



Feel the ground. Wall House: One to One. Venice Biennale 2012 (Photo: Andreas Deffner)

There was an Australian architect called John Allen who had developed some improvements on the form of building this kind of houses lifted from the ground -that was his first innovation. My house was very much inspired and based on what he had done. So that was my simple life, I had my motorbike which I was very proud of. I didn't need much: I had a solar panel on the roof, I had two lights which I used to carry in different places with a long wire, and I had a music system from the car so I had that self-sufficient piece of architecture -now they will call it green but at that time it was a common sense thing to do. When I landed I thought I would spend two or three years there and finally I lived there for 10 years. Of course living in that simple way has definitely influenced me more than any theories to realize that if the inside of your life is good you don't really need much from the outside. You can live in many ways, for me it was a personal learning experience.

(...)
I believe a lot in a kind of direct engagement: to teach through full scale, to have contact with reality: real material, real people, real site. Basically I think that architecture is real rather than abstract or poetic or so many other things. It is real. And if you lose the realness of architecture then you can become irrelevant in the future. And that's why in the Venice Biennale in 2012 I did a project and I told David Chipperfield [the curator] that my response will be in full scale because architecture must not be represented in another way. So you can be poetic but you must inhabit that with your body scale and then you can write about it. Only in the real scale the synthesis of architecture can come together in a balance; otherwise any aspect you talk about is not the true picture. So I often try to do full scale experiments with the students; (...) I feel we are architects and I want to confront students with the reality only to remain a designer, not to become a carpenter or to become a mason or whatever. And therefore I support these programs always with the people who know how to do because I want the highest excellence and not to reduce it to what people are now going to be able to do here.

So affordability is not only about economic affordability, it is for all resources. Environmental issues become automatically of our concern: what kind of habitat can we afford to build for the future?

Sometimes the innovation upon traditional ways of doing things is a very subtle innovation that you don't even notice. For example in this project where instead of using a lot of wood to support the coconut leaves there is some wire holding those leaves. It's a kind of hybrid between high-tech and low-tech, because I believe it is not about high-tech or low-tech; I think in each project there must be a negotiation about the appropriate proportion between the two of them. (...)

After these ten years passed in the hut I wanted to build another set of experimental constructions where I wouldn't have to convince the clients to do some radical things. So I had to compose my own house out of many techniques that I wanted to test. This is called *Wall house* (see pages 8-9). These bricks that you see are not modern bricks, these are preindustrial bricks that were made in that area. My knowledge was increasing about sustainability, measures and ratings and all that, and I was not in agreement with all the green rating systems where they dismiss bricks because they say they consume so much energy, so much fuel to burn the brick that it's not sustainable. But brick is the first building material that people have ever manufactured and it has still today performed well so it's not a thing to be dismissed just because new ratings. So what I found out is that I am uncomfortable because they make the brick have a standard energy unit when they measure, they don't talk about the quality of energy -if I am burning the brick with the coconut shells or with coal it's the

same for them, and that's not good, it has to be a qualitative rating. It must be more about quality and social response.

So in this house I was trying to prove that if you use the local bricks -which are very weak, there is hardly any strength, the limb mud is almost stronger than the brick itself- it's much more healthy than to try to chase the factory-made brick which is going to make quarries, which is going to use coal... So I wanted to revive this kind of brick which they were still making in the area -they were using it to fix the old heritage buildings, and for making some ceilings- but I thought if you make the walls thicker because the brick is weaker is even better for the insulation and everything so I did this wall house to revive this technique. Later on this house became most famous because somebody published it internationally and then everybody wanted to publish the same again and again and that's why when I was invited by David Chipperfield to the Biennale 2012 I decided to build the same house in full scale. (...)

There are so many ideas that have been tested there, including the plan where there is much more outdoor spaces in the tropical climate than indoor spaces. We were using this kind of locally available

things to build this kind of spaces, and in the windows as well. Just like in winter or summer you can change your sweater, you can also change the skin of the building in a simple way -not in a high-tech. So there is a wooden frame and you use it with a mesh during the mosquito season and you use the glass when it's raining and it's dark so you need more light. So this kind of simple approaches. (...) I also researched with formworks which are normally the main reason for not producing "intelligent" slabs because of the high cost. (...)

(...) One of the more radical experimentations I did is a technique in which mud houses are built with earth -only earth- and filled with earth bricks to treat the house as a kiln and then to fire the whole thing together, so when the house is cooked it becomes earth. It is called *baked in situ mud construction*. It is very radical and almost all the money is spent on labour and nothing on material because it is used in places where the earth is good enough for the brick. This is an idea pioneered by Ray Meeker, a Californian potter. I did my PhD on this kind of topic, measuring the relevance of what happens when the house becomes not a consumer of materials but a producer of building materials and how the socio-economic dimension changes if the brick is not brought to the fire but the fire is brought to the house. (...)

