

CARTHA

III Santísima Trinidad, december 2015

Marco Serra

Tanguy Auffret-Postel | Rabih Shibli | Albert Palazon | Bernardo Menezes Falcão | Onnis Luque

Fritz Barell | Enrique Peleaz | Laura Bonell and Daniel Lopéz Dòriga | Tiffany Melançon | Pedro Bragança

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Editorial

CARTHA

The inevitability of the triangle

When dissecting the building process, we found that we could pindown three main intervenients; client, architect and user.

_The client is the source of the process. It is the will and the birth of the whole discussion. Without client, there would be no project, no building.

_The architect is the means to an end. It is the negotiator between the client's wishes, the user's needs and his own views.

_The user is the end, the one that gives meaning to the built environment, that projects itself onto it, appropriates and lives in it, with it.¹

These three entities are always present even if they are absent. This is possible due to the collective and societal nature of Man, which allows individuals to assimilate an empirical knowledge about the built environment and to take an active role in its construction. The built environment, and its language, are the result of the constant, either conscious or unconscious, dialogue between this trinity.

If we were to understand the role of the client as a specific entity that starts the project, follows it through to its conclusion and ends up profiting from

its use, we could argue that, for example, in the "Torre de David" project², the figure of the original client was replaced by an informally organized group of people that started taking over an unoccupied structure. For them, the project started as soon as they moved in and had to transform the raw structure into livable quarters.

We could use the same example to discuss the absence of the role of the architect. Even though there was no architect involved in the planning and execution processes of the "finished" structure, the concept of what architecture is, is extremely present. The materials used, the disposition of the rooms, the placing of the household amenities, these are all decisions that are deeply influenced by the perception these people have of their built environment that is, in turn, influenced by architects.

In this same situation, the final user was not the originally intended. As the original project came to an halt, a new potential user started started to appear, a user that would be detached from the one idealized by the client and the architect but still a very valid one. The people that took the Torre over gave purpose to this otherwise dead skeleton, they won it over and brought it to life by projecting onto it their needs and wants.

This realization of the inevitability of the triangle is both comforting and disturbing for architects for even though it is known that architects will always be

¹ as brilliantly explored by the work of Onnis Luque "USF DF", featured in this issue

² see "Back in the Caves" by Albert Palazon in this issue

indirectly present, it is also known that they do not have to be present, *per se*. This reinforces the strength and responsibility of architecture as a social event but questions the role of the architect as a *persona*.

In our present situation, these figures have become decomposed to the point that, for instance, an investor from Suriname that is unknowingly backing a real-estate developer in Zurich, via his stock-market portfolio, might end up being the end-user of the luxury housing complex this developer builds in Italy. The Triangle can be multiplied but, at the end, it is just a matter of proximity, it can always be brought down to the three original vertices.

With this issue, Santísima Trinidad, we aim to take a picture of the current conception of the client-architect-user relation, the influence it has on our reality and how it is influenced by it in return.³ As one might see when reading it, the presence of the three entities is mostly volatile; sometimes the three vertices have been exploded into multiple dots becoming blurry, sometimes one of the vertices is engulfed by the other two⁴, other times all of the vertices becomes a sole point.⁵ But again, it is a matter of proximity, the triangle is always there.

3 see "Gears of Utopia" by Tanguy Auffret-Postel in this issue

4 see "Ghata – A Cover against Herculean Odds" by Rabih Shibli in this issue

5 see "A Portrait of Stone" by Bonell and Dòriga in this issue

Marco Serra

Interview Rubén Valdez

Few architects may understand the complexity of the relationships between the client, the user and the architect as well as Marco Serra. As a chief architect for Novartis, with a robust trajectory behind him, Serra has engaged at an eye level with most of the vertices involved in architecture, acquiring an unrivalled understanding on the completeness of the architectural process and his different actors.

Italian & Swiss, born in Zürich in 1970, he studied architecture at the ETHZ, graduating in 1996 with Prof. Hans Kollhoff. After working in the office of Prof. Adrian Meyer from 1996 to 1999 and for Diener & Diener Architects from 1999 to 2002, Serra started working at Novartis in 2003 and is responsible for the Campus master planning. From 2002 to 2005 he was architect in charge of the design for the main gate and the car park project of the Campus in Basel. Since 2006 he is the responsible design architect for the conversion project of the Abadia Retuerta into a hotel with spa in Valladolid, Spain. Since 2014 he is the Global Novartis chief architect.

Referring to our current call for papers¹, what is your opinion thinking about the architect, the client and the user, the way they relate to each other and the different situations between them?

Rather than a trinity, it's a new form of Architect.

One single entity that would produce its own architecture for its own usage?

More than one single entity, what I have in mind is how I consider the ideal Architect should work. Today's culture has the tendency to see architecture equal to design. Unfortunately the tendency goes more and more into this direction, and I consider this a problematic development. The basis of the architects has been reduced to a very thin area and has been detached from the construction sites and from the implementation. The practice shows that architects are involved, depending on their profile, first of all on a very high level and in the very beginning. This presumes that architecture can be reduced to the elegant movement of the architect's hand. The architect as a complete, universal actor is more and more disappearing.

Whether we see the architect as an entity that manages all the different parts of his discipline or as a person that builds a language through architectonic gestures. How would you define your position within your personal work, in relation to the trinity of user, client and architect?

First of all I would like to define my ideal character of the architect. I think the architect shouldn't be neither a manager nor a coordinator, nor would I reduce him to a coordinator of disciplines. The important part in an architect's work is to be able to absorb the different disciplines and make them become one, in what is the result of his activity. The architect should be able to discuss with all disciplines at the same eye level without falling into the trap of becoming a superficial generalist. If you have a look at the way medieval monks used to build their facilities, you will be astonished by the exemplary way they did their work. What fascinates about medieval architecture is its coherence.

Probably the coherence comes from the fact, that the architect was the user and the client at the same time?

Having had the opportunity to work for a decade on the restoration of an ancient monastery, I saw that the coherence did not at first, come from an architectonic will, but from the circumstances under which the projects were set up. The monks would define the strategy and the location of the monastery. They would define the architecture including details, construction and materials. They were also the constructors themselves and last but not least they were also the users. Their buildings do nothing else than reflect these circumstances. That is where the coherence comes from. Having said this, I do not argue for regression. I argue for completeness in the architect's work. *Les pierres sauvages*, written by Fernand Pouillon, describes the life of a monk building a monastery in southern France, which I think it is a fantastic illustration of the topic.

Going back to the Santisima Trinidad subject; In your position as a global chief architect, what would be your role in this wholeness of the architecture?

First of all, I'm far away from being a modern monk, overarching all disciplines. But one of the particularities of my work is that the first discussions in projects do not happen about architecture, but about project circumstances. Also, having the possibility to see into different areas and stages of the project gives me the opportunity to see things that as an external architect you generally don't see. Take the start up or the hand-over phases of a project. These are important phases, but despite of this, often architects are not present during these discussions. The start-up is the phase in which you lay out the project basis and therefore you have the most influence over it. The hand-over is the moment when you can learn from all the mistakes. These are very valuable insights.

Talking about design and experimentation, have the usage and building restrictions of the campus been in contradiction with the architects will to experiment?

There is no general answer and it varies from project to project. It also depends how much engagement the company has put into the project. Beyond that, it is not only about the architect, but about the whole team: the general planner, the user and the client. Depending on the cooperation and the energy the stakeholders have put into the project, the result is better or worse. The better the team, the higher is the probability to find good answers to what you call restrictions.

So that in order to achieve a satisfactory building you would need to work again as a single entity, the client the user and the architect together?

Considering that the cooperation is crucial to the result, the question is how you set up teams. Good projects begin by picking the right members and this is why the choice of the architect and his team is so important. You can mitigate mistakes and improve quality by setting up a good structure, but much more effective is the right choice of people. The other aspect you can influence the quality with, is how you set up roles and responsibilities.

So more precisely, how do you choose an architect?

Probably the most important aspect in the choice of the architect is trust. Also reference projects are good but more important is experience. The only way to understand these qualities, is to interview and talk to people. Particularly in an environment of a very sophisticated communication, face to face talks become more and more important. Think about the extraordinary ability of studios to visualize projects. It is really hard to distinguish what has been built and what not. This brings us to the next point which is important in the choice of teams, and this is the visit of projects. Only by looking at realized buildings you can distinguish the quality of the studios. This is why I think that competitions do not a priori lead to the best result. Independently of whether you do a competition or a direct commission, I prefer as a first step the discussion. We had the experience that competitions are not simple because the immediate interaction between planner and client is lacking. Also,

in competitions you need to have a very clear briefing, this is why some companies begin with intermediate discussions in competitions.

Since early twentieth century, different companies like Olivetti, Nestle or Ford have had a wide research in the working space, its consequences on productivity and its social implications. However, they often chose one architect in long term collaboration. Having worked with such a vast group of different architects in the same campus, has added an extra level of difficulty in developing the project?

I think that the choice of architects is linked to the overall philosophy of the company. I have a very high respect for long term thinking, but the longer the timeline, the more difficult is it to continue working with one structure over the whole project. The highest value of working with different architects is that you can learn from them. The challenge is how you transfer these learnings from project to project. We have tried to do that by keeping continuity within the teams, therefore integrating experienced employees in different projects. You can integrate learnings into guidelines, but the best way to transfer learnings is through people.

So in this sense you would say that the client has a constant learning from different practices and that enriches its existence as a client?

Yes, I would say so.

Thinking about the building in an international and local context, apart from the users inside of the building there is another kind of user that perceives the building from the outside. How would this constellation of architects and clients insert itself not only in a Basel context but in an international context ?

To what do you relate it, what kind of perception?

Of course there is an image of the values that the company wants to present. By hiring several different architects you send a complete different message than just hiring one.



I think one of the important messages that you send out is the care for quality. This is both internal and external related. For the external aspect, I think it is related to the company's expectations, which is to attract talents. By setting high expectations onto yourself, you also set high expectations towards the outside. Working with the best teams sets the expectations that we want to be attractive for the best employees, and this is related to the ambition of becoming the most attractive company for the best people. Good people create good companies. The same is true for internal. By caring for the people you send a strong signal, that people is important to the company. The first target of the project is not architecture, but the employees. The idea of attracting and working with the best employees has been instrumental to the idea of working with the best planners. We believe that the best work environment will create and retain the best people.

Gears of Utopia – On the “plateaux” of the Ecole de Nantes by Lacaton & Vassal

Tanguy Auffret-Postel



Fig. 1 Interior view of the Nantes school of architecture

1 About architecture and power, see Michel Foucault, *Surveiller Et Punir* (Gallimard 1975).

2 Le Corbusier designed the Dom-ino project in 1914 to offer a solution for rapid reconstruction of destroyed regions. He envisioned two concrete slabs resting on pillars and linked by a staircase. In his vision, people would freely complete the skeleton with architectural solution of their choosing. The goal was double, to offer maximum flexibility but also to maintain a coherence beyond individual choices.

3 San Rocco #8, *What's wrong with the primitive hut*, multiple authors, Milan, 2013.

4 J. Stanley Mathews, *From Agit-Prop To Free Space: the architecture of Cedric Price* (Black Dog Pub Ltd 2007).

5 Fernando Márquez Cecilia and Richard C Levene, *Lacaton And Vassal, 1993/2015* (El Croquis 2015).

Thinking about the relationships between clients, users and architects really comes down to examining the «relations de pouvoir¹» that takes place between those three entities. Of course, in some cases, the wills of the three might align for the best or for the worse. But those scenarios do not provide interesting case studies for this paper as we are unable to distinguish the strategies of the different players and therefore question them. The Ecole de Nantes by Lacaton & Vassal provides us with a more intriguing example. A client (the French ministry for culture that run the schools of architecture) chooses an architect (Lacaton & Vassal) who offers a project destined to enable its users (teachers and students) to inhabit it more intensely or rather differently. To do so, architects created, among many other architectural features, large spaces called “plateaux” which could be described as large slabs of concrete that stand between the actual program (classrooms, library, etc.) and the polycarbonate façades. These “plateaux” were destined from the beginning to host what could not happen in the defined areas of the program. Visiting the building today, five years after its opening, raises a few questions. What could we learn from Nantes to make it the prototype of an ongoing suite of buildings and not an isolated burst of optimism?

