captação de recursos e consolidação de parcerias que nos possibilitam evoluir e expandir a nossa atuação.

[Saiba mais](#)

**Manifestos**  
**ARQUITECTURA NA**  
**PERIFERIA, BRAZIL**



# Oasis Urbano

Oasis Urbano is an intercultural and multidisciplinary collective that facilitates the co-production of common spaces and liveable cities

[www.oasisurbano.org](http://www.oasisurbano.org) →

Oasis Urbano co-produces inclusive strategies for holistic neighborhood transformations. We understand informal urban settlements not as a problem but as an essential part of the solution for the most pressing challenges that cities are facing today and in the future. We connect local communities with academia, civil and cultural organizations, businesses and public decision makers to exchange knowledge and experiences. In multidisciplinary, intercultural urban labs, these diverse stakeholders meet on site to discuss, design, build and have fun together. These collective experiences build trust and prove the potential of co-production in open outcome design processes with surprising results. By finding common languages, we bridge the gap between bottom-up initiatives and top-down planning, and enable the co-creation of a city worth living for all of its inhabitants.

The idea for Oasis Urbano arose out of friendships between Medellín and Berlin. Rooted in the Colombian informal neighborhood of Moravia, the project has steadily expanded with a spirit of intercultural collaboration and unity, reaching other places and communities across Latin America, Europe and beyond. In Moravia we learned how to facilitate processes of urban co-production together with local actor networks and urban stakeholders. Our principles and methods have proven their potential to negotiate and create liveable and inclusive public spaces, not only in Moravia and similar informal contexts, but also in the formally designed city. If you want to learn more about the fascinating microcosm of Moravia, check out the documentary [Sesiones Tropicales](#) and our book [Moravia Manifesto](#), and don't hesitate to contact us!

Manifestos  
OASIS URBANO, GERMANY

#### **APRDELESP**

APRDELESP (desde 2012) es una oficina de arquitectura basada en la Ciudad de México: una práctica como investigación sobre el espacio y sus procesos de apropiación.

ENG

La tipología de una práctica de arquitectura tradicional es obsoleta: privilegia la infraestructura privada, como una oficina, sobre la infraestructura accesible al público, como una página de Internet o un karaoke. El aislamiento puede ser útil en un momento específico y bajo ciertas circunstancias, pero una práctica de arquitectura debe de ser capaz de abrirse al público, incorporando la participación social en los procesos de diseño. La publicación y documentación de la información debe de generarse a través de un mecanismo automático que muestre en tiempo real los avances del proceso de diseño; cada decisión debería estar disponible para escrutinio público.

Como práctica de arquitectura, APRDELESP tiene el mismo nivel de compromiso con las infraestructuras pública y privada así como con la física y digital de la oficina. El desarrollo de estos campos y la exploración de las intersecciones entre ellos son fundamentales para el funcionamiento diario de nuestra oficina y como modo de investigación de las fuerzas de apropiación. Creemos que las oficinas de arquitectura están en una posición crítica para usar sus propios lugares de trabajo y otras infraestructuras como sitios prototípicos de investigación y experimentación espacial.

## **Manifiesto APRDELESP, MEXICO**

# Material Cultures

Material Cultures is a not-for-profit design and research organisation working at the intersection of natural materials, low embodied carbon construction and construction technology. Our mission is to work towards a bio-regional construction industry which is integrated into regenerative and socially just land and building systems. We argue for the reintegration of architecture and agriculture, understanding buildings as irrevocably linked to landscapes of extraction. Bio-based materials are low in embodied carbon and offer an alternative to the globally sourced, carbon-intensive, socially destructive materials commonly used in the construction industry. We challenge the systems, technologies, processes, supply chains, regulations and materials that make up the construction industry with the aim of transforming the way we build. Our practice works across different scales developing materials and prototypical buildings to look strategically at the adaptation of the landscapes and supply chains from which they emerge. We design buildings working to integrate bio-based materials and minimally processed minerals into efficient construction systems. Alongside this we carry out strategic research into how these ideas can be applied at scale and how they relate to a broader move towards regenerative land management practices. We run our own construction skills programme, MAKE, alongside research and teaching at the Architectural Association, Central St Martins in London and the ETH in Zurich.

**Manifestos**  
MATERIAL CULTURES, ENGLAND

**Rotor is a cooperative design practice that investigates the organisation of the material environment.**

**Manifestos**  
**ROTOR, BELGIUM**

## About

MVD, the short form of the Spanish "movido", which means "emotionally moved", can be understood as the era of a cultural shift through the targeted use of visual media. MVD has set itself the goal of creating products and services through static as well as moving images and spaces, or the use of appropriate media. MVD sees itself as a team for the conception, development and realisation of visual media in a specific ambience. The spectrum ranges from classic corporate design projects in the fields of culture, art and research, to holistic interactive communication solutions in private and public spaces, to the implementation of own events in the discourse between popular culture and avant-garde.

**Manifestos**  
MVD, AUSTRIA



Founded in 2012, Plan Común provides strategies to maximize and reinforce public and collective space -understood as a key aspect of architecture, regardless of its scale or program- by means of simple architecture tools, through a critical discourse, research, design and building. We are convinced that radical, basic -even silent- forms are more likely to be relevant and universal, and serve as a support for collective use and imagination. We use a critical and strategic approach towards briefs and commissions, in order to question and transform spatial hierarchy and uses. We intend to work within an ethic of the collective aiming at relevance and usefulness for the many.

Since September 2018, Plan Común is based in Paris, France.

15 rue Martel, 75010 Paris, France | [contact@plancomun.com](mailto:contact@plancomun.com)  
| Facebook - Twitter - Instagram

#### Exhibitions (selection)

- 2022 *Commun, arc en rêve*, Bordeaux, France.
- 2021 *The Available City*. Chicago Architecture Biennial, United States.
- 2020 *The State of Art of Architecture Milano* at Triennale Milano, Italy.
- 2019 *Oikos* (with Kuehn Malvezzi) at BAP! Versailles, France.
- 2019 *Plan Comun: Common Places* at Kolektiv Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia.
- 2017 *Forum Basel*. Swiss Architecture Museum, Basel, Switzerland.
- 2016 *The Limits of Landscape*. Lisbon Architecture Triennale in Portugal.
- 2016 *Forms follows...* Exhibition at House of Architecture in Graz. Austria.

## Manifestos PLAN COMUN, SPAIN

LA ESCUELA\_\_ is an artist-run platform for radical learning and collective making in public spaces. We understand art as a form of knowledge production, and education as an artistic practice in itself. La Escuela seeks to bring learning and art to everyone by partnering with universities, institutions, and communities to create formative projects in public spaces throughout Latin America. La Escuela is rooted in a long genealogy of Latin American artists and educators who seek to bring education closer to real contexts, so as to learn and act on them. Through public learning, we propose a transdisciplinary program where diverse forms of practices coincide through the transformative capacity of education.

**Manifestos**  
LA ESCUELA, SOUTH AMERICA

# THE DECORATORS

ABOUT

CONTACT

COLLABORATORS

The Decorators is a multidisciplinary design collective founded by Suzanne O'Connell, Xavi Llach Font, Carolina Caicedo and Mariana Pestana. With backgrounds in landscape architecture, interior architecture and psychology, The Decorators work on spatial design projects that aim to reconnect the physical elements of a place with its social dimension. They employ a methodology that builds on the social and cultural makeup of a site to create new experiences

that can prompt interaction or shape communal memory. They support this by designing infrastructures for social interaction. These include physical elements that choreograph and set the stage for a multitude of possible uses. Their clients include local authorities, museums, curators and brands, and their work ranges from context-specific engagement strategies and public realm landscapes, to exhibition design and interactive interiors.



**Manifestos**  
THE DECORATORS, ENGLAND

derive - Society for Urban Research was established in Vienna as an independent and interdisciplinary network focusing on critical urban research. The NGO aims to collect and spread knowledge on urban issues and foster debate about urban developments from a sociopolitical point of view. Since 2000 derive publishes the international magazine >>derive - Magazin for Urban Research

**Manifestos**  
DERIVE, AUSTRIA



On the opposite page: TAKK, Arca, Barcelona, Spain, 2022.

# EVENTS AND CULTURAL PLATFORMS

## *Architecture as Event, Ephemeral Activation, and Political Practice*



### **Abstract**

*Festivals show how protest architecture can be expressed through events that stop ordinary time and turn public space into a stage for collective imagination. Instead of building permanent structures, these practices energize the city with temporary, ritual-like interventions that focus on participation, conflict, and sharing resources. By involving bodies, memory, and culture, the festival format redefines architecture as an event—an act of activation rather than construction. The phenomenon connects various paths: from the history of radical avant-gardes to today’s festival trends; from the complex role of cultural institutions and city branding to grassroots activism. In this context, architecture festivals operate at the intersection of art, education, and politics, blending distinctions between exhibition and performance, ritual and protest. For example, events like Concéntrico in Logroño and the Floating University in Berlin demonstrate how festivals create temporary infrastructures that activate public spaces, reshape urban rituals, and challenge the idea of community itself. Ultimately, the festival is viewed as a form of protest architecture—more than just a spectacle to watch, but a spatial and temporal disturbance that changes visibility, sparks civic imagination, and opens the city to new forms of collective living.*

## Events and Cultural Platforms. Architecture as Event, Ephemeral Activation, and Political Practice

What is architecture? The answer no longer has clear boundaries. If, as Jill Stoner states in her theory of minor architecture, architecture can no longer be limited to just constructing buildings, it means it is constantly exploring new expressions.<sup>1</sup> Architecture's attempts to find new forms - that are extended beyond the building, such as a walk or a kitchen<sup>2</sup> - become particularly interesting when society begins to be conceived as a collective, and no longer as a set of individuals.

The escape from the dictates of traditional architecture, understood through Georges Bataille's perspective as architecture of coercion<sup>3</sup>—where power is imposed from above—brings designers closer to rediscovering the political potential of architecture in generating collective actions.

This chapter aims to explore the political significance of a specific segment of “ephemeral” architectural agency that has gained prominence in recent times, specifically the production of events such as festivals, design weeks, and biennials. During these events, the architect's role is not to construct but to animate. Activating spaces, bodies, culture, and memory serves as a way to work not with fixed spaces and their permanence, but with creating opportunities. Bryony Roberts, through her practice and writings, clearly explains the concept of “situated practice,” which arises from feminist and queer theories. This idea suggests that creating architecture should originate from authentic social and cultural contexts and that actions, rooted in real and diverse bodies and for-

1 Cf. Stoner, J. (2018). *Toward a minor architecture*. Routledge.

2 Architectural practices have expanded their boundaries, as evidenced by the walks organized by Stalker, Osservatorio Nomade (Rome), or the exhibition on the theme of food at the Spanish pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2023.

3 Cf. Bataille, G. (1993). *L'architecture du pouvoir*. Gallimard.

med through relationships, represent the future of design.<sup>4</sup>

In today's capitalism, the festival/event can be both a tool to generate consensus or "distract" from odd issues, or it can become a proactive tool that can prompt a rethinking of many issues related to space: from its relation to people, to the concept of ownership, which is often seen as the most personal connection you can have with architecture.<sup>5</sup>

Certainly, it's essential to recognize that ephemeral architecture isn't something new and that spectacle has always been «the rule, rather than the exception». Of course, something has changed. But the difference between the political architecture around the Sun King, Louis XIV, of the 17th century, and the political architecture around modern telecommunications and entertainment is the extent of permeation into everyone's lives.<sup>6</sup> In summary, architecture as events has been a tool used by power for centuries, as a neutral instrument and not as a form of protest, but today it is finding a different understanding.

In the contemporaneity, otherness becomes a fundamental principle for the collective imagination. Building less is an invitation to reflect politically on architecture as a process rooted in and influenced by people, time, politics, ethics, and disorder. But how is this otherness created, and what meanings can it carry?<sup>7</sup>

This chapter examines the architecture festival as a tool to impact the relation between design and politics, aligning it with the form of protest: both are rooted in temporal disruption. The suspension of static time and the uniqueness of the event serve as ways to break from the ordinary and challenge its rules.

Furio Jesi, in *Il tempo della festa*,<sup>8</sup> emphasizes the significance of the festival — the root of the festival's identity — as a mythical time outside of history that contains a rupture within itself. Hierarchies are often overturned, as in carnival, and laws are neither respected nor enforced, revealing truths that are suppressed or denied. For architects, it means

4 Roberts, B. (2020). *Expanding modes of practice*. *Log*, 48 (Winter/Spring), 9–14. Anyone Corporation. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26909914>

5 Cfr. Veblen, T. (1898). *The beginnings of ownership*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 4(3), 352–365. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2761517>

6 Cfr. Ingersoll, R. (2021). *All the world's a stage: Architecture and spectacle*. C3, (411), 78–79.

7 Cf. Till, J. (2009). *Architecture depends*. The MIT Press.

8 Jesi, F. (1977). *Il tempo della festa*. In F. Jesi, *Il tempo della festa e altri scritti politici*. Nottetempo; Jesi, F. (2002). *Mito. Iniziativa e destino*. Bollati Boringhieri; Jesi, F. (2008). *Spartakus. Simbologia della rivolta*. Bollati Boringhieri.

sacrificing perfection and control to embrace movement.

Far from the typical image of architects as creators of buildings that stand the test of time and history, in this chapter we aim to explore the dimension of architecture as a collective, procedural, and context-dependent process. Here, the project intervention relinquishes perfection and control, instead embracing movement. This is primarily reflected in two actions: the selection and care of the setup that hosts the festival, and the development of a cultural program. At the boundary between aesthetic gesture and political tension, the architecture festival brings the urban fabric to life.

*The Festival as a Collective Practice on the Common Space:  
Ephemeral Architecture, Urban Temporality, and the Role of Cultural  
Memory in Civic Life*

Ephemeral architecture, like many political practices, primarily operates in the public space, or more precisely, in the common space. This is never a private space, but rather what in English is called common—a material and symbolic space collectively created, shaped by relations and tensions. The commons have become central in contemporary urban and political debates, especially since Elinor Ostrom’s work, which won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009 for showing that local communities can manage common resources sustainably without privatization or centralized government control.<sup>9</sup>

According to Stavros Stavrides, “common spaces” are places created collectively by people dedicated to building a shared world that reflects and supports their community. The common space is not naturally given but is formed through practices of openness, inclusiveness, and negotiation, and is always in a state of flux, acting as a porous boundary that both separates and connects. Its transitional nature, constantly evolving, allows the commons to embrace festivals as temporary yet productive forms of urban renewal.<sup>10</sup>

The transformation of urban space during celebrations is not a new concept. The city has long experienced times when its normal structures are temporarily altered by collective activities. This ongoing conflict

9 Ostrom, E. (2009). *Beyond markets and states: Polycentric governance of complex economic systems*. Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/economic-sciences/2009/ostrom/lecture/>

10 Cfr. Stavrides, S. (2016). *Common space: The city as commons*. Zed Books.

between everyday use of space and its temporary, festive, or rebellious transformations has been a consistent theme in the history of European cities.

An eloquent example is Venice in the eighteenth century, where the fleeting nature of festivals played a key role in city life. Canaletto, Guardi, and Bellotto's paintings clearly illustrate this: scenes where Piazza San Marco, the edges of the Grand Canal, or the sestieri's fields are filled with crowds, masks, boxes, and equipment, transforming the city into a spectacle. These images don't just depict a picturesque landscape but also document a specific arrangement of urban space on two levels: civic order and its temporary suspension.<sup>11</sup>

In these views, the city presents itself as a complex entity: on one hand, a foundation of authority and representation; on the other, a living organism where hierarchies loosen, masks multiply, and the scene becomes open to collective participation. The party, essentially, is a way for the city to take a break from itself, revealing what typically remains hidden within the norm: desire, play, and vital disorder.

Festivities take on different and significant meanings. According to Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>12</sup> they are key moments of rupture and renewal with respect to the concept of history, which, in its contemporary form, tended to focus on the past and monuments in the present. Nietzsche argues that an excess of history and memory can become paralyzing for life: an animal that cannot forget is doomed to sterile repetition. In this sense, the celebration—particularly as a form of discontinuity and subversion of chronological time—allows the community to briefly free itself from the burden of the past and open another time, “inactual,” in which different actions are possible. It is only through these temporal openings—the thresholds, passages, and interruptions—that a community can renew itself and access new ways of organizing future projects.

Another perspective comes from Jan Assmann's definition of cultural memory.<sup>13</sup> According to the German theorist, each society structures its identity through a system of collective memories that are distinguished from everyday memory by their duration, symbolism, and ritua-

11 Cfr. Foscari, G. (2014). *Elements of Venice*. Lars Müller Publishers.

12 Cfr. Nietzsche, F. (1874). *On the usefulness and harm of history for life*. In *Untimely Meditations* (D. J. Parent, Trans., 1983). Hackett Publishing.

13 Assmann, J. (2008). *Communicative and cultural memory*. In A. Erll & A. Nünning (Eds.), *Cultural memory studies: An international and interdisciplinary handbook* (pp. 109–118). De Gruyter.

lity. Parties and festivals fall into this category: they are moments when the community reflects on itself and tells its story. Material culture—texts, objects, architecture—serves as a tangible support for collective memory, anchoring it in space and enabling society to make itself visible to itself and to others. Assmann highlights that cultural memory does not simply preserve the past as an objective record but actively reconstructs it through shared stories, symbols, and gestures. In this view, architecture festivals—being spaces that are collectively created and temporally positioned—become sites of active memory, where cultural identity is shaped not in stability but through movement. Therefore, festivals are more than just cultural events; they are acts of creating collective memory and identity, serving as tools to reactivate urban space and time through the community’s living body.

### *Festivalization, Exhibitions, and Public Space: Temporary Urban Transformations, Participation, and the Possible Political Role of Architecture*

In recent years, there has been a growing proliferation of festivals related to architecture, design, and urban practices.<sup>14</sup> This expansion has led many scholars to discuss festivalization, which is the tendency to organize cultural events as festivals to engage an increasingly broad, dynamic, and transient audience. As Richards and Palmer note, contemporary cities compete for visibility and attractiveness through “eventful strategies” that utilize culture as an economic, symbolic, and identity tool.<sup>15</sup> In this context, the festival becomes a key city branding tool: a temporary showcase capable of shaping a new urban image, often disconnected from deeper processes of social change.

An iconic example is Burning Man in Nevada, a music festival that, while claiming to be independent and countercultural, has had a significant impact on global visibility and real estate development in the desert area where it takes place. The event is often cited as an example of aesthetic-political appropriation of space and, at the same time, a risk of turning into a cultural spectacle. The temporary transformation of Black Rock City is now part of an economic ecosystem involving tech-

14 Cfr. Robinson, J. (2023). *The City on Display: Architecture Festivals and the Urban Commons*. Routledge.

15 Richards, G., & Palmer, R. (2010). *Eventful Cities: Cultural Management and Urban Revitalisation*. Routledge.

nology startups, international architects, and designers, fitting entirely into the immaterial processes of constructing the territorial brand.

This phenomenon is also linked to the increasing availability of public funds for culture, aimed at encouraging investment in cities hosting festivals. These funds tend to boost facilities for the public, such as hotels and restaurants, which often raise prices as festival dates approach. Funds are specifically allocated for initiatives that produce immediate and visible impacts related to participation, inclusion, and sustainability, often serving as elements of green, social, or pink washing. As Claire Bishop (2012) points out, not every participatory project is inherently progressive. The risk, instead, is that political action becomes overshadowed by the performance of involvement, turning activation into an aestheticized form of symbolic delegation. Bishop states: «participation has become a feel-good substitute for real engagement and structural transformation».<sup>16</sup>

The spread and funding of cultural festivals are accompanied by a festivalization trend, even within the most established cultural institutions. Even architecture exhibitions are increasingly adopting festival-like formats, blurring the lines between exhibition, performance, and actual space production. The Biennales, in particular, have become venues for temporary activation, where architecture is no longer just shown through drawings, photographs, or models but is built, experienced, and inhabited. For example, the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2023, titled *Open for Maintenance*, featured a participatory infrastructure focused on care, reuse, and social inclusion. The project involved local associations, activist groups, and vulnerable individuals, transforming the pavilion into a collective construction site and a space for urban rehabilitation.<sup>17</sup>

This blur makes it hard today to tell the difference between an exhibition and a festival. While the former traditionally showcases and conserves, the latter energizes, creates, and changes. Yet, this overlap is not necessarily a problem. In fact, it is exactly in this gray area that spaces for political and cultural negotiation emerge, where architecture questions its own tools, languages, and ways of relating. Claire Bishop, in

16 Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. Verso. p. 14.

17 Cf. Ngo, A. L., Summa cum Femmer, & Büro Juliane Greb (2023). *Open for Maintenance – Wegen Umbau geöffnet*. Catalogo del Padiglione Tedesco, Biennale Architettura 2023.

this regard, talks about the need for «a critique of relational aesthetics that does not limit itself to celebrating participation, but investigates who participates, how and why».<sup>18</sup> In this sense, the evolving relationship between exhibition and festival can be seen as an effort to highlight, perform, and involve the political side of the architectural project.

*Architecture Festivals as Ephemeral Interventions: Differentiating Festivals, Exhibitions, and Collective Urban Practices through Concéntrico and Floating University*

Despite the increasing overlap between exhibition and performative forms, it is important to differentiate contemporary architecture festivals from other temporary practices such as exhibitions or traditional festivities. The confusion is partly understandable: all three operate in a suspension of ordinary time and influence space through a collective dimension. However, their purposes differ significantly.

Traditional festivals, like the Festa della Sensa in Venice or Renaissance carnivals, were ritual events that expressed social unity. Their role was to affirm a shared identity through the extraordinary: breaking the daily routine paradoxically reinforced that routine, renewing it in cycles. Even when hierarchies were temporarily overturned, as in carnival, it was clear that this suspension aimed to restore balance. In this way, the feast functions as a conservative tool rooted in repetition.

A similar process can be seen in architecture exhibitions: here, too, there is a ritual, a structure, a narrative, but the goal is often to create a coherent form of representation—a unifying theme that connects the projects in a shared vision. Exhibitions tend to organize, preserve, and express a system—sometimes critically—using stable methods of communication. They are more about telling a story than breaking new ground.

The architecture festival, on the other hand, moves in a completely different direction. Instead of building consensus, it operates on the threshold of dissent: it does not seek a single narrative but often values multiplicity, dissonance, and heterogeneity. It does not unify but problematizes; it is not exposed, but active. It is a form that rejects the centrality and authority of a univocal discourse, and that precisely through temporariness creates frictions, openings, and creative conflicts. If the

18 Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. Verso. p. 276

exhibition focuses on the permanence of the object and the festival on the permanence of ritual, the festival emphasizes the permanence of possibility.

It is not a space where you celebrate an already established community but an occasion that challenges the very idea of community, proposing a relationship that is unstable, located, transitory, and only takes shape in the act of meeting.

In recent years, numerous architecture festivals have emerged that choose to operate through light, temporary, localized formats. Some have become genuine urban and cultural activation tools, while maintaining a small scale and strong ties to their contexts. Among the many examples—ranging from the participatory construction site of Bellastock in France to hybrid formats like Architecture Fringe in Scotland—this chapter aims to explore two emblematic experiences: the festival *Concéntrico* in Spain and the Floating University in Berlin.

Although very different from one another, these two initiatives have garnered wide public and media attention, representing effective—though not traditional—forms of what is here called a “festival.” The term is intentionally broad, referring to an event capable of enlivening urban space and creating a temporary platform for research, experimentation, and relationship-building. The focus is less on their formal definitions and more on their ability to activate collective imaginations through ephemeral, site-specific design.

*Concéntrico*, now in its tenth edition, has gradually built a deep and ongoing relationship with the urban fabric of Logroño, a small town in the Rioja region of northern Spain. As a place outside the main channels of architectural culture, it has begun to develop its own public and symbolic identity centered around architecture as a collective practice through this festival. Its strength lies in consistency: each year, a series of installations and small events reshapes the city center, turning familiar spaces into new places, creating new geographies and fresh perspectives.

Floating University, on the other hand, was created from a specific urban need and a desire for protection. The location where it settled—the abandoned water reservoir near the former Tempelhof airport in Berlin—is a leftover but strategic site designated in urban plans for scientific research. When the collective Raumlabor—who has been working with ephemeral architecture since the nineties—and with extensive experience in temporary and site-specific projects, identified the area, they sensed the imminent threat of speculation. Their response was a direct action: occupying the space through an event, creating an ephemeral,

interdisciplinary, and radical school. Founded in 2018 as Floating University, the initiative became so influential that it even questioned its own name: unable to officially use the term ‘university,’ the organizers later adopted the simple name Floating, often crossing out the word “University” as an ironic and political statement.

If Concéntrico is based on periodic repetition as a tool for symbolic and relational construction, Floating is based on an intermittent permanence: not a festival in the traditional sense, but a temporary infrastructure that returns, reactivates, transforms, and resists in time through practices of care and adaptation. Both projects—despite their differences in scale, modalities, and languages—demonstrate that to animate architecture means to inhabit time and space as political and collective events, not as fixed frameworks.

*Concéntrico: Monumentality, Heritage, and 1:1 Scale Interventions as Tools for Collective Engagement, Urban Reactivation, and the Politics of Public Space*

Concéntrico is an international architecture and design festival held every year in Logroño, northern Spain. Founded in 2015 by the Fundación Cultural Arquitectos de La Rioja and curated by Javier Peña, the festival has from its beginning served as a platform to rethink the relationship between architecture and public space, working on a 1:1 scale and making targeted interventions that are spread throughout the entire city center. The installations are not designed as showcases or decorations; instead, they are minimal interventions rich with meaning, aiming to draw attention to everyday spaces that are often taken for granted and to create, even if just for a few days, new shared imaginings.

Concéntrico’s founder and architect, Javier Peña Ibáñez, states in an interview that «Everything is present. It’s in the street. People can go to it, they can play with it, touch it. It’s very accessible».<sup>19</sup> One of the main reasons for this choice is the desire to involve the citizens of Logroño, beyond the tourists and architects who visit each year for the festival week. In the early editions, the festival took place in the old city, which is historically interesting and needed to regain attention, but was not very busy with local residents. The installation Ringdeluxee, by Plastique Fantastique, which appeared as a silver inflatable ring around a

19 Peña Ibáñez, J. in Conversation, in Axel, N., & Peña Ibáñez, J. (Eds.). (2025). *Concéntrico: Urban Innovation Laboratory*. Park Books.

historic building in the city center, marked a decisive turning point that successfully attracted the residents' interest. Since the first editions, the city's heritage has been used as a way to reflect on patriotism, urban symbolism, and especially the city's identity. In the 2025 edition of Monumental Splash, Salazar Sequeiro Medina transforms the fountain of General Espartero into a temporary public pool, encouraging citizens to claim the monument as a space of comfort and gathering, reimagining the meaning of the state symbol in a collective way. Previously, the same statue was the subject of another installation where the base of the equine statue was replaced with a private house, questioning the role of statues in public space by blending the aesthetics of glorification with a scene from everyday life that people can relate to.

The idea of the past and its contemporary significance comes back in the Extra-Ordinary Door, designed by Associates Architecture. This installation takes on a symbolic and morphological role at the threshold. Located in one of the most historically rich areas of the city, along Calle Marqués de San Nicolás—part of the Camino de Santiago—the installation is placed where the defensive walls once provided urban protection. Right there, now marked by a deep break in the wall's continuity—necessary for the passage of cars and pedestrians—the project envisions a possible “repair” of that gap. A temporary threshold, made of green-painted wood, recalls the ephemeral doors set up for the Fiesta de San Bernabé, evoking both the festive spirit and the shape of the nearby Revellín Gate. It is not just a historical or commemorative piece but an effort to connect urban form with collective memory. The small square where it sits, usually crossed quickly, becomes an open-air theater—a place for performances, shows, or simply observing the rhythm of daily life. The passage, which is often hurried and distracted, turns into an occasion for attention and staying.

Concentrico encompasses the entire city, creating a widespread festival that energizes Logroño as a whole, emphasizing a key factor: pedestrian accessibility. Walking easily allows you to traverse the different urban landscapes that make up the city, from the historic center to the vineyard, passing through the park and residential suburbs. In this continuous system of environments, installations emerge as temporary features that uncover the hidden potential of existing spaces, redefining how they are used.

In the heart of Logroño's historic center, Round About Baths by Leopold Banchini Architects transforms an unremarkable roundabout into an unexpected space for gathering and care. Where there were once only

cars, a small complex of public baths—including a sauna, cold water tubs, and changing rooms—is built with temporary wooden structures that give new meaning and centrality to a forgotten spot. The project reimagines public baths as a collective, accessible, and sensory experience, creating a sanctuary of intimacy and social interaction amidst urban traffic. Even when dismantled, the installation leaves a lasting impression: the roundabout, once just a functional intersection, becomes a potential urban scene. Round About Baths embodies the idea of a city that can be explored and activated everywhere, where even the most ordinary places can become part of the collective story.

In the urban park that runs along the river, Hiber Space fits into 2022 as a wooden refuge immersed in the greenery of Gallarza Park. Designed as a space for contemplation and rest, the intervention consists of an elliptical wooden structure, completely walkable and habitable, which invites people to slow down and connect with the natural environment. The exterior, closed and protective, creates a threshold between city and nature, while the interior opens in a spiral that guides the gaze toward the sky. The project reflects on the idea of hibernation as a necessary pause in urban frenzy, offering a quiet and intimate space where time seems to expand. Hiber Space does not impose a specific use: you can enter, sit, lie down, read, meditate - it is a space to “not do,” to inhabit the park in a slow and reflective way. In this sense, the installation reactivates an existing scenario without altering it, but rather enhancing it as a possible place of encounter and interiority.

