

QUESTIONS TO ZAIDA MUXI

From Stéphanie Dadour and Anne Debarre

For the issue 3 of the Re-vue Malaquais:

<http://www.actes-sud.fr/catalogue/architecture-et-urbanisme/re-vue-malaquais>

METHODS - What references and sources do you use to read and analyze architecture and the city ? In the abstract you sent us, you mention the genealogy method. How does it apply to architecture? Can you give us an example ?

We couldn't understand the architecture as an independent field. For us it's linked with many aspects beyond its strict limits, and further than a technical problem. From our perspective the most interesting way to understand architecture is in relation with the specific social and political background of each time and each place.

Architecture is not an autonomous field, therefore we need knowledges from other fields that could help us to explain and understand the architecture. For us it's also important not to dismiss other kinds of knowledge, like the living experience of inhabitants or users of buildings.

We considered a must the revision of the past from a contemporary perspective to be able to understand our present. We use the methodology of the genealogy based on historic information and material to reveal important questions of our present, to recognize the organization of processes and to analyze the fields of power in each case. We also introduce the importance of the post occupancy analysis, is not only important to know the drawings but also what was before the project and what happen after the building was done and inhabited

Departure point is the visibility of experiences of the past in which architects use their knowledge to create better conditions for human life, sometimes as "traditional" architect, that means designing and building, but others also as politics, sociologist, thinkers... Our methodology is a kind of genealogy work as we always look back to understand what is happen now and also our arguments are built on the basis of the interwoven of different knowledge like: Feminist theory, Posts structuralism, Radical urban sociology, Philosophy and political background... and never forgetting the reality, what is happening out there.

We consider that there is not a neutral practice so the recognition of how our vision and practice could change depending on our political and philosophical position. Or that we need to make clear from where we are acting, it is not the same if you agree with neoliberalism thesis or with a neo-Marxist position or ecological or feminist.

REVISITING HISTORY - As an architect, Your commitment towards alternative spaces is first reflected by a return to the history of architecture: what kind of rewritings do you suggest? (we are referring here to the various articles in your book *Arquitectura y Politica* with JM Montaner, to the history review with

women architects *undiaunaarquitecta*). What other decentering operations do you propose (geographical, socio-cultural ...)?

I've propose that we have to make a new interpretation of our architecture heritage-history to deconstruct the heroic discourse, that means to recognize other's contributions. The first thing is changing the gravity center point or European - north American's main focus, enlarging the lenses and reading again everything, primary and secondary sources, placing the architectural works in time and space (socio, cultural, economic and political background) and understanding that any architectural product is the result of a deeper and integrated process, in which many people and circumstances intervene. But for me the beginning of a new or different regarding to our past came from giving visibility to women, their, our participation in all the human activities.

We need to have a critical position to the supposed neutral history that explain the singular male, white and powerful as an only and individual maker; all the different the artifacts that the humanity have created all along our history are so complex to be made for a single person. We need to reveal the complexity and the necessary contribution of many others in any human contribution, for that it's necessary to read again our past, and to incorporate thoughts that come from our daily life, that means if we work in groups, we realize that men and women had things to contribute now, why don't we thing that it was like that in the past?

To show forgotten architects we found the international research group "un dia una arquitecta". The aim of the group is to unveil the participation of women in architecture. We had begun to publish on March 8th 2015 one woman architect biography a day through our blog, beginning with women architects from Seventeen Century and we have received more than 340.000 visits from all over the world.

HETERONOMY/AUTONOMY OF ARCHITECTURE - How do these heteronomous architecture representations operate, how do such knowledge "about architecture" can become knowledge "for" architecture? The histories you have (re)written have their autonomy, but you also articulate them to actions: what lessons these new readings of history give you?

We propose to build a new interpretation from history that allows us to understand better our present. There could be some autonomy in the composition of architecture, but as far as it is an answer to a singular reality is not autonomous. The architecture to be able to function (in mechanical or uses terms but also in beauty) has to be related to the social, cultural, economic contexts, if not it's just a composition. For us "these histories" are the basis to understand the processes that give birth to one or other example of architecture or urbanism, with that in mind you could read the complexity behind the element and after that it is possible to analyze and to understand the spatial relations of an architectural work. **Those are the basis of our book "Arquitectura y política" in which we arose questions about our society, and the inhabitants of contemporary architecture and cities, what are the positions of the architects who design public spaces, housing... in the control era and if it is licit to accept whatever the project is, definitively what could be the ethic of the profession nowadays and**

for answer all these unknowns is necessary to reveal and to regard in a new way our past as architects related to society.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES - What are your contemporary fields of action ? How do you engage your students in building these alternative worlds?

Our contemporary fields of action are linked with the political transformation we are living in Spanish cities. Our future, an inclusive and democratic one, has in the cities the real place to begin the democratic transformation. The city government is the one that's closer to citizen's daily life, dreams and necessities.