Life is the show, architecture is its stage. An architect's fantasy.

Architects have for a long time understood their ability to forge systems that would influence the way life happened inside them. This consciousness for their power culminated with a hardcore modernism that proclaimed it could infant a new man. The Dom-ino system² might be the paroxysmal and yet strangely the most minimalist example of such systems. By updating the idea of the primitive hut³, it concentrated its means to provide a skeleton for life. The fascination it has inspired since, probably draws its intensity from the openness of interpretation it allows. Indeed, while the world discovered the conceptual danger of an almighty environment, architects also envisioned strategies to put their power to the service of a progressivist view. They believed in their ability to create genuinely new spatial systems as well as in new emancipated ways of life. Fascination and trust in technology nourished a series of emblematic projects of which Cedric Price's fun palace might be the most influential.⁴ Lacaton & Vassal have many times cited their admiration for its poetry and radicalness. Their project for Nantes, although often described as austere and low-tech, openly places itself in the footsteps of this high-tech and joyful chef d'oeuvre.⁵ But where Price's fantasy sadly stayed on paper, Lacaton & Vassal actually brought their machine to the real world, with all its complexity. When visiting

the School today and discussing with its users, one can only witness the acuity of the initial ambition. Invention and appropriation appears to be everywhere: from the pink trailers that host a café to the badminton classes but also with the exhibitions, the concerts the final reviews, etc.

Students and professors have integrated this mute space in their everyday life and praise its many qualities: proportions, light, views. Nevertheless, the “plateaux” are now threatened to become a caricature of themselves. The school administration controls ever more closely what can and cannot happen in these structures, limiting its use to more classical appropriation scenarios. Furthermore, the space is now being rented to host external events for clients in search of a creative “décor”. This driftage reminds us the risk that many innovative social and spatial structures face once the image of their freedom becomes more important than their actual freedom.

Imagining the contemporary agora. The strategies of Lacaton & Vassal to create «espaces capables».

The idea of public space as the centre of democracy is deeply rooted in our cultural history. So many projects try to refer to it, or invoke it that we have reached a point where it has become a completely washed out concept, rendered hollow by its ubiquity. An intense life has become mandatory for any projects. Perspectives of crowded piazzas with happy children are now everywhere, from malls to museums they only contribute to emphasising the loss of influence of architecture. Should great empty spaces be the only alternative? Should architects abandon their ideal to meaningful configurations of space? Lacaton & Vassal’s work is a powerful antidote to those who think that flexibility and intensity are only neoliberal values. Making Cedric’s price statement their own, they reaffirm the idea that space can empower people rather than constrain them while providing new solutions regarding its implementation. Indeed the silent and powerful structure in Nantes drives its force not only from the high tech’s. Taking clues from architects who decided to counter the modernist dictate by reconnecting to permanent

figures and reaffirming the inner logic of architecture, Lacaton & Vassal uses their controlled architectural vocabulary to produce spatial quality. This attitude is not meant to detach architecture from its political context but rather to allow life to happen on its own, as if architecture offered an antidote to its own power. It also ensures that all means focus on creating the best possible space. This approach has been recently described as a “style de l’absence” by Jacques Lucan in reference to Roland Barthes and the “degré zero de l’écriture”⁶. Indeed, Lacaton & Vassal’s work is sometimes presented as a non-architectural, or rather as an architecture that focuses mostly on peripheral strategies (cost, climate, etc.) and on a simple research for maximum space efficiency. Yet, when visiting their buildings, and particularly Nantes, one can only agree with critics⁷ who describe it as a powerful architecture in the complete understanding of the word. The school and particularly the plateaux offer strong statements regarding tectonics, space and materiality. In Nantes, Lacaton & Vassal achieved an architecture that welcomes new uses but does not dictate them. This also implied that the potential for social inventions is left to the users. Spaces could have stayed empty and lifeless without interfering with the core functions of the school. This is a risk the architects are willing to take to leave things open. In Nantes, they gave (almost) no clue on to what should happen. No big signs to tell you how much fun you are supposed to have, no fancy furniture to position a resting area, no flashy colours to instigate a playful atmosphere. Those initiatives and choices were left to the users. This confidence in the community’s ability to invent is what sets apart those plateaux from a “googletopia”⁸. But for reality to live up to the radical expectations of the project, users must be able to grasp opportunities and explore concrete ways to appropriate space.

Architectural Coevolution. Inventing social frameworks to enable new spaces. And vice versa.

Coevolution refers to a concept of natural science first described by Charles Darwin that postulates that plants and insects have evolved in a continuous «va et vient».

⁶ Jacques Lucan, *Précisions Sur Un État Présent De L’architecture* (Presses Polytechniques et Universitaires Romandes 2015). p.247

⁷ Iñaki Ábalos in Anne Lacaton and Jean Vassal, *Lacaton & Vassal* (Gustavo Gili 2011). p.4

⁸ Google has been among the first companies to communicate about its offices, praising the added value of a fun and flexible workplace. Yet many people have questioned this strategy, arguing that this joyful atmosphere was first and foremost a tool to intensify workload.



Fig. 2 Example of coevolution

According to this theory, evolution from one of the entities oriented the other to develop structures (pistils, trunks, etc.) that worked in close relationship with the other. The idea that sustains this theory is that iterative adaptation is more efficient to reach a complex system of interaction than a siloed development. One could postulate that architecture and social structures are the same. Taking the examples of Swiss cooperatives like *kraftwerk*, one can see that the amazing typology architects developed were made possible because groups of inhabitants invented over time a framework to update what community life meant today. If architects had acted alone by inventing everything from the ground up, failure would have probably been right around the corner. Looking at the world and its current state, one can only hope that architects will continue to reflect upon the relationships between their creations and the life it welcomes. This evolution will be even more fruitful if concrete examples, good or bad, nourish their reflection. The intense life inside the Nantes School shows us that the desire for new ways of inhabiting our daily surroundings is still vivid and full of poetical and political potential. But it also shows us the perils that inevitably threaten those bubbles of liberty. For other contemporary fun palaces to see light, users should maintain a certain level of control over their destiny. To help them do so, architects must finely tune their building to provide opportunities and desire. A lesson from Nantes is that a strong yet open form is a first step in this direction.

Tanguy Auffret-Postel, born 1985, studied architecture in Rennes and Versailles. He now lives in Lausanne where he collaborates with local architecture offices and develops personal research projects. He has been an assistant at the Versailles School of Landscape and is currently an assistant to atelier architecten de vyllder vinck taillieu at EPFL. He is also part of the curatorial team of gallery TILT in Renens.

Fig. 1 Photo Marine Mallédan

Fig. 2, Wikipedia, *Amegilla Cingulata* On *Acanthus Illicifolius*' en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bee accessed 4 December 2015 under CC license 4.0.

Ghata – A Cover against Herculean Odds

Rabih Shibli



As an architect born two years after the breakout of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), I witnessed lots of destruction (three times my family's same house) and flawed reconstruction processes, repetitive waves of displacement, and the rise and fall of grandiose ideologies. My perception of space and place has become tied to uncertainties. This perception applies to my clients who are at the same time the end users. The specificity of each project that I have designed in the past decade is based on the nature of the *struggle* facing my 'clients' where politics, anxieties, longings, and capacities intersect to develop *the built environment*. My latest project Ghata (cover) has been conceptualized to address the plight of Syrian refugees during their protracted and temporary stay in Lebanon, and to draw on the significant role of proactive architecture in response to unfolding crises.

The Struggle

The seismic pressures that followed the up-rise movements have caused deep rifts among local constituents of the 'Arab Spring' countries and in many cases, contravened to the covert and overt aspirations of the 'New Middle East'. Syria is a stark example of the inherent complexities of the region that cannot simply absorb hasty transformational agendas without paying a high bloody price.

Since the breakout of protests in March 2011,

almost half of the Syrian population underwent internal displacement (7.6 million) or have sought shelter mainly in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan (4.5 million). With the direct engagement of regional and international players in the Syrian war(s), refugees' stay in neighboring countries is expected to prolong while abilities to host are diminishing. Accordingly, the past year witnessed a new trend of displacement as thousands of refugees march across Europe in search for naturalization. Meanwhile, millions are enduring severe conditions living in collective shelters, formal camps, or in informal tented settlements that are supported by humanitarian agencies that operate with conventional methods, in unconventional times.

To date, Lebanon is hosting the largest concentration of refugees per-capita worldwide. Around 1.2 million registered Syrian refugees and an unknown number of unregistered are dispersed along 1,700 locations of the country's geographically small (10,452 square meters) and politically fragile landscape. Fatigue in the structural governance body is rendered with vacancy in Presidency since May 2014, postponing of Parliamentary elections twice since May 2013, and absence of a well structured national response plan for the Syrian refugee crisis.

Following the first year of the crisis and the engagement of regional and international forces in the Syrian quagmire, the protracted nature of the civil war





loomed as a palpable fact. Although many humanitarian programs modified their operations in order to respond to the critical repercussions of the long-term stay of the refugees however, applications didn't yield impactful results.

The Cover – Ghata

As a director of the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service (CCECS) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), I launched the Syria Relief Project (SRP) in December 2012 to address the refugees exacerbating conditions. During the first phase of the project, CCECS collected and distributed clothes donations, and supported students' initiatives and activities. The project unfolded to engage most faculties across the university tackling a wide number of sectors that include water sanitation and hygiene, education, food safety and nutrition, trauma and mental health, and shelter.

In my expertise as an architect leading the SRP, I designed the Ghata, meaning “cover” in English, to serve as a multifunctional structure for refugees. The guiding principles of the Ghata are based on the (a) simplicity and portability, (b) adaptability and scalability, (c) climatic responsiveness, (d) economic efficiency and endurance of the design that is aimed to ensure decent shelter conditions for Syrian refugees facing a protracted stay within the Lebanese mired grounds.

AUB student volunteers assembled the first unit in August 2013 in an Informal Tented Settlement (ITS) in South Lebanon. This basic 20 sqm structure was modified and adjusted by the user refugee family to correspond to their daily needs. Unit 2 was assembled on the campus of the American University of Beirut (AUB) for further testing and modifications. Units 3 and 4 were assembled in ITS's as classrooms and literacy programs were delivered by local partners to refugee students. Children constitute the highest percentage of Syrian refugees in Lebanon (53.2%), out of which only 14% (90,000) are accommodated within the already overcrowded Public schooling system.