The same logic of reactivation used by Arenas (2021) guides Konstantin Grcic’s intervention in the residential periphery, where a border area—usually neutral and marginal—is equipped with a series of circular arenas made of concrete and gravel. These simple spatial devices can be freely used by local residents for games, meetings, assemblies, and sports. Finally, extending beyond the cityscape, Mesa Elevada en el Paisaje (2023) is situated between rows of vineyards surrounding Logroño, creating an elevated platform that allows people to pause and look. As in other cases, the landscape is not transformed but challenged, reactivated, and made accessible for unexpected uses. Through these interventions, the festival spreads across the city as a network of temporary episodes that enliven spaces and inspire new ways of inhabiting.

In some cases, the effectiveness of installations in activating urban space is such that it generates a collective desire for permanence. This is the case of Throwing Shade, the intervention carried out by Camille at Concéntrico in Plaza Sin Nombre, an area densely populated and very

frequented by children and families. The square, devoid of infrastructure and considered more as a passage space than as a place to live, has been transformed by Walala into a shady, lively, playful, and colorful area. The intervention had an immediate impact: the square was filled with life, becoming a point of reference for the community. Faced with this transformation, it was maintained even after the festival, a sign of how much activation was perceived as necessary.

In conclusion, the Concéntrico festival is much more than just a review of temporary installations: it is a cultural and political tool that has arisen during a time of significant social change, responding to a widespread desire for new forms of urban democracy. Born in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis and the social tensions that have swept across Europe and the Mediterranean, the festival has provided a platform for civic possibilities, where public space becomes a field for experimentation and collective listening. Its ephemeral installations, far from being simple aesthetic objects, serve as agents of temporary disruption to the urban order, creating openings in daily life and reactivating a more conscious relationship between citizens and cities. In this sense, the most meaningful legacy of Concéntrico is not just in the architectural forms it presents, but in its ability to give the community back its role, encouraging a shared transformation of places through care, imagination, and action. The festival thus becomes a vital sensor of the present, capable of inspiring alternative visions of urban space and helping to build a new culture of the public.

#### Floating University, Berlin: Temporary, Ecological, and Collective Architecture as a Tool for Urban Experimentation, Political Engagement, and Transdisciplinary Learning

Unlike Concentrico, the second case study is set in a prominent location in Berlin: the stormwater reservoir of the former Tempelhof airport. The project was initially curated by the Raumlabor collective. Raumlabor has been active since the 1990s, developing in the context of a free Berlin, which had just seen the fall of the wall, where life was inexpensive and law enforcement control was weak. Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius, in a conversation with the author, explains how the collective's beginnings after university graduation are linked to the generative power of the city, which, alongside the university, has always been a dominant influence in shaping their architectural practice. In their statement, they describe themselves as a collective that seeks out abandoned or transitional spaces, which they explore and activate collectively, outside the

boundaries of traditional institutions.<sup>20</sup>

The initiative was initially called Floating University but lost the word ‘university’ because they were fined and reprimanded for using a formal name that required verification. Currently, the word ‘floating’ remains, while ‘university’ appears but is barred and unreadable, serving as a symbol of what has been allowed or denied. The floating, as it is called in jargon, rises on a space abandoned for decades, which over time has become a unique ecosystem where plants, animals, and algae coexist—what Gilles Clement would call a “third landscape,” and Donna Haraway would refer to as natureculture. The site is located near the former Tempelhof Airport. Tempelhof is an urban symbol with strong political connotations: a massive former Nazi military structure that was transformed into a civil airport during the Cold War and later converted into an urban park after a 2014 city referendum blocked further development. In this liminal space, suspended between historical memory and an uncertain future, raumlabor has built two of its most notable projects: JuniPark and, a few years later, the Floating University. The first is an urban cohabitation experiment set on the edge of Tempelhof Park, functioning as a “temporary city’ to test new forms of coexistence among citizens, students, migrants, and activists.<sup>21</sup>

Floating was established in 2018 when Raumlabor created a real urban offshore campus for collective and transdisciplinary learning. For six months (April–September), the space hosts students, teachers, and international visitors: more than 20 seminars, 47 workshops, conferences, performances, spaces “hottub talks,” concerts, and debates. The architectural spaces—auditoriums, learning areas, a laboratory tower for water filtration, a kitchen, a bar, and toilets—are collectively built by the participants themselves. Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius, a member of Raumlabor, states that «we wanted to create a space for encounter, a space for research, and a space that is fun, charming, and critical of everything we saw happening in the city».<sup>22</sup> The resulting learning environment blends spatial experimentation with urban critique, embodying a radical pedagogical approach that challenges the usual ways urban space is created.

20 [https://raumlabor.net/floating-ev/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://raumlabor.net/floating-ev/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) accessed on 14, September, 2025.

21 <https://floating-berlin.org/site/> accessed on 14, September, 2025.

22 Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius in conversation with Martina Dussin, 4 March 2025.

Two points are particularly intriguing. The first is this tension, as defined by architects themselves, between architecture and law. The reservoir was a concealed treasure within the city, with its purpose in municipal documents designated for scientific research. Notably, Raumlabor's strategy to safeguard this site involved animation, which became so significant that it attracted top scholars. There was a strong desire to occupy the site, but the community continued negotiations and sought funding, creating a constant tension between official rules, the government, and the project.

At the end of its first year of operation, the Floating University received public funds allocated for the centenary of the Bauhaus. Today, the project continues as an association and non-profit organization, entrusted by the collective raumlabor to a network of external collaborators. This choice stems from a desire to share responsibility for a constantly expanding reality, which has become too large for only the original group to manage. It is notable how the collective itself recognizes that public funding opportunities are gradually decreasing due to recent cultural austerity policies in Germany. Despite this, raumlabor mainly operates with public or institutional funds, while maintaining a critical stance toward architecture competitions, which it often views as a waste of time. The collective only participates if it is confident of winning, preferring to invest energy in tangible projects that are built through collaborative processes and specific locations. Floating does not see architecture as a permanent structure but as a collective, temporary, ecological, and critical process. At a time when building is seen as unecological, raumlabor suggests that architects should stop aiming for monumental permanence and instead take on roles as facilitators, environmental stewards, and political provocateurs. This project challenges the traditional role of the architect, emphasizing architecture as ecological and social responsibility—not as the creation of permanent objects but as the development of temporary, vital spaces.

### *Conclusions: Ephemeral Architecture, Ritual Temporality, and the Political Potential of Festivals in Urban Space*

The analysis of these examples results in three main observations. The first point is that the temporary but cyclical nature of architecture festivals introduces a form of ritual temporality that opposes the linearity of ordinary time. The annual repetition is not merely a replica, but a return that renews and transforms. As Gadamer observes, the festival

is neither simple memory nor expectation, but a present “sui generis,” a suspension that opens another time.<sup>23</sup> It is in this liminality—the threshold between daily life and the event—that the political potential of the festival plays out: not as an ephemeral spectacle, but as a moment of hyper-ordinariness that redefines the social paradigms of the city. Each edition not only rewrites the space but restores the rules of coexistence, creating an implicit urban pedagogy that repeats over time.

Secondly, what profoundly distinguishes contemporary architecture festivals from traditional celebrations—often tools of control disguised as entertainment, as in the panem et circenses model—is their ability to activate forms of aesthetic and political empowerment. Far from pacifying the social body, these events tend to present themselves as aiming at awakening its tensions, providing space for divergence and participation, and do so through aesthetics. Ephemeral architecture, precisely as an aesthetic language, has the capacity to redefine what is visible, what can be perceived, and what can happen in a space. In this sense, aesthetics are not decoration but a critical device: a tool to imagine the possible, to break the obvious, and to build different worlds. Finally, the very ambiguity of these festivals—their hybrid position between art, activism, pedagogy, and architecture—represents a political force. It is through this spatial and temporal ambiguity that the so-called “partition of the sensible,” as Jacques Rancière called it,<sup>24</sup> is challenged: the invisible order that establishes who has the right to speak, to be heard, and to occupy space. In festivals, voices that are normally marginalized can emerge; roles are reshuffled; urban space opens up to a multiplicity of expressions that find no place elsewhere. In these temporary and spatial gaps, architecture ceases to represent power and begins to distribute possibilities. It is here that its most radical politicization manifests: not in building structures, but in opening places where people can speak, act, and imagine together.

23 Gadamer, H. G. (1979). *Truth and method* (W. Glen-Doepel, Trans.). Sheed and Ward.

24 Cf. Rancière, J. (2000). *Le partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*. La Fabrique.



Concéntrico, 2025 edition, Logroño Spain.



Concéntrico, 2025 edition, Logroño Spain.



Concéntrico, 2025 edition, Logroño Spain.



Raumlaborberlin, Spacebuster, New York City, USA, 2009.



Raumlaborberlin, Parlament, Timișoara, Romania, 2016



Raumlabor, Floating University, from 2018.



Raumlabor, Floating University, from 2018.



Raumlabor, Floating University, from 2018.



Raumlabor, Floating University, from 2018.



PART III  
*conclusion*



# *Building Platforms: Architecture in the Age of Hyper-Politics*

## **Abstract**

*This dissertation presents protest architecture as an emerging and evolving field where spatial practices engage with political, social, and ecological issues. Instead of establishing a new stylistic category, it describes activist architecture as a disciplinary condition marked by shared attitudes—ethical, aesthetic, and political—that operate through various tools such as cooperative housing, self-construction, urban festivals, pedagogical infrastructures, and critical publishing. The distinction between tools (contingent and adaptable) and attitude (a stable conceptual orientation) is identified as crucial for understanding this field.*

*The research shows that protest architecture influences both physical and narrative aspects. Physically, it seeks to change land management, housing systems, and forms of collective governance. Narratively, it shifts architectural dialogue by revealing suppressed ideas, challenging property systems, and amplifying marginalized voices. Architecture is therefore seen as both a tangible and a narrative tool capable of questioning spatial power and transforming public perception.*

*In this field, whether institutions support or do not support plays a crucial role in shaping these architectural practices. Institutions serve as mediators, amplifiers, and co-producers of activist architecture. Museums, universities, foundations, and public programs increasingly see architecture*

*as a form of political inquiry. The connection with institutions, however, involves a certain relinquishment of one's protest position, and it is important to recognize the difference between space practices that maintain their integrity and act independently and those that take advantage of institutions to support and/or convey their message.*

*Certainly, the dissertation argues that institutions should not be seen as neutral containers but as contested infrastructures where spatial struggles are negotiated.*

*The contemporary political climate, viewed through Anthony J. Jagger's concept of hyper-politics, complicates architectural efforts: political communication floods public life while collective agency wanes. This leads to risks of aestheticization and symbolic activism—a regime where political meaning is proclaimed rather than actively implemented. Still, the thesis points to signs of a shift toward renewed forms of collective, conflict-driven, and infrastructural political engagement.*

*Ultimately, the dissertation sees activist architecture as an ongoing effort, focused on creating platforms for collective action rather than offering definitive solutions. Its importance lies in sustaining political imagination and fostering spaces where new solidarities, institutions, and spatial visions can be tested and evolved.*

## Building Platforms: Architecture in the Age of Hyper-Politics

### *The Need for Definition: Building a Shared Code*

Fuad-Luke said that «design activism is too varied for a single definition»<sup>1</sup>, but through this research we realized that the growing prominence of spatial practices centered on dissent underscores the need to define a field. It can be described—though not definitively—as activist architecture, even if the term ‘protest’—as a metaphor—has carried us this far. The goal is not to create a new, rigid disciplinary box but to identify a set of postures, tools, institutions, and imaginaries that are reshaping how architecture views itself and its power dynamics.

Rejecting a fixed definition does not weaken the possibility of a theoretical foundation. Instead, it highlights the situated, relational, and often temporary nature of the practices studied in this research. However, choosing to maintain an open definition does not imply that theoretical work is secondary to action, nor that architecture should delay action for the sake of clarity. As Adam Thorpe asks, «Why worry about definitions and criteria—shouldn’t we just act?». <sup>2</sup> His point shows that action and definition are not opposite but mutually supportive: «We need a definition if we want to study design activism, for example, to develop theories and practices. The definition brings some rigor to discussions of design as activism and lets participants in the discussion clarify their positions with respect to some specific criteria». <sup>3</sup>

This view is crucial for this thesis. The urgency to act does not lessen the importance of conceptual precision, and clarity of concept does not hinder action. Instead, a common code allows practices to be shared, translated, and debated across different disciplines and institutions. As

1 Fuad-Luke, A. (2009). *Design activism: Beautiful strangeness for a sustainable world*. Earthscan.

2 Mouffe, C. (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the world politically*. Verso; Mouffe, C. (2008). *Artistic practices and critical politics*. In S. Madoff (Ed.), *Art school (propositions for the 21st century)* (pp. 6–15). MIT Press.

3 Id.

Thorpe continues, «by borrowing concepts from accepted notions of activism, we avoid having to ‘reinvent the wheel’ while at the same time acquiring language that speaks across disciplinary boundaries».<sup>4</sup> This is especially relevant in architecture, a field where, as Fuad-Luke has noted and Thorpe repeats, designers often «mainly talk to themselves», limiting the political impact of their work.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, recognizing activist architecture as a developing field does not mean favoring language over practice. Instead, it means viewing definition as a foundation for action that aims to be cumulative, communicable, and structurally transformative, not episodic or self-referential. In this way, conceptual clarity is not a retreat from practice but a prerequisite for engaging with power, public space, and institutions in ongoing and critical ways.

Within this framework, the difference between tools (collaborative design, publications, self-building actions, installations, events, and others) and attitude (an ethical, aesthetic, and political stance) becomes key. Tools stay flexible and contingent, while attitude embodies the conceptual innovation of activist architecture: a way of working that surpasses mere instruments and positions design as an agency capable of disrupting, reframing, revealing, and centering marginalized groups.

From this perspective, the research proposes an epistemological stance in which architecture is seen less as the creation of distinct objects and more as a platform for negotiating space and power. The project does not vanish; it is transformed into a platform—a support system that interacts with networks, redistributes capacities, and hosts conflict as an active element of spatial change.

Activism in architecture is therefore not a style or genre, but a condition of work, characterized by its ability to raise questions rather than give answers. Its value is found not only in its tangible results—its effect on the built environment—but also in its role in fostering a renewed disciplinary imagination, where architecture becomes a space for political questioning, institutional critique, and collective envisioning.

4 Id.

5 Fuad-Luke, A. (2009). *Design activism: Beautiful strangeness for a sustainable world*. Earthscan.

## *Tools and Attitudes*

The case studies in this dissertation demonstrate that activist architecture cannot be understood through a single type of spatial intervention. From cooperative housing models and self-construction networks to urban festivals and political publishing, these practices utilize what can be called tools—contextual, operational devices designed to address specific spatial and institutional situations. Despite their differences, a comparative analysis reveals a shared conceptual foundation that extends beyond the formal or material qualities of each tool and indicates a deeper consistency throughout the field.

Across these projects, space is not seen as a fixed entity or a neutral container but as a medium capable of transforming social, legal, and economic structures. In the Concéntrico Festival and the Floating University by Raumlabor, temporary interventions activate the city as a space for collective imagination rather than passive consumption; La Borda redefines domestic space as infrastructure for shared ownership and mutual support; Orizzontale and Recetas Urbanas turn construction processes into forms of direct political action; and The Funambulist reimagines publishing as a spatial practice that fosters new audiences and redistributes knowledge. In all these cases, architecture becomes a way of doing rather than just a way of designing.

This shared approach is closely connected to questioning the idea of professional identity. The architect becomes less a sole author and more a mediator, facilitator, or enabler of collective action. The architect's role shifts: responsibility and expertise move among residents, activists, students, municipal officials, and a broader network of collaborators. Participation, therefore, is not about consultation or symbolic involvement; it emerges as collective action—an embodied, material process of doing things together—whether it's building, organizing, educating, or publishing. This aligns with traditions of emancipatory pedagogy and participatory planning but directs those ideas toward spatial outcomes that are both immediate and infrastructural.

These practices also maintain economic and institutional independence. They experiment with cooperative or self-managed financial models, prioritize economies of reuse and repair over extractive practices, and establish strategic relationships with institutions rather than subordinate ones. Many reject competitions, prestige commissions, and symbolic cultural programming, instead seeking forms of sustainability that keep projects accountable to the communities that create them.

Ultimately, aesthetics function not just as a matter of style but as a political tool. The visual, material, and emotional elements of these projects foster recognition, encounter, and desire—key factors that enable them to redistribute agency. Temporary pavilions, repurposed scaffolding, modular assemblies, and editorial formats do more than convey messages; they help others envision and sometimes create different spatial realities. Additionally, the DIY aesthetic helps people grasp architecture and presents it as something relatable and accessible.

What ultimately unites these practices is not the tool itself, nor the scale, medium, or timing of the interventions, but a shared attitude: a political, ethical, and aesthetic outlook that views architecture as a way to redistribute agency and change the conditions under which space is collectively created. This attitude aligns with what Chantal Mouffe describes as an **agonistic** view of the public sphere (as has been repeatedly mentioned throughout the thesis), where spatial practices do not aim for consensus or neutral solutions but instead make conflicts visible and open to challenge. In this sense, activist architecture does not just offer alternative forms of building or programming; it creates spaces where diverse actors can challenge dominant arrangements of property, representation, and belonging.<sup>6</sup> The operational aspect of this attitude is also characterized by the development of enabling infrastructures for cooperation, echoing Shannon Mattern's idea of design and knowledge systems as cultural and political infrastructures rather than just technical supports.<sup>7</sup> Many of the projects studied—whether in the form of a cooperative housing arrangement, a self-build network, or an educational and environmental campus—do not merely provide spaces to occupy; they foster infrastructural relationships that support new ways of living, teaching, publishing, and organizing. This infrastructural view of architecture implies that emancipatory change is not only about representation or immediate activism but also about creating the material and institutional conditions under which collective action can be sustained. A similar orientation can be found in Alberto Corsín Jiménez's discussion of infrastructures for the commons, in which design is understood as a process of prototyping social and political relations.<sup>8</sup> The practi-

6 See note 2.

7 Mattern, S. (2021). *A city is not a computer: Other urban intelligences*. Princeton University Press.

8 Corsín Jiménez, A. (2023). *The prototype: More-than-human design realism*. MIT Press.

ces analyzed here—whether reusing materials, reconfiguring property through cooperative legal frameworks, or creating alternative pedagogies—operate as prototypes for other possible worlds, testing and iterating new dispositions of space and power. Their value does not reside solely in the form they produce, but in their capacity to enable forms of mutualism, solidarity, and political subjectivation. From this perspective, activist architecture is not primarily a new architectural language, but a reorientation of the discipline, an expansion of its capacity to act within contested terrains of urban and ecological life.

### *Research Findings*

This research's findings unfold across two interconnected levels that together highlight the political and epistemic relevance of architectural practices presenting themselves as activism. On one side, these practices influence reality by making tangible changes within the built environment. On the other side, they help shape the narrative of architecture by generating reflective and critical discussions that redefine the cultural and symbolic roles of the discipline.

From a material perspective, the projects analyzed demonstrate architecture's ability to influence urban and social realities through cooperative housing, collective land management, and community-driven spatial governance. These interventions gain significance not just through their physical form but through their capacity to foster networked and replicable processes of socio-spatial change. Instead of existing as isolated objects, they serve as platforms for civic interdependence,<sup>9</sup> and make the city a model and repository of shared practices, where design acts as a provisional tool for organizing collective life rather than a final, finished product.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, research shows that architecture produces effects even when its material impact is limited. In such cases, architecture acts as a narrative tool, capable of challenging established meanings, reframing social imaginaries, and opening new spaces for political reflection. This aligns with Chantal Mouffe's theory of cultural and artistic practices as platforms where ideological formations can be contested and reshaped, contributing to a broader struggle over how shared worlds are interpreted. Within this framework, the architect becomes not only a space

9 See note 7.

10 See note 8.

designer but also a storyteller, whose positioning, communication strategy, and critical self-awareness become essential parts of the project. This process can be described as a form of critical autopoiesis, in which architecture questions its own assumptions, responsibilities, and historical complicities—a perspective that echoes Donna Haraway’s call to recognize situated knowledge and to stay with the trouble rather than rush toward quick solutions.<sup>11</sup>

Such narrative practices do not merely symbolize gestures but actively contribute to creating counter-hegemonic imaginaries that broaden public debate and reclaim themes historically marginalized in architectural discourse, including identity, ecological justice, and communicative agency.<sup>12</sup> Even when spatial changes are small, the discursive effects of these practices show that architecture can serve as a tool for political inquiry, highlighting issues that dominant institutional structures have made invisible or irrelevant.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the value of activist architectural practices cannot be measured solely by their material outcomes. Their significance also lies in their ability to introduce new interpretive frameworks and forms of collective learning, affirming the dual role of architecture as both a material and narrative technology: a practice that constructs worlds not only in concrete and soil but also through language, memory, and political imagination.

### *Institutional Impact*

The practices examined in this dissertation show that activist architecture does not oppose institutions, nor does it only thrive outside of traditional institutions. Instead, it functions within a dynamic environment of museums, foundations, public programs, universities, and grant-making organizations that increasingly see architecture as a form of political inquiry. Institutions serve as mediators, funders, and amplifiers of practices that challenge prevailing spatial orders and create new forms of collective life. Their role is neither neutral nor just supportive: it transforms both the possibilities for activist work and the institutional structures themselves.

This dynamic is especially clear in countries with strong cultural and

11 Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.

12 Trione, V. (2022). *Artivismo: Arte, politica, impegno*. Einaudi.

social infrastructures, like Spain, Germany, France, and Italy, where public funding and policies support experimental practices that might not be sustainable in market-driven environments. Cooperative housing models such as La Borda depend on municipal support and housing policies that promote collective ownership; the pedagogical and ecological experiment of Floating University in Berlin benefits from university and municipal capitals; Concéntrico Festival works closely with the Ayuntamiento de Logroño and cultural foundations; and the recognition of Orizzontale through programs like the Young Architects Program at MAXXI shows how new practices of spatial activism become visible through institutional platforms.

If institutions provide economic and symbolic support, they also create platforms for visibility and translation, allowing activist architecture to reach audiences beyond localized struggles.

International biennials have become essential in this regard. For example, the Venice Architecture Biennale of 2023, curated by Lesley Lokko, highlighted decolonization and decarbonization by using architectural research to address race, the environment, and extractive economies. Similarly, the Chicago Architecture Biennial, in its 2019 and 2021 editions, focused on land rights, vacancy, and community-led spatial production, transforming the biennial from an exhibition of expertise into a space for critical pedagogy and infrastructural innovation. More recently, the Copenhagen Architecture Biennial adopted the theme “Slow Down” and as its director affirms that it’s time for activism. This declaration reinforces the shift from passive display toward active engagement, where biennials not only host activist work but become sites of learning, translation and institutional change. In these instances, institutions do not merely showcase activist work: they learn from it, adopting its language, priorities, and alliances.

Similar shifts are evident in research funding. The Carter Manny Award from the Graham Foundation recently supported dissertations on structural violence, Indigenous sovereignty, and environmental degradation.<sup>13</sup> The Wheelwright Prize at Harvard GSD awarded Mauro Marinelli for *Topographies of Resistance: Architecture and the Survi-*

13The winners of the 2025 edition are Dean Michel with a research titled *A Watery Grave in the Desert: Termination, Survivance, and the Chemehuevi Indian Tribe* and Anna Renken’s research *Ecological Mediations: Design with Environmental Science and Technology in Late Twentieth-Century North America*. Cf. <http://www.grahamfoundation.org/> accessed on 19/11/2025.

*val of Cultures*, a project exploring how architecture supports autonomous mountain cultures in the Alps, Andes, and Himalayas against climate change, infrastructural erosion, and cultural loss, challenging urban-centered development narratives.<sup>14</sup> The OBEL Award has also broadened its scope by recognizing architectural projects that focus on ecological justice, social responsibility, and reorganizing spatial resources for the common good.<sup>15</sup> Similar trends are visible at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, which recently launched the Indigenous Land Restitution Research-Creation Fellowship (2026–2027), a program dedicated to land rights, self-determination, and Indigenous perspectives on territory and design. These examples demonstrate that leading academic and cultural institutions now see architecture not just as a technical or aesthetic field but as a means to address displacement, extractivism, and territorial justice.

Beyond these major platforms and international awards, a growing network of smaller institutions and local initiatives also plays an essential role. Programs like the Festival des Cabanes at Villa Medici, the micro-architecture festival FEM in the Italian Apennines, and site-specific educational residencies such as those at Maxxi L'Aquila or Arc en Rêve in Bordeaux, demonstrate how smaller, dispersed institutions serve as experimental labs for situated practices. These initiatives create spaces where collective building, ecological responsibility, and alternative teaching methods can be explored on a scale that is more localized, relational, and ongoing. They show that engagement with activist architecture by institutions doesn't rely only on large exhibitions or international fellowships but also on smaller infrastructures that support long-term, community-focused spatial practices.

However, this institutional influence requires careful analysis. As Andrea Fraser famously states, institutions are not outside entities that can simply be opposed; they are social relationships in which we participate: «the institution is inside of us».<sup>16</sup> Instead of viewing an external realm from which critique can be aimed, Fraser shows that cultural actors themselves reproduce institutional conditions and are thus involved in their change.

14 Cf. <https://wheelwrightprize.org/2025-winner-mauro-marinelli/>, accessed on 19/11/2025.

15 Cfr. <https://obel.foundation/>, accessed on 19/11/2025.

16 Fraser, A. (2005). *From the critique of institutions to an institution of critique*. *Artforum*, 44(1), 278–283.

Here, Fraser's provocation thoughtfully intersects with Karen Archey's argument in *After Institutions*.<sup>17</sup> Archey argues that cultural institutions can no longer depend on a false sense of autonomy that separates them from the world they are part of. Instead of acting as neutral spaces for artistic or architectural creation, they need to recognize their connection to economic, political, and ecological systems and take responsibility for shaping those systems. As Archey states, the goal is not to dismantle institutions but to reimagine them as infrastructures that support collective ideas and political action—structures that host practices which challenge dominant stories, shift visibility, and engage audiences beyond narrow cultural spheres.

Together, Fraser and Archey clarify the stakes of the current transformation: institutions are neither abandoned nor simply instrumentalized; they are contested platforms, spaces where activist architecture negotiates power, visibility, and material support. This aligns with the conception of the public sphere as an agonistic field—one in which conflict is not eliminated but made productive, opening space for alternative spatial and political futures.

Viewed from this angle, the connection between activist architecture and institutions isn't a dilemma—inside versus outside—but a matter of strategic institutional reprogramming. Institutions provide visibility, funding, and cultural legitimacy, yet they are still part of political economies that influence what can be said, built, or funded. Activist architecture interacts with them not as neutral allies but as systems to be changed, where new ways of sharing spatial power and collective authorship can be created.

At the same time, the relationship between activist practices and institutions requires distinguishing between two parallel but interconnected pathways within the field. On one side are spontaneous, bottom-up spatial practices that emerge from protest, occupation, and forms of direct action. These practices often operate outside formal structures, grounded in urgency, conflict, and localized forms of self-organization. On the other side are institutionally supported projects—those enabled by museums, municipalities, foundations, universities, or cultural welfare programs—which mobilize architectural activism through more stable infrastructures and resources. These two pathways do not simply coexist; they create different forms of political agency, visibility, and risk. Institutional support can amplify activist efforts, but it may also resha-

17 Archey, K. (2022). *After institutions*. Floating Opera Press.

pe, stabilize, or partially weaken their oppositional charge. Rather than viewing one as more authentic than the other, this dissertation emphasizes understanding the tensions, negotiations, and strategic compromises that shape architecture as it moves across various scales of political and institutional engagement. From this distinction, the use and the mistake of the word protest or the word activism in relation to the word architecture derive.

### *Beyond Fixed Agendas: Architecture in a Hyper-Political Landscape*

The practices explored in this dissertation show that activist/protest architecture is an ongoing, unfinished project rather than a fixed model or stable political agenda. Its political power doesn't lie in presenting complete alternatives to the current situation but in consistently testing what architecture can achieve amid changing struggles, limited resources, and complex institutional ties. What might seem like tactical restraint is actually an active approach within a fluid landscape, where design serves as a tool for learning, adapting, and reshaping alliances over time. Rather than signaling hesitation, acting with restraint, modesty, or within certain limits can be seen as moments of collective self-understanding. Architecture—like art—offers society an opportunity to reflect on the imaginary figures that uphold its coherence and self-perception. Cultural and artistic practices create spaces of resistance that disrupt the social imaginary necessary for capitalist reproduction and can either reinforce or challenge a given symbolic order. As Mouffe famously argues, there is an aesthetic dimension in the political, and a political dimension in art. This indicates that activist architecture's political power is not just an accessory to its spatial functions: it arises within and through its aesthetic, organizational, and material choices.<sup>18</sup> Understanding these practices as evolving means recognizing that political transformation is not a single event but a long-term negotiation of interdependence. In this framework, organization is not just procedural but a political act: a way of understanding the interaction between static objects, infrastructures, and imaginaries that shape our environments. Design becomes a way to weave relationships, fostering forms of coexistence instead of reinforcing the idea of isolated authorship. Every architectural intervention provides an affordance, a potential for

18 Cf. Mouffe, C., Wagner, E., & Mouffe, C. (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the world politically*. Verso. P. 91.

action—psychic, material, or institutional—that interacts with others and opens possibilities for gathering, caring, resisting, or reconfiguring spatial norms.

