

Nothing is more Abstract than Reality – The current State of Affairs

Patrícia Barbas

Instead of utilizing the circulated draft, I rather prefer to share my thoughts, that I assume are shared by a sizeable portion of my generation, on what is the current state of affairs. And I'm thinking about a current perspective on the discipline and on our lives as well, because I cannot conceive being an architect without a strong awareness of the world in which I live. And as long as I'm around I will do my best to hold on to the idea that we must contribute to the construction of a better world, conducting both my professional practice and my life according to these principles, that I was fortunate enough to inherit from my parents, and that I find everyday in my family, friends, colleagues and students.

In this present world a character like Donald Trump can think about winning a presidential election in the United States. The release of the Panama Papers can bring down the Icelandic government the day after. The Europe in which we live is plagued with inequality, the acronym coined to group the countries in economic crisis could hardly be more demeaning: PIGS, and the Greek situation confirms the widening of the fracture between North and South. The European Union in which we live is once again putting up walls, like in Hungary, blocking the entrance to refugees running away from war torn countries, and watching daily, with unruffled indifference, the death of thousands of

people trying to cross the Mediterranean. The apparent stability is over. Nothing is more abstract than reality.

We are the generation who witnessed both the inception and the failure of the ideals of the European Union: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the opening of the Schengen space, free circulation of people and goods, ease of access to information and fast communication, WiFi, social networks and low cost flights. We are the generation who watched the prodigality with which the European funds were wasted, who watched both the rise of the credit bubble with easy money and its burst, the rise of corruption and who will still be around to pay the bill. We are also the generation who fought against the rise of tuition, who fought for our rights and who demonstrated against social and political injustice. We are the ones who felt the loss of identity, the indignity and shame when our countries sold their souls trying to become part of the first league, the Northern one of course. No, we are not all the same. *Nothing is more abstract than reality.*

We are the more travelled generation, with friendships across the world and a lived perspective from other realities. We are the ones who emigrated looking for work, and the ones who choose to stay in our countries despite the difficulties. We believe that we can do better, try better, and fail better. We are the true embo-

diment of the word sustainability. We accept, with the same commitment, to refurbish a cousin's kitchen, to write a text, to design exhibitions, cities, or real and unreal buildings, and we do not fall lesser for that. We use the lack of opportunities to bundle efforts, to make alliances, to think collectively, to write and mobilize. We are not pampered children and do not need patronizing. We demand parity, we demand to be treated like peers. We rebel and do not fear the heated debate necessary to understand our time, despite the extreme confusion of the present.*

* This was a letter to the president of the FAD 2016 jury, written and sent in May 2016 as a member of it. It was based on a draft, made by him to be commented and completed as the result of all our conversations and debates. In our first jury meeting I was classified as a Young Architect albeit my 45 years. In the draft he used keywords as crisis, never ending recession, new paradigm, sustainability and European convergence in a way that I could not disagree more with.

I decided to publish here because this applies to a much larger audience. Unfortunately, Moises Gallego is not alone, and because of that, this is a statement of a generation that speaks not only for itself but for the ones younger than us, already out there with all capabilities and in defiance of beginning and enduring life and practice. We will not go down as ones who undermine our youngest, who as Kronos devoured his sons to prevent to be overcome by them. We are the present, the caretakers of the future of our discipline.

Patrícia Barbas (Luanda, 1971). Diploma in Architecture from FAUTL, Lisbon. Collaborated with Aires Mateus, Gonçalo Byrne, and João Pedro Falcão de Campos. Guest Professor at Carleton University, Ottawa and EPFL Lausanne.