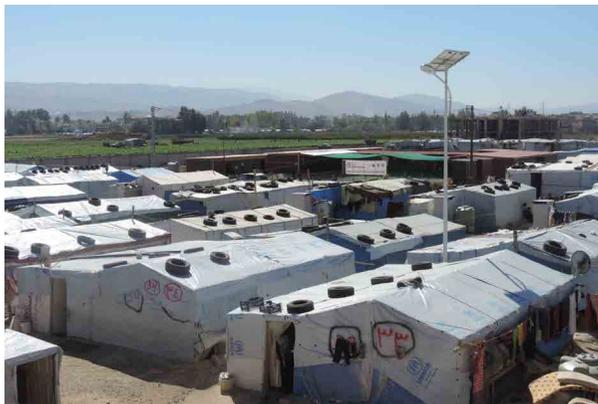
Assembling Portable Schools

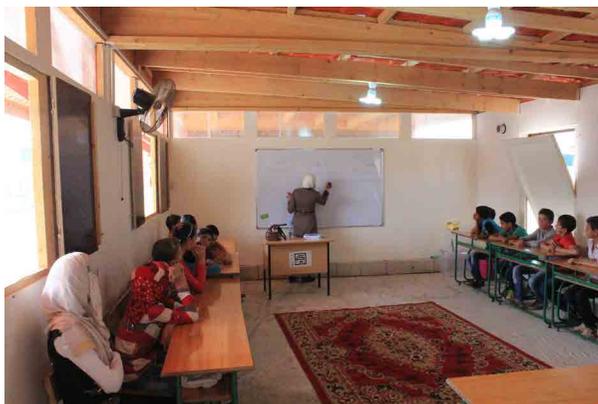
In May 2014, CCECS partners with the local NGO

Kayany under the project titled “Ghata: Bringing Education to Refugees in Informal Tented Settlements”. To date, 6 Ghata schools have been assembled in Beqaa, the district hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Each school is built to cater for an average of 700 refugee students (age groups 4 to 14) on a double shift-basis. A unit of 40 sqm proved to be the most efficient to function as a classroom that accommodates for an average of 40 students. The ground floor area needed for a Ghata school campus is around 1200 sqm. Each school includes: 9 classrooms, 1 office space, 4 dry sanitation latrines, a kitchen, and a storage area. Structures are laid out in a U form maintaining an outdoors activities area.

Malala foundation funded a Ghata Vocational Training Center that was assembled in Beqaa and that consists of 6 workshops (60 sqm each). Each workshop is equipped with tools and machinery with an objective to train female refugees (age groups 14 to 18) on skills that will help them find suitable jobs in the host country, and that will prepare them for active engagement in the reconstruction of Syria in the aftermath of the notorious war. Malala Yousafzai inaugurated the Center on June 12, 2015 and celebrated her 18th birthday with the refugee students.

Situated within tented settlements, Ghata schools also serve as distribution hubs used by relief agencies during school breaks. The schoolyards are fit to unload shelter equipment and supplies, clothes-donations, hygiene kits, food rations, wood logs, and the like. Awareness campaigns are frequently held in Ghata classrooms addressing practices that include, hygiene, child protection, gender based violence, and resilience. The open outdoors central area (school yard) of every Ghata campus hosts events that are celebrated by refugees in commemoration to their traditional cultural values. Schools shift function to community shelters in times of severe weather conditions. Following a snowstorm that hit Lebanon last winter (causing four children to freeze to death in Beqaa), refugees residing in settlements adjoining the portable schools sought warmth in the Ghata classrooms. The physical and mental well being of refugees came out as essential needs to be addressed within the holistic approach of the





project. Accordingly, a Ghata clinic with an area of 60 sqm is designed to be situated within every school campus with a focus on primary and mental health care.

Currently there are more than 3000 refugee children that have been able to enjoy a sense of normalcy in the Ghata schools amidst the surrounding madness. However, more than 700 thousand Syrian refugee children are “unable to attend school because the overburdened national education infrastructure cannot cope with the extra student load” in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan according to UNICEF.

Healing for the future

Ten years ago I founded and directed Beit Bil Jnoub (House In The South), a non-profit organization that was heavily involved in the reconstruction process following the 2006 Lebanon War. Working closely with hundreds of families who lost their memories, and in many cases their beloved ones, under the rubble of their destroyed houses, enabled me to realize the significance of design and architecture in the recovery process of war-torn societies. Designing for refugees who are enduring a protracted stay on mired grounds has been a more challenging task to achieve. In addition to the needs and requirements of the end users, the design had to respond to inherent local concerns and to political complexities.

Accordingly, architecture in contested landscapes is the composition of a design that absorbs deep-seated anxieties, and a spatial configuration that is the direct product of resilience. It is imperative to institutionalize this process into the design and architecture theory in an era where we are witnessing the emergence of a nation of 60 million refugees, according to UNHCR’s gathered data in 2014. The psychological profile of the ‘rising’ user groups is charged with tensions and would require healing environments that are constructed by this responsive, progressive architecture. The practice needs to embrace unconventional users, who represent at the same time the clients, and who own nothing but shattered memories and undetermined future.

Rabih Shibli is the director of the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service at the American University of Beirut and the founder and director of Beit Bil Jnoub (House In The South), a non profit institution. His latest research and projects focus on the Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on Lebanon.

Back in the Caves

Albert Palazon



Fig. 1 Towhee bunting and egg. Drawn from nature by A. Wilson, engraved by A. Lawson.

Hummingbirds are master crafters. They are true nest builders. Their skills in the field of architecture are simply astonishing. These hummingbirds build a tiny, knot-like structure attached to a tree branch with spider silk. The nest structure is crafted from bark, leaf strands and silk fibers, which make it strong and stretchable. The nest is covered on the outside with lichen for camouflage and lined on the inside with hair or feathers for insulation. A craftsman heritage that helped their species survive while provided a solution to a very specific need.

The nest building tradition among hummingbirds comes from thousands of years ago. In actual fact, these tiny flying creatures were already building such developed architectures while us humans were still living in caves. Recalling the beginnings of human race, it is interesting to notice that the first nomad communities in the prehistoric times did not design or build their living environments. Their survival would depend on their ability on “finding architecture”: interpreting a place and adapting to it. Inside the sheltered space of a cave, a flat surface could be seen as a sleeping spot or a gathering place; a crack on the rock could become a fireplace or maybe room for storage. Architecture was in the eye of the beholder.

As opposed to the bird’s nest which represents the achievement of an “ideal” design with a very specific purpose, the cave is an ambiguous place that ena-

bles the user to solve his needs in a flexible manner. Caves made us develop a basic framework and sense in the whole process of adaptability, which became the basis of what we today call “Architecture”. This analogy: nest (Planned environment) versus cave (Adaptive environment), as a depiction of two different paradigms, was the starting point of Sou Fujimoto’s conference in the light of the “Seminario de Montevideo 13” on October 2012 in Uruguay. Fujimoto’s thoughts on the adaptable aspects of indeterminate places give clues about the true nature of contemporary architecture. Could architecture be much more detached from the traditional notion of client-architect-commission that we have? Do architects have a significant role in that scenario?

In the year 2012, the photographer Iwan Baan together with urban think tank studio were awarded with the golden lion at the Venice biennale for the graphic depiction of a vertical self-made favela growing in the fabric of an abandoned skyscraper in central Caracas. Their series of pictures gave vivid evidence of how users create architectures interacting with their surrounding contexts.

The “Torre de David” project proved that architecture doesn’t only need to be the act of designing a place but, most importantly, having the ability to read it in order to dwell it. London based artist Nadav Kander highlights the same reality on human adaptability by



Fig. 2 Torre David – gran horizonte



Fig. 3 Chongqing IV. Sunday Picnic
vimeo.com/29879295

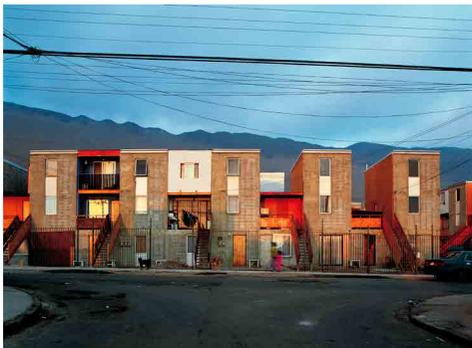


Fig. 4 Quinta Monroy Chile by Alejandro Aravena and Elemental Studio 2011

means of his photo series taken along his three yearlong Yangtze River photo project: Sunday Picnic at Chongqing is a revealing picture of how a humble family can transform the residual space under a massive concrete motorway into an impressive daytime living room by the river.

From my humble perspective, not that many architects have shown awareness of people's volatile needs and adaptation skills. Even fewer have used that knowledge as a design tool. In the year 2003, Alejandro Aravena together with Elemental studio carried out a shocking housing experiment at Quinta Monroy, Chile. The core concept of their project was to design a housing complex which would allow users to expand their own homes and inhabit their places in a personal way. One could argue that Quinta Monroy in Chile reproduces the same social phenomenon of the "Torre de David" under a planned environment by the author. Aravena's proposal produced an incredibly rich and successful outcome. The project was flexible enough to allow an assorted variety of situations in it. Its main strength consisted of accepting the fact that adaptation is part of survival. It is fascinating to observe how buildings and spaces drastically evolve over time and get away from their original function. That natural process is strongly related to both the notion of "cave architecture" and the notion of adaptation as a mean to survival.

Giles Gilbert Scott was a brilliant English architect of the early XXth century. His work comprises relevant buildings such as the Liverpool Cathedral, the Battersea Power Station or the old Bankside power station in London. He mastered the art of brickwork and was the author of some of the most valuable industrial architectures of the last century. Little could Gilbert Scott have ever imagined that, long after his death, the Bankside power station would eventually become the new international cathedral of contemporary art; now vastly known as "the Tate Modern". Aware of it or not, Gilbert Scott designed a super structure which was flexible enough to house any possible scenario. Herzog and De Meuron, the Swiss team which led the renovation for the Tate modern, saw the opportunities in the original fabric. A stigmatized nonfunctional brick

power station became one of the most significant cultural and urban landmarks in Europe. The Tate Modern is an excellent example of what adaptation is: an essential process necessary in every ecosystem, environment or architecture that aims to stay alive.

Modern life evolves faster than ever. We, architects, must understand that contemporary architecture has to be adaptable to a constant change. There is an increasing necessity of designing buildings that can have multiple lives, buildings which can cope with almost any situation and guarantee a future adaptation. At the end of the day, a very specific need required by a specific client is only a fleeting situation in time. For that reason, I believe the role of the client is slowly fading away in favor of both users and designers. An architecture that doesn't want to expire cannot be defined by a single client's need. Many other future clients, users and even architects will have to find new opportunities in a building that aspires to be long lasting. We will perish and die, but our buildings will be left behind in the fabric of our cities, and they will have many other future lives, some of which will be surprisingly unexpected. Bear in mind the "Torre de David", the Bankside power station or Quinta Monroy in Chile.

Let's leave things open and flowing. Maybe we should just project architectures more like "caves", where nothing is ever meticulously designed, but there is always a chance to find shelter and a "home" in them.

Albert Palazon (Barcelona 1987) is an architect, 3d artist and music producer from Barcelona based in Madrid. He works as a project architect at Mansilla+Tuñón studio since 2012. (Nowadays called Emilio Tuñón architects: emiliotunon.com). Albert Palazon was trained as an architect at the Architecture School of Barcelona (ETSAB), the Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland and the Faculty of Architecture in Montevideo, Uruguay (FARQ, Udelar). During his studies, he got involved in different architecture practices, such as Enric Ruiz Geli's interdisciplinary team at cloud 9 Barcelona. In 2012 he was awarded with the Arquia Foundation National Scholarship competition which led him to Madrid. He has won various competitions as a team member at Emilio Tuñón architects, as well as he has been mentioned at European 13 Finland or Asemas national master thesis contest under his own name. He is currently working on his next music album, which will soon see the light.

Fig. 1 American Ornithology; or The Natural History of the Birds of the United States by Alexander Wilson

Fig. 2 Photo Iwan Baan

Fig. 3 Photo Nadav Kander

Fig. 4 Photo Cristobal Palma

Pre-Architect

Bernardo Menezes Falcão



Fig. 1 Courtyard of the „Big Yard“

1 Dehaene, Michiel. "On the Difficulty to Make a Public Proposition, or the Chance Encounter of the Panopticon and the Boyle Air Pump on a Drawing Board." Ed. Salomon Frausto. NAI Publishers / Berlage Institute. Hunch – Publicity. 14. 2010: 28-37. Print.