Nevertheless, this openness does not eliminate conflict. As Carl Schmitt reminds us, every human relation—religious, economic, or political—constitutes a site of antagonism.<sup>19</sup> For protest/activist architecture, this means that evolving practices remain exposed to tension, disagreement, and institutional friction. Far from reducing their impact, such encounters reveal that the field advances not through linear progress but through iterative confrontations with power, property regimes, and competing spatial imaginaries. Political modesty should not be mistaken for political neutrality. Instead, it shows a refusal to adopt a fixed or all-encompassing political stance in a time marked by ecological crises, institutional instability, and a growth of social movements. These evolving practices challenge the idea that architecture should provide stable solutions or definitive visions. Rather, they emphasize that knowledge develops through action, that alliances change, and that the ability to imagine worlds is linked to the ability to revise them.

This evolving dimension sets the stage for a significant tension. As demands for clear political positioning grow, architecture risks falling into a state where the need for explicit alignment overshadows the underlying, process-oriented, and infrastructural work that initially drives change. This raises the question that will be explored in the next section: how to differentiate between political engagement and a potential regime of hyper-politics, where political meaning must be constantly signaled, declared, and performed.

Within this landscape, the evolving field of protest/activist architecture faces what Anthony J. Jagger describes as a condition of hyper-politics, where political expression permeates everyday life, but the ability to change structural systems diminishes. In this environment, the line between the public and private spheres blurs, and political participation becomes more mediated through symbolic, emotional, and aesthetic means rather than through sustained organizational efforts. The level of political discourse does not necessarily lead to collective action; instead, it often circulates as visibility, performance, or self-narration.

In this setting, intermediary organizations such as unions, parties, and

19 Schmitt, C. (2007). *The concept of the political* (G. Schwab, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

lasting movements become weak or disappear.<sup>20</sup> Individuals stop seeing themselves as part of a stable “we,” turning instead into nodes within shifting, informal networks that rarely develop into institutional power. The result is a paradox: while political expression expands across digital platforms, the capacity to influence decision-making shrinks, and architectural practices may swing between heightened political expectations and limited political influence.

The effects are organizational and psychological. Hyper-politics depends on emotional intensity and rapid attention cycles, creating a shortened sense of time that favors reaction over reflection. Activist-oriented architectural practices risk internalizing this rhythm: actions become events, events turn into content, and the constant demand to perform political meaning can deplete the resources needed for long-term, infrastructural work. But this is not a flaw in architecture; rather, it’s a structural reality that highlights the challenge of constructing resilient worlds in a climate that favors quick approval over gradual change. This situation prompts unresolved questions that call for ongoing disciplinary reflection. What does it mean for architecture to operate within a system where activism becomes mainly visual and media-driven, where political expression often takes the form of urgent images rather than shared institutional processes? How can spatial practices help rebuild collective capacities instead of just producing individual acts of dissent? Could protest/activist architecture assist in reestablishing forms of political belonging that support continuous, negotiated, and multispecies commitments rather than episodic acts of identification? These questions do not suggest that symbolic practices are unimportant. Instead, they challenge architecture to imagine how representational and material aspects can reconnect, and how debate and imagination platforms might act as prerequisites for action rather than substitutes for it. The key task is not to abandon symbolic or aesthetic elements but to understand how they can foster new institutional structures, innovative ecologies of care, and novel infrastructures for political imagination.

One risk arising from the hyper-political condition is the aestheticization of reality, where political conflict becomes a stage that makes crises visible without necessarily allowing for resolution. Architecture plays a role in this tension when design languages that evoke urgency, resistan-

20 It is important to note that this reasoning refers to the present day, but the history of architecture is rich in figures who, together with institutions, have been politically engaged.

ce, or solidarity remain disconnected from material or legal changes, thereby reinforcing a form of political spectatorship rather than fostering new possibilities. In this scenario, the aesthetic and media presence of architecture may create a sense of political satisfaction without actual change, forming what some theorists call a symbolic economy of critique. This approach does not eliminate antagonism; instead, it absorbs it, integrating it into a field of political affects that circulate without changing the underlying distributional logics of space, land, or resources. The challenge, then, is to maintain the expressive power of activist architecture while avoiding a politics that is mainly atmospheric, where aesthetic impact replaces ongoing struggle. Seen from a historical perspective, this moment follows the shift from post-politics, characterized by managerial consensus and the neutralization of conflict, through the rise of anti-political populisms, toward the current state marked by hyper-expressive individualization and declining collective agency. However, despite this contraction, signs of a different future are emerging. Cooperative land trusts, climate justice groups, renewed labor unions, Indigenous territorial defense networks, and community-led infrastructures indicate that the desire for long-term, conflict-driven, and common-focused political work is reappearing. In this reorganization, the idea of the platform, as introduced in this dissertation, is not only a metaphor but a spatial hypothesis: an architectural form capable of supporting encounters, facilitating disagreements, and redistributing authorship. Platforms do not promise harmony; they enable agonistic coexistence. They function as infrastructures for learning, maintaining, and repairing shared worlds, allowing activist architecture to go beyond the expressive pressures of hyper-politics and toward practices that reinforce collective political identities over time. In this way, activist architecture's most important contribution may lie not in having a fully developed political program but in its ability to keep open the conditions for political imagination, creating situations where new solidarities, new institutions, and new spatial futures can be rehearsed, challenged, and transformed.

### *Final Conclusion*

This dissertation started with three questions: (1) What tools do designers and architectural thinkers use to engage in or support protest and opposition? (2) How does the modern activist approach compare to, differ from, or build upon the twentieth-century figure of the intel-

lectual engaged in activism? (3) What are the political and disciplinary outcomes of these practices?

Research indicates that protest/activist architecture does not depend on a single, stable set of tools. Instead, it uses context-dependent, localized operational devices: cooperative housing, self-building networks, urban festivals, educational and ecological infrastructures, critical publishing, legal experiments, and tactical land and building occupations. These tools serve not only as means of expression but also as spatial and institutional technologies that redistribute agency, challenge property laws, and open contested spaces of collective life. In this way, architecture no longer mainly produces individual objects; it functions as a platform—a physical and organizational foundation that supports networks, hosts conflicts, and fosters shared action capabilities.

Regarding the second question, the dissertation highlights both continuity and rupture with the twentieth-century tradition of the engaged intellectual. Like earlier engaged thinkers, contemporary activist practitioners reveal injustice and build counter-publics. However, the source of authority tends to shift from the individual voice of critique to collective authorship, interdependence, and infrastructural work. Following Andrea Fraser and Karen Archey, critique is no longer viewed as operating outside institutions; instead, institutions are seen as internal, relational, and co-produced realities. Protest/activist architecture, therefore, does not just “speak truth to power,” but also reorganizes the conditions under which power is distributed and accessed. The role of the architect becomes less about representing alternatives and more about creating the material, legal, and educational supports through which alternatives can flourish.

The third question addresses the political and disciplinary impacts of these practices. Politically, protest/activist architecture helps renew democratic imaginaries by making conflict visible and legitimate, supporting claims over land and resources, and building infrastructures of mutual aid—even within the limits of what Anthony J. Jagger calls hyper-politics, where political meaning is often expressed intensely but rarely results in lasting institutional change. To counteract superficial or symbolic activism, the case studies here demonstrate processes of commoning, cooperative governance, ecological stewardship, and slow institutional change. Disciplinarily, protest/activist architecture broadens the scope of architectural knowledge beyond just designing form and aesthetics, positioning architecture as a material and storytelling tool—a way to reorganize spatial imaginaries, property relations, ecolo-

gical responsibilities, and institutional possibilities. Architecture becomes a field of connections.

Through this lens, the dissertation advances one of its key propositions: the platform as a conceptual and operational figure for contemporary protest/activist architecture. Platforms are neither metaphors nor software analogies; they are spatial, legal, organizational, and pedagogical infrastructures that enable collective subjectivation while acknowledging conflict, dissensus, and asymmetry. A platform does not seek to harmonize or resolve political tensions; it sustains them as conditions for shared world-building. It provides continuity without closure and support without prescription. Whereas hyper-politics disperses political energy into rapid cycles of expression, the platform fosters the temporal depth necessary for building long-term capacities and alliances.

Protest/activist architecture emerges not as a fixed code but as an ongoing project, a field in development whose importance lies in maintaining the possibility of building institutions of the commons, care infrastructures, and interconnected ecologies. Its role is neither utopian nor just symbolic. It explores how spaces, laws, materials, and stories can be arranged so that collective life becomes understandable, manageable, and livable amidst historical uncertainty.

If architecture is to engage in political change, it won't do so by providing final solutions but by creating and maintaining platforms where new solidarities, institutions, and spatial futures can be rehearsed, challenged, and transformed. In this way, architecture doesn't just interpret the world but becomes one of the ways it is reshaped.

A final and relevant distinction emerges when examining the double genealogy of the practices discussed in this dissertation. On one side, there are bottom-up spatial actions—ephemeral, tactical, often precarious—whose political significance stems from their roots in protest cultures and their ability to interrupt or reconfigure space from below—and that is what the research called protest architecture at the beginning. On the other side, there are institutionally supported projects that share similar tools, aesthetics, and goals, yet operate through frameworks of funding, cultural programming, and curatorial mediation—and that is what emerged as activist architecture. Instead of merging these two spheres into a single narrative, it is essential to recognize that they are fundamentally different, even when they overlap in practices, actors, or language.

Institutional proximity naturally creates tension: the risk that political intent becomes codified, aestheticized, or softened by the very structu-

res that support it. This does not negate the value of institutional work—much of today’s most impactful activist architecture relies on hybrid alliances—but it does require a conscious awareness of what is gained and what is sacrificed when dissent becomes part of cultural welfare. Throughout this dissertation, it has been emphasized that activist architecture operates with institutions, not against them, but this engagement must be viewed as a site of negotiation rather than as a neutral condition.

This tension echoes the distinction made by Pippo Ciorra between commitment and engagement. In his view, “participatory architects” and collaborative groups embody a form of commitment rooted in pragmatic, local work with communities, focused on immediate re-qualification and shared creation. In contrast, engagement refers to a more ideological allegiance—«the adherence to some partisan ideological position... drawing artistic or architectural strength precisely from the friction between reality and design».<sup>21</sup> Ciorra’s distinction is helpful not because it neatly categorizes contemporary practices, but because it underscores the ambiguities when architecture seeks to regain political relevance: between service and resistance, between pragmatism and ideology, between infrastructural care and symbolic opposition.

The field mapped in this dissertation occupies the space between these extremes. The case studies shift between practices of commitment—collaborative construction, cooperative infrastructure, pedagogical platforms—and moments of engagement, where architecture openly challenges dominant spatial orders. Its political strength lies in this oscillation, which resists rigid labels and instead fosters modes of action adaptable to changing political landscapes and institutional dependencies. Recognizing this duality supports the core argument: activist architecture should not be romanticized as entirely autonomous nor dismissed as co-opted by institutions, but instead understood as a practice that constantly renegotiates its political role within the infrastructures that support it. In this context, the distinction between spontaneous protest and institutional activism is not a binary to be resolved but a productive threshold. It reveals both the fragility and the potential of current activist architecture: its capacity to create platforms where conflict is visible, where solidarities are built, and where new futures are practiced despite highly political constraints. Recognizing this threshold is crucial not only for understanding the field today but also for imagining how

21 Ciorra, P. (2016). *(Un)Political*. In Stoppani, T., Ponzio, G., & Themistokleous, G. (Eds.). (2016). *This Thing Called Theory*. Routledge.

architectural practices can continue evolving—moving between commitment and engagement, between the street and the institution—while maintaining the critical ability to reshape the conditions shaping collective life.



Writing in front of the Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel, Switzerland (June 2022).  
From Francesca Cocchiara, Sergios Strigklogiannis, Atlas of Urban Mythologies  
(dpr-barcelona, Irish Architecture Foundation, 2023).



# Appendix- Interviews

## Abstract

*This chapter draws on a series of interviews conducted with Maria Cristina Gamboa (Lacól, Barcelona), Léopold Lambert (The Funambulist, France), Nasrin Mohiti Asli (Orizzontale, Italy), Santiago Cirugeda (Recetas Urbanas, Sevilla), and Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius (Raumlabor, Berlin). Their perspectives provide insight into the practices and positions of some of the most influential contemporary collectives and activist-oriented architectural studios.*

*Interview with Maria  
Cristina Gamboa, member,  
associate and founder of  
Lacol*

*29th August 2023, Barcelona, Spain*

M. D: First, I would like to ask you to tell me the story about the beginning of La Borda project. I know the story of the former factory and the last protests of the local associations, but I'm curious about your relationship with this world of militant groups, in which moment you were involved in the project, and what was your role. I'd like to know in general how you, as an office, are connected to this kind of reality. Do you have a method to find clients, to find projects? Even if in this case client couldn't be the proper word. So, how do you get involved and how do you manage these connections?

C. G. M.: As you were mentioning, talking about the protests, 2011 was the starting point of the project of Camp Batlló. But 2009 was the year of the final project at the University of Architecture for three of the members of Lacol. Pol [Massoni], Arnau [Andrés], Lali [Daví], chose Camp Batlló as the site of their thesis. This was the start of the involvement with Can

Batlló. In 2012, one year after the entrance, there was the beginning of the conviviality and the beginning of this kind of bottom-up process. Also, we had graduated so we were architects. In 2012 there was a kind of a collective discussion organized in Camp Batlló to think about the future of the space, the needs, etc. At the same time, it was a moment where the Ciutat Invisible, the project that you can find downstairs our office, was doing a project for the Federation of Cooperatives always about this idea of a cooperative neighborhood.

All these thoughts were really influential for us because they gave us a theoretical framework to understand also our role. For all these cooperative neighborhood projects housing was an important topic. Because of the economical crisis, It was a moment of collective discussion, about bottom up processes, about Can Batlló. There were arising all those ideas about cooperative services or cooperative projects. We were

thinking about how we could develop a collective response to individual needs in the framework of this revitalization or reoccupation of Can Batlló. I remember it was a Saturday, when, after all the collective discussions, all the research for the Federation, the idea of a cooperative housing came out. It was 2012, one year after the entrance of Can Batlló, one year of observation. We made the assembly, we were doing things, we were starting to restore some of the spaces, we had a good energy. There was a huge economic crisis and moreover Can Batlló until that moment had been the economic core of the neighborhood as it was the industrial activity that gave historically work to the population. That's why we started to understand that we could do more and we understood that we have to create not only a social space but also an "economical space", a space able to contribute to the economy of the neighborhood. Can Batlló was discussing about what to become, and the answer was to become not just a library, nor just a gathering space, but a piece of the city able to propose a mix of spaces. From those old reflections, different projects were emerging. Almost at the same time there was the beginning of Coopolis, an incubator of social economy always in Can Batlló. Everything came out from all those thoughts about how we can bring the mixture of

the city inside Can Batlló, how we can support economy again, and how we can be part of the social and economic market in a way. This idea of following the values of cooperativism, being kind of horizontal, all those projects, were kind of starting with different groups of people. In fact, La Col and the Ciutat Invisible, were involved in both projects [Coopolis and Can Batlló], sometimes in an informal way. I would say that in the case of La Borda it was more informal, because after that Saturday thinking about cooperative housing and other kind of uses, a group of neighbors started to gather, really informal, to find international references of cooperative housing. For two years about 15 people have been thinking about how to formalize and bring to Spain, to Barcelona, to Sants, the cooperative housing model. That was a moment of analyzing several models, like the Denmark model, the Uruguayan model, just really trying to understand how different frameworks and protocols can be transferred to our context, and that was the moment to start to talk with the Municipality, to start to talk a bit with the cooperative of financial services, to start to have informal conversations and to imagine how this could be developed. At that moment we were just graduated, so Can Batlló was a space for experimentation for us. It was a place where we could di-

scuss about our role of architects, really in relation with society. We were surrounded by anthropologists, sociologists, journalists, even by philosophers sometimes, I'm thinking about one from the Ciudad Invisible. It was a moment of informal discussions where everyone was kind of bringing his own knowledge and background. Most of them were also really involved with squat movement. I would say Can Battlò was for most of us the first activism involvement that deals with urban space, with another way of developing the city. This was also linked to the context of the housing crisis after the bubble of 2011. Can Battlò started to become an alternative kind of housing. We were really interested, and it was from this mix of activism and from these discussions that we got involved. Meanwhile that was for us the beginning of discussing internally about the potential of housing as a political artifact. We wanted to discover what could happened if we break this relation between ownership and housing, which it was really embedded in the Spanish culture, we wanted to examine in depth the potentials about of cooperative housing and to challenge this idea of the ownership, this idea of individualism. And this was kind of the beginning. So the way we get involved in Can Battlò was really, really organic. In a certain moment, the cooperati-

ve housing project was becoming more real, suddenly the municipality was interested in testing it, COP57, the cooperative of financial services that gave support to La Borda and that was essential for us, started to see the importance of what we were trying to make. COPS57 is a project that is in the center of the social economy of Barcelona and as I said before, the economic network of Sants was one of our main interests. We were starting to touch, to know each other, to understand what we all have in our minds, to be involved with each other. For example, people from La Ciudad Invisible, said that they were having the theoretical framework as they were reading about the history and the different kind of genealogies of cooperativism of the city and especially of the neighborhood. Sometimes they were joking with us about how much we, architects, were lucky to have them next to us, because they were building a lot of thoughts and formalizing them and giving kind of proposals. However, we were having a projective approach through space, so we were part of the scale of the discussions. Moreover, there was a common idea of the city of Barcelona that was related to the Olympics that wasn't political at all but because of that people were starting to think about it in a differ way. After these two years, 2012-2014, we were involved and

being part of all these discussions as a neighbor. We really started to give our architectural knowledge and be useful for the project and at one point we made a kind of open presentation, and around that a sort of assembly of La Borda began to gather, we weren't 15 people anymore. So, in an activist way, we gave our skills until this opening. Then the project was constituted with a formal assembly, about 40 people or even more, it had the support of the municipality and of the COP57. At that moment the assembly said that we were going to start the process of development in a more kind of formal way, that we needed a team of economists, architects, lawyers to help us. They really wanted to have the control of the project, they clarified that the assembly had to decide first. They had experience of participation and they wanted to adopt it. They were also dealing with money of course, so they asked different people about the honorarium. As Lacol, we presented our proposal, but because we were a cooperative, because of the engagement with the surrounding, with the neighborhood, because of our previous project with participation in public spaces, they basically select us. It was everything organic. We were hired professionally by La Borda to develop the project. For us that was a movement from activism to professional work.

While designing La Borda, we founded La Dinamo. La Dinamo is a foundation of Sants, close to our office. La Dinamo was founded by La Ciutat Invisible and Lacol to, in a way, systematize all the knowledge that we were creating with La Borda and to promote cooperative housing in the context of Catalonia. It emerged from Lacol, which is autonomous, but in a way, it's really linked with it because it promotes its model. The foundation was made to manage the relation with municipalities within Europe. And sometimes it needs the supply of architecture or of some theoretical research about how topology is affecting the conviviality. La Dinamo is a tool that Lacol developed but that is getting more and more autonomous. Nowadays clients arrive to Lacol through La Dinamo, which in the same way was a tool that we generated through the process of La Borda to share the knowledge. Instead of growing as Lacol and having different branches about housing policies we thought it was more instrumental to develop an independent project. We have members of Lacol, especially Lali, almost working entirely with La Dinamo. We were in the beginning controlling and check how La Dinamo was working, we were part of the political space of decision in La Dinamo. But the idea was to start together and basically to be independent in the future.

This is part of the idea of economy that we had in our minds. Lacol don't want to grow and be hierarchical, we prefer to be fractal. We were trying to develop prototypes of new economical developers in a way, and La Dinamo, it's not a cooperative, it's a foundation, because it was linked to legal issues, because we received funding to create La Dinamo. A person linked to one of the members of Lacol wanted to develop a social project and he asked us to create together a sort of political apparatus to give social value to the money that he had. This was the initial founding of La Dinamo but basically Lacol began as a really activist project. That happened when we were finishing the university and when we graduated, we wanted Lacol to become a real profession for us, a way to provide us a decent work. It was in parallel to the beginning of projects such as La Borda, in parallel to the beginning of this understanding how we can develop political projects, to the needs of a decent work. For us, as Lacol, economy is linked to providing us decent conditions of work and to how we design. Because doing hours and hours on models or on designing is a kind of luxury that we cannot afford, and that common people can't afford. Sometimes we say that detail is political. Detail is about economy, deals with our dignity and the dignity of the people that wor-

ks in the construction. In the end economy was at the center of La Borda, because basically the main goal of La Borda was doing affordable housing and doing that in an urban context requires thinking about economy. In other contexts, such in rural areas, cooperatives focus more on how to develop the conviviality model. But here in Barcelona and especially in Sants, a historical labor neighborhood there are two main values. The first one is conviviality, linked to another way of living, a sort of critique to capitalism, to individualization, to the automatization of the society, and the second one is affordability, because of the crisis. Economy was really crossing the project and the architecture too. Being affordable was one of the statements of La Borda assembly, because at the end, I would say, that the 80% of the cost of the development is architecture.

M. D.: I agree that is really important to create value and to create something that can grow itself. As you mentioned the economic issue I would like to talk about its relationship with design. La Borda housing is one of the few examples where social needs and good design are combined, and when I say this, I mean that usually the first thing architects give up when they build social housings, is the "good", the "beauty", that I believe is a kind of right of everybody.

They do this to save money, but you did not, you found a way even if we all know that is not an easy moment for the economy. People like to live in La Borda. Did you sacrifice in a way your personal profit? How do you manage to economically support the office and meanwhile to select ethical project to design?

C. G. M.: Well, Can Batlló was a school for us, we understood the agency of the architect in the context of the urban development, of the urban transformations and of participation. La Borda was of course the first project, it was the first collective housing project. We were paid from La Borda but we also included a huge work of research for us, because it was an opportunity for us to understand how to propose collective housing for cooperatives, to understand its main characteristics. That part of research was for us activism but just because it was the first time that we had such type of commission. We had responsibility, and we felt it, to deeply understand how a cooperative could challenge the conditions of the housing provision, and in which way the questions that arise as part of the process, are valuable for architecture. In a moment we realized that if there weren't an individual ownership, it would mean that the building had to be flexible and adaptable, because inhabitants can

change. It wouldn't be their house. It wouldn't be as, I don't know, as a common "guante" [gloves] for the people. So, our idea was to understand how each condition of development could affect different people.

But all those processes of reflection, of course, were something that, in terms of economy, were not paid but we were fine with that because it was the first project, because we were learning and because we create a solid structure that we use in all the other projects.

M. D.: Does this happen with other project? After La Borda, how do you manage it?

C. G. M.: Now it's working better, we still use that knowledge. At that time, we were super young as a studio, we were kind of precarious. At the beginning, it was much more precarious than now, then Lacol turns into a tool for stability for us. La Borda project gave us stability because it was kind of a long-term project, it took about six year to be completed. But of course, there was also the other side of the coin. We dedicated a lot of time to La Borda but we had to do other things, but gathering around La Borda, being part of Lacol to discuss and research together about La Borda, at the same time, gave us the opportunity to develop a curriculum to enter the municipality competition for housing projects.

So all this was crucial.

M. D.: So you did different works meanwhile La Borda, I wonder what kind of projects you were and you are doing.

C. G. M.: Claro, we were doing a lot of different, and I would say, smaller projects. We did a lot of technical works. There was a good network around Lacol, around Sants, and in the previous office we were working on the ground floor and that allowed us to interact a lot with people, families, and social economies that turn into clients in a way. I think that being a cooperative and being part of the social economy activity introduced us to a community and let us receive projects. But of course, during La Borda we were doing just small projects and also sometimes projects that probably didn't have our same values. We also developed a lot of participatory projects for the municipality of Barcelona. So we weren't doing just architecture. Lacol started together with Barcelona en Comú. That was a progressive moment for the municipality of Barcelona and for the whole Catalonia. The growth of social economy, the growth of cooperativism in Barcelona and Catalonia, is also linked to the political moment that we have been having for the past eight years. There was an ecosystem and we were part of it.

M.D.: Sometime I feel that politics is something back in fashion nowadays, there are a lot of architects that do exhibitions, installations, festivals, and other kind of ephemeral project. Housing is quite the opposite. Have you ever done those kinds of works? Maybe just to have incomes to support you.

C. G. M.: In some cases, we were invited to do exhibitions, for example we did an exhibition for the Museum of Design in Glorious and we used it as an opportunity for us to bring some ideas outside. In the end we were feeling that there is a kind of responsibility. With certain projects we felt that we were making politics. In that situation of social and political and economic crisis we were trying to give a response. That's why we were linked to La Borda, to Copolis, and to this idea of social economy. We were focus on how we could have brought these kinds of activities to the neighborhood around. And of course, I think we were lucky. These projects formalized and became real and that allowed us to really work with this kind of project. This would not be possible, I think, without the social economy context of the neighbourhood, the heritage of cooperativism from the last century, but also that precise moment, in which the municipality was also changing and in which these

projects were possible. Lacol and another cooperative were invited or hired by the municipality to be the coordinators of the housing plan of Barcelona. That was an opportunity to introduce several themes, like how gentrification and tourism are affecting the city, but also how cooperative housing can be one of the accesses to fulfil the goal. Some years ago, in Barcelona there was just the 1.52% of social housing. For us the goal was to arrive from the 2% to the 15% of affordable housing in the city. We were involved in housing policies, trying to see what has been affecting this condition. Was that about ownership? About gentrification? Tourism? There were a lot of arising questions and we were part of that discussion. Moreover, we were next to the development processes to start possible cooperative housing. Because, without the context, to start a cooperative housing project is difficult, especially without COP57. If you go to a conventional bank and you say that you want collective fund, they will say “ok, who is going to be responsible? I want the name and I want individual ownership”. So, when you want to break the system, there are different stages. In my opinion in this ecosystem each stakeholder is essential. Without all this, as architects, we could not have developed that. Sometimes when we explain our experience, it’s naive to say, it se-

ems that everyone can develop cooperative housing. It’s not true, because without this kind of bank, we couldn’t have done it. Without the support of the municipality, it couldn’t have been possible. So at the end, I think that we sized a specific moment with specific stakeholders. And of course, we really made a lot of work. The impact of La Borda was huge because it reflects many of all those questions and conditions. It shows the instrumentality of architecture. But as architects alone, this would not have been possible.

M. D.: Do you think that the relation with the Municipality of Barcelona was important?

C. G. G.: Of course, because La Borda is in a public land. Being affordable in Barcelona without using of public land is impossible. Barcelona is a dense city with a lot of international investment and real estate market in this moment but also previously, during the crisis when everything was cheaper, international funds were buying the city. It was really hard to buy private land. One of the challenges that currently we are working on with La Dinamo is how to introduce cooperative housing in the private stock, because, of course, the public land is few and there is a huge demand of public housing. The available land has to be developed by the housing agencies

and cooperative housing is just one of the stakeholders to develop public or affordable housing. The key point is how we can cooperate the private stock. And this is part of the research that La Dinamo is doing to understand how we can develop cooperative housing in existing buildings or in private buildings and how using community land trust as a way to generate alternative models, without being related to the public and the municipality, to be as much independent as possible to political changes. Since two months ago we have a new government and we don't know if they it's going to continue to support the movement and we don't know how autonomous we can be. Our idea in this last ten year was to develop as much as tools. Now there are many cooperatives, many architects, many teams supporting and making this project as strong as possible. Because if in a certain moment the political support is missed, we'll need to move to private possibilities, or we'll need to claim, or to protest for good policies. We know that we must face eventual critical changes. We experiment a moment of construction. If there will be a moment of political shift we'll need to resist, to oppose, to find a way to be resilient. And this was part of Lacol too. We were working for the municipality, we were dependent but we really wanted to find a way to be independent.

M. D.: If they change the policy of social housing would you protest?

C. C. G.: Of course. Lacol, La Dinamo, and other cooperatives, did protest right before the last elections. It was a moment where the three cooperatives or even more, they were still without the signature of the leasehold of the land. All those cooperatives have been working for years after won competitions, but they were about to formalize and concrete the project, they needed this security that the project would continue. It was a moment of pushing the municipality, even with media, with demonstrations. Even with a progressive municipality that gives support, there are always moments of conflict. I think that this was something important in Lacol and for cooperative housing too, this idea of independence from municipality.

M. D.: Before you were saying that you got involved in the situation, in the associations network, but then it was you that asked the municipality to elaborate a plan or a deal together, wasn't it?

C. C. G.: Well, the agreement of the leasehold of the land was done with the previous government. It was a right party, quite conservative. For them it was a way to externalize and to privatize the development, but they were dele-

gating it to cooperatives. The coop can be understood as a private project. I think that the previous government, this right party that I was talking about, was basically delegating the provision of housing to the private sector. But for us, it was instrumental, because for us, the private sector, as the public, as the community, it was kind of the potential for us. Then the final signature was done with the new government. But the agreement was done with the previous one. It's important to say that we, as la Borda, presented the project, we made all the negotiations with the right party in the government. La Borda was doing all the negotiations with the municipality, and it hired Lacol as architects. They hired La Ciudad Invisible for the economy and the coordination of the project, in a way. And then they also hired a lawyer, a cooperative of lawyers. So La Borda was doing a self-development and they were having the total control. But as Lacol, as we were involved as architects, and because five of the members of Lacol finally are living in La Borda - I live in La Borda and Paul lives in La Borda, for example - we were also got involved as inhabitants. This allowed us to really understand the whole process. If we were only being involved as architects, we would see just a part of the process. But when some of us were involved as inhabitants, this allowed us to

have the whole process. Basically, in a certain moment of the process, the rest of the neighbor asked us, why don't you have a house? Why don't you want to be an inhabitant? And it was organic in that way. At the beginning we were involved as neighbor and as activist. We defend our proposal as architects, but in a certain moment, in 2014, when the project grew, we were involved also as inhabitants. And this, as Lacol, was key because this allowed us to understand which are the conflicts about the discussions about economy, the discussions about conviviality, the discussions about legal issues. We realized about the meaning of developing a cooperative housing project in all vectors and axes of it, we were more aware about it. We learnt all this, and now when we are talking with a new group, we empathize, because I know what you are having about.