To engage the students, I think that the first thing to do is to make clear that our knowledge is a necessary one (think that the crisis in Spain put the architects as part of the problems that take us to this situation and also the idea that there are not work for us. For that, we need to change this perception making broad the meaning of the profession). We are necessary to improve the living conditions of our society, but we are not alone in that aim, we have to recognize the different knowledge that come from others professions and, specially, the one that come from citizenship. We need to be prepared to listen and to dialog with others.

We invite the students to reflex about the different circumstances of architecture: context, society, politics, economics... For example, a few years ago and related to a research group "Postsuburbia" we organized a summer course with guest lecturers from different disciplines around the sprawl and a workshop that propose to study the problem of this kind of places from the perspective of the people who is leaving there, form their daily life needs. From that experience and our following research we'd established a new approach to how to rebuild them. <http://www.postsuburbia.org/>

Till last June and for 10 years I was engaged with the work of Col·lectiu Punt 6 (<http://punt6.org/>). Col·lectiu Punt 6 is an organization that works from a gender perspective, and seeks to account for women's everyday life experience. This vision, inclusive with the rest of our society, considers the participation as an essential instrument in projects and sustainability as basic criteria of development. We foster public active participation, and in particular women's participation, because it is essential to analyze and highlight everyday life experiences in the urban environment. We have been working in different fields: we conduct feminist research on the intersection of gender and urban planning, on housing, women's safety, women's history in architecture, participatory methodologies, among other topics; We conduct training programs and workshops with government leaders, policy makers, and city planners about the benefits of including a gender perspective in architecture and urban planning; We contribute to urban projects from a gender perspective through participatory processes, from the diagnosis to the evaluation. We participate in the interdisciplinary discourse that cities build today.

From June I left the Col·lectiu because I'm working as planner director (having responsibility in planning, housing, public spaces, public space and building's maintenance,...) in the city of

Santa Coloma de Gramenet, so It's a new opportunity to probe and to develop what I have been doing as professor, as theorist and as activist.

ACTIVELY ENGAGED ARCHITECTS - The crisis in Spain has given rise to new practices: many young architects (Cirugeda, Jaque, etc.) develop projects for which they claim a political dimension. Beyond their short-term responses to the crisis, do they represent possible pathways that could develop more widely? From your point of view, how do architects working with institutions can be politically engaged?

We have to differentiate between practices that are conjuncturals and what are really based in a compromise for a better world, and not a simple reaction to the crisis. In that sense the position of Santiago Cirugeda is exemplar, because he began his critical response to reality years before the reality impact our society.

What is very interesting is that the crisis gives birth to discussions and collaborative organizations between architects, other professions and citizens. So, we could find civil or neighborhood platforms that fight for the right to the city in collaboration with professional and social movements (for example *fem plaça*; *fem rambla*; *PAH* are different civic movements to look for the right to the city). And also we could find pro-active groups of architects that get engaged with the reality where they live-work and participate in equal conditions with citizens to find solutions (LaCol, Raons públiques, Volta, Equal Saree, Col·lectiu punt 6, La pell de la Ciutat, Straddle3...), and also the came to light of networks of architects to share experiences and knowledge through "Arquitecturas Colectivas" network . And last but not least, the different meetings, books, blogs focuses in the women participation in our profession (from "undiaunaarquitecta", Col·lectiu punt 6, Equal Saree, ArquitectAs...)

Please return your answers before January 21st 2016 to stephaniedadour@gmail.com and annedebarre@wanadoo.fr

The issue no.3 of the Re-vue Malaquais is entitled : Architectes/Architectures.

Derrière ce titre, on envisagera à la fois les pratiques des architectes et leurs productions, dans leur diversité et dans leurs interrelations. On observera précisément les faits construits (ce qui est la spécificité du laboratoire ACS), mais selon des entrées et des approches variées: pratiques professionnelles (postions, statuts, stratégies, jeux d'acteur, manières de travailler le projet) et on envisage les productions des architectes dans un cadre qui dépasse les seuls bâtiments: expositions, publications, éditions...

Quelques précisions de cadrage :

Être architecte relève de pratiques qui s'inventent, se réinventent, se déclinent pour faire face – s'adapter ou réagir – à des contextes changeants. On peut questionner les formes d'exercices, les rôles des architectes dans les tensions et la dynamique du champ professionnel qu'ils constituent. Cette notion de champ permet de ne pas se cantonner à une sociologie des métiers de l'architecture, mais bien d'envisager conjointement pratiques et productions. On interrogera donc les démarches de projets, le travail de conception architecturale, les paroles et écrits des architectes, leurs productions à des échelles et dans des formats variés.

Les articles traiteront ces deux entrées, mais aussi bien l'une ou l'autre : c'est la lecture de l'ensemble du numéro qui donnera à voir un champ architectural en mouvement. Parmi les thèmes envisagés, on peut repérer, entre autres dans le désordre : la notion d'architecte-auteur, le lieu de l'agence d'architecture, l'apport des savoirs sociaux aux pratiques de projet, les collectifs de jeunes architectes, le Grand Paris, la norme...