2 Wohnen in Gemeinschaft – Living in a Community. STAATBAU GmbH – Netzwerkagentur Generationen Wohnen & Senatsverwaltung Für Stadtentwicklung, 1 May 2015. Web. 25 Nov. 2015. stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/wohnen/wohnbau/download/wohnen_in_gemeinschaft.pdf

3 Oswald, Philipp. "Pre- and post-architecture." Department of Architecture. ETH Zurich. Urban Mutations on the Edge. 2015. Lecture.

*There was a time when the urban planner or architect was a public figure. He or she would have been the expert mandarin of a technocratic society, the public intellectual, the celebrated artist, or the popular leader of a participatory movement. The erosion of these public positions has produced a slumbering malaise within the discipline. But more importantly, it points to a general incapacity to engage coherently in the public sphere, in the legitimation of public actions.*¹

Some months ago, on the occasion of a study trip to Berlin, I visited the *BigYard*, a recently built half-block residential complex in the historic neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg, in Berlin. Our host was Sascha Zander, resident at the Bigyard and architect co-founder at Zanderroth Architekten, the office responsible for this co-housing project.

Zander and Roth initiated their practice by the end of the 1990's decided to choose the projects they would like to build. Since then, they have developed an effective building model according to which they became able to generate their own architecture design commissions. While leveraging on the popular co-housing schemes of *Baugruppen*, the architects subtracted the developer from the building equation, not only to provide more affordable houses, but also to reclaim back the responsibility for defining the urban and social impacts of their projects within the city.² Self-initiative

took them to consider additional tasks concerning the classical practice of architecture, while starting to deal with the factors that precede it, i.e. that make architecture possible in the first place.³ Philipp Oswald coined this *modus operandi* as 'Pre-architecture'.

I A tour around the BigYard

At Zelterstrasse, the sober playfulness of the 100m-length paneled façade distinguishes the new building from the surrounding five-story homogeneous blocks of Prenzlauer Berg centennial borough, in a sheer respectful manner. From the street, what intuitively looks to be an apartment building, with flats stacked on each other, reveals to be a row of four-story townhouses disguised by a unifying façade. This volume is only breached by a pedestrian covered passage, which provides access to the backyard. An oblong courtyard garden mediates between the longitudinal street volume with 23 townhouses, and a parallel one in the back with 22 housing units. Here, three-story penthouses, with direct access to the communal roof terrace, are stacked on top of three-story garden houses, a step away from the courtyard garden. In total, 135 people dwell in the BigYard, four of the 45 units are shared, and intended to host guests.

On the way to visit the communal roof terrace, we are not allowed to cross the courtyard, as agreed between residents, given the early hour. In this regard,

Sascha elaborates on the *dörflichen* character of the project and refers to the founding principle of providing an atmosphere similar to a village, where high density of occupation intersects with the desire for an individual house, under the condition of a permanently negotiated close proximity.

This project addresses the wishes of middle-class families earning average incomes – ‘separate dwellings, large garden, green roof, open outlook, front door onto the street, parking behind the house⁴ –, which didn’t have the chance to gain access to the housing market and become homeowners within the inner city. According to the architect, the goal was to offer a lifestyle that combined the urban and suburban condition in a central location: ‘the project expands our ideas about contemporary urban housing. Housing is no longer confined to simply providing accommodation for people. It has more to do with the spatial organization of leisure time spent at home. Housing should contribute to recreation.’⁴

Sascha describes the building model process that allowed them to set up this residential complex from its first spark, tracing the most significant tasks carried out, as well as their phasing, for a period of four years, between 2006 and 2010. With approximately 9.000 m² of total floor area, this project represents a total investment of 15 million euros.

According to the architect, it all started with the choice of the plot to intervene and the search for its owner, with whom they signed a one-year ‘option to buy’ contract, assuming themselves the initial risk. In order to gain time to develop the project, as well as to complete the organization of the Baugruppe, this figure fits well one of the main challenges of their model: the need for a long organizational lead-time. / With a clear concept in mind regarding the usages and their target audience, during the first months they developed the concept design and the submission project, in order to get official approval. Still without any client, architects took the economical risk. / Once the project was officially approved, architects launched an advertising campaign for selling the housing units at ‘SmartHoming’ website⁵, the ‘sister’ company of Zanderroth Architekten, which dedicates to marketing,

project management and client care. A brochure with all the necessary information for purchasing an apartment – location, list of the different available flats’ typologies, floorplans, areas quantities, visualizations, prices – was made available to the public. The aim was to find clients – and future users – to participate in Big-Yard Baugruppe. / The Baugruppe grew gradually upon applications, under the legal framework of a civil law association. Members signed a partnership agreement – GbR (*Gesellschaft bürgerlichen Rechts*) – that outlined who was to obtain which apartment and which share of the total cost it represented. From this point, the clients’ collective shared all the financial risks, and the liability of each member was proportional to the respective share of ownership. Likewise, all the decisions represented a consensus between all the members of the group. / As soon as the required capital for construction was gathered from members’ funds, the Baugruppe acquired the plot and Zanderroth Architekten proceeded with the construction project.

From this moment onwards, the architects organized monthly group meetings with the members of the Baugruppe both to report about the progress of the project, and to collect participants’ points of view. One-to-one meetings between the architect and each one of the clients also took place during the final stage of the construction project, in order to fine-tune aspects related to the organization of domestic spaces and to define interior coatings, pavements and furniture materials in each apartment. / The construction would take approximately two years, evolving efficiently under architects’ control. By assuming construction management, architects managed to cut time and costs in the process. / Once built, keys were delivered to the house owners. The architects also became residents.

With the development and maturation of this Baugruppe building model, Zanderroth Architekten managed to develop and consistently implement multiple co-housing projects within Berlin’s inner districts for the last ten years.

II Baugruppen and the Self-made City⁶

Zander and Roth started their practice by elaborating a catalogue of empty plots in Berlin, and found more than

⁴ Zander, Sascha, and Christian Roth. „Architecture Without Developers.“ *Reinventing Construction*. Ed. Ilka Ruby and Andreas Ruby. Comp. Julia Von Mende. Berlin: Ruby, 2010. 419-432. Print.

⁵ Projekte – SmartHoming. SmartHoming. Web. 25 Nov. 2015. smarthoming.de/de/projekte/

⁶ Title of the book: Ring, Kristien / AA Projects. *Self-made City: Berlin – Stadtgestaltung Und Wohnprojekte in Eigeninitiative = Self-initiated Urban Living and Architectural Interventions*. Berlin: Jovis, 2013. Print.

7 Ring, Kristien / AA Projects. „Selfmade Not Ready-made.“ Selfmade City: Berlin - Stadtgestaltung Und Wohnprojekte in Eigeninitiative = Self-initiated Urban Living and Architectural Interventions. Berlin: Jovis, 2013. 14-25. Print.

1000. After selecting a few, they researched about their ownership and dedicated to persuade landowners with their ideas for these sites. This pro-active and entrepreneurial attitude earned them their first commission.

Indeed, Berlin is labeled a ‘Self-made city’. Self-initiated projects became a mainstream phenomenon within the last 15 years, providing paradigmatic cases of architecture and urban development, particularly concerning housing.

This singularity is rooted in Berlin’s squatter movements ‘tradition’, born in the 1980’s, when artists and activists broke in, took control and made livable vacant buildings in Kreuzberg neighborhood, after the cancellation of government’s ambitious plans for a new highway that would tear apart that neighborhood. In 1987, IBA *Altbau* would tap into the do-it-yourself energy of the squatter movement by fixing these old buildings, then handing them over to their residents as rightful owners. After the fall of the Wall in 1989, social housing (government subsidized, rent-controlled, pre-fabricated concrete housing) made up most of the housing all over Berlin. In turn, the old center of East Berlin was a no-man’s land, with over 25.000 apartments unoccupied. A strong associative and self-made culture developed in the early 1990’s among people occupying these rundown buildings. Self-initiated projects in the form of clandestine bars, clubs, galleries, shops, cultural institutions, meeting and working places were countless. On the other hand, the focus of development in the city after political reunification in 1990 would turn East, and profit-oriented investments focusing the renovation of these buildings had a disruptive impact over these associations. Despite this, between 1984 and 2003, the governmental program *Bauliche Selbsthilfe* (in English, Self-Help Building) enabled over 300 squatted buildings and self-organized housing projects to be legalized through private self-initiative. Indeed, Berlin’s transformation years were the foundation for do-it-yourself project makers.

In 2002, German’s economic recession took the State to cut funding for housing programs and investors stop building housing. Berlin’s urban fabric was left with numerous empty building sites. These small ‘holes’ presented the very special potential of Berlin and

were the catalysts for a new type of development in the inner city.⁷

At this stage, affordable living spaces in the city became limited, and the economic pressure on residents and users had risen dramatically. Nevertheless, families wanted to stay in the city and people show interest in owning their apartment; both to ensure a stable cost of living and to dwell in more personalized living spaces. Basing upon this generalized desire, Zanderroth Architekten starts to develop architecture projects themselves, carrying out designs to fill the existing ‘holes’ in the urban fabric.

The formation of *Baugruppen* (in English, builders group, building collective, client collective) is the framework condition that enables them to substantiate these enterprises. These are the outcome of a specific legal and cultural context, and constitute a condition sine qua non for the necessary generation of usages, clients and funding, which enables the materialization of the architecture project.

Zanderroth initiate their first *Baugruppe* in 2005, forming a small group of clients with whom they propose to share the responsibility of design. While demonstrating alternative solutions, it is the possibility that architects deploy for people to take charge of determining their own living environment that reveals a valuable resource in urban development, created in the area of tension between freedom and need.⁷

III Production of desire

The success of Zanderroth Architekten approach is related both with the affordability and the flexibility of their residential units. Middle-class people earning average incomes become able to become homeowners within the inner city. Besides, the opportunity to get individually tailored living space adds inestimable value to the investment of a lifetime.

After understanding that the developers earned a 20% average profit in each project – difference between production costs and sales price – Zander and Roth decided to determine their own framework. According to this building model, there would be no developer to assume the risk and make a profit thereby. Instead, the coordinated design and construction processes enabled



Fig. 2 North-oriented corner site between Schönholzerstrasse and Ruppiner Strasse

8 Ring, Kristien / AA Projects. „Project Rusc.“ Self-made City: Berlin - Stadtgestaltung Und Wohnprojekte in Eigeninitiative = Self-initiated Urban Living and Architectural Interventions. Berlin: Jovis, 2013. 76-77. Print.

9 „Inductive Urban Development.“ Concept. Zanderroth Architekten. Web. 25 Nov. 2015. zanderroth.de/en/profil/konzept

them to finance additional spatial qualities through reducing production costs. Cost-effective projects are obtained as there are less people involved, and time-saving decisions are taken along a centralized and optimized construction process. When comparing to the prices provided by real-estate market, the final cost per square meter is far below the market average.

Furthermore, their cunning ploy is also founded on the discovery of less valuable plots, according to real-estate investors' perspective. The conscious choice for a 'difficult' site is one of their trump cards: within a cheaper plot they manage to create assets that add value both to the site, to the new buildings, and ultimately to its surroundings. Architects consider themselves to be responsible, together with their clients, to do a meaningful design for the housing units and the building, but also for the urban space, emphasizing the importance of the interface between public and private.