So, La Borda in a way was this learning process, we fine-tuned the process of development, so then we can replicate it and we made La Dinamo, to help new projects. But as Lacol, technically, we were only involved in the architecture, not in the whole development, not in the coordination of La Borda. La Borda hired a project manager, hired a coordinator, and Lacol was just a one of the teams working in la Borda. Lacol wasn't developing La Borda, it's just the architecture.

M. D.: Always talking about the land agreement with the municipality, what will happen in 75 years?

M. C. G.: Basically, in 75 years La Borda can renegotiate the contract and continue in the same way, or the building would be managed in other ways. At the end the land is public, and the building is social housing. Now it's managed by a cooperative, in 75 years the contract can be renovated, or the cooperative has to leave the building, and the building can be managed by the housing agency, in the worst case. It's also true that the inhabitants are following the criteria for social housing, we were in the list for social housing, but the management is a key point. If the cooperative as a legal entity and a social entity managing the building cannot continue being there, basically it would develop a conventional social housing project, managed by the municipality, and basically making a rent to the flats or whatever. But this is something that we will see, we don't know what is going to happen.

M. D.: Are you worried about this?

M. C. G.: No. La Borda has the responsibility to guarantee in 75 year a house for its inhabitants. In 30 year La Borda is going to return the loan of the construction and after it will start to generate money

with the rents, the cooperative decided this. From the year 30 to the year 75 La Borda will start to generate economy and savings. The political idea, is that the money would be reinvested or will help other cooperatives to start without a loan or in a better condition. The idea is to generate a certain economy that is going to support the model. In 75 years, La Borda will have the "musculo", the capacity, if there won't be a contract of renovation, to develop a new project. The weak moment was the beginning of La Borda, because we didn't have the capital. After 75 years, there will be a capital that will allow to grow. Or maybe La Borda at the end, in the year 40, will say that we need another project, so we will do it. The economical structure of La Borda aims to continue generating funds, savings. The idea is, and this is part of the economical structure, that at the end, formally or legally, the money that we pay is going to a collective box, savings or whatever. The idea is to generate a common structure of funding or economy to make stronger the cooperative housing project, supporting others. So, this is part of how we are trying to understand the economic model between projects, not autonomous.

M. D.: That's interesting, how a structure can generate money, as a system. Could we now talk a little

about life inside the cooperative housing, about the people, their works, about what they decided to share, spaces, and beliefs. Who are the inhabitants? Where do they come from? Are there traditional families? Are the inhabitants fine to share space? Are they happy? And most of all, are they comfortable with sharing spaces? Or would they prefer to have their own private house?

M. C. G.: The initial group of 15 people was a group really linked to the assembly of Can Battlò, and most of them were part of some cooperatives in the neighborhood. That was a group that knew each other from the spaces of activism, basically. They shared certain values, and when there was the opening of the project, that I mentioned in the beginning, in Can Battlò there was a public presentation. The project had a strong relation to the territory, and the people who were kind of starting it and being involved in a certain way had a personal relation of each other. I would say that the configuration of the group was quite linked to these sharing of value for the spaces of activism initially. Then La Borda, of course, had its own media, it made a communication campaign, also to receive funds, etc. And with these campaigns and this explanation of the project, the media, etc., the people interested in the project

was growing. From that moment people that weren't related to the project, but were interested, entered the list of collaboration. But I would say that they had a common background, linked to collective projects, activism, and social movements. And at the same time they were sharing certain political values, also about privacy and sharing spaces. This is something that sometimes is a kind of a critique to La Borda, which is not variegated. In terms of economy, I think it is different, because maybe we are architects, there are teachers, there are people from many different kinds of professions. But sometimes we say that the cultural level maybe is higher. Most of them have, for example, education, even all of them in the university, or most of them. This is something different from the neighborhood, which is quite a popular neighborhood. In terms of the economy, maybe it is not that different, because of course there is also a maximum of incomes established by the municipality. But culturally, this is something that when we trying to understand, collecting data and trying to discover a bit about the people and the profile of the people. Sometimes we talk about if there is a kind of a gentrification process, it is not maybe about the economy, but sometimes it is about the cultural attitude. In my opinion in the end, La Borda was a political project, because it

was trying to fight against the speculation in the city. This idea of the collective ownership and not being individual owners, it was something that people demanded as a political position.

The new projects, I would say, are much more diverse in terms of people. Maybe sometimes inhabitants don't know each other, they haven't shared previous spaces of activism, they came from many, many different backgrounds. I was developing the project of La Balma, and the group was really different from La Borda. For La Borda there was a kind of a starting point, there were connections, and probably because of the risk and the challenge of the process, because it was the first time, this was a strength of the project. Shared values made the decisions easier to make. Sometimes you have the feeling that La Borda was a Trojan horse, or the first example that works as a model, and that is quite challenging. For example, on the discussions about the right of heritage, which was key, we decided to not heritage the unit, because otherwise it's not going to break the individuality. This idea of the individual ownership is really linked to the ownership, but also the right to inherit something, so we were discussing with political issues, in a way, trying to detach about yourself, to try to see the potential of a model. So I think that this was the strength of

La Borda, the group, that I think it was a really strong group. It was really diverse in terms of ages, we were really young in that moment, we were around 30s, and it was people from 40s, 50s, 60s, it was people already retired. It's quite diverse in terms of composition, not now but when we moved to La Borda, there was a group of four adults in cohabitation, it seems right now but at that time it wasn't - there are two adults retired that haven't any kind of romantic or sexual relation, that live together. They are just sharing. There are a lot of people that live together even if they are not a couple or a family. They are a community. There were a lot of people living alone at the beginning, now most of the youngest turn into couples of families. I would say that there are just five people around 50s-60s living alone but then they share the common spaces. The community provides care. This is another important them, as people get older, they need a support for caring, and La Borda sometimes give a response to this different conditions. I would say that right now the 40% is family and there are two mono-parentales - a mother with a kid, and a father with a kid -. The design of the building appears open to different kind of social structure. We did a series of interviews in the beginning, and a mixture of needs appeared, we also understood that we had to foresee the evo-

lution. There were kids that now are teenagers and of course they have different needs. In 10 years, things are going to change. People like me, that maybe I have a medium size, maybe in the future would need a bigger flat. It was a matter of understanding different needs. And we are not diverse in terms of origin, so we didn't have to consider cultural tradition in a deep way while designing. We are all from Europe, which is another critique to La Borda and because of this the new projects are trying to establish criteria to be more diverse in that sense even if being similar and sharing values, being a network, was at the same time essential to the good luck of the project. Now these projects are trying to challenge all this. La Borda at the beginning hadn't economical support, it was the very first project. So if you didn't have the capacity to pay the initial down payment, you cannot have been a member of La Borda. There is a maximum of income established by the municipality, that you must have to capitalize the cooperative and this was something that was leaving people, more vulnerable people, or people with less incomes, out of the project.

M. D.: Could you tell me the amount of the incomes needed to be part of the cooperative?

M. C. G.: When you enter La Bor-

da, you have to pay 18.500 euros. If you don't have these savings, this was a barrier. We established solidarity mechanisms, and there were a couple of people that applied them, so they paid with a lot more time, because others were trying to pay it faster, but if someone had zero savings, and there was one person for example with a low salary, it's difficult to imagine that this would be possible. For people without family that can support them it was sometimes difficult, and it was a kind of a barrier. In terms of the diversity, of course there is diversity right now, the professionals, even economy. Six months ago we did a kind of radiography about the economic situation, and realized that there are people that are still with La Borda because the monthly fee is around 500 euros for the medium flat, which is 60 square meters plus the common areas that you have, which is almost half of the market we can say right now in Barcelona, and that includes also the energy bills and everything. It's much lower because we can collectivize the heating, the contracts, etc. I pay 500 euros for the monthly fee for the 60 square meters plus all the common areas, which includes the rent, the energy supply of the common areas, a kind of a solidarity fee that we pay each other, then the person who is hired to help with all the economy bills and everything, all this is 500, and

then we pay the individual energy supply, the cost, which includes the internet, water, heating and electricity, and it's around 80 euros, so with 580 in Barcelona, you have everything, which is quite low than the market, more or less. But the 18.000 as the initial sum is kind of a barrier. At the end, the people, the most vulnerable ones, or have a lot of support from the cooperative, or from the family. This is something that all the cooperatives are trying to deal with. Municipalities are giving special support to families, so there is a mechanism from the cooperative, from the sector, even from the municipality, trying to deal with that. It's quite diverse in certain aspects. It's really good anyway, of course. I think that La Borda wanted to develop a model of conviviality that makes people live in different ways. You have your flat, I would say that the only specific need that you have outside is the lavatory, but if you really wanted to have the lavatory inside, you could do it, because at the end there is the connection.

M. D.: What about the kitchen? in our Western society it is something really important and private.

M. C. G.: The kitchen is inside, it's small, but so you can decide to use the big one in common.

La Borda basically has units of minimum 40sqm, which was the

minimum size for the regulation in Barcelona and then you can have all these common areas. So, for example, there are people like me, because we are two, and we applied for the medium size flat, but there were other people that want bigger spaces, there was also a couple that applied for the L size. It's a personal decision about how you want to position yourself regarding the common areas or about how much you want to reduce. The common areas are a way to collectivize services that you can have in the house, and have it in common size, such as the heating, the laundry, or the guest room, instead of having a small room empty all the time in your home, you have a guest room together. But I think that the way that people are using the common areas is super diverse, because of the rhythm, because of the desire. So this is making the way that people are living open, you are not forced to do anything. This is something that each cooperative, in the moment of designing, can discuss about. Each cooperative can decide if it wants to force or not to make common decisions, and each project in a way has its own needs and spaces. The way that spaces are relating to architecture, are different, I would say.

M. D.: I imagine that you have meetings...

M. C. G.: Of course, there is kind of an obligation, which you have rights and duties, and you have to be involved in a commission of management, or conviviality. You have to be in a commission, and you have to be every two months in the general assembly. The cleaning is also done by the people, one hour every five weeks more or less. This is the minimum implication. The assembly is the space of decision, the space of work and management, being part of it means being part of these working and cleaning groups. It's as open as you want, because, for example, every Wednesday, there is a collective dinner, and you can be part of it or not. For example, each Wednesday, we cook for around 38, 40 people, and there are 60 people living in La Borda, so there are 20 people who is not involved in these collective dinners. We are aware about the point that La Borda, or the cooperative housing, is just one of the ways to the provision of affordable housing, and maybe it's not for everyone. And here is where each cooperative must understand the level of conviviality or the level of privacy or not. All these thresholds are part of the process of designing. I would say that the discussions during the process are key for the exit of the conviviality, and the trust developed through the project, and the exercise to solve conflicts or different point of view during the process of

development is also important for them to be aware about the different needs.

M. D.: Did you manage this part of participation?

M: C: G: When it was dealing with architecture, yes but it was another commission, it was called Model of Conviviality. And then, of course, the tempos of the architecture are different from the tempos of the social construction, the trust and everything. At the beginning you have to define more or less the spaces, and this idea of being flexible was important because then the life and the decisions we've taken after have the possibility to change through time. For example, we decided we had a kitchen on the ground floor because the idea to cook together, to eat together was present, but then the Model of Conviviality was guessing to externalized it, to have or not to have a cooker for everybody. They discussed about how they could self-managed it and so on. There were discussions about laundries too. How to use the app for example. All this is developed by the Model of Conviviality, not by Lacol. I would say that the people, in general, are happy with the way they are using the building. I think that people feel that they can be involved as much as they want because the minimum is quite soft. We were asking about the

ways that the laundries are managed, the guest rooms are managed. We were always trying to establish certain criteria to understand how we feel about these spaces, how we manage, how we have ideas, how we can change. The Model of Conviviality committee is really running to see if there are things that are not working, etc.

M: D.: In terms of architectural decisions, did you give them proposals, options? or did you first listen them?

M. C. G.: We were developing the building, not dealing with participation. In one hand, there was this idea of a collective ownership, in the other hand we knew that those people that were part of the process in a certain moment can maybe leave. We wanted to develop a collective imaginary, we were establishing a collective need. So, people were being really active in the definition of the needs within the Model of Conviviality but we were also defining the collectively, the common goals in terms of environmental performance, which was for example really important. The idea was to define the values first, and then formalized them in different ways and spaces. We were developing different options, of course, of the configuration of the main building, but we were establishing the stages of participation from the collective, from

the total control of the values and the ideas. We wanted people to define, to express their needs, not the spaces needed, because this was giving us, as architects, the possibility to imagine the best forms. I don't know how to say it. We were doing collective discussions for taking decisions in the first stages, and then we were establishing certain rules to arrive to the typology. We were also establishing different levels of participation, because in the end, the appropriation of the user during the conviviality is really important. So we were defining flexible spaces in order for them to imagine. We had the idea of establishing a matrix of spaces, of a certain manual of how to connect or not connect rooms with each other. There were a series of things to develop this idea of an architecture of the participation coming from the values going to the architecture. Of course, when we defined the environmental values, we started to really working. That's why the main building, the atrium, the densification of the south facade, many of those strategies, were selected. We call it fuerza. This idea of a popular architecture that is present. We didn't want it to generate something super technological. For example, the idea of the corrala, the cluster in the middle, came from a traditional typology of the south of Spain. It isn't something new.

M. D.: Was that choice yours or was the cooperative asking you that particular architecture?

M. C. G.: Well, the first workshop was about bringing images of architecture. We were starting with things which really touch the subjective part of the individuals but trying to construct a collective imaginary. Images about people in the street, or this idea of the neighbors, of collective spaces, about certain materials. There were many things about, of course, the comfort. We were talking about sharing individual experiences about your family, about how you construct the idea of a house, or a home... So, this was kind of the beginning.

We were trying to maintain even a political discussion. For us, make something popular meant looking at certain examples of architecture from popular to self-management. It was important for us which kind of reference we were presenting as architects, which kind of language, etc. And this was part of the first stage. Because at the end, the construction of a common vocabulary was also super important. Because to discuss about architecture, this idea of transfer our knowledge to them and make it accessible in terms of language, in terms of drawings, this was a way to give them control. It was a process of discussing and making kind of dynamics not linked to space but to

the values behind the space. And make them aware about how instrumental the space for the life of the user is, about the control and the political realm about that. We were trying to give all these kinds of discussions to the cooperative in the first stages before arriving to architecture. In a certain moment, there was also a certain conflict for us, giving a matrix of non-geographical spaces is breaking with the conception about the home. Because they had been living in traditional units until that point, so it was difficult to imagine something different, we had to defend certain ideas of ours. They had to be aware about why we were presenting that. Otherwise, they would have felt that the living room was small and the bedroom really big. Sometimes a workshop was basically explaining certain decisions. There are different level of participation. At the beginning workshops were a lot about values, about subjectivities, about creating this common idea of cooperative, there was a lot of participation, but at the end, when you have to decide about certain things really technical, to assume certain risks, you just communicate your decision to the cooperative. But for example they asked us for sustainability in terms of materiality. La Borda asked us to define a proposal for building in wood, concrete, and steel, for example. And they took the decision of wood.

Discussing about the value deals with moral worship and everyone is participating in the same way but then there are moments where you have to express the hierarchy of your knowledge for the common good. There is a hierarchy in decisions. This is something that we were really managing. There is a power that you have. I think that you have to recognize your power of knowledge and to allow them to have an agency. You have also a kind of responsibility to share, to show the different possibilities, and to take decisions about architecture, about installations, about materials. You have to express the advantages and disadvantages and try to make them accessible. There is a process of empowerment, even if I don't like this word. Anyway it's like that I'm delegating the decision to you because I really believe in your capacity and the importance that you have, I know that you are co-responsible as me because you are going to live here, because you are going to defend it, etc. Many of the bravest decisions were taken by the cooperative. I think that all these series of discussions with the users and with, for example, the technicians in the housing department, in the license department were able to build La Borda, because we were constantly challenging regulations, we were taking risks. All these series of conversations and trust between the assembly and

us let us challenge regulations and not follow regulations. We had the trust of the assembly, we knew that they were not going to denunciar [report]. When you delegate your power and establish all this kind of trust, it allows to challenge the pre-established frameworks of operation of architecture. And I think that the innovation came here. I think that it was not because we were proposing things, it was because, precisely, people were asking us to reboot the structure. We were asked to make a new structure or to make things flexible. It was a challenge, in a way.

M. D.: Did you follow a specific system or model to do this participation process, or did you invent it?

C. C. G.: It was the first time, we were basically learning by doing. I think that it was important that there was a committee of architecture inside the cooperative. During the whole project there was a group of around 5, 7, 8 people, which now is called maintenance. But during the phase of development, it was called architecture. And it was a group of people, not architects, basically future inhabitants, members of the assembly, that were following the process with us. Every two weeks, almost, we were having meetings to explain them the process and the

decisions that we were making in the studio. And in the end, we were kind of defining collectively which kind of decision had to be taken by the main assembly and which were to accept. It was a process of delegating too, from the assembly to this working group that had worked as a connection between us, Lacol, and the assembly.

Certainly not everything can be decided by the assembly. This filter, this stress, was taken by these people that basically were helping us to decide options and how to present our decisions, suggesting us which things were more difficult to understand and which things were easier, because they weren't architects, so they didn't have any kind of knowledge about that kind of stuff, but in that moment that was fundamental and really useful.

M. D.: In the end what do you think about the interdisciplinarity that you had? We could say that architects are now working more and more with different kind of figures and sometimes architecture seems to disappear. What do you think about that?

C. C. G.: I think it's really interesting. We understood interdisciplinarity as a potential. We were really young at that moment. It was 2016, nine years ago. We were younger than 30 years old. We had to develop the project and we had

the responsibility and that's why we choose quite experimented things around us. La Borda was engaged for real because they understood that that kind of project was in a certain way the opportunity to develop things in a different way. They were super, super engaged and we had a lot of trust in them. They felt this trust and help us a lot. I would say that we were not losing architecture. Architecture was the outcome of this series of conversation. The challenge was giving value to the qualities of architecture. Maybe sometimes all these discussions can erase it but if you understand that conversation give power to our traditional concept of design you change your point of view. Maybe interdisciplinarity is important for us, as we are a collective and we want to blur the idea of authorship. It happens that I have an idea, and Paul has a different one, but when we discuss a third one emerges. We don't believe in this myth, the myth of the architect as genius, that does important acts made of his own creation. For us it was easy to introduce all the collaborators, to involve the assembly as part of the process and take the most from them. We learn a lot. Because of the economy it was important to connect all of them. For example, the detail of the slab, the structure, the fire and the acoustic aspects, the choose of wood were key. I remembered that we were all

sitting together discussing about how to give inertia to the wood because we needed it because of our climate, we were discussing about acoustics and that determined the structural system, about how we could just make the system in the cheapest way possible. All the details of the building were a series of crossed discussions of all of them in the same table. It was the first time for us, but it was interesting. Economy defined a lot our decisions. The details of La Borda are not because of aesthetics, any of them. They were imposed by a particular combination of economy and how to fulfill the regulation. For us it was key and we continue working in this way. We also left the building naked. The building wasn't finished because of the cost of the construction. We were also trying to be creative in the sense that we were working with a low budget. We were always trying to reduce costs, in each stage of the project, but it came out that it was quite interesting. The idea of self-construction of the users was also one of the reasons that defines the building naked and unfurnished aesthetics. The building is continuously being built without us in a way. It's part of the process. I would say that the management of the city is part of our designing. I would say that the management of the existing and what is already here is important for us. At the moment we have this

idea of the moratorium of the construction, we don't want to build more, it's more about managing it. I have the feeling that this is key in our practice and for the people, like me, that live there. It was an opportunity. Someone could look at it as a losing of the role of the architect but no, we learn through it. You cannot know everything, but with all this knowledge behind you so we go further than who you are. There were and there are a lot of different perspectives that are enriching. In the group of La Borda there is a strong feminist group that was super important to discuss about the domestic realm from a political and a feminist point of view. So in that case we didn't have any specialist of gender issues. And I say this because sometimes there are architects specialized in that. That was an input from the group of La Borda, really important.

M. D.: What about the furniture?

M. C. G.: Furniture is totally defined by the user.

M. D.: Could we say that the result is beautiful?

M. C. G.: If you ask this to the people they would answer that they don't like the building. For example, they don't like las barandillas. In my opinion architects like the building but some of them don't.

There's a critic of architecture of Catalonia saying that it was kind of bad.

What the people appreciate of La Borda is the comfort of the flats, suddenly they have comfort and without pains. Like this idea of having a climatic condition is something amazing for them, probably because of the bad conditions of flats in Barcelona. They also appreciate the conviviality, a man said that he meets his daughter all the time in the common spaces and he enjoys it a lot. The interactions through the units, made possible by the decision of erasing traditional corridors, is really appreciated. During Covid we experimented its potential. So, people detaching a lot of good characteristics, but they don't talk about beauties, they find it inside maybe, mostly because of the wood, but they don't like the rough technologies, the metal parts, the polycarbonate. We experiment with windows, that are doors, trying to challenge this idea of privacy about the door which is a window. They were a bit shocked at the beginning discussing about this. They were kind of pre-educating themselves about all this kind of things. But definitely they don't find it beautiful, they don't see the beauty. I have the feeling that even the neighbors around La Borda don't like the building, they probably like the south façade because they feel it more human as there

are all the shadows and the balconies etc., but the north facade it's a bit hard. In a certain moment we wanted to recognize the industrial past of the land make something that it was not looking like traditional housing, that's why we did it that way. Maybe now it would be different.

M. D: This probably shows how architects think differently from people. Going to the end, before you mentioned some references that you used, the one of Denmark and the one of Uruguay. Could you talk a little about them?

M. C. G.: Basically most of them were references in terms of housing policies, about collective ownership, about the relation with the municipality. It wasn't about design. They are good models to understand how policies can protect this type of housing, against speculation.

For example, from Uruguay something important was this idea of multidisciplinary teams legalized by the government to give support to the project. The government there has a strong role. Self-construction was also really present in Uruguay, in the FUC-VAM Model. We were studying the model of development, while in terms of architecture probably we took more from other examples. Like the Sal in Portugal. Sal is basically the housing policy du-

ring the socialist revolution of the 1973-1975 in Portugal. There was a huge lack of housing at that moment that the government tried to fight, developing policies with people, developing multidisciplinary teams. Siza was involved in it in a certain moment. For us it was important the idea of the involvement of the user, the relation with the city, the relation of the architect and the participation on tools. Also because there was the idea about generating economy and about the construction being a way to generate economy in the areas. It was more about understanding the condition of architecture as part of this whole process. Again, in terms of architecture I think that we took ideas from the traditional architecture of courtyards, from popular architecture and from contemporary architects, Lacaton&Vassal is really present for example. I would say that we had different references depending on what part of the building we were facing. Participation was important when we were looking to crawl or air skin. Well, there were so many references.

M. D.: Do you believe that you have created an architectural language with La Borda? or not? Was it more like a model, a typology that can be replicated?

M. C. G.: Thanks to La Borda we established values. We often talk

about five points, about the participation and the involvement of the user and how this is also reflected in the way that we put the protocols in the building, then the idea of the community and how the space deals with it, the organization, and the transition from the public to the private in circulations and common areas, the sustainability, the affordability. These thoughts are present in all the buildings that we design. As Lacol I could say that La Borda is more a code, a sort of manifesto that we're constantly working on. But each project presents variety, different characteristics. There's an idea of reiteration but every time we have to adapt the concept to the case, because the community changes, because the plot and the surroundings change. But this idea is present.

M. D.: Do you still work on La Borda? Or do you consider it over?

M. C. G.: Of course we have a relation with the maintenance committee of La Borda. Paul for example, lives in La Borda and is in the maintenance committee. As Lacol we don't take any kind of decisions. We used to do reports with the support of the environmental consultancy, we did one after one year from the end of the project, then due year after it, then a couple of years ago but mainly to check the energy supply, to really see if thin-

gs are working and if we can give advice to improve them. Informally we still talk about new needs. In my opinion it's important in this kind of buildings to maintain an involvement, to understand which kind of relation you can have during the whole life of the building. In the beginning we did different sessions for explaining topics and decisions, especially to let them understand and control the building, also in the future. That was super important.

M. D.: Just one last big question, do you consider your work political?

M. C. G.: I think I would say yes, our work is political. From social economy and from cooperativism we really understood the cooperatives sector as a counter proposal to capitalism. We have a super anti-capitalistic approach. We make proposals to have a precise effect in terms of economy in terms of society, of people's life. This is political for us, so yes, totally. We try to deal and to challenge capitalism in many ways, and doing this we are constantly defining our mission. We wanted to build community infrastructures for life sustainability and sustainability in the broadest way possible, to support lives that worth to be to live, in a way, and architecture in the end is a tool that we have to do so, isn't it?

Our knowledge served La Borda vision, they delegated us some responsibility, we couldn't discuss every decision. I think that this idea of collective design deals more with the values and the programs needed, to the very beginning when you must decide the configuration of the building. Then is about choosing between option, and at the very end is about user appropriation of the unit. We assume that we have a knowledge that we put in value, maybe we were also looking to crawl with these collages about participation and maybe we were positioning ourselves in a place to have a major control, also because when you are working with environmental – and maybe this is a critique or a reflection that I'm doing now - when architecture becomes more technographic because of regulation, because of sustainability, because of many things, certain decisions are really defined in the technical side but all these tensions are important. You have to be transparent, to present all of them, but trust it's part of the process. La Borda has been designed collectively in that sense.

*Interview with Leópolo  
Lambert, editor-in-chief of  
Funambulist magazine*

*13th August 2024, Paris, France*

M.D.: First of all, could you tell the beginning of the Funambulist, how the blog and the podcast started, how you decided to start writing, to make a magazine, in short, the evolution until the Funambulist as a printed magazine and basically why after the university, or meanwhile, you didn't choose to become an architect, in a traditional way, was yours a reaction to the contemporary architectural narrow-minded world?

L.L.: The ancestor of the Funambulist was a very small blog that we created with two friends of mine, Martin Lebourgeois and Marcel Marquet, both of those friends were teaching assistants even if we were all still students, but they were assistants in a first year course, I couldn't because I was working full-time back then as an architect. So, we had this blog to talk to first-year students. Those two friends were already very much in touch with the first-year students, they were talking to them, you know, several times a week but I

was out of touch, so I was eager to use that platform to talk to them. I was informed that I had just to speak to students but then I realized that quite a few people within the school were reading, it not just the first year and then I realized that also some people outside of the school, from the real world, I mean, quite a lot of people were following us. That made me want to do it in English. I think that as switch for that time. That was 2007.

M.D.: Which was not so common in France

L.L.: I just came back from an exchange at Hong Kong University and my English was quite good even if even today it's not perfect. It was challenging and a position that I took. I also lived in Bombay for a little bit before that time so my environment was been built in English. Then I did a master in Brooklyn so my English got a little bit stronger and also my net had more English speaking par-

ticipations. So originally I started the blog to sensitize young architecture students to the political consequences of architecture, to speak about the political implication of architecture. I was learning by doing, it's 17 year that I'm learning from what I'm doing all the time. I opened my personal blog in 2010, that was basically made of the former one, and I remember that at some point I was deliberately going to be what I called "boring", I mean, I was always writing all those articles that were roughly 800 words each time, that's really short actually. The format of a blog, that is a kind of a very short web magazine, was popular at that time and they were started to decline in a way, so, having a blog wasn't something new. I remember I was very angry at Dezeen and Archdaily, and so on, that were booming at that moment. And I mean, actually that wasn't being mad at them, but being mad that people would have this kind of attention spam in architecture. Like they could only spend like 10 seconds on something. Those sites had a lot of images. It had to be images, images, images. So I remember I thought like "okay, I'm going to talk to people who are truly interested in engaging with that topic, not trying to make it a little bit more, you know, like soundbites or something like that". And around that time, I was finishing my master's and starting to

work in an architecture office, a down-to-earth architecture office, because I wanted to do that kind of work, I wanted to learn to do construction management and construction drawings. That was interesting for me because I never had that. I mean, you know, I think in Italy it's a bit similar, like the curriculum in school is not very hands-on. It's not like in some school in Switzerland or other places. So, I needed to learn the practical part of architecture, the true world's architecture. And then after two years working there, I got fired. You know, New York, fantastic New York. But then I managed to secure my visa and thanks to people who helped me, and I managed to get myself a new job, which I absolutely love, which was assisting someone who was my mentor back then, Madeleine Gaines, but only part-time. And then that gives me more time to work even a little bit more. But by that time, I had written like already hundreds of articles. Like I was very prolific in a sort of like, usually I make that joke saying like, only a white man can think that he can write something like that, that amount of articles, and have people interested and have no shame and never think like, oh, is that really interesting? Or am I really the person who should be writing that? Like, I don't know. Those questions were really not part of my thought, it's a bit ri-

diculous. And at the same time, it was a luck, I suppose. It was a privilege. And therefore it put me always in the idea of writing more, researching more, reflecting more. And more and more having like a little bit of an audience. And this audience became really extended outside of architecture. We were in 2013 at that moment. And the podcast was a little bit trying to, even though it was not just academic people I interviewed, it was trying to take some knowledge that was produced within the university and to spread it outside also, because I was living in New York back then, and you know, university costs so much money there. So the idea was to democratize a little bit this knowledge. And then it was also a way for me to really start grappling in a much more serious way with what I call the politics of bodies. Like, you know, the final list is the politics of space and bodies. And so the politics of bodies so far was very abstract and theoretical and philosophical to me, but not yet quite as political as it should be. And so really engaging with the racial question, really engaging with the gender question, really engaging with the queer question, and I learned so much from the people I was interviewing. And back then there was like two interviews per week. So it was also pretty prolific. And I left New York and I really wanted to be full-time on my own work at that

moment. And I did consider creating an architecture office. I really thought about it. I really try to.

