

THE FORM OF FORM

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A key topic for this discussion is suburban landscape and counterculture, how suburbs are not simply poor spaces, but rather less normative spaces. Amadora shows how a lack of normativity allows for an entirely new edge landscape to emerge. At the same time, it also allows for counterculture, simply by virtue of its distance from the center. Other topics are logistics and industry, and how Sines—with

its refinery, which was mythically intended to be the logistic hub of the whole Iberian Peninsula—has become an unbelievable accumulation of landscapes. Postindustrial landscape and logistics bring the discussion to Almada, on Lisbon's South Bank. Almada's shipyard and the Lazaretto, the city's industry and warehouses, are all on the other side of the river. Almada faces the city and is what you see from Lisbon. These objects are the entrails, the unwanted pieces that make the city work.

ION

Hence the fascination with the ruin, a kind of universe that we can probe. The ruins of the apocalypse are all the things whose tragedy we perceive, but without the knowledge of why they happened. That's what makes them so tragic: we did them; no one else did. We just can't figure out why we did them. AT

DISC

Joaquim Moreno
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JOAQUIM MORENO, ETHEL BARAONA POHL, GUILLERMO LOPEZ, AND ANNA PUIGJANER (BARCELONA, APRIL 2016)

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(JM)

—We were asked to expand on the contents of these chapters, to tie them together. They need a little bit of mayonnaise, an emulsion. An emulsion is when we use mechanical agitation to make two things that aren't compatible become a firm substance. Take egg yolks and fat and whisk them violently until they become mayonnaise. This is an emulsion. That's our job: to emulsify these particular topics, which don't come together easily.

(GL)

—The apocalypse is supposed to be the end of times, but after the end of times there are no ruins, since no one is there to judge or see anything. So ... going from there, this turns into a very speculative approach. I like to mix up the titles: *The Limit of Ruins*, *The Landscape of Ruins*, and *The Apocalypse of Landscape*. All these combinations make a lot of sense.

(EBP)

—You talk about apocalypse and I think what you're saying is that it's a problem of semantics. Perhaps we can talk about dystopia ... If you look at the pure dictionary meaning of the word, we will be there at the apocalypse. So it depends on the kind of path we want to take from here.

(JM)

—In Cyprien Gaillard's works we have the sublime vantage point. It's a dystopia, an apocalypse, the gigantic storm that for some reason doesn't kill you. When you can experience horror and fear without danger. That's pure eighteenth-century sublimity. That's

why it's so bizarre here. We don't know exactly how to get that particular sense from those films. We're watching hooligans fighting each other, with an unbelievable soundtrack, and that's a macabre dance ... Why can't we stop looking?

(EBP)

—But there's a difference. You were talking about emulsions, and there's a big difference in the way we perceive apocalypse reborn from the Maya or as seen in Detroit eight years ago. The feelings we can have about it are very different. At least for me they are. It's not the way that apocalypse happens, or dystopia happens, but it's a matter of representation as well.

I think Detroit is a good example that can work as a catalyst for debate if we don't get lost in its aestheticization ... whatever you see in your Facebook feed every day with more ruins and car factories abandoned.

(JM)

—But in Detroit these are ruins of ruins, Detroit has been ruined for a long time.

(EBP)

—I think a very interesting point is the presence of human beings. Most of the pictures of Detroit were of empty buildings. So, how can we, as human beings, adapt ourselves to live in those ruins? Or not?

(AP)

—It's somehow actually a classic topic in architecture, our relationship with ruins and the idea of apocalypse. You know Metabolism was based

on films using collages of images of Hiroshima ... It was the acceptance of the ruin as a condition to produce architecture. It is not that architecture has to solve the situation but rather to accept the ruin as a state of being. And sometimes the ruin is that: a state of being. These limits of landscape that you have mentioned before are exactly that: a state of unclarity that, thanks to that state of mind, allows you to behave in a certain and particular way. Somehow it's as if we needed ruins in our cities ...

(GL)

—Ruins?! We need ruins?

(AP)

—For instance ...

(JM)

—If you want to use a very clichéd distinction between these two things, that's the essential difference between landscape and architecture. Architecture is the thing that when it's ready, it starts to ruin, landscape is that thing that when it's ready, it starts to grow.

(EBP)

—*Es un filósofo ...*

SEASIDE LOGISTICS

↓

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—We are focusing on one side of *The Limits of Landscape*. The other side is the postindustrial landscape. Peripheries like these were made out of production. When industry disappears or moves somewhere else, we are left with these postindustrial landscapes to deal with. That's why Sines is so important; it's pure logistics. The postindustrial ruins are the new edge between the network, the city, and the periphery. And now we are starting to have all these logistic infrastructures without production. We have all the logistics, and we have all this territory that is independent of everyday life. It is a *suprastructure*.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—We are facing a paradigm shift. These spaces are not for work anymore. We need to find new ways to reuse them if people still think it's valuable to have some infrastructures so far away from the places they are living or working. Otherwise it's not useful even to try.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—There is one thing that we have learned these last years in Spain, after the construction boom (at the beginning the reaction was among architects). For many years the main question was, what should we do with all these ghost cities and ghost infrastructures? There was a need to do something. Recently, though, we have realized that we don't need to do anything. Sometimes it's better not to do anything. I don't know about the examples you were specifically talking about, but we have to be aware that sometimes there's no need to do anything.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—In some cities, floating populations are bigger than

THE LIMITS OF LANDSCAPE

↓

(JM)

—In Almada, north of Lisbon, you go from a farming suburb to a dormitory. These dormitories produce other kinds of cities: shopping malls. We are about to witness the crash.