Through an urban-oriented architectural design that goes beyond investor's urgency to create built financial assets, Zanderroth put to practice the capability to transform a disadvantage into an advantage. Their first project for RUSC Baugruppe illustrates well this aspect.⁸ At the north-oriented corner site between Schönholzerstrasse and Ruppiner Strasse, the architects created a public square within private property, completely open to the neighborhood, and the Baugruppe assumed to take care of it for the next one hundred years. The constraint typical of a Berlin block corner, where light doesn't reach adequately most of its compartments, was faced as an opportunity to enhance the urban character of this intervention, and deployed an 'untypical' solution. It resulted in the separation of the program in two buildings, with apartments facing three sides – towards the street, the new square and the backyard. Architects and clients' collective took on responsibilities that reached beyond their own property and buildings, creating new possibilities in the neighborhood and encouraging interaction with the surrounding urban environment.

Another pillar of this building model is the 'design deal' arranged between the architects and their Baugruppen members. Architects state *a priori* that clients are to keep what would be the profit margin of the deve-

loper; in exchange, they demand total freedom for each project's design, except for the domestic interior spaces, as mentioned before in the case of BigYard.

Concerning the design of the housing units, Zanderroth effort is put into optimizing spatial organization regarding maximum economy and flexibility of space, as well as into interpreting the spatial requirements of a specific target audience. In BigYard project for example, a project thought out to house young families with children and an average income, architects define the spacious kitchen as the living core of the house, with a 4.20m height that allows it to have visual contact with two floors, and a balcony towards the backyard. On the other hand, housing units are generally provided with smaller areas than the ones delivered by real-estate market, simultaneously allowing for a certain number of adjustments regarding the compartmentalization of the unit – the number of bedrooms for example. Through the design of 'untypical' and, nevertheless, smart typologies, architects manage to produce densely occupied projects, thus generating more affordable housing units.

On an urban scale, projects carried out by Baugruppen are gradually growing in size due both to the recent scarcity of small infill plots and to the unification of different collectives with compatible wishes regarding the conceptualization of public space. The challenges featured by these new urban interventions bring an added complexity to Baugruppen processes. Nevertheless, these also reveal new potentials for architects to explore while shaping pieces of the city.⁹

A project of such scale exposes, first of all, the necessity for admitting other programmatic usages in the project, in order to offer adequate urban living conditions. Finding the mechanisms to integrate infrastructural facilities like supermarkets, schools or day care centers, is one of the challenges with which the architects are currently dealing with. According to the architects, the hypothesis is to call companies or institutions to become part of Baugruppen from the beginning, in order to enable for integrated solutions. This integration may admit, for example, cases of 'cross-subsidizing', according to which profit-oriented supermarket chains are brought on board only if con-

tributing for lowering housing unit's prices.⁴

Commenting on their recent project in Friedrichshain borough, within a plot with 8.000 m², the architects identify also their aim to widen the socio-economic range of people that can afford to join Baugruppen. Leveraging on a more substantial critical mass, they managed to offer a wider range of prices for the apartments by diversifying units' sizes and relating these with its vertical position in the building – size plus height equals price. This redistribution strategy allowed them to offer penthouses with a price per square meter that is almost the double of the price they offer for other apartments within the same building project. On the other hand, they have also foreseen the option for merging and separating two adjacent apartments, arguing for the evolution of needs of the tenants over the course of their lives, and the possibility for enabling rentals. They conclude: 'Nevertheless, it would be naïve to believe that, like some kind of Robin Hood for the housing market, we could ever compensate for the major political failures that exist in Berlin due to the complete lack of a socially sustainable housing policy.'⁴

¹⁰ „Fideicomiso – Self-providing Housing Trusts in Argentina Initiated by Entrepreneurial Architects...“ Motivating Collective Custom Build. 24 Apr. 2013. Web. 2 Dec. 2015. mccb-homeimprovements.wordpress.com/2013/04/24/fideicomiso-self-providing-housing-trusts-in-argentina-initiated-by-entrepreneurial-architects/

IV The public role of the architect

While initiators of their own projects for co-housing buildings, Zanderroth Architekten assumes and conciliates multifarious pre-architectural tasks – land procurement, expertise in law, financial modeling, market analysis, marketing, Baugruppen mediation and client care – besides the architecture design proper of a 'classical' practice of architecture, as we know it from school. Nonetheless, and despite not revealing an unprecedented building model, both their discourse and designs seem to propose a 'fresh approach' within the architecture debate, arguing on the possibility for architects to play a public role.

In fact, there are multiple examples of architecture practices that integrate services and optimize building processes, in order to deliver cheaper turnkey projects. This is usually the case with market-oriented strategies, which have underlying profit margins, and where users are not part of the building 'equation'.

On the other hand, housing cooperatives are also a pertinent figure for drawing a parallel with Bau-

gruppen. Often created to provide affordable housing, their relevance is much related with the absence in the first place of the mentality of private property ownership, thus avoiding any motivation for real-estate speculation. According to Zander and Roth, reality shows nonetheless that a newly founded cooperative is not as financially powerful as a building group, as it must raise the entire budget for the building project from scratch.⁴ Moreover, the current European economical context is revealing to be arid ground, since States' effort gradually abandoned these social mechanisms, instead facilitating the life of housing corporations and stimulating the real-estate market, thought as catalysts for 'urgent' economical growth.

On this purpose, it is worth to mention a particular case: the Fideicomiso, a legal framework that resurged in Argentina after national banking crisis in 2001, enabling local architects to initiate their own building models.¹⁰ According to this figure, architects and clients sign a kind of fiduciary contract based on trust that allows the architect to take on the risk of a development, using the residents collective assets to buy the land, fund the project and deliver the scheme. Like with Baugruppen, this scheme draws clients to participate along the design process and the final price of the apartments is thought to be 20-30 percent cheaper than on the open market. Yet, and despite having contributed during the last ten years to the revitalization and densification of low-valued neighborhoods across Buenos Aires, Fideicomiso projects have few arguments to produce any significant impact within a broader societal context, given their small scale.

In turn, Zanderroth Architekten building model reveals new faculties that instill added values to the design project. Catalyzing on the strength of Baugruppen – culturally assimilated and legally matured within Berlin's context –, their practice distinguishes for channeling this ability to deal with the generation of usages, clients and funding, towards the production of a critical intervention in the city. In order to produce an effective impact by reaching beyond plot boundaries, this model either challenges or engages with the societal *status quo*, ultimately through design. That is what Pre-Architects do: they put forward a social agenda.

Regarding the ‘classical’ architectural practice, the Pre-Architect displays a reaction to the ‘self-amputation’ to which Postmodernism had condemned the professional field of architecture, since the 1960s and 1970s. Criticism of technocracy, rationalism, and utopianism led architecture back to its own discipline, this way screening out questions that were to go beyond it, allegedly undermining architecture. The increasing reduction of architectural discourse to questions of form blocked out the question of how architecture could be created in the first place. But the architectonic design can gain relevance only if it answers the question of how it can be created.

The proposal of this new professional figure is to go beyond the narrower field of architecture, i.e. the architect as the exclusive artistic genius serving a private client, and turn to pre-architectural themes, as an inclusive engaged architect that plays a public role. While leading to the re-politicization of the architectural debate – Who builds with which resources and to what end?³ –, the advent of the Pre-Architect testifies to the democratization of architecture.

In this regard, and against the background of the persistent image of the master-architect, it might reveal pertinent to draw attention to the multifarious relations between the architect and the public on post-war context, as systematized by Avermaete.¹¹ Either the syndicalist – who questioned the social status quo –, the populist – who challenged professional conventions –, the activist – who fought for spatial justice by transgressing the action boundaries of the profession –, or the facilitator – who engaged inhabitants to realize an ambitious project –, they all have intervened within society by dealing with pre-architectural tasks, this way contributing for empowering the people.

In fact, the political load of architecture manifests today once again, this time reacting to the backlash of neo-liberal times and its disruptive effect on the urban condition. Therefore, the Pre-Architect is, once again, called to develop the skills that allow him to engage coherently in the public sphere and in the legitimation of public actions. The Pre-Architect is a public figure.

11 Avermaete, Tom. „The Architect and the Public: Empowering People in Postwar Architecture Culture.” Ed. Salomon Frausto. NAI Publishers / Berlage Institute. Hunch - Publicity 2010: 48-63. Print.

Bernardo Menezes Falcão is a Portuguese architect. He holds a postgraduate Diploma on Sustainable Cities and has completed the Master of Advanced Studies in Urban Design at ETH Zurich as a scholar of Geisendorf Foundation. His project ‘Inside-Out’ for the informal settlements of Cairo – developed in collaboration with Grigorios Dimitriadis and Shinji Terada – was exhibited in the 2015 Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism and Architecture in Shenzhen and Hong Kong, and in the Egypt Urban Forum, organized by UN Habitat in Cairo. As a practitioner since 2007, he collaborated with urban planning and architecture offices in Lisbon, Zurich and Rotterdam.

Fig. 1 Photo Simon Menges

Fig. 2 Photo Andrea Kroth

USF \ DF Appropriation techniques

Onnis Luque



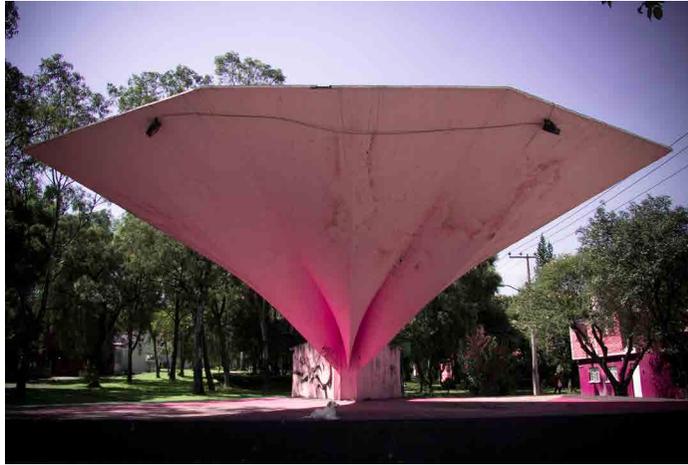
51. Primera unidad de habitación y servicios Santa Fé del Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, 1953 (en colaboración con Luis Ramos). Vista aérea.

This Photo essay draws light on everyday tactics of appropriation elaborated by the inhabitants while living in – and living with – one of Mexico City’s most outstanding modernist heritage sites: the 1957 Unidad Habitacional Santa Fé by Architect Mario Pani.

Photographer Onnis Luque playfully presents the creative tensions between architecture and improvisation, space and time, project and everyday life. He provides us with deep insight into the multiple functions, forms and facets of the lively transformation process this social housing estate is undertaking day by day.