M.D.: I couldn't have image that

L.L.: I mean, it's funny, you know, when I was at school, many of my friends who were people that I always thought were smarter than me, were always imagining not doing architecture, maybe doing film, maybe doing set design, or, I don't know, other stuff. But at the end many of them ended up being like very much down to earth architect, being architects in the traditional way, whereas I was very interested in design and the creativity, and I ended up being the one writing and editing but yeah, I was trying to create my own office.

M. D.: in New York?

L.L.: No, in Paris. When I came back I thought of a few things, I thought it could be interesting to have an architectural practice that could be an expert in playgrounds, for example, or this kind of things. Ok, playgrounds do not seem like the most political program but I think they are actually quite political in many ways. So I would have perhaps enjoyed that but I honestly it was not very serious, I mean, I don't think it would have worked. I think I would have be obliged to take like commissions that I really didn't want to do and

so on. Then I thought to build something from what already exists. And back then, in 2014, it was already seven years that I had been writing. An audience already existed, there was this community of potential writer and so that's how the magazine is born, as a way to go further in that work and as a way to also to create a sustainable economy, for first the magazine keep existing and then to make it sustainable for me and then later for the other people of the team. I really thought of a business model, I thought it needed to be anchored in the idea of subscription. Having people who subscribe and who support the magazine started to be important for me. That's when my main job became to be an editor. It's easier being an editor and to be a writer on the side than to be a designer on the side. I feel it's a bit hard to design perhaps.

M.D.: Did you feel that it was easier to write?

L.L.: It felt like editing and writing came more easily together and so that's how I ended up being also a writer. I'm continuing my writing on the side so to speak.

M.D.: was that like a natural path? Did you face a moment when you had to decide what to do?

L.L.: When I had to start being fully on my own, so that that one moment I've just described, the

whole process was pretty organic. It sort of made sense. I remember even a few years before that someone telling me that I was going to end up being a researcher much more than an architect, and I replied that no, I didn't think so, that I'll be an architect.

M.D.: As you mentioned this sort of contradiction between being an architect and being a researcher, that are actually two different jobs, I would say that, in comparison to other architecture magazines, the *Funambulist* doesn't have a lot of drawings, that are one of the most important tool of architecture.

L.L.: There're quite a few maps I would say.

M.D.: There are maps that could appeared much more related to geography.

L.L.: I don't make a difference. For me an architectural plan is a map and a map is an architectural plan. We can say that an architectural plan is a geographical survey of something, maybe.

M.D.: Was having less drawings a choice that you made? Maybe because architects and people in general are not used to read about architecture.

L.L.: Well, I said I was an editor, but I was also a writer. I think

another way to say it, which is probably a more interesting way, is that for many years I've been trying and I'm still trying today, to keep a certain degree in my articles. I tried to bring politics to architecture, but when I started the magazine, I tried to bring architecture to politics. I tried to be engaged in circles of people who are also engaged in politics, not just architects. It's more about gathering around a table, let's call it table, with your own architectural expertise and with your way of approaching the world that is through space, as architects' relationship to the world is.

M.D.: And did you have the feeling that that was something new, something uncommon?

L.L.: Weirdly enough, yes. The first time I realized that people were starting to become friends at that moment, and that I started to constantly talk with legal theorists. We really were writing a lot of political philosophy and political theory on the law. They were actually interested in hearing me talking about, I guess, a spatial dimension of colonialism in Palestine, for example, and in general about politics through architecture. I was mind blown. I was mind blown that people who seemed so interesting in what they were doing could have any interest in what I had to say as an architect.

So that was a great feeling. I think this is perhaps something that someone, the generation above me, like Eyal Weizmann has been managing to do as well.

But yeah, I think there weren't a lot of people, surely geographers more than architects, being comfortable discussing about politics. Not many architects felt comfortable coming out of their bubble, architectural bubble, disciplinary bubble. Whereas today, it's more the case, which is great.

M.D.: Venice University used to have theory courses, a lot of theory courses during the 60s, 70s, that disappeared.

L.L.: Because of the ejection of the left in the 80s and because of the Brigade Rosse, probably.

M.D.: Probably, but nowadays the situation is changing. Worldwide there's a renovated interest in political theory. Could you describe how you got closer to politics? How the political theme entered your practice? Was that something about your personal life? Or something that you studied at the university in Paris? Or was it about the US?

L.L.: So I think it has to do with a million things, mostly people that I encountered. People I encountered at moments where I had questions and they had perhaps not as many answers, but perhaps even

better ways of formulating those questions. That's always great, you know, when you have a question and someone tells you, well, that's an interesting question, but how about you ask it this way? And you're like, oh, wow. But usually when I have to reflect a little bit on my path, and I understand that it is good to have moments you're able to pinpoint, to realize that that moment was important for me because I understood something there. So as a student, I would say there was two moments that were significant for my path. One was in 2005. I was at the second year of university, I had been in Paris for one and a half year, coming from a small town. In the 2005 there was the pretty big uprising in the banlieue. People who were even a little bit younger than me back then were revolting every night and being shot by the police, hit with tear gas and all these kind of things. And so for me, that was a marking moment that had to do with architecture, with the city, of course, because it's a banlieue and, you know, I met the history of colonialism and structural racism and all that. So that was an important moment. And then two and a half years later, I visited Palestine. My first visit to Palestine was clearly a realization, an epiphany, I realized how, first of all, the extent of colonialism in Palestine, and second of all, how much architecture was used for that colonialism too.

M.D.: Did you go there for a personal journey?

L.L.: Yeah, the first time was a curiosity. Palestine was in my imaginary because I was a child during the Austria Accords. I was a young adult during the second intifada. I was raised as a Christian. It was all part of my personal map. Going there was a little bit more by curiosities than anything else the first time. And then every single time I came back I was more engaged with the question and more and more in solidarity with Palestinian people and more and more engaged with that question about how architecture is being used as a weapon there.

M.D.: The wide geography of the articles shows a wide network of people. Could you explain to me your geographical decisions and how you created that network?

L.L.: So, first of all, I would call it a community, even more than a network. It is exactly the way you identify it immediately. Many friendships were born from this work together. What I call political friendship. We sort of think together, we think with each other, we learn from each other. We care for each other. You know, you could also, decide to work with people who keep things extremely professional or even people who can be a little bit asshole or

whatever. For me, it's always very important to have a very good feeling with the people I work with. So that led very often to some friendships. But the geographical range, I think I would explain differently. I come from a very bourgeois background myself, I had the chance to travel quite a bit. As a teenager, perhaps, quote unquote, I travelled just in Europe, but still I had a sort of right to travel, the possibility to travel, which of course so many people don't, because they simply don't have the means to travel. That led me doing an exchange in Hong Kong, going to live in Bombay for a little bit, going to New York. And, being every month or every two months, able to go somewhere, which I'm very grateful for. I mean, for the last eight, nine years, thanks to lectures and stuff like that I've been invited to go places. That's also a great, privilege and luck. Certainly, some conversation on the ground leads also to more solidarity and more curiosity and more knowledge and more, well, questioning. And so that's how it ended up in the magazine at some point as well.

Of course, at the same time, there's quite a few places that are regularly discussed in the magazine, where I've never been as a person, because some friends have managed to make me travel there without me going there. That's what I call imaginaries usually, and it means

being able to access a particular people's imaginary, to create solidarity out of it, which is something you see all the time. I mean, many people have never been to Palestine and that does not prevent them from being in solidarity, for example. It's either encounters with places and then people in those places, or even encounter with some people who made me go there without actually moving there, which led to this variety of geographies. This is also because the magazine from the beginning has been deliberately internationalist. The Funambulist takes seriously internationalism. It's easy to say that you want to be international and then maintain a Europe central vision and talk about US and Australia. Internationalism is talking about Palestine, talk about Kurdistan, talk about Zapatistas.

If we're going to call ourselves internationalists, it should be about, I don't know, the anti-colonial struggles in Pacific Islands, or it should be about the various dimensions of political struggles in all over the Indian subcontinent or what does pan-Africanism means on the continent in the details, all those kind of things.

M.D.: There are few articles about Italy.

L.L.: I tried to count every article. There are articles about Italy and some adjacent articles about

Lybia and Italian colonialism. I have to admit that I have a little bit of a weird rating of places we've been talking about. I attribute one point per page. I also have a factor of multiplication. Like the more recent the more points it gets in order to evaluate better how much we write about one country. It's a good compass for me too. There are some places where I would feel a little bit embarrassed actually, because really we haven't engaged with them properly.

At this time Italy is at position 51 out of 200. In Europe classification at first place there is France, Britain for second, then Ireland, Germany, Greece, Spain, Poland, Portugal, Belgium, and then Italy. It's not very strongly represented, it's true.

M.D.: So you have a system to classify...

L.L.: It sounds very mechanical, but it's not. I can think that we haven't talked enough about Italy, so I try to keep that in the corner of the mind somewhere and then try to do a little bit better. Sometimes that system shows that we haven't talked at all about Cambodia, for example, so we try to fix that.

M.D.: This attention to geography is visible in the various index.

L.L.: But it's important to say that we don't want to check all the

boxes. Okay. We just think that if we're serious about our internationalism, then we should also understand that what is happening in the middle of Siberia, for example, has a lot to say about what's happening in Papua New Guinea or in South America in many ways. I don't mean that they are the same issue, but there are bridges that can be built between those different places.

M.D.: How authors are connected to places? For example, if you'd like to write about Siberia, how does it work? Do authors propose themselves? Do you look for authors?

L.L.: A lot of time it's me looking for someone that can teach me something about a place, someone who is involved, someone who can address the struggles. Siberia is a good example. We were supposed to have an article about it, but it failed. But I had an indigenous person from Western Siberia whose parents and who herself, until she had to flee were quite involved in the fight against carbon mines there. That author knows the indigenous struggles, the felling of Siberia against Russian colonization.

M.D.: Is important for you that the author comes from the same country that he's writing about?

L.L.: The answer to this question is yes. Is it important? Yes. Is it necessary? Is it a rule? No. Is it something that is absolutely inflexible? No. I've write about many places myself that are not my own.

M.D.: How do you choose the issue's themes? How that decision reflects a position towards architecture?

L.L.: So towards architecture, I would say it reflects nothing, but on purpose. The magazine is - it's going to sound weird - almost doing a favor to architects by not speaking to them.

It comes from my sensitivity as someone who's been trained as an architect, so I know that they can get it if they work hard enough, if they are patient enough, if they're engaged with it enough. Then they will get it but it's almost a favor to not to pre-chew the food that we're giving them.

The themes come from a sort of urgency to say something. But let me explain, of course the themes are decided six, seven, eight months in advance, so it's not urgent as it needs to come now. To be completely transparent sometimes themes are even really open, so there's not a schedule about issues. For example, the issue on forests didn't come from an environmental emergency, of course there's this problem, but I didn't have a very strong argument. I just felt

that there was a good amount of people we could have ask to write something great about their work on forest politics. On the other side sometimes, there are issues that seem important to articulate in that precise moment. For example, the issue "Fifty shades of whiteness" came from my frustration at seeing people within the entire racist movement to treat differently Ukrainian refugees, they were welcomed in a much, much, much better way than people coming from Afghanistan or Syria or Eastern Africa. It's almost ridiculous to say it, it is incredible. But I was a little bit shocked at how people within the anti-racist movement felt that Ukrainians were white without any sort of nuance, when actually in Western Europe we know very well that Ukrainian immigrants are not considered exactly white. They are, of course, not considered as black, far from it, but it's not quite as easy as that. And perhaps they are white at the moment because there is a sympathy with the situation that they have to deal with. But that issue was a way to interrogate whiteness in a new way. Not just seeing 100% white or black... but in a slightly more complicated way. What does that mean for Eastern Europeans? What does that mean for Caucasians? In the US, they use the word Caucasian to talk about white people, which is ridiculous because Caucasians are not even Europe-

ans, they're West Asians. That issue was a way to say, ok, you know what? I feel this is a conversation we need to have right now, so I'm going to make an issue. I'm going to talk about it.

M.D.: Who do you write for? by whom is your audience made up?

L.L.: I think less of who they are in terms of what their job is, their expertise and everything, and more of what is the common base we have. I really believe in that. Some publication might have their audience. Some people completely identify with some publication for examples, and then some other people might read a publication just by curiosity. Of course, the audience is very politically engaged, there is definitely no desire, nor any attempt to talk to people who need to be convinced of things, like that colonialism is bad. In the context of France, some people think that race is a social construct and it's not very interesting, and we should talk more about class struggle, for example, without involving race in the discourse. But I would still appreciate those people reading the magazine if they're genuine enough to.

M.D.: But do you know your audience? Do you have a scheme also for that?

L.L.: No, it's impossible. I think it

would be a bit dangerous to have too precise information about the audience. But I think there are some people who come from the architecture world. And when I say architecture, I mean urban design, design, whatever. There are people who come from university, many, many people who come from university, whether they're faculty, PhD students or students. And then there are a whole bunch of people who do not come from either of those two worlds and were just engaged politically or interested intellectually to those questions.

M.D.: How do you manage the relationship between the magazine, the podcast, and the blog?

L.L.: I mean, there's not so much thing going on the blog anymore. We do the podcast when we have time, but it's still a format I really enjoy. And especially we have two podcasts in French that I'm really enjoying. The magazine is the main thing. It's both the main thing as in the effort we are putting in it and also, it's the thing that brings the incomes for the entire project to be able to continue. So, it has completely the highest priority over everything else.

M.D.: What's the purpose of the magazine? To reach a wider public/community, to spread important topics?

L.L.: There are at least two purposes, plus maybe a third one. One is to bring the idea of space and the built environment in the political conversation. Two is to really insist on the question of internationalist solidarity between all those struggles. And three would be, since we have an audience that is us, so to speak, a big us at the scale of the world, how can we create, and that goes back to internationalist solidarity a bit, but how can we multiply the inspiration of the way we are thinking politically together, not taking it all from, for example, the US, but taking it from many, many different places. That would be the third purpose, I suppose. I think it's very important to know why you're doing what you're doing when you're engaged in a project like that, otherwise you just get lost.

M.D.: Yes, I'm thinking now about cruel design in general. That is something that has become important even if, like in Italy, four years ago, nobody was talking about it and now it's something common.

L.L.: Is that the exact expression? Cruel design. Say it in Italian.

M.M.: In Italian is "l'architettura ostile".

L.L.: Okay, similar.

M.M.: I remember when I read for the first time this thing, "l'architettura ostile", in an article, by Not, that is a blog and now also a publisher. I remember that I was surprised, and that was like discovering hot water, you know, something completely new, something that nobody told me within the university. And that's why I decided to do my master thesis and to go on with that path.

L.L.: But since you're talking about this, then that would interrogate no longer the purpose of the magazine, but my own purpose, when I write for architects, my own writing or my own lectures or stuff like that. This is still something I do a lot. Like I talk to architects as architect. The magazine is not that but my personal work it is. When I do speak to architects, specifically what I try to do is to make them realize really just one idea, which involves a whole range of other ideas. But the one argument is that architecture is violence. Always. And so because it organizes bodies in space. Our own way of organizing bodies in space, even if it's good for people, it's still like a pretty violent thing to do. And maybe there's a second idea, sorry, that I want to communicate. Because architecture is violent, then it works so much better for conservative agendas than liberatory agendas, let's say. And so architects, if they don't fully en-

gage with that question, they will always be complicit with oppressive regimes.

M.D.: Yeah, it's a matter maybe of being aware.

L.L.: Yeah, but it's more than awareness. I always use the same example. If you draw a fucking line between two settler colonies. One is called the United States of Mexico. The other is called the United States of America. And you transform that line into a wall. That's super easy. Conceptually speaking, it's so easy. Like you get a bad grade at school for doing that. It's too simple. And yet you can become president of the US with this idea. So it's very, very simple to imagine how architecture can be oppressive. Then if we say like that we need an equally simple idea about how architecture can serve the left, for example. It seems more complicated. Like, if you plan a community space, where the community has to use its space, but you also have to protect it from potential fascists. Well, that's much more complicated than just like build a wall. Of course.

M.D.: Someone could say that every essential action of humans could be seen as violence. Eating is violence for example, but we have to do that in order to live. Maybe architecture could be read the same. Because we have to build architecture to protect ourselves.

L.L.: But eating is extremely violent. There is a violence in eating, for sure if you're eating animals.

M.D.: And do you think that we should stop eating animals to cancel the violence of eating?

L.L.: I mean, I eat animals myself. So I live with that violence. But that would be so stupid of me to say that's not really violence. Because of course we're killing animals to eat them. If that's not violence, I don't know what violence is, honestly.

M.D.: Well, violence, maybe It's a strong word.

L.L.: The problem is, especially in the West, that people think violence equals bad, necessarily. If we go back to France during the nazi occupation, people were fighting them. people were putting dynamites and were blowing up trains and stuff. We are glorifying resistance to the Nazi occupation but now for every other person who does that, you call it terrorism. But when it's against the Nazis in France, then it's called resistance. So, we have forgotten that violence is negative insofar that it is a force that destroys much more than it builds. But, you know, we live in a world where the relationships of powers are such that we do need some form of violence to be able to communicate our idea. Again,

if you're going to create a community center, even for homeless people or for a queer community or something, you want it to be protective against potential fascists or whoever might burn the building at the end of the day. So you need walls, indeed, to protect yourselves. That's true. But that is a violence itself. Like, right now, if the two of us are in this room, able to have a calm conversation without being bothered by, like, a whole bunch of people around us, it's because there are walls that formalize private properties that exclude the entire world from this space. And it is a violence. The question whether it's good or bad, it comes after. At first, we must acknowledge it is a violence of excluding people.

M.D.: I have the same problem with the title of my thesis because usually I use the word protest architecture. But protest, every time, is understood as a destructive way of doing. Protest, in architects' mind, seems something that can't build. And that is not my opinion. But every time it's a struggle to make architects understand this. For example, when I ask if architecture can protest, a lot of architects tell me that, no, architecture can't protest. That maybe architects themselves can protest with architecture, that maybe architecture's culture can protest, maybe with magazines, maybe

with other forms of architecture like exhibition and so on. But that architecture, purely, can't protest.

L.L.: What's a barricade then for them? What's a university occupation? like the ones in the 70s in Italy? Like, you know, there is an architecture of protest, for sure.

M.D.: Maybe they were talking about contemporary architecture.

L.L.: Oh, barricades still exist.

M.D.: Politics in architecture is a theme that is back in fashion, in a way. That architects use in various way, not just building materials projects. There are so many ways of doing political architecture. We could notice that nowadays there are a lot of practices that face some easier way of designing, like for example, public ephemeral projects. Do you think that politics sometime could become just a pretext – not so believed – to catch contemporary attention? To be visible?

What do you think about the relationship between architects and exhibitions or institutions or universities? Also economically, just because there a lot of collectives that do some projects to pay the bills and be free to do anything else.

L.L.: You have to think what is your end goal, what is your pur-

pose. You know, to go back to your question, no one will say I'm doing this to become famous, of course, but they want to get visibility, to have people say good things about and in that case it's also important to have a good relationship with the institutions. Then, you will probably take the easy way when it's offered to you and you will probably not take the way where people are starting to threaten you and all that. Whereas if your purpose is actually to truly serve the left more than anything else or to truly engage with the colonial order in which many of our societies still live or this kind of thing, then this is what will drive all your decision. And then when you have to negotiate with, as you said, the institutions, museums, universities, whatever else, then you might be able to compromise to indeed get money, for example, to be able to build something or to build a building, but you always need to be in a position where what you win is more than what you lose, in this kind of negotiation. So I have empathy for people who really try to do this but I also feel a lot of these practices because I don't mind the fact that they're ephemeral and all that because I think there's a beauty in ephemerality and I think there's a strength in ephemerality, but I do see how, in France at least, but even in Europe it's easy to see, there are many people who talk about, you know, architecture for

the community, architecture for the people and all that. But when you look a little bit closer, then you realize that the people talking are middle class white people who like to do a little bit of a festival. I mean, I also don't mind when people really are very honest with what they're doing.

And if indeed what they're doing is to perhaps to go in the countryside, somewhere in Europe and therefore, of course they won't be engaging with questions of structural racism or coloniality or stuff like that, because most of the people in the countryside, most of the community in the countryside, they'll be dealing with white farmers and people like that. But I'm much more engaged on those questions of coloniality and structural racism, I have zero patience for white people who say they're doing this kind of work and actually they're not doing anything, honestly, it's just a pretense. But it doesn't matter. Honestly, this sounds like more of a negative way.

I think you led me a little bit in your question to be a little bit negative, but I will say on the other hand that I feel there's a new generation of people in School of Architecture or right outside of School of Architecture who are doing amazing work. I've been seeing it. I started studying architecture 20 years ago, so I was really able to witness the change, and the change is magnificent in

many ways. It's not the institution, of course, it's not universities that are so much more progressive now or whatever, but there's so many more people who are engaged with really important question in their work in architecture now.

M.M.: Do you work as a professor?

L.L.: A little bit. I taught three times in the past six years.

M.M.: And have you ever had the idea of being more involved in university?

L.L.: No, not really. We'll see, but I take what I'm being given when I feel it's going to be interesting. But in general, I'm quite often in universities. I give lectures. I have students writing to me and sharing their project with me. We try to publish some of them as well. And so, I feel I'm attuned to what's going on in, at least in, let's say, in a little world that include US, UK, Western European and South African schools and Australian schools maybe. A little bit Japan as well.

M.D.: And always talking about institutions, what's the role of institutions for the magazine?

L.L.: None whatsoever. The CCA has been advertising for us. It sounds like a very dry profes-

sional relationship, but they've been doing it since issue 10, and now we're up to 53. So, to me, I really see it as a strong support. That is very much a win-win kind of relationship. I mean, they have their advertising in every single issue, but it's, I do appreciate how they always have stuck with us. And I've known the CCA for many years now, so I've seen also the way it's been evolving in their program and the questions they're asking. So, I feel maybe the Funambulist might have influenced them a little bit, which is great as well. So it's true, that's a good example of a sort of not so direct, relationship with an institution, but something that is mutually beneficial. There's only one organization to which we've been applying for grants and getting them, which is a Graham Foundation in Chicago. We're also very grateful for the support they've been bringing. But, I think in the past several years we have only asked them for specific project. The magazine itself is completely independent, money wise, from those institutions. Then we are very appreciative of universities that subscribe to the magazine, of course. I'm very appreciative of universities that invite me to give talks and then pay me for it.

M.D.: Last question. You wrote that architecture is the discipline that organizes bodies in space and

that is easier to talk about how architecture materializes various forms of political violence, instead of articulating a tactical positive discourse about political architectures. Could you comment a little bit more that statement? Do you think that architecture can protest, can have positive consequences? Can architects do good architecture?

L.L.: Yes, yes, yes. To the three questions. I was waiting to see exactly how you formulate the questions. Because sometimes people ask me more like, do you think architecture can be nonviolent? No. Do you think architecture can be liberatory or emancipatory? No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I think there's a space you enter and you're like "oh, I'm free". But there's a space where you enter and you think "oh, I'm in prison". It's called prison. I don't believe in those, but I do believe architecture can be protest. Again, a barricade is the most obvious example. And I do believe that architecture can be involuntarily serving a liberatory agenda, which is not the same thing to say that architecture itself is liberatory. The example I always give is Algiers Casbah. The old city, very dense and on a hill, helped the Algerian liberation fighter against the French colonial army to fight a fight that they were going to lose. If you put them in a prairie, they would lose after five

minutes. You would have like a massive army against few people with bad weapons. But if you put them in a city that they know by heart they resist better. The streets there are sort of seniors that French don't really understand. French don't know where to go. The architecture of the city itself provides conditions that can help liberatory agenda. But it's not the architecture itself that does the liberation. It just provides the conditions in which the liberation struggle itself can be fought with a better chance to win than if you're in the field. I refer to the 18th century battles when you have two symmetrical army and they meet in a field and then they shoot each other. And whoever has the least people dying, then wins. The liberation struggles don't work like that. Like there's just a few bunch of people fighting a massive army usually. And so, you somehow need to have your direct environment to work for you. Sometimes it's mountains, sometimes it's a city, sometimes it's other things, but in that case, architects have nothing to do with it.

Architects can do good but sometimes I think you can do good by not doing too much. If you're going to, again, create a community center that is under attack, that the city wants to get rid of, or something like that, well then you know the very first thing is

perhaps to just have a space, also a warehouse is already better than nothing. So sometimes architects think that there's the need of a such a level of sophistication in architecture for it to be good.

Then, what does that mean when the bathroom of a building has incorporated trans and queer people? What does that mean for some US universities I visited to have sanitary pads or tampons even in what is assumed to be the male bathroom? Those are nothing to do with architecture, with the architects at least. It just has to do with the way people appropriate a building and all that. I feel architects can do good, but only if they accept to have a relatively humble contribution to a place that will be good for the people that will be in it.

It's also a matter of what kind of program you accept to design. Because if you're going to design like a brand new developer housing building in a neighborhood that is under gentrifying attack all the time, you can do the best possible architecture in the world, you will be published in the Croquis or whatever, but it will be shit because you would have been complicit in expelling people from their own neighborhood. So similarly, if you say yes to a program where you have very little to decide and you just have to provide architectural skills in making a space that is, you know, quite nice and good, but the

program itself is already very well made for the people that's trying to serve, then, you know, you don't have that much to do and you can be pretty humble about it.

M.D.: And can we consider the Funambulist a way to protest?

L.L.: So until issue number 20, I think the magazine was very dedicated to describe how colonial violence or racist violence or misogynistic or heteronormative violence work. And in doing so, perhaps, it was a sort of protest, through a description. But then I realized that you can do that all your life. You can keep describing how violence work. You can describe how fucked up things are all the time. And so, after issue 20, I decided I wanted to more promote the political struggles and the way people organize and what people do for each other and how people take over their own city or their own way of life and all that. It is a form of protest, but it's true that it might be the step beyond protest, which is the step of organizing. I don't know if the magazine does it, but the magazine channels, some of those, do it around the world.

*Interview with Nasrin  
Mohiti Asli, member of  
Orizzontale.*

*19th March 2024, Rome, Italy*

M. D.: In my research, I am looking for architects who “protest” through their works and actions...

N. M. A.: Interesting, also because protest has taken on different forms. It can be resistance, for example, or resilience, which is this new formula whereby you stand your ground while reacting in a softer way. I would say that the culture of protest and resistance has changed. Resisting seems almost like a violent act nowadays.

M. D.: Sometimes I think about removing the word “protest” from the title because it is very strong and often leads one to think of something unproductive, even destructive.

N. M. A.: When in reality there are forms of protest that are a new form of care, of taking charge of a place to make it grow in a certain sense. It’s a bit paradoxical, but the word resilience can be read as a cleansing of the word resistance because the word resistance still

has something behind it, as you rightly said, that is not very constructive. Now it seems that we always have to be very composed, very quiet, because there are forms of political action that are, let’s say, accepted, or more accepted than others, despite the positive outcomes that protests have brought about in even recent history.

M. D.: In fact, my research also stems from the fact that in recent years there has been a sort of rediscovery of protest movements which, after the long 1968 in Italy, but also in the Western world in general, had suffered a setback.

N. M. A.: We went from the Red Brigades to pizza.

M. D.: Perhaps the 1970s were excessively violent and had the opposite effect, that’s one theory, but the fact remains that there has been a rediscovery of protest movements and demonstrations in recent years.

N. M. A.: I would even say more constructive movements...

M. D.: Yes, and even protest issues have been internalized by the capitalist world. I'm thinking now of pinkwashing or greenwashing.

N. M. A.: A well-known writer here said something very interesting over coffee, namely that differentiating between people, and therefore embracing diversity, is democratic. In capitalism, the more you categorize, the more identifiable groups you have, and therefore the more you can diversify the products on the market. It's interesting to think about this in relation to your statement. Then, of course, forms of architectural thought are always cultural products of their time. We started in 2010 as a more assembly-like group within the university, and then we became a smaller collective, but let's say of people who were all architects. At first, the group was a bit larger, there was also an engineer, and there weren't only people who were part of the Valle Giulia University of Architecture, but then it became more focused on a way of expressing ourselves, of being able to act a little on the dynamics we had been taught within the academy and on how to gain experience in the real world, to bring another way of seeing the city, another architectural language that was somewhat inspired by

the movements in Europe at the time. To return to the point that architecture is a fairly complex field that combines art and science, but is closely linked to how society, the economy, finance, and politics are structured. Cities and large-scale plans are certainly the result of political choices, but even the smallest forms of architecture interact with the ways of life of society at that moment. Architecture usually seeks to chart the future or propose an alternative to the current social, cultural, and economic movement. We are a form that gives space and configuration to certain issues that are being pursued in a given historical period.

M. D.: What has this relationship with the university meant for you? Both in terms of sharing certain approaches or design themes. I wonder, for example, if your interest in public space developed first within the university, perhaps because it was a hot topic at the time, or if there is a correspondence, or perhaps even an antagonism, between your interests and the university.