Venice is a brick city and wherever you go you see the bricks behind the plaster because it is an architecture of ruins and you can notice how it was made. So when I was given the space for the Biennale (...) my idea was that we are evolving the technology collectively, everybody is building another layer on top of what was known. And all these kind of things I wanted to place them together and to make this point in *common ground* which was the topic of the Biennale. I wanted to show that we are not so different, we are already common. (...) This project was somehow poetic but for me it was to show the reality and the rigor that goes into architecture also represented in the process. The engineers were not giving me permission to build the vault because they were people from many countries with different building backgrounds and they were afraid. And they had their own reasons to be concerned according to the factors of safety allowed in their cities. But I thought it was very interesting for the *Common Ground* theme because the gravity force is the same in all our countries and my buildings are still standing there for so long. You don't have to look at construction only as a dangerous thing, and it was incredible and ambitious to build such a thing. It was also very expensive.

But the most important thing was this dialogue between our walls and the original existing walls, and the architecture of the ruin was a setting as it was the site, as if the pillars were the trees, it was carefully situated. An unfinished architecture which likes the ruin also reveals the construction. The main idea was to create a common ground also literally between the old existing building and our building. (...)

Diálogos entrecruzados con Anupama Kundoo

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Con su mirada intensa y cordial, Anupama Kundoo empieza su primer día de clase en la ETSAB proponiendo una conversación abierta con los estudiantes en un aula de la cuarta planta. Desgrana un discurso próximo y perspicaz, impregnado de coherencia y de un optimismo envidiable. Lamentablemente, esta no es una virtud que campe a menudo en nuestras escuelas hoy en día, sumergidas en las incomodidades de la atmósfera universitaria y profesional. Quizás por ello es tan importante buscar nuevos espacios como el *Visiting Studio*, que se inicia este año en la Escuela.

"Be creative". Las condiciones coyunturales en las que los arquitectos trabajamos actualmente, en distintas latitudes y hemisferios, no deberían sino despertar nuestro espíritu más creativo. Lo dice alguien con un *background* que hace especialmente creíble el consejo, por su singular biografía que la lleva a acumular experiencias personales, profesionales y docentes en los cinco continentes: en la India, Australia, Alemania, US o, desde el pasado septiembre, en España. Frente a actitudes de realismo pragmático, que considerarían simple "amaneramiento" cualquier discusión de naturaleza arquitectónica en ciertos entornos con pocos recursos, AK anima siempre a buscar un espacio propio para la dialéctica disciplinar y no se cansa de repetir lo útil de nuestra mirada y conocimiento para mejorar las condiciones de nuestro entorno: *"Architects and designers can make evolve our society"*.

Por ello reivindica que la arquitectura de nuestros días debería conciliar el realismo con la creatividad más generosa, advirtiendo sin embargo que la arquitectura se arriesga a perder su esencia si se reduce a mera abstracción. Quizás hoy más que nunca. Por ello, AK se siente como pez en el agua en el *Studio* Ciutat Meridiana: una de las realidades urbanas más ásperas en nuestra reluciente Barcelona. Este ámbito de proyecto, planteado por Hábitat Urbà del Ayuntamiento de Barcelona, está seduciendo a un grupo privilegiado de una veintena de estudiantes, con los que imaginamos cuáles podrían ser algunas nuevas condiciones para este espacio. Son los desahucios, la alta tasa de desempleo, los denominada pobreza energética... temas de hoy y de aquí, sobre los que es estimulante pensar, no solo con el sombrero de sociólogo,

de geógrafo, de ciudadano o de activista, sino también con el nuestro. *"Poverty must be included in the design"*.

"The process is often more important than the product itself". Probablemente lo sea, pero conviene subrayar que esto lo dice quien es capaz de materializar con enorme esfuerzo una arquitectura high-low tech en ambientes nada favorables. El mérito de inventar soluciones alternativas, de menor coste pero de altísima calidad en términos arquitectónicos, técnicos y plásticos. Esto es algo solo posible desde el máximo convencimiento y autoexigencia en cada una de nuestros propósitos: desde idear con gran ambición un proyecto, hasta conseguir materializarlo pieza por pieza, con tierra, barro, madera o hasta libros!

"Cooperation instead of competition". Con esta intención plantemos el taller temático como una exploración abierta sobre este barrio en los límites de la ciudad. No se trata tanto de competir sobre cuál es la mejor solución arquitectónica a un enunciado determinado, sino de plantear distintos proyectos sobre temáticas y situaciones diversas, proponiendo un trabajo cooperativo entre más de una quincena de proyectos que deben "negociar" un espacio propio, cooperando con el resto. Este es, sin lugar a dudas, un ensayo útil y real para nuestros estudiantes, en una cultura cada vez más convencida de reflejarse en la actitud de las abejas que en la de los leones. Autoexaminarse frente a una realidad tan compleja como esta, no solo respondiendo, sino inventando la pregunta: incomodarse en tener que explicar de cabo a rabo el por qué, el para qué, el cómo, el cuánto y el cuándo del proyecto que han decidido tener entre manos.

"Rethinking Materiality" es una presentación de registros muy diversos de una arquitecta inusual, Anupama Kundoo. Su aproximación arqui-biográfica nos sitúa su pensamiento en relación a unas obras construidas a lo largo de dos décadas, vistas como vernáculos en ocasiones, como modernas en otras. Pero más allá de paradójicos debates estilísticos, ella ahonda en los fundamentos, entusiasmada en observar que representa el "Afordable Habitat" hoy en las distintas latitudes desde las que ella mira el mundo. Y desde esta extrema conciencia, de lo que posible y lo que es asequible, entendemos que, al final, se trata efectivamente de *"Building voids with less resources"*.