The Tree from the Triangle

Fritz Barell

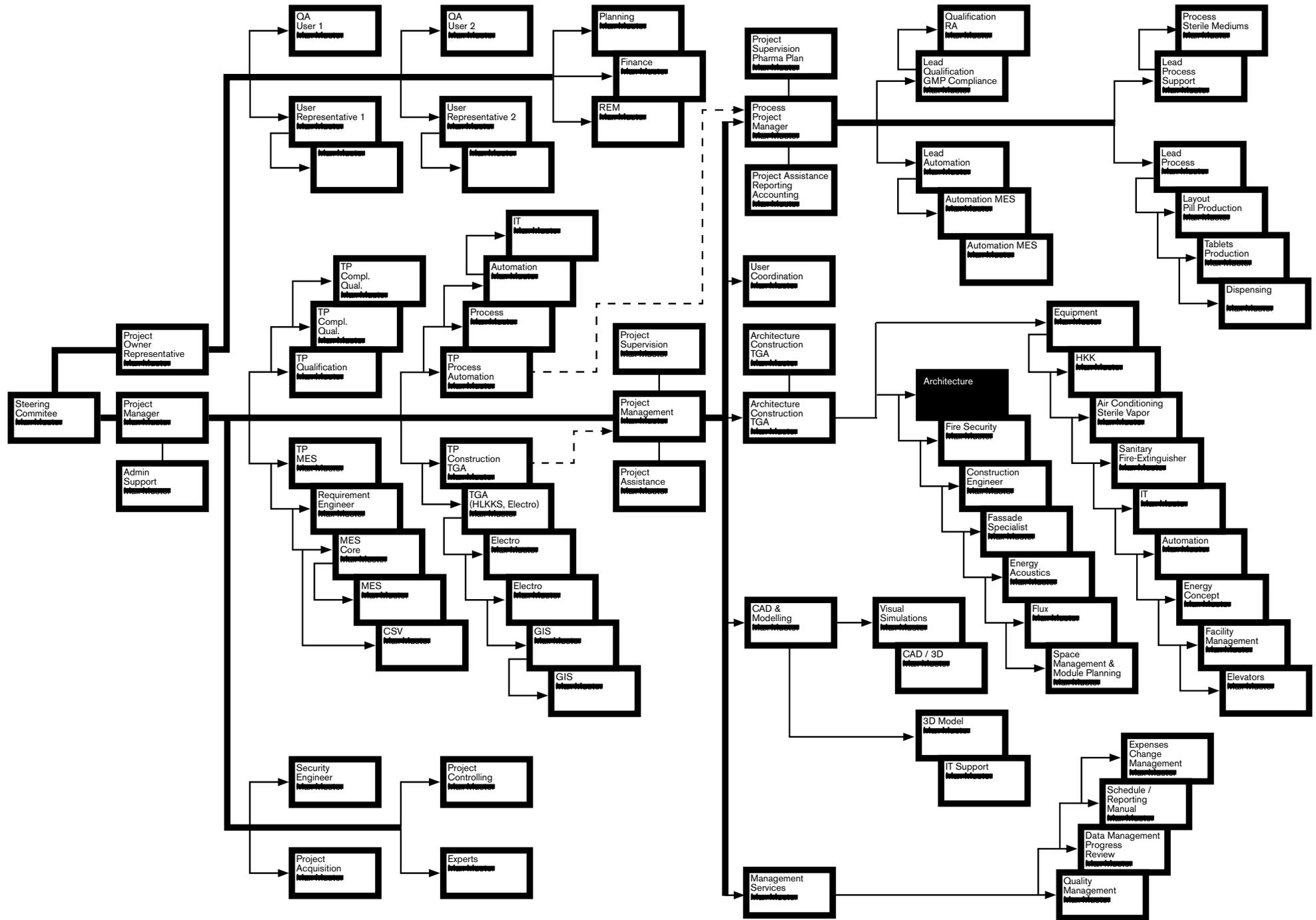
“Fritz Barell” is the fictitious name of someone who gave us access to the information that builds up this diagram but doesn’t want to have his/hers name published. This diagram relates to the overall project structure for a typical production building of a major company.

The graphic work of Max Frischknecht on the project structure makes use of identical modular units arranged according to the hierarchy imposed by the client’s approach to the process of planning, managing and building. The architect is one of many.

The triangle is, in corporate architecture, a long gone fantasy replaced by a tree-like shape of highly hierarchical relations between an exponential amount of intervenients in the project, where the client never really comes in contact with the architect.

Why has this relation come to this point? Is this way of proceeding productive? How is the built reality influenced by the replacing of the triangle by a tree?¹

¹ See the articles of Enrique Pelaez, Pedro Bragança and the interview with Marco Serra for further insights on this specific topic.



Graphics: Max Frischnecht

There's something about Clients

Enrique Pelaez

Being a client in its broad sense “the inception”

Saenz de Oiza, a famous iconoclastic Spanish architect, whose work became prominent in the 1950s and 1960s, used to say that projects are as good as a client can be. Nowadays, when delivering architectural projects it is hard to define what a client is, and more importantly identifying it in complex project structures where a client can have multiple heads. Is the client the one who pays the fee? Who will enjoy the project once accomplished? Whether a client has some commercial connotation or not, a client is the point of departure of a project, where all begins, the source of a need that looks forward to turning out into something that has not ever done before.

Its expectations in the construction industry

The uniqueness of the construction industry, as opposed to the manufacturing industry whose aim is to provide goods in a serial manner and with controlled risks, is rarely appreciated by clients who seek only for profit, and see architects as adding excessive costs and unnecessary to projects. Nevertheless there are some other clients who invest time in explaining its needs in order to be translated into a vision that facilitates the discussions that will derive into a rich dialog that all architects would look for when doing their work. Both types, despite not the only ones, are valid and legitimate options as long as the expectations are set from the very beginning.

Client types, complex structures

There is a range of client types which may be categorised by key characteristics. Some of the categories of client that are likely to be encountered in practice include: public bodies, including local authorities, who are experienced and have a large and wide portfolio; large commercial developers; and large and small companies who build to improve and extend their business and are thus owner occupiers. These different client types will have different needs that must be explored in order to build up a fruitful relationship from which the project can benefit. Although each client is different, very often clients are increasingly adopting a project culture in all aspects of their business, which added to the usual stakeholders surrounding a project, are resulting in high demands and constraints when appointing an architect. This is something that should not be necessarily badly received since working with limits is a challenge rather than a threat in a design process; however, these complex client structures most likely end up in a misalignment of the project goals and a lack of decision making.

During the project life, and within the spectrum mentioned above, clients are mostly linked to stakeholders. These stakeholders range from operators/end users who can actively participate expressing its needs for using the project, to Contractors: who could even become a client in design&build contracts, to Lenders

and investors: who expects to obtain a return on the project investment and to Public bodies, whose interest is to bring somewhat value for the community/society. Additionally, it exists the role of client representative. As the name implies, a client representative represents the interests of a client, this set-up is frequently used by those clients who do not have the in-house knowledge to cope with the project, instead they prefer to delegate the management of the project to another professional entity. There are multiple combinations on which these different roles can be played so as to be a client or a stakeholder but irrespective of the term used in a specific project they all fall under the client's umbrella.

An example would be a Hospital project. In a full public hospital (fig. 1), whose capital expenditure is funded by the public administration, the client is concentrated into one or perhaps two entities, whereas a public hospital developed in a PPP (Public Private Partnership) mode (fig. 2), an specific entity called SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) acquires the financial, technical and operational risks of the Project, and the client embraces several parties.

How to maximise the architect relationship with a client, “bridging the gap”?

With this in mind, it is inevitable that architectural practices are continuously empathising with clients, as opposed to the times when Saenz de Oiza realised his work, and are consequently becoming machineries that react and respond to these needs. To do so, they have to be equipped with multidisciplinary teams with a great variety of skills and backgrounds not only to provide enough confidence to clients but also to manage the expectations of both, client and architect, and understand scope in that sea of interests that can frequently be found in a project. In the end a successful project can be seen as that which better captures the needs of your client, which regrettably might not be remarkable architecture.

Enrique Pelaez (born in Spain) is a Chartered Project Manager Surveyor member of the RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors). He studied Architecture at the University Camilo Jose Cela and also graduated as Technical Architect by the Polytechnic University of Madrid. He holds a Master in Project and Construction Management from the ETSAM

(Madrid), and a MBA in Real Estate. In the present, Enrique works for Herzog & de Meuron in Basel as project manager and previously has worked as consultant for EC Harris working for clients in numerous international large scale projects.

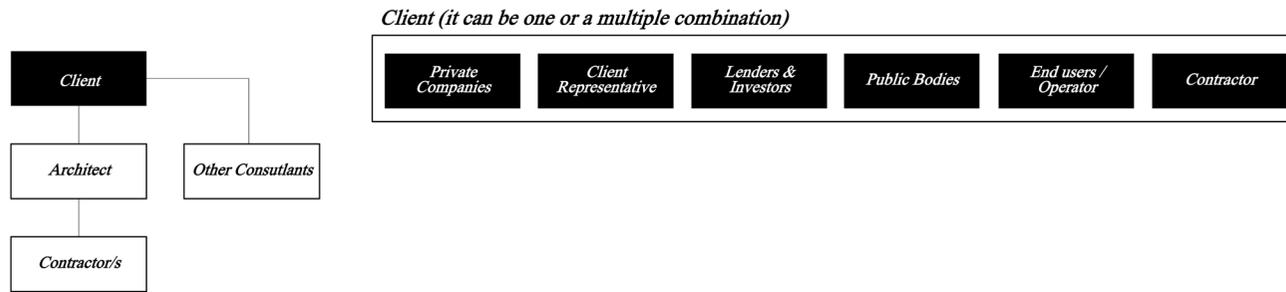


Fig. 1 - Public Hospital Project

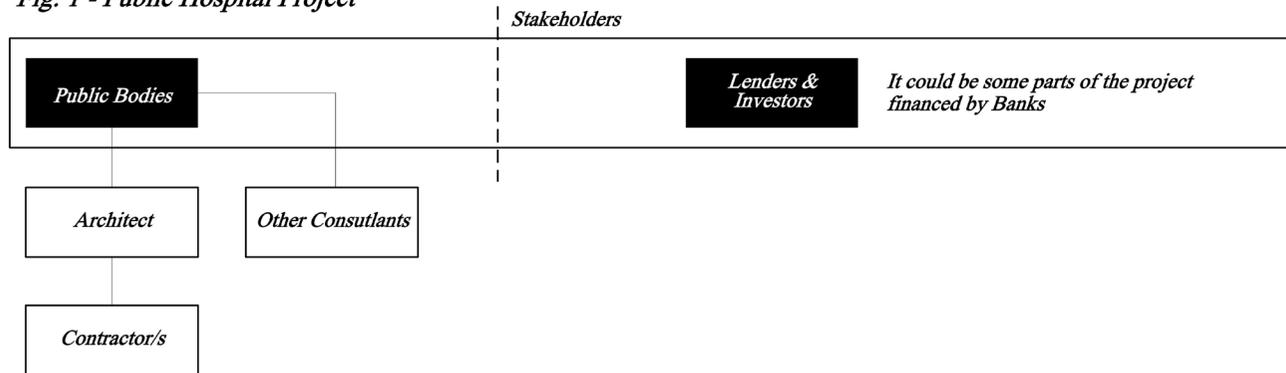
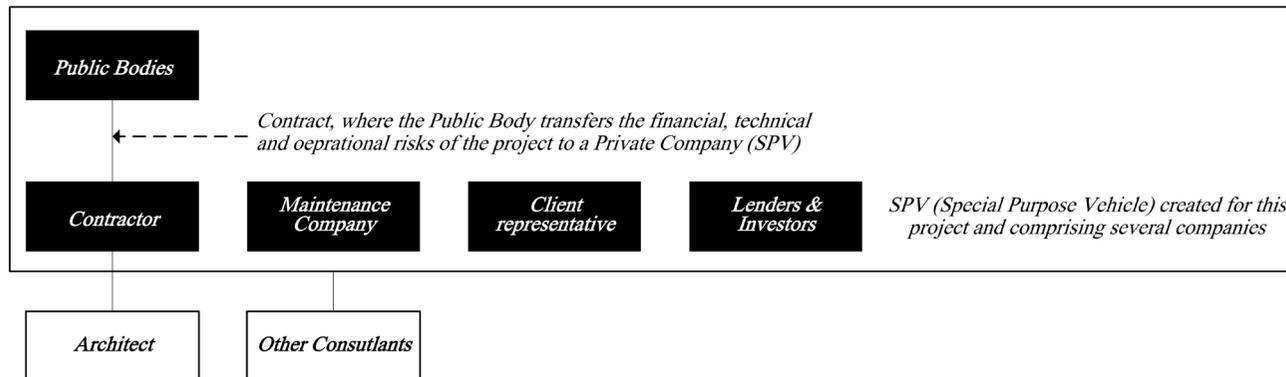


Fig. 2 - Public Hospital Project (PPP)



A Portrait of Stone

Laura Bonell and Daniel López-Dòriga



A person stands in the middle of an old structure and marvels at what once was a home:

At the audacity of its natural enclave,
At the scenography of its exteriors,
At the wise use of its materials,
At the bold combination of its elements,
At the proportions of its spaces.