N. M. A.: Academic circles teach a vision of what the period is, a methodology that has also been developed over the years, so let's say that at university level, what we were taught from the very first year was this great relationship with the project, a great interest

and a great education in criticism, urban planning, and analysis. We also had some important experiences in this regard. For example, in the first year, there was a project called “urban design” in which the aim was to propose a transformation in Rome, analyzing the reasons for it. Specifically, I had seen a neighborhood that had sprung up around IKEA, like a neighborhood around a shopping center, born out of the drive to regenerate the area, when in reality it had not actually led to a great result. However, there were lessons that led us to look at things in a different way. For example, we read Lynch’s ‘The Image of the City’ and studied Rome extensively, including from the perspective of the ancient city and the historic city. Rome was very important, also for the architects who were working on the city and who gave lectures or were involved in activities, such as Stalker and Metropoliz. At university, we did projects such as museums, houses, and theaters. These were projects set within the context, which was considered important and which dealt with the hybrid space that was public space, but the relationship with the existing was not dealt with much; rather, we studied much more architectural history. However, it was a period when there were star architects, who were big names for whom the architectural firm was generally a

medium-sized firm where you mainly worked on computers, a firm that mainly worked on competitions for large projects, such as Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry. During the period when we were studying in Rome, we saw the Maxxi construction site grow. We saw how an architect’s work can also, in a certain sense, sometimes be mutilated. This was the case with the Maxxi, because it was not built according to the initial intention, almost fortunately, because this created the space for the square, otherwise there would have been another building. There was Renzo Piano’s auditorium, there was Meyer who designed the Ara Pacis, so in a certain sense there was this relationship with the contemporary that was viewed with interest because, above all, it was interesting to see how a construction site was developed, but also to observe how the city was, in a certain sense, completely invested in an architectural work and how some things were not actually analyzed within the project. Close to the thesis, when we had already started doing Orizzontale and so there was more awareness of wanting to carry out other types of projects, so we went back to looking at architecture and the role of the architect not just as ‘I build a private house’ or ‘I build a museum,’ which is still of public interest, but we are always talking about large funding. Architecture is closely linked

to the real estate sector, real estate values, and these financial and political dynamics. In short, close to the thesis, we tried to look at what was, let's say, an unproductive space, in quotation marks, which was public space, which is the space of the city that is a shared space that is not clear whose it is, or hybrid spaces, which were perhaps neither public nor private, but simply empty spaces.

It was also a period when, during university, we all frequented social centers to a greater or lesser extent. This played a role because, in any case, being in a city with a strong political movement, for better or worse, being in a city where there are many places that have been reclaimed from the bottom up by hybrid neighborhood movements and political movements, for example, there is the strong Prenestino, which in a certain sense is also an institution where self-construction took place, where a well-known comic book festival is held, and which was born out of those movements of the 1970s in which an entire neighborhood decided to reclaim a property, obviously with all the controversies that can arise when a group that does not have a clear protocol enters a space and decides to say, 'OK, this is a fort, it has been closed for twenty years, now we want to enter it, live in it,

reopen it'. There are many examples of this in Rome, and there was also a lot of inspiration in looking at what were then radical movements and also at what were movements that were just being structured and cemented, such as Raumlabor in Germany, Exist in France, Bellastock, and many other collectives, including Baukuh in Italy—although it was a little different—which were trying to give a different perspective on how architecture was viewed at that time. On top of that, it was a period of crisis, because less and less was being built and the economic boom was over. Gianpie-ro Venturini in *New Generations* always makes an association with the economic crisis, which may indeed be true, but it is also probably a cyclical necessity to want to review the status of the profession, in this case architecture, or at least a specific cultural sphere, and try to see that perhaps it is not in line with the needs of the moment and try to give it a more contemporary look.

M. D.: Thank you for this contextualization between university and public space...

N. M. A.: It also arose as an individual necessity; we didn't see ourselves doing the classic key. The status of the profession involved a standardized path that didn't excite us, namely: studying in depth,

graduating, sending out countless resumes, perhaps even going abroad, working for free, paying our dues, and somehow getting trapped in it.

M. D.: In my opinion, this path you're talking about is now being questioned more. The emergence of collectives has in some ways shown possible alternatives, and Orizzontale has shown one possible alternative. In terms of the establishment of your collective, how would you define your connection to Rome? Or to the neighborhood where you eventually set up your studio or workshop?

N. M. A.: We all come from Sapienza University, but we are not all from Rome. Clearly, things change over time. Now, not all of us live in Rome, and the form of collaboration is changing in a certain sense, even internally. Rome is such a big city, so full of empty spaces.

Our relationship with this neighborhood is linked to one of the two founders who lived in this area. This is one of the few neighborhoods in Rome that can be classified as working class in a certain sense. It is no longer so, but it was a neighborhood that, compared to other cities, could be defined as a working-class neighborhood. There was a lot of immigration from southern Italy here, there were both railway workers'

cottages and a section with shacks for less well-off people, so it was a mixture of spontaneous and more formal architecture. The former Snia factory was located here, behind us. Let's say that there was a private builder who had committed a series of urban planning irregularities. Part of the Snia factory was occupied, and so there is an occupied social center. There is another part that is still in private hands, and then there is another part where the lake emerged, where the former Snia, together with a group of Pigneto residents, the neighborhood committee, and a large petition, managed to expropriate the area and make it public. When we moved in, it wasn't a public area, but there was the lake. A thesis had been written on this area, highlighting how, despite being lacking in public space, it is very lively in terms of neighborhood life, because it has the characteristics of a working-class neighborhood.

M. D.: Was this characteristic of the neighborhood important to you?

N. M. A.: Yes, the fact that there were also special spaces, the fact that it was an area with many people, many young people who worked in the arts and culture sector who lived in this area, so it was interesting for us to start some projects, some actions, here. Espe-

cially because one of the founders, Juan, had analyzed some areas of this neighborhood with the aim of freeing them from road traffic.

Settling here was not a conscious decision, it was natural. There were specific spaces, there had already been initiatives, and there was a positive response. The east is a fairly lively neighborhood, from Centocelle to Quarticciolo to this area here, and it is an active neighborhood in terms of neighborhood movements. At that time, the spaces were interesting, and you could already see many people on bikes. There was a movement that promoted meetings where people would show up on bikes and go around blocking the city. This was born here, wondering why Rome couldn't be a bike-friendly city.

M. D.: Let's say that at the beginning you started doing these ephemeral projects, as you call them. You also stated that at the beginning, ephemerality was a material constraint for you, because you had no budget, but that it has become a real interpretative tool. Could you comment on this transition?

N. M. A.: The first necessity was to do with little, with little in terms of material expenditure, because when you start out you don't have a budget, you only have your effort or your time, and you also have little in terms of expertise,

because none of us actually had much experience in construction in 2010/2011.

In Rome, and also in other cities, you can find a lot of material lying around on the streets or in other places. Sometimes

we went to the recycling center, for example. We thus began to understand the city's production processes or, in any case, how waste is managed. The flow of waste and then within the urban environment is a very complex system; therefore, some projects were designed to temporarily transform a specific space in order to respond to a specific problem and provide an answer to an immediate need, but without the certainty that this was the only and most suitable solution for that particular type of space.

So, yes, it was a matter of immediate necessity, because resources were obviously scarce, but we also had to acquire expertise through practice. We were aware that some processes need to be approached with a different kind of approach and depth, which then became a research practice, i.e., understanding what the needs are, responding to a space, and then making it habitable with little money and instant means, because that way you can actually understand what the possible uses might be. In short, you outline the future, that is, you make a current proposal and you start to involve, above all, the peo-

ple who live in the neighborhoods. There were these moments when public space was literally being built, in these improvised construction sites where moments of contact with people were created, there was a sort of greater curiosity and, in a certain sense, an activity, a program for the space, was also created. Because in spaces that are generally spaces, in terms of quality, especially in the suburbs, because obviously the center of Rome has a different kind of aesthetic, it has a different kind of everyday life compared to the peripheral spaces of the city, but in the peripheral spaces, public places are places to pass through in a certain sense.

M. D.: Do you think this type of intervention you're talking about could be applied to the center of Rome?

N. M. A.: Actually, yes, but obviously reduced compared to what contemporary life is now. They could be applied, above all, to a program aimed at removing the strict consumption or, in any case, the totally tourist-oriented vocation and taking the spectacular nature that is necessary for tourism, but bringing back the everyday life that still exists in the center of Rome, but bringing it back in a slightly more predominant way, so it is not excluded because, in any case, these are dimensions and dynamics to work

on. Apart from the work involved in how to work with resources and how to work on a territory, there is now also the task of learning not to create disposable architecture, in the sense that at a certain stage, the instantaneous project was useful when it was necessary to give an immediate response and also to react to certain transformations. The case of the Perestrello project, for example, was a series of very instantaneous actions that responded to specific needs. Moreover, it was a time when the actions were purely self-produced, self-promoted and promoted in synergy with some neighborhood committees. In some cases, they were perhaps also linked to some protests within the neighborhood or were linked to some other spatial dimensions, such as the social center, because we held a workshop at the gates of Forte Prenestino. However, we did not have a physical center; we met in some spaces where it was possible to build.

M. D.: So there was a sort of network with associations or with issues highlighted by these associations to which you were somehow linked and to which you tried to respond with the tool of architecture, which is a tool that people outside the sector usually don't know how to use. It's interesting that architects are wondering how architecture can be made available for certain issues raised

by other groups. Anyway, this thing about the city and waste made me think a lot, also because I wonder if something like this would be possible in a different city, such as Venice.

N. M. A.: You certainly won't find the material I'm talking about there; here you can find everything.

M. D.: On your website, you say that the ephemeral triggers a process of semantic stratification, just as on another occasion you define the construction site as a place of dialogue. In this interest in the narration of space and the reconstitution, or the reintroduction of waste, through a first act, even a very simple one, I see a strong interest in communication. Recently, while discussing my thesis, it emerged that a division of roles can be practiced between architects and architectural culture, especially in their adherence to the limits of reality, in the sense that an architect has many rules to follow when building a house, a park, a school, etc., while there are far fewer rules to follow when curating an exhibition, proposing a workshop, writing a book, or building an installation, and it is precisely these latter devices—which are now established as forms of architecture, of course—that have enormous narrative power. In this discourse, which sees architectural culture as separate from

architecture in a more practical sense, how would you define your projects?

N. M. A.: We have also carried out public works, so we are familiar with this relationship between wanting to do something and being able to do it. The fact that we work informally in certain areas or in a city like Rome, where there is sometimes a lack of control, especially in certain neighborhoods, is also important. If, on the other hand, interventions were to be carried out in full compliance with the regulations, our hands would obviously be more tied, because architectural practices do not faithfully reflect the will of the professional, so you cannot determine whether a project is more or less activist without considering that in many cases you are bound by a brief or within a regulatory framework from which it is difficult to escape, because obviously that is the situation that has, in a sense, shaped architecture for what it is. Then, in any type of architectural action, the right factors must be present. There must be a context in which there is a strong desire within a territory to embark on a certain path, so it is very much linked to a shared desire between the active territory, citizens, associations, and everything else, so the territorial movement is more—let's call it—"from the bottom up."

There must also be synergy with institutions, both cultural institutions and institutions linked to politics and administration, so it is a very complex machine because, obviously, the impact of an action varies. Then, of course, the importance of a temporary process lies in the moment when it leaves a mark on a territory, which can also be a material mark, it can be an experience, it can be something that then leads to subsequent actions independent of the one carried out at that moment. However, as architects, we have this drive to want to propose, to want to build, to shape, to imagine an alternative and to try to build it. In these actions, this synergy is fundamental in order to be able to determine and actually see a process that leads to even a single experiment. It is not necessarily the case that the entire process and the entire project must be completely experimental, because you cannot completely stretch and stress a bureaucratic network when you take action. I will give an example of the scale of the process, with regard to the public works project that is about to open, which came about through a competition; therefore, the proposal was able to be a little more ambitious, so to speak.

The project was dedicated to transforming a space in a suburb, in this case Aprilia, and there were other areas that had been put up

for competition. Obviously, it was a very complex process because you make a competition proposal in which the project is not the focus, but rather the focus of the idea proposed in the competition is the process that brings about the revolution of that square, and when the Municipality of Aprilia decides to implement the project. I believe our project was one of the few that actually wanted to be implemented, while other public works did not get off the ground. In that case, however, we had to review the initial proposal because, obviously, when you do public works, you can't say you don't have a project, because you still have to put it out to tender; there are rules. So, the fact of sitting down to understand from a perspective in which we can say that we operated more in the architectural culture, when you then enter into architectural work more linked to a context that is structured and has regulations that must be respected, you have to understand the rules of the game when you sit down at the table and understand where you can have a form of openness, and there was, in a certain sense. So, even though we had to propose a project, we managed to maintain the fact that architecture in a public work also requires complex action, within which there are not only technicians who sit at the table to build the process, but there are also other professions that have and

must have a voice, especially when it comes to transformations of parts of cities, i.e., transformations on an urban scale. So a context and a perspective were successfully brought forward. The fact of proposing activities integrated with the construction site, and therefore also the fact of opening the public works site during construction to carry out activities that were related to communicating with the local area, to bringing the local area in, to creating a dialogue between the local area and what was the public works of the square, to already bringing the space to life. Obviously, it was not possible to do everything; obviously, there are always dimensions in which one is confronted with the real dimension, and therefore, obviously, not all ideas, proposals, and experimental parts can be completed. Processes change and adapt, but it is also something we have learned to manage by creating instant architecture that reacts to contexts, so that we can manage a more complex process on a very small and simple scale, with a philosophy of improvement and always trying to bring a small innovative aspect. On the one hand, there is a medium-small scale domain, and on the other, there is the ability to react even to contexts where there was a constructed idea, there was a plan, and that plan must adapt to the needs of the moment.

M. D.: In other case studies I have examined, I often see the alignment of factors, which may be the support of the municipality or local activist groups, or the very presence of strong grassroots protests.

No, I think the example I gave you earlier in Barcelona is relevant, as there is a convergence of factors between the working-class neighborhood and the strong activism and protests that took place there. The municipality of Barcelona rejected it, it wasn't very open to this approach, but then I managed to build that type of building for a number of reasons.

N. M. A.: That is fundamental. When experiments are underway, the ability of a reality or a practice to actually carry out a discourse or research is closely linked to all the factors that are present within the territory, because they are linked to economic, political, and social factors. We are in an Italian national context where, in terms of potential, there is great wealth in terms of space and in terms of how much work would be needed, in many contexts, from the largest and most complex metropolitan areas to the smallest and most rural areas, and there is also a culture on which we rely that has inspired other practices abroad, for example. Sometimes, when talking to other collectives, for example on , the importance of how public spa-

ce is experienced in Italy emerges, within certain dimensions, such as the neighborhood or in certain popular areas, and how this has been a catalyst for some transformations. There are many relevant examples, such as the Roman ephemeral, which has often been described as a source of inspiration. Rome, for example, has had a strong twinning relationship with Paris. There is continuous cultural contamination; it is not something that starts here, but there is a great wealth that must then be based on conditions and on everyone's willingness to bet on certain types of actions. Now we need to see it in practice. What we are seeing now is that this is obviously a topic that has been brought much more into the university thanks to researchers, professors, and new doctoral students, who are bringing these points of view into academic institutions. At the same time, there are people who have been activists during a certain period who are bringing it into municipalities and public administrations. and then there are other museums and similar institutions. We are at a point where we hope that this need for collective self-assessment, risk-taking, and courage will be done in a more organic and complex way. Not only by architects, but by different actors, because architecture is very much linked to processes and territorial contexts.

M. D.: It has now been ten years since your first experiments. How do you see your evolution in the near future? Do you have any specific ambitions? Perhaps linked to a different kind of time, perhaps more permanent?

N. M. A.: Times have changed, in the sense that our relationship with temporariness has also changed, so even when it comes to temporary architecture or recurring events, if not on our part, then on the part of other people—for example, actions that are for certain types of events or festivals, events that need to have a specific ephemeral and temporary architecture, which therefore begins and ends—but we are increasingly linked to recurring processes that last for several years, including research and action processes that are linked to territories—I'll give the example of Belmonte, which is an example of an action and a discourse that have developed and adapted from 2016 to today—and there have been incursions with temporary projects that have instead led to stability, thus managing to build a more lasting infrastructure through the house. We are looking for a physical infrastructure and therefore a space, to bring together a network infrastructure or a relationship with a more material infrastructure. In any case, the aim is to create a so-

lid infrastructure, both from the point of view of internal collaboration and in terms of the projects that are carried out. So this is an ambition, then each of us—because we are individuals with our own interests that are driven internally by certain types of values or demands—could give you a different answer, but I would say that I think working on residential projects would be fundamental, also for Rome as a place. The relationship with the building has been through two specific projects, Belmonte and Riesi. Who knows if a new construction or a more substantial adaptation of the existing building would make sense, but it could be in our wheelhouse right now. We want to think about the project based on current needs and in accordance with the laws that are being implemented now, as well as the new issues that are arising. Now, the maintenance of the territory is required. For example, a European law has been passed that aims to regenerate the landscape between 2030 and 2050. So, we who have worked extensively with urban regeneration should probably start looking more at naturalistic aspects, biodiversity, thinking more about climate change, perhaps even within urban contexts—some cities have really big problems with , they don't think about people's well-being, such as being able to walk around the city, they are more focused on

commercial exchange. Orizzontale always tries to ask new questions, so it could also take a more environmental turn.

M. D.: How is Orizzontale structured?

N. M. A.: It is currently structured in a simple way. We started out as students and formed a non-profit cultural association in 2012. The statute included the promotion of architecture but also other multidisciplinary aspects, including through educational and awareness-raising activities. For national-level tools, we all became architects and registered with the professional association. So, for a while, we worked as an association and as a group of professionals. Now we are looking for a new form to follow the natural growth of the studio and because we feel a different need, as there are projects on a different scale, such as public works. Not all seven of us are in Rome, partly because we are taking different paths despite sharing the same goals. Within Orizzontale, three people have embarked on other careers, so they have remained more in a collaborative form and devote less time, while the Roman core, namely myself, Giuseppe, and Margherita, have been running the practice full-time since 2015. Now we need a new legal form, but it is difficult to find one. We still have the dual

nature of a cultural association and a professional association. We carry out very different projects, curating exhibitions, for example, or even publishing work. We created the magazine *Vuoto*, which is a transmedia tool in which we bring different people together to discuss certain topics.

M. D.: Why did you start producing a magazine?

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N. M. A.: I think it was a very natural thing to do, because we create places where people meet, talk, argue, and we create infrastructures so that actions or behaviors can be hosted or not, and at the same time we also have platforms with a more material form, so to speak, to continue doing this. Platforms that are not necessarily physical places, but can be spaces—called *Vuoto*, in fact—that can be filled with different content. The need arose in a specific and practical way because we had been asked some time ago to produce a monograph, but for us it was a task that seemed very difficult to tackle. Let's say that, talking to other organizations, we shared this discomfort at having to produce a book about ourselves. So during Covid, since there was more time and also a need to reopen a dialogue in the same place among all the members of *Orizzontale*, even those who perhaps

no longer lived the projects on a daily basis, we wanted to create a platform—as you described it well—where we could establish a network with other people and other professionals and be able to spread the word in Italy.

We wanted to do it in Italy, so instead of writing a book about ourselves, we wanted to give a personal vision of how we like to make books, and so, always in a rather open form, always with timeframes and timings that are not always fixed. However, this is something that ultimately creates movement and continues to open up projects. Yes, is a group that shares a lot, and in which the interest of a single person sometimes becomes a driving force for doing certain things or making certain choices in projects, even though we all do different things.

Some are inside the university, they are researchers, between Genoa, Florence, and Bolzano. We are inside the university with collaboration contracts, we carry out laboratory projects, we supervise doctorates and dissertations. All this is important for broadening dialogue and seeing other points of view, from people who undertake research. It is an ongoing relationship, and we now also have an assignment with the Austrian

university. So there are both national universities, the University of L'Aquila specifically, then there are laboratories with La Sapienza University, with the faculty of architecture, then there is Margherita who is part of the urban design course at Roma Tre, and then there is Juan who has done some research grants with some universities and did his doctorate here in Rome, and Jacopo who was linked to the University of Florence and now with the University of Bolzano. We have also collaborated with the Polytechnic University of Turin and the Polytechnic University of Milan, we have participated in Iuav with Wave, and we are now working with the University of Vienna on social design with the University of Applied Arts, so there is this ongoing dialogue and relationship with universities, sometimes even for specific projects.

M. D.: Given the diversity of the work you do, how have you approached the self-sustainability of the studio?

N. M. A.: At the beginning, there was no self-sustainability at all, there was no budget, there were no fees. From 2010/2012, we began to have some coverage and began to be able to support ourselves. Then everyone personally tried to support themselves in some way, continuing to work for some studios, doing internships

abroad. The goal is to make all the work sustainable.

The fact that some people have pursued other careers is clearly always linked to practical life, to having to support themselves. To support our goals, we are forced to compromise; we have to provide sustenance for the studio. We have had to resort to some tricks, and it is not easy to work collectively, it is not easy to have visions and skills that go beyond what may even be one's own competence, so also the organization of the work itself or having a more managerial, even economic, vision. This is obviously a practical critical issue, we have to be able to mediate between what is needed to support ourselves and what is interesting to do. It's a balance that can be maintained. Lately, let's say that most of the assignments or projects that come in are related to what we do, rather than projects such as private homes. We don't do private residential projects at the moment, unless there is some form of interest. This is probably normal, as with a portfolio that is very focused on certain types of sectors, it is easier for us to do installations than to design someone's home.

M. D.: This type of livelihood also sets you apart from traditional architecture firms.

N. M. A.: We are open to different types of work, and we now partici-

pate in many competitions, although clearly for the project categories we have not tackled so far, we feel the need to develop a language. It is also clear that the network that has formed leads us to remain tied to the theme we have followed up to now. The practice certainly becomes more complex and thorny, which is common among collectives, even international ones. We need to find the right way to support ourselves.

This is also because it is one thing to be students within an academic setting, but then, gradually, real needs arise, and so the skill lies in being able to find sustenance and strike a balance, as well as finding an organizational form that can streamline certain processes while also allowing the freedom to feel free within a structure. Because sometimes certain forms of work or collaboration are no longer appropriate for the moment in which you are operating and working together.

M. D.: How was this network you're talking about created?

N. M. A.: Simply by doing projects and participating in initiatives. Let's say by doing and moving, building relationships, sharing time with other people, being on the move, going to certain contexts, taking an interest in telling your story. However, there are tendencies or networks that have

also been created quite naturally. We participated in festivals and invited people to collaborate on certain projects. In this way, an international network was created, little by little.

M. D.: You mentioned two themes that I would like to return to: interdisciplinarity and participation. Regarding participation, how did you begin to identify it as fundamental for you? How has participation been managed from the early years of work to today? And also related to this—because, for example, such processes require knowledge of sociology—how do you view interdisciplinarity? Today, it can be said that interdisciplinarity is increasingly present in the world of architecture. It is even sometimes said that the work of the architect is being eaten away by other fields of knowledge – with which he or she collaborates, whether it be botany or sociology. How would you comment on this statement?

N. M. A.: Initially, public presentations were made of some of the zoning plans, for example, or public audits, but these were very often done in an instrumental way, meaning that there was no real, effective, and continuous dialogue with the community, which might have ranged from a public debate to a national debate. So, let's say that at the beginning,

participation meant seeing people physically in a space, sharing that space, sharing that time, and perhaps even doing some practical construction work together or just sharing a brief informal moment. So it was more related to informal participation in the community, to a physical transformation of a space linked to instant architecture. Then, gradually, due to a series of circumstances—because for some projects we also met other professionals—we also realized that there were skills that went beyond our own, because we are architects, we have a role and we have skills that are perhaps linked to visions of space. but for some other levels of participation, we obviously stop at the part more related to physical action on the site or to the identity part, linked to the construction of an imaginary around the site. So then, specifically, we did some projects in Rome, one was in San Basilio with the Samba station, where there was a group of curators and psychologists who were asked to create an installation in this bocce club, and we created this network even though we already knew them (as architects, we also do public art), and we knew we were good at certain things, while lacking in other aspects, other areas that we wanted to explore further. We don't have the skills to explore the more cultural and emotional dimensions of a place, nor do we know what

tools exist—, there may be other tools because other professions have probably asked themselves the same questions. So we started with a project that was a training ground for tackling other more complex scales, with a project—which is a space back here, Perestrello—where we did an action in which we ran a construction workshop in parallel with an urban exploration workshop, collaborating with social psychologists. From there, we participated in the competition together with this group of curators and this group of social psychologists, to reinforce what is, in any case, the architect's expertise. The architect's expertise is not to be a sociologist. However, the architect's expertise today is to be a mediator. They are mediators between different figures, governing vision and transformation above all, the physical, aesthetic, material spatial translation of what is recorded by other professions. Architects may not be able to create a questionnaire, or rather, they can, but it is clear that they do not have the expertise to create a questionnaire exploring certain patterns, for example, age, or what the problems in a given area might be. So, especially on that and other dynamics, such as how to get people involved, which targets, which methods, there are certainly professionals who are fully capable of doing so, or communication experts. In any case,

communication has always been a valuable part of projects, and having a professional organization dedicated to creating its own line within the process, but based on the communication structure linked to public works, was also fundamental there. Because, after all, architects are not botanists. Architects may have a passion for bringing botanical knowledge into their projects, but they obviously need that specific expertise. When we talk about participatory processes, we are talking about processes in which the presence of different professions is necessary in order to create a dialogue and a more complex procedural structure, which can then lead to the physical transformation of a space. An architectural action can lead to a communicative structure and communicative tools that can then remain within the territory or be taken over by other entities, it can lead to exchange platforms, it can lead to a climate survey. However, architecture is the product of society, so it is not that it is distorted, but simply that architecture has probably done this naturally in a cyclical manner in different ways. I don't think Vanvitelli had anyone telling him what types of wood to use.

M. D.: I was thinking about the fact that architects in the 1970s were more intellectual and approached politics through intellectua-

lism, and being intellectual means being interested in many topics, even outside one's own discipline. Perhaps this recovery of various fields of knowledge indicates that this intellectual approach is being revived...

N. M. A.: Let's say it's interesting intellectual activity. In the sense that, from a utopian perspective, it is about constructing the idea, i.e., that intellectual activity can be linking a thought to an action. Because, in any case, the thought must be tested. However, when collaborating with other professions, it is a complex matter, and the role of mediator is not a simple one. Being able to ride this wave and the fact that the project manages to keep scenarios open and a dimension of the unexpected, i.e., the fact that we can continue to have open architecture, an open project, and open dialogue, is fundamental and constitutes everything we do.

Both physically, in that sometimes the infrastructure is not actually complete, i.e., sometimes there are only structural frameworks that need to be inhabited and characterized, and in terms of processes, where you want to sit down at a table with different types of people who speak different languages but share certain objectives, certain spaces, certain philosophies of doing things. These are obviously not simple processes,

they are very complex processes, but at the same time, the architect maintains in his being as a mediator this ability to visualize and create an objective vision to build a future and also to shape time and space, so to speak. There is also this idea that we always see time as a succession of episodes, but in reality there is this complex matter of seeing time as truly a multidimensional dimension. Architectural work operates on multiple levels and participatory works operate on different dimensions, on the immaterial emotional dimension, on the dimension of social behavior, and has an environmental impact—like any human action. However, within this system, being able to embrace this complexity and perhaps even offer visions that may seem naive when talking about concrete issues, about how spaces are created, about these tables—which can be physical tables, while sometimes these tables are platforms for exchange—is fundamental to actually being able to transform the way we do architecture and the way we create territory and urbanity. We are not the only ones; we also collaborate with professionals and other architects.

M. D.: Certainly, there is now a certain awareness on the part of architects, given the current challenges, whether economic, social, or environmental. The word naive

can be interpreted as something far from conscious, as something that wants to solve a specific problem in a lighter way.

N. M. A.: The truth is that there is no real attempt to solve a problem; the intention is to open up a discussion. Solutions to problems come from open discussions and effective participation, especially if it is a shared problem. I understood the naive dimension to be linked above all to the fact that we very often construct metaphors, but we construct metaphors physically, such as at La Marranella, where we built an iceberg to say that there is more to a territory than what is submerged, but it is about connecting with an identity and also being able to tackle certain types of issues with a little lightness, to still be able to create these informal dimensions, in which it is important for us that even a neighborhood group of elderly people can have their own way of participating, because everyone—and it's not that an architect has to be a botanist and a botanist doesn't have to be an architect—but everyone has their own vision of a future, a place, an action. The ability is precisely that of mediating on what the desire is and managing to effectively transform it into a possible scenario, sometimes this possible scenario is temporary.

M. D.: Speaking of materials, given that the word recycling indicates another important issue for you, how does the recycling of your installations within such a polluting sector as construction take on meaning? Do you feel this collision between the large construction sector and this more sensitive way of doing architecture?

N. M. A.: Initially, recovery was linked to waste in all respects, not just spatially. We worked with people who were normally rejected by urban processes, such as the elderly or children, or anyone who was not the average person, such as those who are defined as “los cuidadores,” or caregivers. So in that case, there was a massive use of waste, but then these are things that are linked to the capabilities of the project at that moment, to the objective at that moment. In other cases, it was a self-metabolism of the structures we created, so many structures became something else. It was never stated in a very straightforward way how it happened. For example, *Otto e mezzo* at Maxxi used beer and plastic crates from , while the structure was a new construction because, for obvious reasons, it had to meet certification and resistance and safety requirements. So it was made of wood, but not a noble wood, mainly construction timber, which is fir, a soft and very cheap wood. The recycling pro-

cess was mainly linked to the beer kegs and then the entire work, once it had been dismantled and taken apart. The work was metabolized because it became a small wall in a theater in Porta Portese, which is still there, at the entrance, and is called *Replica*. Then it became a structure for another festival that needed a stage, it became the *Otto e mezzo* lamps, and so it was reused several times. In a totally informal way, it was not easy to get some materials from an institution like the Maxxi, but someone inside the Maxxi who was very sensitive understood that it was important for us to be able to recover the materials. Other works at Maxxi have become something else, such as *Parasite*, which became a popular gym in northern Rome, and other projects here have become something else, so we gave them to other groups and associations. In other cases, we reused recycled materials, from marble to wood, and it can be said that in most cases it is more a matter of attention, unless there is an interest at the project level in a specific material—perhaps because it is present in the area, or because there is an actual resource nearby—but otherwise it is much more related to the self-metabolism of the structures we build. For example, for this Biennale project, a large part of the material was used for the design of a community gym in Venice, and another part went

to another space in Belluno. It has always been very interesting, but it has been very complex because, to put it bluntly, it is linked to the individual effort of the studio. We had written two projects: one was a sort of platform-type system for the recovery of material that brought together institutions and professionals, as Rotor does, for example, or as other organizations in the north do. Here in Italy, it is not easy to find building materials. We have also seen this with public works, where, despite the intention to do so, certain certifications must always be met. Public tenders do not contemplate reuse, and there are regulations that discourage the reuse of materials. In our case, we still managed to use recycled and recovered rubber, but it is not guaranteed, and the process becomes very complex. So, it is very much linked to an internal investment of time, i.e., we do it mainly for the establishment of a new project because it is a goal. We also recently made a table that is completely made of reclaimed wood, but it obviously depends on the type of project, what the needs are and how much infrastructure can be brought in to recover the material in that case. It was done in Belmonte, it was done in other contexts, it would obviously be interesting to explore what impact each one has, what impact it has on public works, or what tools can be put in place to reduce the

impact, because we are obviously aware that construction processes account for a very high percentage of carbon dioxide emissions. We have tried to consult extensively with public administrations about opening warehouses to find waste from road construction, but it is always very complex to get involved in the processes because, obviously, when it comes to material recovery, action should be taken at source, i.e., decisions should be made at the time of demolition. An agreement must first be made with the company that has to dispose of the material. Agreements should be legislated for from the early stages of the tender process, because companies are obliged to comply with standards for taking material to landfills, where it is then processed in various ways. These are processes that need to be understood in a more vertical way. , when there is openness and interest at the local level, we do it anyway, but it is obviously not always guaranteed. Obviously, it is an issue that we feel we can explore as long as we have the time, but we ask that there be a shared goal. This brings us back to the issue of self-sustainability and understanding how sustainable it is for us to pursue our goal in terms of effort. In some cases, we have been able to change this factor, in others we have not. It would be very interesting to explore this issue in depth, for example by collaborating with

universities. Often, however, the processes are impervious and it becomes difficult to actually make a difference. What we have seen in general is that some manufacturers—and certainly with the new European laws there will be an adaptation in a certain sense—are more focused on repair, on the fact that the structure can be reused and put back into the process, rather than on controlling a process that sometimes escapes them.

M. D.: Simple material and clear, understandable communication seem to me to be distinctive features of Orizzontale. As a final question, given everything you have told me, I would like to ask you specifically your proximity to neighborhood associations and social centers, if there is a link between your collective and politics and how much you have exposed yourselves on this front, how much you have declared politically—and I would also add a personal observation, namely that exposing oneself is certainly viewed differently now than it was ten years ago, when you started, and is in fact viewed more favorably.

N. M. A.: We have always been fairly moderate in our terms. Each of us obviously has a personal approach, but we share values rather than parties or ideologies. We share common principles on social issues. The very fact of working on

what is called the ‘common good’ or trying to have an opinion and also trying to update it in the course of our action is a way of exposing ourselves. For us, doing is a way of exposing ourselves. Perhaps this is also due to belonging to a city like Rome, which thrives on politics, where politics is fundamentally ingrained in everyone. Rome is the capital and the national political center, so there is a strong proximity to this, but also to neighborhood committees, local groups, groups that often do not have a clear definition, are magmatic, often do not have a shared interest but share certain spaces. For example, there has been proximity to social centers in a way that has involved participation in initiatives, but they are open spaces. They are spaces that have, in a sense, reclaimed places that would otherwise have had a different kind of development, but at the same time, they are also places that still need to be transformed. However, even those are contexts that have very clear lines for being in or out, being acceptable or not acceptable. But let’s say that we have always tried to move in a very simple dimension in our relationship with social centers. That is, to do something that could open up the places a little and manage to open up to the local contexts. We like to bring people into contact with each other and not select the people we like to see or not see in

a public space. It may seem like a neutral form, but it is a form that positions us.

In the sense that we are not saying that only young people with a certain level of education can or should participate, but having a dimension that is open to people from different backgrounds means, in a certain sense, taking a stand. Then, of course, we are also close in different ways to movements defending different rights or values. We participate in different events, we are close to different types of issues. The point is that we choose or do not choose certain projects because perhaps they are not close to our research and to what interests us and stimulates us. So we don't expose ourselves in a clear-cut political way, although of course, , each of us has our own position and we discuss it, but we want to promote a way of doing things and a practice of doing things, with a democratic thought behind it, a thought about how spaces can be a common good. The projects are accompanied by research, such as that of Pratone, which is a neighborhood initiative for the preservation of an undeveloped area, not a built-up area. So, we have our own views on what it means to build a city, but we're also aware that building a city is complex, and managing a city is complex, so we also understand that some processes may be more succes-

ful than others because certain political choices are made that we sometimes don't even agree with. We don't expose ourselves too much on this issue by choice, but we think that, in a sense, our point of view is quite clear. Even the fact that we question ourselves within certain types of processes, even being aware that we are subject to criticism, being open to receiving criticism, and even asking ourselves what it means to have an open process, how much is decided in more vertical terms, how much is decided in more inclusive terms, how much a process can be more open and more inclusive, how much less open and inclusive.

M. D.: Perhaps processuality is an underestimated effort...

N. M. A.: Let's say that it is much more important to bring a large group of people to the table and then try to embrace different issues, different political and social values, because we are still a group that certainly does not represent the total complexity of what values may be, but it already has diversity and complexity in itself, and so it is probably this that leads us to try to open up the discussion to different people. Then, of course, we participated in initiatives that had a clear position on certain issues. For example, we participated in an event at the Biennale organized by Palumbo, which was on the issue

of architecture linked to women. Obviously, we have our views on this, and it is always important to continue the discussion and debate, but beyond this project, all our architecture seeks to be as inclusive as possible. Obviously, we are aware that we do not always succeed. Even being involved in controversial processes, i.e., changing scale and being part of a public work, means exposing oneself and being involved in phenomena that can be controversial, because you are obviously doing work on

a different scale, and you also face constraints that are more effective and clearer than, say, work done on a smaller scale and in a more immediate and somewhat more self-organized way.

Orizzontale was a metropolitan action collective, now it is a collective and a laboratory and a research practice and a group of professionals, and therefore works in different fields and gives its own point of view and, from its own point of view, accepts or rejects assignments but promotes others.

*Interview with Santiago  
Cirugeda, member, and  
founder of Recetas Urbanas*

*27th August 2024, Palma de Majorca,  
Spain*

M. D.: I would like to ask you how your work originated and how the key points of your process were defined. For example, considering the reuse of materials, temporality, that disobedience. These topics, connected to each other and depending on one another, arise from a need, perhaps economic, or from a decision. Why did you ultimately choose that path? What was the purpose that inspired you in that initial phase?

S. C.: Well, at the beginning, since I have more years than she does, in fact, over these 16 years, the studio has become more technically strong, and we have more tools to fight with. When I started alone, I didn't have a political ambition; it was a concern of a person, of an individual. I remember, looking out from my grandparents' balcony, at the concrete park, it was the concern of how everything is organized, who decides things.

M. D.: Can you tell them what the concrete park is?

S. C.: Well, there's a building in front of my house, at my parents' house, where there are different types of urbanizations. There's a gated community, ours is private, but it's open. It has a very interesting urbanistic way of functioning because those gardens are private but open. What worried me was thinking about how things work. And if I didn't want to be an architect, but a soldier, then who decides? I was concerned about who is the one who orders that this is here, that is there. That's what worried me. I got into architecture and kept asking myself those questions. I wondered, do I need to be an architect to do something? Or can a citizen do something in the city? Those were my questions, and in fact, when I started, it was to put a swing in the container, because I heard that people wanted to somehow put swings, but I couldn't do it. A swing? Who says that? A playground? Or urbanism, culture? I had no idea. What I did was look for a legal way to put it up. That is, find a way for any ci-

tizen to do something. Not an architect, but a citizen who decides, collectively, to put up a swing.

M. D.: But look how it was fun because neither you had children nor ideas of climbing on a swing. Why did you think of a swing?

S. C.: Because, in fact, there were already young people in San Luis, so there was demand. I heard that people wanted to put swings. In the center of Seville, which is the largest in Spain and the historic center, there were no swings. There were only two on one street. And so, I started asking: who, who commands? who orders? Then I began this activism, saying: well, I wasn't an architect, I was an architecture student, but I was first a citizen. I took on the position of a citizen, not just an architecture student. But I thought: well, I am involved in everything related to architecture, why not? So, I started studying the regulations that the city designs: regulations on how to occupy a square with a container, regulations on how to occupy a facade with scaffolding, scaffolding. In 2000, we built the first illegal house on the roof, which was reported. I was still a student, but these were ways of saying: Well, I, as a person, or Pepe in this case, or the families whose names I don't know, have the right to do things. I mean, they have the right to act in the city, right?

M. D.: What I mean is that there was already an ambition to work for others.

S. C.: Yes.

M. D.: Even though you don't suppose it.

S. C.: No, I wasn't, I'm from the Communist Party, I'm an anarchist; I didn't have a political party consciousness. Without a citizen awareness, you have to look for tools here. That's why, from the beginning, they were urban recipes. From the first project, in 1996, a publication came out explaining how other neighbors could rent a container and set up a playground or plant a tree. In other words, there was a mission to say: I do tests. If they work, I give them to the citizens so they can do it. Of course, when I started doing those individual projects with a collective interest, I realized that other people were approaching. Hey, look, we'd like this, how do we do it? It was like starting to create a community within the city, but without the tools of an architect, the ones in the urban planning office of Seville. So, I began working on that individual activism, thinking about the collective. But initially, it was a start of years until I continued studying architecture and saw that I needed more technical tools. Because people started asking: hey, is a rooftop house il-

legal for me? because I don't have resources or money. Okay, so I saw that architecture had tools that suited my political commitment without a party. Just as I used to consult lawyers, now I need lawyers to teach me more. Now we turn to educators, landscape architects, people. The goal has always been the same; we haven't changed in that aspect. What we've done is make it more sophisticated and stronger.

M. D.: So, this urban guerrilla could be defined as a political approach you had before truly thinking, studying, and practicing architecture.

S. C.: I realized it was a political act; for me, it was a reivindicative act, but I was aware of being political. And I realized that many people with a more marked political condition said that what you're doing is a change, a proposed model. You're bypassing an urban planning level to generate rights for other people. That's politics. We're talking about politics. But it wasn't a prior awareness. And I realized the political potential that had. In fact, over the years, many political parties have contacted me. From the left, they've called me—PSOE, Izquierda Unida, Podemos. Leftist parties have asked me to be part of them. But I've always said no. And why? Because I don't want to be inside a

party. I want to do politics; a politics that seeks human rights, citizens' rights, educational rights, and that the right to housing is fulfilled. But the manipulation any party has is very slow. I don't want to depend on a party. And I don't have to agree with everything a party does. And I don't want the discipline of a party. I believe in beliefs, which sometimes, interestingly, align with people who are religious, or mystical, or leftist, because they are working for the common good. And sometimes, whether the Church works for the common good—whether it's the Church's structure—which I find terrifying—or from the citizens' base, from the left. I don't care. My goal isn't the party or the Church. My goal is the person, the group, the collective. And that's the politics we will follow. That's interesting.

M. D.: Because I see this as a narrative evolution of the project, of yours. And I also perceive a lot of protest in the initial projects, certainly, even in the simplest ones. Because what's interesting about the projects is the meaning more than the space itself. Because they seem like a way to awaken a topic, to inform citizens about something. And there's a lot of strength in that. Just like protest in general, I need to find a real way to achieve change. Also, your work has evolved in search of a more

productive, more creative form. Could you comment on that opinion? Could you tell me the path between the most extreme gestures and collaboration with the general public or other institutions? S. C.: What we're doing now is more complicated. It's more complicated. And it's educational activism. I mean, doing 20 open and legal classrooms in public centers isn't a one-night action, it's not a two-day action. It's because there's an educational community, a family, students, and people coming from outside to work on something that isn't legal.

M. D.: It's harder to do something legally.

S. C.: Much harder. So, the cafeteria we set up in Dos Hermanas is crazy. Or the trenches in Málaga, on top of that, it's madness. Think about it now, actually. Or Cañada Real, or what we're doing now in Vío Verde. No, technically, it's also more complicated because the buildings are larger and have more personal risks. Because there are possibilities of accidents, especially when you involve non-professionals. But they are more difficult technically and legally. And I think, in fact, that's known—it's the right-wing party in Andalusia. During COVID, we sent a dossier about open classrooms for external public centers, for conventional classrooms. Because it's a

place where you can sit, read, eat, teach outside, where the hierarchy of the square classroom doesn't exist. And the PSOE, the Socialist Party, has been in regional government for 20, 22 years, and they know us very well. And they do things with us here. Well, it's the right that's changing and making a plan based on our work from a year or a year and a half ago, about open green classrooms in public centers. I'm told that the right was going to come out with a plan with money to create classrooms that talk about nature, open space, non-hierarchical. And it's been the right. And I don't care if the right takes credit. If the right just made and gave money to public centers to create outdoor, green, self-built classrooms by children, bravo! It's a political change. With the PSOE, we managed to change regulations for the use of urban voids, urban lots. Well, yes, I made that change. Or in Paraguay, we changed the law to support mutual aid cooperatives for building recycling. I mean, yes, we achieved political change, and I don't care who does it. I'm not saying this has to be done by the left. If the left does it, bravo! But if the right does it, bravo! I don't care. In the end, rights are fulfilled. Obviously, the right usually doesn't work as much on social rights as the left. So, I am more aligned with the left ideologically. But that's why I'm not part of any party. I vote for the left, but

I'm not a party member. That's the struggle.

M. D.: And how was the transition from your individual work to *Recetas Urbanas*? What were the important projects for your evolution?

S. C.: The first was that, since they knew me from the press, from the newspapers, it was *Aula Abierta*; in fact, the name *Aula Abierta* stayed in Granada. It was the first time a group of students called us because the university wasn't responding to them, because the dean of Fine Arts wasn't listening to them, and they wanted an autonomous space within the university. They called us and said, 'Hey, we want our own space, managed by students, where professors don't enter.' So, that project already had a small group of us... I brought in an Italian, Lucas Stasi; then a Uruguayan, Pichuco; Harold; Gergo Kukushka was involved, and some Colombians, Alejandro Sorseto. I've never worked for an architecture firm, so I don't know how an architecture studio is run.

M. D.: But you had a managerial degree.

S. C.: Yes, I have a managerial degree for a studio, which she got for me. So, of course, I hadn't worked, I've never worked in a studio. I meet with friends to do larger

projects, but not in a studio with a boss, a coordinator, or anything like that.

M. D.: And now, how big is the studio?

S. C.: Very small. It's project-based. I mean, it's just the two of us, and when a project comes up, we hire one person, maybe for support in the studio, or for support during construction, or for anything else needed depending on the project. How many hires? Five for the Sevilla project. And Camila Bertini is hired for this project, initially. And now we'll hire six more for the school project. It's project-based, and these are people who are in tune with us because we can't maintain a large structure. But yes, we have one person working as a freelancer, helping us with the more technical part of project justification, calculating the installations, both for climate control, plumbing, electricity, and all that; she does the calculations. Depending on the project, someone is needed to calculate the structures. We don't do this ourselves, but we have people who do it for us, freelancers dedicated to this. So, we tell them: for this project, we send the plan, they do the calculations, and deliver it, depending on the project.

M. D.: And how do you find or look for projects?

S. C.: How? They call us.

M. D.: Aren't they public competitions? Today, we're talking about public competitions.

A. A.: People call us. The only public competition we've participated in is the one for La Cañada Real because no one else applied, and the Madrid City Council called us.

M. D.: But they still called us.

S. C.: They called us. That is, the administration also called us because they couldn't solve it. Yes, it's true that the administration calls us and asks us to present because there's no team in Spain that can do it.

A. A.: But we really didn't have the capacity to submit because the competition wasn't aimed at a small architecture firm. The project outlined in the public tender was for the supply of containers. So, the Cañada Real Civic Center had to be made with prefabricated models, like the ones you've seen at the school where we met, and this was going to be a social-community center, so it was just a matter of finishing it, adding a bit of facade, some metal, but they were looking for a company with greater financial resources. Therefore, we had to form a joint venture, which is a Temporary

Business Union, with another company that invoices more than 100,000 euros a year and has built more than a certain volume, but we didn't meet these requirements.

S. C.: No, you say you need to have invoiced 700,000 euros in the last two years. We've never reached 700,000 euros. Or an insurance of 600,000 euros or one of 100,000. That is, it doesn't allow a small firm to submit. We made a contract with a big one, a friend of ours, who didn't do anything, just signed, which is already a lot. We asked, what have you invoiced in the last year? 200 million. And what insurance do you have? Well, one of, I don't know if it was 600,000 or a million euros. That's what we need. Even for that project, we looked for the missing piece. In this case, an important, friendly company that provides us with structures. If not, it couldn't be done. And of course, what happens is that we don't do what the Administration requires. We work with 1,200 people. We work with the prison, with a school, with neighbors. We win the competition and say, yes, but we do it our way. People no longer know how we work. We don't know who we are, or how we work. Now, freedom. And of course, it was very important for them to see that we work with so many people. In fact, that building hasn't been stolen or

damaged because the neighbors take care of it. And it's a problematic neighborhood. The only time we've worked like that with the Administration was because they brought us in. We left ourselves. And the problem with large firms and structures is that they need many public projects, a lot, a lot, a lot, to keep people employed. We come and go. There are two of us, and we hire people for six months who are working on other projects, and that is our urban feeding network. That's why it's very hard for it to be destroyed.

M. D.: And you wouldn't like to work more with institutions?

S. C.: No.

M. D.: Like to do bigger things?

S. C.: No. Have you seen the neighbors? Those neighbors need us. So, I have to be with them.

M. D.: Of course, I think about public money because it could be an opportunity.

S. C.: We spend little. We're a family with an old van, meaning we don't have big financial needs. And that allows us to keep going.

M. D.: More money for building, right?

S. C.: They've offered us a lot of

money, many stories. And there's a topic you're probably not going to ask about, but I'm going to tell you before I forget. For example, Benedicta Tagliabue, who is a cool, poor, Italian actress, millionaire, rich. Well, she and her husband, who was Enrique Miralles, have an obsession with us: that we have to collaborate on one of her projects. In fact, we just tried to do that now. That scale change you mention, I appreciate it from Benedicta; Benedicta is our friend. But I'm in her house, she's another wealthy aristocrat, but I don't dislike her, I don't like her, she's our friend. In a project for a train station costing 200 million euros, she asks how our social and political work can be applied to her project. And it's not a pose of elegance; she believes it, but she doesn't have the knowledge. So, what's our proposal? That we've agreed with eight teams, ten teams, that we've been invited to eight teams: Rencujas, Benedicta. She says she's going to present the train station project in Prague, where Recetas Urbanas will propose a social perspective.

M. D.: And how can it be done?

S. C.: Exactly. That's a scale change that interests us. Who's funding us? I first tell Benedicta, I say, Benedicta, I want two million euros. Because I understand the environment, I say, there are alcoholics, people with mental health issues, immigrants around the station,

they're at all stations. Yes, I contact the networks of associations and NGOs working there. And I say, Benedicta, what's the challenge? You have 200 million to do this. Can you do the same with two million? I mean, do you lose quality in your architecture by cutting two million? No, I can do it. Good, with two million I'll go to a school, a workshop, train agents, work with local entities in Prague to manage and maintain the park, working with foreigners, alcoholics, and immigrants on that project. What happens? When Benedicta presents it in Prague, she makes a video where I explain in English; the city council and the government stay. And they say: none of the ten architecture teams has presented anything related to social issues. All have presented a superstructure. And they say: we don't have social technicians. We have mobility engineers, landscape architects, architects, designers, but no social workers. That's a change, both for Benedicta and for the city council. And they say: we don't have technicians. We can't evaluate whether what you're proposing is good or bad because no one here is a social worker. What happens? Because the last meetings, because that jury isn't a one-week gathering. Come on, let's give it to this one. A train station like Prague's requires a year of project oversight. This one fails here, that one fails there. Because it's a land-

mark project with a lot of money for the city, always Prague's. These are competitions that last a year of jury deliberation. The good thing is that at the end of the jury, in the final meetings, Benedicta and the Dutch team that won were present, but they already brought participation professionals and social issues to the jury. Social work professionals, who didn't exist before. Now, if a city council or government decides to build a train station, the jury must include specialists in trains, traffic, engineers, landscape architects, because there's a park and social workers. And you might ask: but why social workers? If we're talking about a train station here. And if the architectural team wants to do social work from the construction, because that work will last five years. So, are you going to do it? Of course, it's currently on hold. The Dutch team won, but what has changed in mindset is that, in large city projects, you can't just build a museum or a station and ignore the surrounding problems. I am from the first phase. If you're going to build a train station and there are people sleeping on the street with alcohol, drug, or immigrant issues, when you do the work, you'll close it, put up surveillance and police. You'll kick those people out and say: get out. And when the work is finished, five or ten years later, I don't know where those people will be. I've

kicked them out. The work and construction have expelled them. I say: I arrive here and ask, who are you? What are your needs? Blood alcohol level? What associations are there? As an architect with your team of social workers. That change in mindset at that large scale has happened here for the first time, in this project. That's a change in mindset.

M. D.: So, could you talk about what the role of the architect is now? What is the role of the architect today? S. C.: An architect can't just come in and put up a damn project without caring about what's next door. The MACBA in Barcelona, the Museum of Contemporary Art. You can't just arrive, tell a thousand neighbors to go to hell, and put up a Richard Rogers building right in their face. I mean, the architect must care, not just about making it look pretty, white, and curved. You go to a place, a city, an environment that you need to know, understand, and respect. If you're an architect, with all the capabilities that entails. And the administration in Spain hasn't asked for that. It hasn't demanded it. I think it's a requirement that architects should be given. That they need later. I don't know much about this. Well, then hire social workers, psychologists, whoever you want. But you have to hire them.

M. D.: Because now architecture is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Yes, obviously. Maybe it can be, as they say, a cause.

S. C.: There are architects who say: I don't get involved in social issues, I'm an architect. There are architects who say: I am an architect, I make spaces. I create forms. I do the best I can. Do you hear that kind of speech from many architects? Like, I couldn't care less about what happens outside. I want to make a building that looks better. Because that's artistic. But I think, son of a bitch, what you're going to do will affect what's next door and the people who were there before. So, you have to be careful about what actions are going to be taken. For me, that's the main thing. I used to be a city architect, and I cared more about people than the profession. It's something we value a lot. That is, I have tools from architecture to do more things, but I use them as tools, not as an ultimate goal of architecture. A tool. Now, what matters to me here? That people are educated and have a job, and that the house is in good condition. But an architect would say: Should the house be fixed? I say, no, no. It's just that if we fix these people's houses and there's no community or social work, they'll still be just as poor, but with prettier houses.

M. D.: You have to give something

to work with, for real.

A.C.: That they feel good and not alone, and that they say: 'My neighborhood is a working-class neighborhood.' We're not selling drugs; that's a stigma that also needs to be addressed. A negativity, right?

M. D.: Yes. And always talking about the economy. Has it always been easy to keep the studio open? Or have you had to give up certain types of financial compensation?

S. C.: How many times have we gone broke? Many. Many? Broke? Do you know what that means?

M. D.: No. S. C.: Not having money. Oh, many. Alice, I remember applying for a university position because we had no work. And, honestly, we've been offered money for very large projects. The most we've been offered was 980,000 euros in fees. But... it wouldn't have been good. And we said no, for a project in Italy. But it's an investment fund from the French bank, Banca Paribas, that invited us to Marseille. And I've always lived more peacefully. I'm not going to get involved in a project with a lot of money that's crap, because we'll ruin ourselves. We did it because we were invited; in fact, we have an art gallery with our work. And they always say: sell a model, do something. And my friends tell me: Andrés, let people have a mo-

del of recipes in their house, what do you care about selling it? But we don't have time. I'm worried about the street project in Madrid, which is what concerns us most. The most beautiful project we have is in Madrid, an organization working with young people in total exclusion. Totally shattered. And we're making a camp, but they don't have funding because the right has come to Madrid, and it's a clearly left-wing group. We've been working on this project for five years, and they don't even have 20,000 euros to continue. I would keep going, but we're missing materials, things. We need to take young people to the countryside, pay for a house and food for them. And we keep going, and we will keep going. Five years, six years, as long as it takes. Now I'm at odds with MACBA. We're at MACBA now. Look, I just got a call. They called me from MACBA. But no, the neighbors of Raval in Barcelona are against the expansion, and I won't do it.

M. D.: What's your stance on art?

S. C.: For me, art, as an experience, enriches me. And it gives me the ability to do things. But of course, I always joke. It's just that as an artist, they let me do whatever I want. And I advocate for the possibility of being a citizen. So, if I have a résumé as an artist, I have more capacity to do things than

you, who are just a citizen. So, yes, I don't reject the art world because I'm interested in it. But we're not professionalized in the art world. I mean, we could seek money by exhibiting every year, selling works, talking to museums. I'm not interested. Nothing. I care about art itself, just like literature, like the overflow, rugby. Because I like it. But 90% of our work is listening to people who send us problems and giving them solutions. Sometimes with money, sometimes without.

M. D.: How has *Recetas Urbanas* changed over time?

S. C.: No cambió nada. De hecho, siempre decía que si te dan premios, es que algo malo estás haciendo. Siempre, yo. Cuando empiezan a darte premios, es que algo malo estás haciendo. Siempre. Y algunos premios los rechazan. Reconocimiento. O sea, nos dieron uno a Naire de mil euros y dije que no. Y no eran malos. Era el alcalde de Vitoria, la ciudad en España con más premios de medioambiente. O sea, que era un premio otorgado por una ciudad que admiro. El anillo verde de Vitoria, el urbanismo de Vitoria, es premiado en Europa por los buenos urbanismos que hacen desde la ciudad. Y esa ciudad me da un premio. Digo, pues no. Qué mejor. Hombre, si me da tu primera ministra, le digo que a la mierda. O si me dan los de Vox, ultraderecha,

me dan un premio y me mando así. Pero no me ha preocupado mucho. De hecho, hay mucha gracia porque los premios son un negocio ahora. Es un negocio porque muchos premios que hay, tienes que pagar por presentarte. Eso es un negocio actual. Y mucha gente manda, y le dan 500 premios. Manda un premio y pone premio mundial de arquitectura. Y pagas 300 euros o 300 libras para adquirirlo. Y te dan un premio. Tienes un premio que te da una empresa que organiza eventos para ganar dinero con todos los idiotas que se presentan. Pero los premios importantes, los Oscar, que es un premio a nivel nacional, a mí me gustaba porque buscaba perfiles muy críticos. Tampoco hay mucha importancia, pero no ha cambiado nada. Es más, no hemos hecho nada porque nos dan más premios. O sea, me dio pena el premio de Moscú. Me invitaron al Chernikov. Porque a mí Chernikov le copiaba, le dibujaba como Chernikov, un constructivista ruso. Y un nieto de Chernikov dijo: «A mí me gustaría tener el premio Chernikov». Y me llamaron ellos y no escuché. No hice nada, ni tengo que pagar. Dicen, oye, finalista. Además, eran 50 mil euros, que me daban igual. Porque me gustaba Chernikov. Es decir, lo que hay alrededor, nos afecta muy poco: tanto el arte, como los premios, como el dinero. A día de hoy, es tan bonito lo que pode-

mos hacer. O sea, la recompensa es tan grande que te importa un carajo el resto. Es decir, trabajar en Sevilla, lo último que hemos hecho, es hacer un aula ilegal en Sevilla. Que lo hemos financiado porque teníamos dinero y materiales. Y hemos puesto nuestro trabajo gratis. Trabajar con los jóvenes que estuvimos en julio pasado. Chicos, chicas violadas, gente que viene de pandillas, de la droga. Y vemos que estamos trabajando juntos, que nos entendemos. Estar con las vecinas. La Dolores, la gitana, el otro. Ver que hay una afinidad para trabajar en común. No nos pagan nada estas personas, los vecinos. Pero me ha gustado verlos. Y que mi niña los vea y que estemos ahí. Eso ya me da alegría. Y lo vi salir, es muy difícil porque las ayudas no están pensadas. Son muy lentas, son muy falsas. Pero es lo que tenemos ahora mismo.

M. D.: So there is a very strong relationship with Spain or with Seville, or with the specific communities of each project. What is the relationship like with the communities where they work?