It was built 80, 200, 2000 years ago. Its owner was its creator was its user. It was a house made for oneself. Or was it oneself turned into a house? *“This house, my portrait of stone. A house that looks like me, or said in another way, a house like me. But which me?”*

Upon reading on Curzio Malaparte’s words, a very specific kind of client emerges: that who does not need of an architect to project the way he will live. In other words, if there is an architect, he is not important. While it is not uncommon for clients to impose their wishes on the spaces they are going to inhabit, often to their architects’ disbelief, rarely does the result manage to generate consensus and go on to become a lasting piece of architecture, a masterpiece, admired by future generations. The idea that a person’s character can be set on stone, that ideals can be translated into living spaces speaks of the genuine personality of these creators/clients.

¹ In Google Maps his house is described as „Sir John Soane’s Museum. Former home of eccentric art collector“.

I

The oldest example that comes to mind is emperor Hadrian, who projected Villa Adriana for himself on the 2nd century AD. In “Memoirs of Hadrian”, Marguerite Yourcenar imagines him writing: *“Each building stone was the strange concretion of a will, a memory, and sometimes a challenge. Each structure was the chart of a dream.”*

Having been a conqueror, a traveller, a nomad, he envisioned his own house as his final encampment; tents and pavilions made of jasper, porphyry and obsidian.

II

Sir John Soane greatly admired the remains of the villa when he visited it as part of his Grand Tour of Italy. The opulent marbles were long gone, and all there was left were the brick structures of what once was, but the top-lit ruined vaults left a lasting impression on him.

In spite of him being a renowned architect of his time, Soane is almost better known as an art collector¹ and the home he built for himself is certainly not a typical architect’s house.

Inside, walls are hidden from sight, covered by objects upon objects. Mirrors are placed strategically, multiplying the feeling of a never-ending cabinet of treasures and curiosities. However, architecture is not hidden but enhanced, as the carved-like maze of room

upon room becomes a treatise on how to get natural light inside a building and how to lit a work of art.

No architect without an art collection would have built a house like this; no art collector without the knowledge of an architect could have built a house like this. *“To study Soane is to be faced with the problem of the expression of personality in architecture, for it is surely possible to find in his work reflections of the edginess and vanity, the persecution complex and the unyielding Old Testament morality, the inner conflicts, uncertainties and introspection, which we know were fundamental to his character.”*²

In his search of the “poetry of architecture”³, his house is in essence more aesthetic than it is comfortable. It is a museum more than it is a home.

III

Not one, not two, but three (and maybe even four) architects⁴ were commissioned to build El Carmen Blanco (1916-1928), the house and atelier that José María Rodríguez-Acosta envisioned in the mountains of Granada, just outside the Alhambra palaces. They all contributed in some way, but the result is essentially Rodríguez-Acosta’s. *“Every spot in the space of this unusual place registers an intention that is emotional or aesthetic. (...) Imprinted are the keys of his artistic thoughts, of his talent, of his curiosity and of his desires.”*⁵

Rodríguez-Acosta projected this place as if he were painting. It is a delicate balance of masses and voids, construction and nature, modernity and classicism. As in Sir John Soane’s Museum, each of its fragments is defined individually, but sums up to the result of its complex totality.

IV

On the opposite side of the spectrum stands casa Malaparte (1937-1939). Its vision upon arriving from land or sea is that of a monolith on a cliff. There is no sum of parts but an absolute whole: a purely shaped piece of architecture that looks like a wrecked ship, a bunker and a temple.

Its hard materiality reminds us of the rock on which it stands, its roof resembles the sea’s horizon; but its rotund symmetry is a reminder of its artificiality. It

is not the creation of nature but the creation of a man: of his character and of his life experiences, which become embedded in its formal expression.

As with his writing, the house is surreal and poetic and inflexible. It is not a home, it is a stage for a life, albeit a very particular one.

...

A person looks at pictures of a new structure and marvels at what is, right now, a home:

At the audacity of its natural enclave,
At the scenography of its exteriors,
At the wise use of its materials,
At the bold combination of its elements,
At the proportions of its spaces.

It is an ongoing construction that started on 1968. Its owner is its creator is its user. It is a house made for oneself. Or is it oneself turned into a house?

V

Set in Esplugues de Llobregat, on the outskirts of Barcelona, sculptor Xavier Corberó’s house has been generating interest and curiosity for a while. He bought the land almost 50 years ago, and slow but steady, he has been building a home that is not a house, but an intricate labyrinth of modernly interpreted classical shapes bathed in sunlight.

It has the volumetric complexity of Ricardo Bofill’s “cities in space” projects from the seventies and the playfulness of the English follies. In spite of this, it is profoundly personal. It has no other purpose but to be the home of his sculptures and a daily inspiration source for him and the artists he has in residence.

It is also the closest we can get to learning the process of one of these houses on real time. These words are all his own⁶, but they seem to define the mind of others:

“I wanted to create, to the extent feasible, a continuum; a place in which the real space is not as important as the mental space.” Corberó or Hadrian?



2 „Soane and his contemporaries“, David Watkin. Part of the book „John Soane“ (Academy Editions / St Martin’s Press, 1983).

3 In his conferences and classes, Soane often talked about the „poetry of architecture“ as the impressions created by the picturesque effects of his projecting.



4 Ricardo Santa Cruz, Teodoro de Anasagasti, José Felipe Giménez Lacal were the official architects commissioned. Modesto Cendoya, then the Conservation Architect of the palaces of Alhambra, has been said to have been consulted at some point, especially in regards to the architecture of the gardens.

5 “Cada punto del espacio de este insólito lugar lleva inscrita una intención de orden emocional o estética. (...) Alliquedarán impresas las claves de su pensamiento estético, de su talento, de sus inquietudes y de sus anhelos.” Miguel Rodríguez-Acosta, nephew of the painter (Translation by the authors).

6 Extracts taken from the video „In Residence: Xavier Corberó“, by Albert Moya for Nowness.



“I always consider things in themselves. Rooms are considered to remain exactly as they are, and maybe to lodge a sculpture, or some piece of furniture. It possesses utility in itself, not a defining function.” Corberó or Soane?

“What I try to do does not stem from reason. It comes from life itself. I use reason to build things up, so they don’t fall to pieces. But the motives behind all the rest are aesthetic, ethic and, if you will, divine”. Corberó or Rodríguez-Acosta?

“The outcome of what I do has to be poetry, which I believe is the measure of all things” Corberó or Malaparte?

An emperor, an art collector, a painter, a writer and a sculptor. Only one of them was an architect, or were they all?

Laura Bonell and Daniel López-Dòriga (Barcelona, 1987) both studied architecture in ETSAB. They each spent one year studying out, in Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio and Technische Universität München respectively. They started their office together, Bonell+Dòriga, in 2014, where they work in projects at various scales: from small private commissions to public competitions. Among other places, their work has been published in famed Casabella magazine, as part of their 85th anniversary issue focused on young architects.

Artist's Loft House Renovation

Tiffany Melançon



Latent in every architectural project is a tension between the designer's ambitions and the user's needs. Architectural photography reveals this tension when it shows a building unoccupied, with furniture rearranged, or the personal effects of inhabitants erased. This essay discusses the subtle wrangling between authorship and ownership in architecture, often played out through a camera's lens, by presenting 'before' and 'after' images of my own home renovation project near Basel, Switzerland.

The house was built in 1963 as an artist's loft and apartment for the Swiss painter Hans Weidmann. He lived on the ground floor and worked upstairs in the studio made to his specifications: only northern natural light and a 3.5 meter high ceiling. Fifty years later my husband and I acquired the property and transformed it into a three bedroom home for our young family, acting both as the architects and the users of the project. Seeing the renovation as a continued dialogue with the house's former life, we imagined the original architect, Renee Tofel, and the original user Weidmann as additional 'clients' with specific wishes to be negotiated.

Tofel designed the house as a classic modern picture, self-consciously set apart from the nineteenth century cottages of its surrounding suburban context. He made a simple industrial 'box' with perfect spatial reduction (four walls, ribbon windows and a flat, accessible roof) and punctured the concrete stair tower

with sporadic, tapered window openings, referencing Le Corbusier's Ronchamp, built only eight years prior.

To preserve its clear modernist appearance and open loft quality, we chose minimal intervention, adapting our own user needs to the house rather than the house to the typical user needs. This meant programming the more public space of living, kitchen and dining on the upper loft floor, and the private, divided spaces of bedrooms and bathrooms on the ground floor, where we utilized oversized sliding doors to modulate different degrees of opened and closed. Because the loft had only one band of north facing windows, we introduced new discreet window openings, placed like framed pictures hung on the studio walls.

The photos in this essay together ask: How do the stories architects tell about the design object house differ from the stories we tell about home? What context and life is edited out of the images we construct, and how does architecture construct the life it claims merely to house? These pictures of a modern artist's loft turned into an architect's home reflect on the ways ambitions and needs are often nested, one inside the other.

Tiffany Melançon (born 1972, United States) is a Basel, Switzerland based architect and principal at Melançon & Co. Before starting independent practice in 2013, she worked with Flubacher-Nyfeler + Partner and Herzog & de Meuron in Basel and Bond Street Architects in New York City.









The quasi-temple of Architecture

Pedro Bragança

The advent of modern capitalism has changed everything and Architecture is no exception. These last few decades, in particular, resemble an acute transition, when everything moves at a speed more and more difficult to track. The relocation of the world's centers, accomplished by the new geography of production and capital reflect a new balance that has also its own dark side of poverty and disparities.¹

Probably architects, in a very optimistic sense, still hope that creative work can always become a front to reverse the arising constraints in society. However, “creativity has always been absorbed by capital” and “the creative professional was never *outside* accumulation, but an essential part of it.”² To an economic and political supremacy corresponds a disciplinary mainstream, which works as an enabler of the establishment. Or, better said, it is the establishment itself.

Being dominant, the establishment is not absolute at all and that is why we have the moral obligation to challenge it. By formulating a possible way out that takes into account the obstacles raised by disciplinary fragmentation, I try to do so.

This essay is a contribution written in a specific circumstance and in a concrete geography, being contaminated by both. It is impossible to deny (and I do not intend to do that) the subjective and, in a sense, autobiographical dimension that a text of this kind acquires.

¹ Rather than confirm, this fact counters the expectations of the ecumenical progress and common growth dynamics that underlie and legitimize capitalism itself. The hope of *laissez-faire* has always been placed on the supposed benefits of the trickle-down effect, a concept that defines the redistributive potential of capital accumulation. But instead of being dissipated, in society as in the world, the differences have been deepened and, as Thomas Piketty recently argued, they have reached levels only similar to those of the nineteenth century.

² Goodbun, Klein, Rumpfhuber & Till, *The Design of Scarcity*, Strelka Press, 2013, p. 6.

Compartmentalization of the design process

As almost all disciplines, Architecture tends to a progressive specialization and herein lies a great paradox: if learning more about a certain specific subject can enable significant gains in knowledge, it can also make the architects lose control of the entire design process, being hostages of a very particular task or matter. Furthermore, to specialize the discipline of Architecture means, ultimately, to compartmentalize it.

Through the last decades, some major studios have changed the established procedures of the design process, yielding to the pressure of the entrepreneurial spirit. They started to break the common alignments, dividing them into isolated tasks and distributing them by their drawing laborers, mere executors, whose repetitive routine established an excessive gap between practice and criticism. Meaning a substantial increase in productivity, this can also be very advantageous to investors and to the Market engine because, if the project should always be a political act, the more isolated and absent architects are from an entire vision, the more the Market ideology can reign. And if it reigns, it will impose its own moral, aesthetic and constructive codes under a supposed objectivity.