S. C.: They do it very well for me because... Imagine, four mothers call us who want a cafeteria for a school. Because the government hasn't provided one. And the government is illegal. We ask INLSEE for all the paperwork. I mean, when a community has four

mothers... We're going to make a cafeteria, brother, it's not possible. There are four, but more mothers are missing. When they have 40, family, they call us. And we give them information, projects to convince other families. The people from MACBA, well, I stay behind the museum to give these folks information and to attack the museum where I work. Communities need to be cared for. That's why, in this project, they've kicked out the others. In this neighborhood project, there's a team that started, Atomic Lab, they were seeking prominence, publicity, and money. Not working with the neighbors. I mean, working with the neighbors to achieve it. They're a cool team. We appear in the press, and the neighbors realize they're not fools and have said, enough of this, now. And they've kicked them out of the project. And this team is magnificent. The neighbors aren't fools. Maybe they don't have money, but they're not fools. And they were kicked out because of a serious problem. That's why we're here, and she said: I trust you. One of the presidents. Because she knows we operate transparently. The community involves care and attention. Well, for example, her being there, tired, cold. We're not like here, in paradise. It's also a struggle for me. Or in La Cañada Real. There, there's no bathroom to pee, no water. But yes, it's tough. But in the end, if there's no

water, the family brings it. If you're cold, they give you a coat. If you're tired, they bring you a chair. And you're building community. The truth is, many groups, like Atomic Lab, for example, here, and others I know, work in society because it's a pose. It's a shitty pose. How many groups like that are there? Many. You could give a number like that. Even NGOs, which profit, get money for social work. Architects Without Borders, in La Cañada Real, received 480,000 euros. They built a small house that Moroccans burned down because they weren't transparent. When they saw that this work was done with 240,000 euros, building five structures with the neighbors, like this. What benefit are they going to get from that? And you realize, they set their salaries at 3,500 euros each for advice they did poorly. And you realize that I'm one of those who audits groups. I mean, I say: Hey, let's do an audit, motherfuckers. Let's do it. Let's see what you've received from the state, how much you've spent. Groups, friends too, friends who have exhausted themselves. I mean, a group, an association, has a maximum annual amount of money it receives from administrations, maybe half a million euros, and they've already received it. And if today we're going to do a project together, because I can't ask for more money, but if you ask for it, you pay me. On the other hand,

what's happened? There are many friendly groups we know. We've talked about that, about age, that people already have families, that at 50, groups get tired of fighting. I don't know what, maybe I keep fighting because someone is younger than me, I don't know. Or because the people we work with are younger, I have no idea. But the same story remains. Yes. Today, I believe activism in architecture has become a way to gain visibility, in a certain form.

M. D.: Always speaking about participation, how has the discourse on participation evolved? Why did you start collaborating with local people? Why do you seek volunteers? How do you find volunteers? S. C.: We don't look for people; it's that people look for us. In fact, we haven't been able to work on the Cárcel project in Galicia this year because we're focused on something else—a showcase and a collective—and we're helping there. But other Galicians are asking for help, as well as some folks from Extremadura for their warehouse and some young people, who are constantly calling us. So, obviously, we haven't promoted the school project because we don't have a license. But universities and people are already calling us because they're always asking, "What are you doing? Where are you?" We're in Seville building. We're constructing a joint university

to strengthen it and develop its projects. Many people come to learn, to get energy, to decide if they have agreements, formulas, urban recipes, and we give them those. Most of what we do is free advice for collectives and individuals. I had a collection of over 1,200 emails with direct inquiries, including photos of questions. From, "Do you want a house? How do I build an illegal house?" to, "How can we build a building, a school?" Continuously. And it still happens. So, the big work of providing recipes, for example, and other groups tell me, "People, Santi, do you respond? Do you respond?" We've called Asurama, Astor Bravax, sent them an email, and they tell me no. Tell me no or tell me you're busy. But they don't respond. So, people working in participation, equality, good vibes, being good people, don't respond to emails from people who are overwhelmed, even if they know how to ask for help and say, "No, sorry, good luck, but I don't have the capacity." Same thing—so the question is, am I lying to you or not? Am I lying to you? Let's see if you can handle it. But of course, the evidence of that is in the projects. And I have many complaints from people who do projects. By the way, in the documentary that aired on TV called "All for Praxis," they don't show it anymore because it was a failure. And they only talk about other projects where there

was participation with neighbors and the community. So, when you dig deeper, what happens is, as Pepe Kelle says, all books lie. It's very easy to talk about social work and participation and have a photo with neighbors. Look, it's very easy to have the big pajamas with your crew. Yes. What's happening? I'm heading over. I have something for you, wait. Stop it for now. It's warm inside, and I like it. Oh, why?

M. D.: Does the overall aesthetic of your work have a specific reason, or is it just a consequence of your main intention? Thinking, for example, about the industrial aspect, the colors...

S. C.: There's actually a true part, and that is, because of the materials we use... For example, materials that are easy for non-professionals to handle. Bolted metal structures, wood, which is easy to work with. There's an aesthetic repetition of saying, well, the reused material sometimes looks like... Intentional, but the windows now from Aremurani are going to be brown. Why? Because we have brown windows. I'm not saying windows have to be white because... No, it's just that they're going to fix brown windows like that. That's what we use because we have to reuse. So, an important part comes from reusing, from adding elements... And another part comes from

the addition of differences, changes made during the process. For example, in the prison, they made a crooked window. Why? I think because all the windows in the prison were straight. And when they made a large window, they made it crooked. I have no idea why. And I don't say, "Oh, this is crooked," but that's just how it is.

S. C.: Architecture is like an ugly child. Look, no mother sees her child as ugly. Yes, yes. And they used to tell me that in Ola Abierta's first project, which was made of sheets, windows, it was kind of ugly. I mean, objectively ugly, but I thought it was beautiful. They told me, hey, architecture is very beautiful in the process, but the result is a bit ugly. And I said, who doesn't have an ugly friend? Because an ugly friend isn't really ugly. But your friend is smart, dances well, invites you to drink beer, his mother knows he's ugly. But he's the most beautiful person in the world. Pornographic architecture, which is architecture of absolute beauty, is pathetic. They look like models, I mean, the architecture that's sold are models. Young girls, young guys, all very handsome. That's the idea of architecture. Sometimes a material is used, sometimes, and they say, hey, this is old. And my father is old, but I wouldn't shoot my father, I mean. There are things that age, or aren't so pretty, and people already say...

what for? If the process is beautiful. I mean, raising a person or raising a child doesn't matter how they turn out, you love them. I don't care if they're handsome or ugly, damn it. That's the point of architecture. The aesthetics, we try to make it look good. But it looks good because the criteria are common. We don't decide, this way, and if it's not, I don't do it. I want a curved, purple glass. This black isn't the black I asked for. I want a matte black and for the roof to change. That's silly. What looks nice? They always look nice. Our projects are photogenic, but because they are the accumulation of elements, ideas, changes made in the work. And you notice that, and that's what's beautiful. So, there's no strict rule in the aesthetics of following a clear standard. And we want things to look good, last a long time, be beautiful, on a small scale. But we know there will be an accumulation of differences, mistakes, or materials we don't like, but that's what we have. But we're not aiming for industrial or post-industrial aesthetics.

M. D.: Yes, it's an important topic in architecture. Last question. We talked about material waste. Architecture is a highly polluting sector. And you promote the reuse of materials, a market that has been growing in recent years, but it doesn't produce significant figures. How do you position your-

selves regarding this discourse? Is your reuse of materials part of a larger strategy? How could it evolve to have a greater impact?

S. C.: For more than twenty years, we've been working with reused materials. In the Open Classroom project, 95% of the materials were reused, and in the Madrid Public School, 90%. We've reached percentages of 70–90%, and although today it's sometimes less, we continue with the same logic: avoiding waste. We used to look for materials in the trash; now we have agreements with administrations and companies, even with Netflix, to ensure that materials from productions or demolitions are directed to social projects. One example was the Barcelona tricentennial: we signed an agreement with the Enric Miralles Foundation to recover half a million euros worth of materials that were about to be discarded. We transferred them to schools and social centers in various cities. I don't care where the public money comes from, as long as the resources are used well. In recent projects, we've hired people with drug addiction problems for disassembly, creating jobs and reusing materials that now equip five schools in Seville. This circular economy work has been ongoing for over two decades, and we continue to promote it through documentaries and collaborations that show its real impact.

M. D.: So, you're happy that you opened a classic architecture studio for us. S. C.: Well, people who know us know that the studio is where we have dinner with friends because we don't have more space.

*Interview with Benjamin  
Foerster-Baldenius,  
member and co-founder of  
Raumlabor*

*21st November 2024, Berlin,  
Germany*

M. D.: The main point in this moment of my thesis is to find practices that take a political stance. I also start from the assumption that if in the 60s and 70s architects engaged in political positions through being intellectuals, nowadays it's more about activism. That's why I'm trying to find practices, studios, and collectives that engage with activism in some way. It's not easy at all. As I mentioned in the email, I went to Barcelona to speak with Lacol, I don't know if they did this. They created a cooperative housing project called La Borda, which is a new approach to housing and communal living. It's located in a specific neighborhood—a working-class neighborhood. I don't know how, but they used local movements to collaborate with the Barcelona municipality to build a different kind of housing that is quite remarkable. It even won some awards. That's important to me because usually these kinds of projects don't win awards, even though this is becoming more common again.

Somehow the point is that today, many collectives are involved in creating ephemeral installations, events, and other types of architecture. Another part of my research focuses on different architectural tools. For example, La Borda is a cooperative housing. Then I went to Paris to speak with Leopold Lambert, the editor of *The Funambulist*, a magazine dedicated to political architecture. I'm also exploring related projects like housing and ephemeral architecture. I'm trying to investigate all the different tools related to architecture. Of course, I'm interested in Raumlabor because you've been working on this for, I don't know, probably 20 years?

B. F-W.: 25.

M. D.: I also talked with Santiago Cirugeda of *Recetas Urbanas*, who also started about 30 years ago. I'm trying to understand how this came about and why there are so many young architects trying to do something different from traditio-

nal architectural firms. I just want to discuss this with you. I have some questions, but we can talk freely. The first question is about how you started Ramlabor—could you tell me the story of its beginnings? How you got started, how the group members met, and the story behind your first projects.

B. F-W.: I think it's a very simple beginning. What does "beginning" mean? Most of us were studying at the same university, the Technical University Berlin. I also studied at the Art Academy Udeca in Berlin, while Jan went to the Cooper Union, and Markus attended the Butler School. We gathered information from different places, and we were friends.

M. D.: Was the university important to you? Did you have any great courses or teachers?

B. F-W.: Not really, no. It was more about my interpretation; maybe others would say something different. But for me, being in Berlin at that specific time was more important. I'd say half of our architectural education came from outside the university—through the squatting movement, raves, exhibitions in public spaces, and occupying areas temporarily to make things happen. It was a very affordable city where you could live without stressing too much about food or housing. That environment al-

lowed for activism and creating things that would be much harder under other circumstances. I remember visiting Jan while he was in New York, which was still fairly affordable then, but it already required a big effort to raise the money and find a place to stay. It was a huge responsibility because you owed that money to the people who loaned it to you, all just to pursue your studies and being successful. In Berlin, that wasn't the case. Our technical university and art academy are not well-known architecture schools with big reputations. They don't have a major reputation, so you could just focus on your work. Honestly, what makes studying here in Berlin interesting is the city itself.

M. D.: That's interesting because the economic situation has completely changed now. I'm not familiar with Berlin, but many groups are now taking on various projects simply because they can't afford to build large structures. And I don't know why, but usually—like in Italy, at university—we study to design museums, villas, skyscrapers, which is quite distant from reality. Then you go out of university and discover another world. That's why young architects are trying to meet and do different kinds of projects, but it's not really a choice. It's more because they don't have other ways to do what they want to do, what they feel.

You're telling me that you started because Berlin was affordable and you could do what you really wanted to do.

B. F-W.: It was an interesting city. There were things happening and topics being raised that, under different circumstances, wouldn't have gone viral. Of course, it was a city of reunification, with the wall coming down, a lot of two different societies clashing and coming together. There was much to discover and negotiate in this city. Additionally, there was a certain void because no one really cared what you were doing. Compared to now, the police were almost not present, except at times when they believed they needed to act against the squatters. Suddenly, it felt like a police state, but otherwise, you just did your own thing. We never asked for permission; we just did stuff. Of course, there were also people at the schools and academies who taught there—good, laid-back, helpful folks who supported what we were doing or at least didn't stand in our way. And looked at it, why not? Let them do it.

M. D.: It's not so traditional.

B. F-W.: And that was, of course, a good situation where we could all, at least for myself, make my diploma about the stuff that I was doing.

M. D.: So the university was somewhat free to design a skyscraper to complete the school. It felt natural for you to focus on ephemeral projects. I use the word 'ephemeral,' but I'm not sure if you see your projects that way. So you weren't interested in building houses or anything like that. Why did you choose to work on different kinds of projects?

B. F-W.: It's interesting, but for us, I think it didn't feel different. It was more about the feeling that we are continuing the project we started doing here over the past, I don't know, five to ten years while we were studying. We want to keep that same approach. The way of research we learned at the school. And we want to keep going instead of sitting in an office or in a galley where you just count square meters and make tile plans for bathrooms. We were simply not interested in the clash of realities you mentioned. We didn't want that. We wanted to continue. We value that freedom because we had the luxury of being in a city where we could take it. And there wasn't much space for that.

M. D.: But about participation, did you approach participation as a method? Why did you choose to do that? Was it something you learned in university, or was it from the city, the movements. How this idea came about? Because right

now, universities are starting to offer courses on how to involve people, citizens, in projects. But I don't know, maybe 20 years ago, in Italy for example, they definitely weren't teaching about involving citizens.

B. F-W.: No, it's actually the opposite. I think architecture education is about unlearning people to work collectively, to engage in collective processes. I believe that, as we grow up—whether in families, schools, groups of friends, or other social settings—we become accustomed to doing things together. Except if you're a loner, then you'll likely never participate in architecture in that way. Instead of that, at the university level, we were trained to do group work and collaborate. There was Alfred Hut, who organized workshops in architectural participation, but only at the Academy of Arts in Berlin. Beyond that, I don't think it requires special training; it needs support for those who want to do it. We never really saw it as practicing participation—it was more about doing things the way we believed they should be done. We also consistently worked on projects with non-architects—friends who were artists, musicians, and other practitioners. In the squatter movement, it was quite helpful that there were some architects involved, but also others.

M. D.: But were you part of squatter movements or some other kind?

B. F-W.: Sure.

M. D.: Any other specific movements? That's interesting, because when I think about the 90s, I get the idea of big architects wanting to demonstrate they are the authors.

B. F-W.: They're still around, and that's true. The era of the big heroes was definitely modernism. Everything that came after was an attempt to revisit this idea of the architect as a Le Corbusier, Gropius, and others as the big hero. Of course, Peter Eisenman was also trying to be a big hero, along with all the other guys who were... And also Rem Koolhaas and so on. And they still try to do that; they still think they are the big heroes and they're saving the world with their absurd ideas and social ideas. But, in fact, I think this is not what the world needs.

M. D.: And did you have any references for your work at that time, like architectures, architects, or professors at the university that inspired you in some way?

B. F-W.: Sure. At my school, there was, for sure, Alfred Huth, who worked with Günther Domining on Red Beauty. He talked about

that and was involved in interesting projects, though he wasn't... He also introduced us to great architecture, specifically Frank Lloyd Wright's work. He shared insights about networks of architects and their projects, which was very helpful. I see him as more of a role model as a teacher. Also, one of the Hausrucker guys was there, and of course, there were visitors to our school, including a big workshop with Cedric Price. He was walking around with his cigar and glass of whiskey. He was approachable, and we could talk to him, which was great. We, of course, liked Achim Brand's drawings, and we were big fans of all that Italian architecture, too. They made stunning drawings, and we were trying to figure out what we could do with that and where it might lead us—ideas like the instant city and the plug-in systems. That was definitely a great inspiration. It was fun to look at. From my perspective now, I'd say it was also very climate-neutral architecture. Because it was drawings, it was basically just a little bit of ink on a piece of paper. Yes.

M. D.: That's also about radical architecture. I have to say that sometimes, when I use the word protest, people—whether architects or researchers—think of something destructive. They see protest as something that isn't about building, an answer that doesn't involve

positive efforts or results. Usually, protest is seen as the opposite of designing, something that is not constructive. But I'm trying to point out that radicals, with all their projects, weren't necessarily building physically. Instead, they emphasized ideas that became the foundation—fundamentals for imagination and for designing in new ways. In Italy, we needed radical architectures to start thinking differently. For example, once, I was talking with a French architect. She felt accused by my research and told me that there are laws architects must abide by. This was interesting because you mentioned that in Berlin, there was initially a kind of lawlessness, maybe. B. F-W.: A lack of control, rather. M. D.: I would say the laws are already in place. Now, architects have to deal with the law and a lot of regulation. So, it's probably much more difficult to design something that complies with regulations. I'm also trying to understand this relationship between projects and institutions. That's an important point in my research. But let's go back in a moment.

B. F-W.: It's interesting how architecture and law often clash. Actually, my very first architect project, maybe the only one I ever did, dealt with this topic. I created this wild, performative, ephemeral architecture diploma. Two months later, I was approached by a couple

who had heard about it through a friend of mine. They thought I might be exactly the architect they were looking for. They owned an allotment garden in Berlin—one of those 500-square-meter gardens with a small garden house—and they lived in a 120-square-meter apartment. They wanted to move into that garden, even though they knew there are many restrictions on constructions and buildings in such areas. They asked if I could design something that would make it possible for them to move there. I then sat down and started to investigate. First, I thought about what the law says, what restrictions exist, and all the legal terms concerning garden house sizes, roof shapes, foundations, basements, and so on. It became clear that these laws don't offer much freedom. However, I also found out there are other laws—exceptions to permission rules. For example, you can build certain structures without needing permission, like a bike stand, a mailbox, or a radio mast. You can also build a small greenhouse—up to about eight cubic meters—without having to ask anyone. In Germany, you can build artworks without permission up to four meters high. I was, at Joachim von Niesau's place. He is building artworks. Some of them are taller than four meters, but others are smaller. I observed all these pieces and assembled them together.

I said, Lo, this is your house. You get a garden house, an artwork, a greenhouse, and a house—a basement of that size, and so on. And if you put it all together... That's a house. It's a house. It's smaller than your apartment, but it's still a house.

M. D.: So you build it.

B. F-W.: And then we built it. Wow. After that, I stopped with building architecture because it took me a year of my life to complete that project. I had two people who, at the beginning, were happy. They got divorced five years later. I think...

M. D.: Was it because of the house?

B. F-W.: It was related to the house. It was a very ambitious way of living that I pushed them into. Then I decided that maybe this kind of architecture, even though it's funny and somewhat enjoyable, doesn't have much impact on our society.

M. D.: So, was that your goal? When you graduated from university, did you have specific goals for your role or the kind of work you wanted to do?

B. F-W.: I believe I had goals for my life. I was always involved in various protest movements even

before, including against the first and second Iraq wars, the 2000 Olympics in Berlin, and for housing reform, among other causes. So, I was constantly part of these efforts... I also had a large network of friends. And until a moment when it almost became too much for me, I thought I had to do something other than just organizing demonstrations and protest meetings. You started to do... Also other things. So I think I never studied architecture because I wanted to become a star, a pop star architect.

M. D.: Of course. And as you mentioned that you were working with many artists, and I don't know, other kinds of people or practitioners. How do you manage? How have you handled interdisciplinarity in your projects so far? Did you work with a wide range of professionals? Because this is another important point right now. Once, a professor of mine told me that nowadays architects are becoming gardeners, artists, or whatever else. And this is something that, in a way, is eroding the traditional role of architects. It's about time.

B. F-W.: It's about time to deconstruct the traditional role of architects. The main idea now is that architects need to find a way to live and practice without building, because building is destroying our planet. That's obvious and not just my opinion. One-third of global

CO2 emissions come from buildings. We have to change. And the only way, the only power we as architects have, is to simply stop. If we don't stop immediately, there's no...

M. D.: That was the conclusion of my master's thesis.

B. F-W.: We can keep designing, but we shouldn't actually build what we design. We can create skyscrapers. Why not? But we shouldn't construct them. Nobody really needs them, that's true. And that's the side we overlook. Many so-called architects—I wouldn't even call it architecture—develop most of the constructions you see everywhere in the world. You can go to the Balkans, Georgia, Istanbul, Moscow, or anywhere else. Asia, Dubai—it's astonishing—things are being built that nobody truly needs, using enormous amounts of energy and resources. It's just a giant machine to spend money and pour concrete. The money market, not laws, drives this. It's capitalism, not legislation, that really rules. When the architect you mentioned said that architects are entirely driven by laws, that's not true. We're driven by the market. Without money, we wouldn't be building, and laws wouldn't matter either. Maybe there should be stricter laws, making it impossible to build certain structures.

M. D.: Maybe we should change the law.

B. F-W.: In the beginning, when we started all these kinds of ephemeral projects with Hormel & Bohr, I wasn't thinking about that at all. Climate change was a topic, but it wasn't as clear that the architect's practice is so closely linked to it. We had dying forests back in the 80s. It was therefore obvious that there were certain things we shouldn't do. Recycling was already a topic then too, so it was clear that we should use materials that we try to recycle as much as possible and aim to reuse and conserve resources. But it wasn't... It was more like, sure, let's do it in a way that makes sense. It wasn't even about protest, you know? It wasn't meant to be a protest. It was just that, when we do things, we try to do them in a way that aligns with what is ethically, morally, and responsibly right as people living on this planet.

M. D.: And what about the aesthetic of your projects? As you mentioned, this theme of recycling and sustainability is connected to the do-it-yourself aesthetic, which is now becoming popular again. For example, I don't know if Assemble from London—sure—They are creating many ephemeral projects in London squares using timber, with this aesthetic that is becoming trendy. So, what do you

think about the aesthetic of your projects and how it is being used now?

B. F-W.: I believe that, in some ways, if you realize your projects with a specific material, it inherently carries a certain aesthetic. If you want to work with leftovers or trash, it becomes difficult to avoid a particular look. You can still paint over it.

M. D.: So, aesthetics are not a matter?

B. F-W.: No, but it's just something to adjust.

M. D.: Were you thinking about the aesthetic back then? What was the point?

B. F-W.: Sure, we're always thinking about aesthetics. Of course, we want to create things that look cool, that people find somehow, I don't know, a certain kind of sexiness. But at the same time, we believe that, as we know, space isn't just made of walls, roofs, and floors, but is shaped by social interaction. It's what happens that truly matters, what people do, and who else can interact with these structures—animals, plants, and so on. Aesthetics is really something that, wow, it's so simple to make something look good. So you can achieve it in the end. What's more important is to think

about projects, activities, ways, movements, and involving people in these things, and how it can work. The rest is more or less our hobby. Architecture is our hobby.

M. D.: I want to connect this topic of materials with that of economics. First, I'd like to ask you: where did you find the materials for your first projects? Because, a few months ago, I was talking with Orizontale, a collective from Rome, and they told me that they started to build a lot with trash materials, since Rome is full of trash. That was kind of fun, especially because I studied in Venice, and in Venice, of course, you can't find anything on the streets to design with.

B. F-W.: If you find a street, then...

M. D.: It's interesting to see how the city, whether it's Berlin or Rome, provides materials for projects. Did you experience the same?

B. F-W.: No, of course, I think that... If we consider materials that we could activate for our projects, then, of course, first of all, we look around. We try to figure out what is there. And then, there are places that are full of stuff, and it becomes more a question of how to make an interesting project out of it. It's more about the choice of material. Then, there are places like Venice, but also Rwanda, for example—there's nothing. In Rwanda,

everything is used until nothing is left. Places like that, and also in India and many other places, things are just... There's always people who still have a use for something. Recycling really isn't a topic because everything gets recycled anyway. It's more a question of, if this is the case, and they've already cut down all the forests in the country as well, like in Great Britain and the Easter Islands—what do you do? How can you... What can you activate to create shelter and space? Giving the space some sort of framing. And then, I think, you have to be creative. There are always things, things to consider...

M. D.: That's the point. Talking about economics, how did you find a way to create an economy that supported your office, your... I now call it office but actually I don't know which word you use for your practice. Anyway, collectives work closely with institutions and museums, producing numerous publications and exhibitions to raise funds for the development of their projects. Was that a problem for you at the beginning?

B. F-W.: I don't clearly remember that money was a major issue. Of course, we always needed funds, but somehow it was possible to get by with simple means. Much of the projects we undertake are supported by cultural funds, mostly German, occasionally Austrian,

and sometimes Swiss cultural money. We're basically doing the same as French collectives. I'm not so sure about Spanish collectives because there isn't much cultural funding there. There is some, but not much. Anyway, I believe this situation is unmatched anywhere else in the world, especially in Germany. Again, we held a very privileged position here with cultural funding. Now, that is somewhat at risk. Recent decisions in Berlin and across the Federal Republic threaten this, with significant cuts to cultural funding. So, we need to see if we can still continue. However, many institutions still receive support from the national, regional, or city levels, or are funded through them. We quite often collaborate with these institutions. Additionally, many festivals—various art festivals—invite us to participate.

M. D.: Invited?

B. F-W.: Very often. Sometimes, we undertake self-initiated projects where we fundraise on our own. Big ones include the Floating University and the Haus der Statistik — these are huge projects, real tankers. But then, some of the projects we do just by ourselves. Occasionally, we collaborate with initiatives and try to fundraise together, or we become part of the initiative and fundraise from within. Mostly, these are projects

that are somewhat within our close environment.

M. D.: Do you also participate in competitions? Like public competitions...

B. F-W.: We try to avoid it.

M. D.: . That's interesting.

B. F-W.: And why? Because we do exhibitions, and sometimes exhibitions have to... I mean, museums have to make a pitch because they get public money, and they have to show that they've considered different ideas. But we usually only participate in a pitch when we're confident we will win.

M. D.: But why do you try to avoid competitions? Is it a waste of time and energy?

B. F-W.: No... Why create a design when 50, 100, or even just 30 other architects also invest time and ideas only to end up disappointed? Then there's one winner. As that wouldn't make the world a better place. No. No. And anyway, we don't want to build, so we don't need to hold competitions for the world we live and work in. We prefer to collaborate with people on projects that we believe in.

M. D.: This is a dream. Can we discuss the Floating University for a bit? I really like that project

because it approaches education in a unique way. That might be another tool of architecture, in my imaginary list. How did that idea originate? What was the trigger for that project?

B. F-W.: There's a certain myth I always tell. Maybe I should check if it's really true because I've told it so often. For sure, it all started with this site.

So, it all began with this rainwater basin being there.

M. D.: And how did you come across that?

B. F-W.: All by chance, because we've been working on the old Tempelhof Airport for a long time. We've been developing projects around it for a long time to also showcase a particular way of managing a large public space. The rainwater basin is part of that complex, even though it's on the other side of the road. The beginning was a site that we discovered through research we did in the surrounding area. That was a kind of a magic site. That was clear from the beginning, but it was also clear that, in a way, it's good the way it is. No? It was somehow a secret area in the middle of the city, which is great. And some secrets you have to keep. But basically, starting with 2008 and the financial crash and the global money looking for ways to invest,

Berlin became a hotspot for real estate speculation. That meant the city was full of truffle pigs looking for investments. It was super clear that this piece of land in the middle of the city wouldn't be secret for long. So, we were looking for an idea to put our foot in the door and basically squat that piece of land in a way so charming that nobody would ever think of moving us out.

M. D.: Interesting.

B. F-W.: And of course, it's not so simple. It required a lot of negotiation and a good idea. It also needed funding and something sustainable that aligned with our identity. The concept of a learning environment was very close to us; it was dear to us. We conducted numerous workshops, taught during summer schools, and collaborated with Orizzontale and other collectives. We organized many efforts to create a public space built together with large groups of students. We thought, let's do it. The final piece was the availability of new funding in Germany for 2019, the 100-year Bauhaus anniversary, which supported projects related to the Bauhaus celebration. We made the connection and decided to name it a university. We didn't care whether it was officially a university or just a place for research or meeting – our goal was to create an encounter space, a place

for research, fun, charm, and critical discussion about everything happening in the city.

M. D.: Super interesting.

B. F-W.: But that was only for the first year. After that, we had to find other ways, including spreading the responsibility—not just on my shoulders and Florian’s, who had just left. We were the ones making the project. After a year, it was clear we couldn’t be the only ones taking all the responsibility.

M. D.: That’s a huge project. So, last question: Do you think that architecture can protest?

B. F-W.: It sounds like a good question. If I interpret it literally, it’s challenging because we need to discuss the definition of the term “architecture” in this context. Because, of course, if architecture is a building or a drawing, and if we say this drawing can protest, it will mean that we give a certain life to the drawing. But of course, it’s not the drawing itself, but the person who created the drawing or the group behind it. In that sense, architecture can only serve as a tool for protest.

M. D.: So, architects may be able to protest.

B. F-W.: Architects, for sure. Architects have to protest, and that’s

without doubt. But can they protest through architecture? I believe they can. Some projects we’ve done in Milan, involving forms of turmoil like inflatable cushions that double as banners, are literally ways of going on the street and making a statement. So, there is an architecture of protest, definitely. I also believe that architects, along with others like doctors, hairdressers, and industry workers—everyone with an education or even without—should be critically aware of what’s happening and find ways to challenge it. That’s the essence of protest. Of course, it can go both ways. Germany in the past 15 years has seen very frightening protests. Protest doesn’t necessarily mean people are fighting for a better world; it can be the opposite. Think of Germany 90 years ago—there were large protests that definitely went in the wrong direction. Just to say, yes, people can protest, but it’s not about whether they can protest, but about what their protests are about. Where are they leading us? Are they helping anyone in any way?

M. D.: So, questioning is probably an important part of protest. In my view, I’m doing this research because I’m trying to find a way to become an architect in Italy and do meaningful work... Since the law in Italy is lax and ineffective, the situation is, of course, worse than here. For Italian architects, it’s re-

ally difficult to find a non-traditional way to practice architecture. Sometimes I think this research is just me trying to find a break, a way to do something different in Italy, maybe even in Venice.

B. F-W.: For architects, fighting for these spaces of negotiation—those that have been provided by democracy in the past—is crucial. Now, we see democracy crumbling everywhere, which means there's

no room for negotiation. We're heading back into totalitarianism with big strides at the moment, especially in Italy. In Germany, we're all on edge, wondering what the next elections will bring. We also know that some of the world's biggest countries are now governed by totalitarian leaders. The system might not be fully totalitarian in the US yet, but what Trump says—he's going to turn the US into one.





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Venice, 4th May 2026.