Being slightly simplistic, I can find here a helpful and clarifier binomial between the market goals – profit and accumulation – and Architecture. And if, as Joseph Rykwert said, “Architecture is primarily

3 Joseph Rykwert, "Architecture and the Public Good", *Research and Practice in Architecture*, Alvar Aalto Academy, Helsinki, 2001.



Fig. 1 Johannes Vermeer, *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, 1655.

4 Stefano Boeri, *Fare di più con meno. Idee per riprogettare l'Italia*, il Saggiatore, Milano, 2012.

5 To learn more about this: Aureli, P. V., *Less is Enough*, Strelka Press, 2012.

6 Walter Benjamin, "The Destructive Character", in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writing*. Vol. 2 (2), 1931-1934 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 541-542.

concerned with the Public Good (...), private profit can only enter into its calculation negatively to an extracurricular matter."³ Thus, to the compartmentalization of the design process and to the subsequent fragmentation of the discipline, the market will reply with an infallible cohesion.

Compartmentalization is also the result of the segmentation the merchant status imposes: while architects are highly specialized technical designers, customers become promoters or investors and dwellers become consumers. One could suppose that with the proliferation of *stakeholders* and *skills* (keywords of the market lexicon) the design process would become more discussed and diverse, but it doesn't seem to be that simple. Among all those *agents* there is a field of struggle and dispute of power and dominance.

While the Market rules the world, sometimes the architects themselves begin to occupy a peripheral space in the design process. This is the scenario of the second loss, when they are not victims of the specialization that I mentioned above, but victims of their own desire. Even if those Architects formally and legally maintain their centrality, they become pure bureaucrats of accumulation, whose mission is to apply generic trends to a specific geography. *Fare di più con Meno*⁴ (*Do more with less*), a very successful book by Stefano Boeri, is a good example of how an idea of Architecture can surrender to the dominant spirit of austerity, and then create a kind of new reductionist aesthetic.⁵ Instead of being, as it initially seems, a brand new speech, it remains an official rhetoric of the establishment.

Considering this paradox, I wonder whether it is possible for architects to formulate, in their own disciplinary space, a balance that implies at the same time, openness and cohesion, individuality and plurality, autonomy and commitment. Suddenly, the return to the Self becomes an imperative route.

The Radical Self

The Self can be an irreplaceable field of work and criticism, as a minimum, indivisible and impenetrable compartment of the individual thought. The borderline of ambiguity and confusion which Architecture

sometimes reaches requires successive actions of retrospection and revision, where the architect, in an exercise of great concentration, seeks a kind of reorganization of his own speech.

It seems to me that there are great similarities between the importance of the Self to the discipline of Architecture and the religious concepts of Contemplation and Action. *Contemplation and Action* has been developed by several theological currents, based on the biblical episode of Luke 10:38-42 (*At the home of Martha and Mary*), where two sisters receive Jesus in their own home. Martha, the active one, engaged in the service, while Mary, the contemplative one, devoted herself to the Word of the Lord. From this episode and from the enigmatic assertion "Mary has chosen what is better", with which Luke concludes, numerous interpretations emerged, split into treatises, religious texts, works of art, ...

Beyond the religious calling of the scripture, I think it is essential to retrieve this simultaneously contemplative and active sense as a mutually complemented binomial. The active life is the current practice – I mean, the design work as we do it on a daily basis (details, construction projects, budgets, etc.). It remains an intellectual work, but it is totally distinct from contemplation. Contemplation is about reflection, synthesis and concentration; it is a great individual effort, limited in time, where the architect gets involved in his *Radical Self*. And I use "Radical" here not in its common sense. The *Radical Self* is an intellectual redoubt of revision and invention, placed in the roots of each person.

It is just in these crucial moments that the architect, the client and the user are exhaustively the same. Not because they are in fact the same person (they don't need to be, indeed) but because a kind of objective coincidence, or a contemplative state of fullness, may give back to Architecture its essential condition of pleasure and delight, like a "spectacle of deepest harmony."⁶ What I am speaking about is an incursion and a deep ethical commitment that the author sets with himself as an ethics that merges with practice: in other words, a nexus between Contemplation and Action. It seems to me that only the art or, rather, only



Fig. 2 The Chapel of Our Lady of Conception



Fig. 3 In this image we can see the isolated chapel and in the background the Convent of Christ, drawing by Albrecht Haupt, 1888

the artistic practice of design is able to promote the necessary conciliation of these two worlds.

In the pursuit not only of the reorganization of a speech and of a thought but also of the primary and essential condition of that speech and that thought, Architects made some works that can be thought as trials. To these syntheses that gather in the project a sought essence and, at the same time, become great experiments, we are calling *quasi-temples of Architecture*.

Quasi-temple

The quasi-temple is an inventory and a device of meditation, where the architect puts both a statement of principles and a symbolic universe. It is about anonymity and discretion, ethics and *métier*, like a laboratory – a space of experience and ongoing discussion – where he formulates and tries out his substantial speech.

I say *quasi* because the ideas of essence and sufficiency arise here as unreachable horizons and not as owned realities. In fact, the total temple is an impossibility as the absolute essence and sufficiency also are. So, from these exercises come up the possible temples.

I can collect numerous examples of quasi-temples throughout history that correspond exactly to this intention. Some of them are remarkable treaties or hypothesis and speculative exercises that defined turning points in the history of architecture: Laugier's primitive hut, Corbusier's Domino house or Rossi's Teatro del Mondo, just to remember three very obvious examples.

But, contrary to what one might think, they do not have to be merely theoretical manifestos or intangible works, neither world-famous icons. I am thinking, for example, of a small, enigmatic chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Conception, built around 1540 in Tomar (Portugal). Its authorship and the circumstances of its construction are clouded by uncertainty, which turned it into a kind of artefact of curiosities, about which several authors have invented multiple hypotheses. Let's follow, in my opinion, the most exciting of those, which has also been considered by contemporary scholars the most consistent.

In 1972, the American art historian George Kubler suggested⁷ that the author was João de Castilho, a royal architect who was involved in the main works

of the Portuguese monarchy in the first half of the 16th century. Among these works is the expansion of the Convent of Christ, a colossal religious complex whose construction went through many stages for an extremely long period.

Considering that the chapel is located just a few meters away from the convent, it can appear that the two works have been developed in parallel by the same author. Trusting on the recently presented thesis of Celso Ramos⁸, more than a chapel, the Conception was to be a mausoleum that never received the remains of the king who commissioned it, John III. And the Convent of Christ was a royal site, so, if Kubler's theory is correct, we would be facing two simultaneous works with the same client, the same author but two opposite statements.

While the project of the Convent of Christ was subject to all formal and stylistic constraints that any royal work had to be, being supervised by intermediaries of the king, the tiny chapel appeared as an exercise of freedom and novelty. For Kubler, the Conception "recalls so many other kinds of building that it may have been intended as an architectural experiment or trial piece, never repeated, yet allowed to remain as a curiosity, like certain experimental ships and trains which need to be built only once."⁹

We can imagine Castilho confronting himself with the restrictions and failures of the super-ornamented style and of the resources that he had spent part of his life using. As Kubler pointed out¹⁰, *Manueline* rule was unsustainable and impossible to continue and Castilho could have realized it first than the others. In this sense, this early experience, advanced for his own time, was precipitated by the urgency of launching an alternative to the mainstream. The sequence of the historical events that followed proved him right. Conception was his own quasi-temple where, believing in what Kubler's current advocated, he worked until his death – as a final essay, which turned itself into an ideological and ethical testament.

I am quite sure that many troubles that people, and particularly architects, are facing in the present day, under the atrophy and the absence of alternatives, can find great parallels in the past. As Castilho did, now

7 Walter Benjamin, "The Destructive Character", in Walter Benjamin, Selected Writing. Vol. 2 (2), 1931-1934 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 541-542.

8 Celso Ramos, A Capela de Nossa Senhora da Conceição em Tomar, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto, 2013.

9 George Kubler, Portuguese Plain Architecture: Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521-1706, Wesleyan University Press, 1972, p.33

10 Idem, lb.

we probably need to stop, rethink and start over again. It is very hard to find nowadays examples of quasi-temples, but it is not because they no longer exist or exist less. It is because, being a deposit of reflection and intelligence, a quasi-temple does not dispense, rather compels, the maturity that only time can give. And even if they are detached from a specific time or period, it requires a certain critical distance to find them and think about them. Not being particularly about style or appearance (but being also about both), as a new mannerism, a quasi-temple can be revealed in several expressions and authors. It is a complex construction whose interest lies in the intellectual structure that is behind each building.

By speaking of a new mannerism, it immediately occurs to me the work of the Chilean architect Cecilia Puga, which I have tried to follow with great curiosity (which is not easy considering the anonymity that she takes¹¹). She says her project is „sparing in formal elements, concrete in the technique employed”, and that tries “to avoid militant affiliation to a given historical or formal moment“. Behind these words lies a very strong proposition that is reflected in her work.

In San Francisco Lodge (2005), a low budget second residence located 300 km south of Santiago, Puga builds and makes explicit her paradox and takes it almost to the limit. Between an extreme, almost intimate, personalism and the enough contextualism, the project becomes a complex challenge with which herself engages.

I am sure that the true coherence of Puga’s project method is only fully understood in a global vision of her work. And although this conclusion may seem somewhat general and trivial, it makes perfect sense here. However, this project, in particular, contains an advanced exploration work on themes and elements that in Casa de Campo in Marchigue (2000) and Casa Bahia Azul (2002) were still clues. The building sits on a concrete plinth that clearly makes it stand out from the ground, as a great declaration of autonomy and emancipation, but, at the same time, it is committed to the geography, by having, for example, in the roof pitch a resemblance to the slope of the hill behind.

This is a work full of ironies – this one I referred

can be considered just one of many – where her statement, quoted above, is literally transposed. There is no real formal, material, historical, stylistic or technological commitment. Only a strong bond to the program and to the very idea of wide admission.

By translating her proposition into a specific project, Puga is, I would risk to say, working hard in her own *quasi-temple*.

...

The many political, economic and social crisis of the present days look like a huge destructive and unpredictable hurricane. Apparently it can be a blocking force to architects, but I must remember that it is also precisely in the eye of the hurricane that a strange feeling of stillness can suddenly become its reversal.

The quasi-temple is the celebration of the Architecture itself. It is not determined by the power of a state, or king, or market, and neither does it incorporate the ethical and moral values of each one of them. And although we must accept “the impossibility of an absolute value judgment”, as P. V. Aureli said, we can and must speak of an own disciplinary corpus with its intrinsic values, which underlies the so-called autonomy.

With this possible definition of a quasi-temple, I want to state that it seems urgent to me to rescue for the Architectural praxis the ability to question and challenge the status, rather than being a guardian of it. Now, the self-induced refusal of the impositions of a dominant mode and the pursuit of alternatives are acts of resistance and courage that are still scarce and increasingly urgent for Architecture. The best, if not the only, way to resist is to preserve the completeness and the integrity of the discipline. And the *Radical Self* is the proper field to do it, trusting that in the deepest individuality lies a real plural subject.

Pedro Bragança (Porto, 1989) is a PhD student and researcher at Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto (FAUP). After finishing his master’s degree in architecture in 2014, he has developed projects in Dome Architecture platform with Hugo Barros. His research program is focused on forms of inhabiting the contemporary territory in complex urban contexts. Since 2013, he is editor of Unidade Magazine.

Fig. 2 Photo Celso Ramos, 2013; Fig. 4 Photo Cristobal Palma

¹¹ It became easier after the GG monograph (2G; 53) and through Cristobal Palma impressive photographs.



Fig. 4 San Francisco Lodge, Cecilia Puga

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