(EBP)

—This is Ballardian, absolutely.

(JM)

—Let's talk about one specific example: the most horrifying shopping mall in Porto was actually saved by rock & roll. Stop is the name of the place. It's one of these shopping malls with the classic layout, pastel colors, and those eighties' things that are more or less ghosts today. It was occupied by rock bands. They painted the windows black, installed sound insulation, and used it to practice. When you go in, there's no one there. There is only music ... rehearsal rooms. It's a fully functional rehearsal space. All these places are affected by other possibilities of representation. That's when they become spaces for counterculture, when you make the effort to not make a stereotype about how other people survive.

How do we reorganize these particular limits? How can we ask significant questions, instead of being vacuous? How can it become an architectural problem? If we all agree that the sort of music that we like comes from places that we don't like, is there a limit to the architectural thinking going on there? Why is the architecture we like producing sound we don't like? Shouldn't good architecture be producing good music? And shouldn't bad architecture be producing bad music? So we kind

resident populations. Lisbon is now like Barcelona and Venice; most of the people are tourists. We have unbelievable infrastructural pressure on these cities, which are surrounded by postindustrial infrastructure, postindustrial ruins, and we can't connect the two things. On the one hand, we have lots of extra logistics, and on the other we have a tremendous shortage of logistics, because we are not crossing the map.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—That doesn't mean you have an excess of logistics here and a shortage of logistics there. And it doesn't mean you will solve this with that. You can solve this and do nothing with that, for example.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—It depends.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—Tourists come to the city center for a reason. And even if you make the most wonderful touristic infrastructure in the ruins, they may not like it, because it takes forty-five minutes to go to have drinks in the city center.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—Barcelona is trying to balance the floating population. They say that the floating population is quite nice, but it's under control because they can control how many trains arrive in the city, how many planes, how many boats.

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

—We can control the beds for each night. So the city council knows perfectly ...

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—... not perfectly ...

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

—... how to control everything they can. That's a real counterculture. It spreads all around the city.

of have to cut this well-intentioned correspondence between things. How can we begin doing this and making it an architectural problem? Because it is an architecture problem.

(AP)

—I wouldn't say that it's less strong, but I would say that maybe it is not part of what we understand as architectural production. One of the marvelous things about it is that there are a lot of in-between situations and ambiguities, and, in the end, it's architecture itself. That's why I was saying before that we somehow need ruins, because a ruin is an object that is not working as it was supposed to. It's in a state of ambiguity, waiting to work again, to somehow be redefined. And it's precisely in this state of ambiguity that it's an architectural state of mind ... I wouldn't say that it's not architecture. Therefore, where a lot of things are happening, it's not about law—it's actually a state of "out-of-the-law," out of the norm. And in this state it allows for openness.

(EBP)

—This is exactly what Aristide Antonas defines in his Urban Protocols: a set of rules that are ambiguous enough to adapt, depending on the case. The building, the void, the ruin ... For people to use them for a certain amount of time and then leave. And everyone can come and visit in a different way. This ambiguity is something that we have lost in architecture. We were concerned to make the best-finished building for one purpose, and it leads to ruin when it is no longer used for that purpose. Nobody uses it anymore. Like the car factories in Detroit.

(GL)

—Maybe we have been thinking of ruins from an aesthetic point of view. From this perspective it's kind of a metaphor or aestheticization. But ruins also speak of politics, since ruins made us as architects too. Let's say that architecture dealing with ruins has nothing to do with producing forms but rather

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—Airbnb is counterculture!

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—Everybody is saying things that they will regret in three minutes ... like Airbnb is counterculture.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—We could talk about that. Uber is not counterculture, it's against the law.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—No, it's not against the law ... it depends. If you want to receive someone in your room, it is not against the law. But if you rent an apartment—which is not for touristic use—for the whole year, it's a very different business.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—Shouldn't we be collectively building a new representation of the city?

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—With infrastructures?

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—With all this. I think there's a little bit of a challenge in asking architecture schools to think about a logistic space like Sines, or to do a forensic analysis of all the infrastructure that has to be apart from the city to serve the city. Trafaria, the other side of the river, is really the best place to see Lisbon. It's a hell of a view. It's worth crossing the river for.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—Now you are talking about discipline. It's our job to say this kind of thing.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—Should we be building another representation to allow other connections? Apparently there's still something to do.

with managing existing forms. So architecture is no longer making forms when it lives with ruins. It has to do with politics because you have to deal with something that exists and you're not producing something new.

(JM)

—The ruin, even the modern ruin, is always in tension between form and its loss. That is the romance of the ruin. It's the nature of formlessness reclaiming back what was taken and formalized.

(AP)

—I think there's something important here in Barcelona: we have the case of Plaza las Glorias, which has always been considered a failure—unfinished, in progress, and somehow in a kind of permanent state of ruin. It's a leftover from something that happened years ago. It's in a permanent state of change. And somehow we always talk about it in a negative way. But it's quite important to have it in the city. That's why I was saying before that it's extremely important to have ruins. Of course, it's a matter of proportion. Detroit is unbalanced in that sense, but in Barcelona and in many European cities it is enormously important to have this state of ruin within the city in order to produce encounters and discussion.

(JM)

—But—and we are talking about Amadora—we know that it was not a paradise. We also know empirically that what is there now is not hell. Both are extreme visions, but we still don't know how we apply a particular system of representation to that. Even this ruin. We call the ruin an opportunity or a disaster always from a certain privileged vantage point. How do we take that perspective away? That I think is the question: to assess the limits of our perception to build powerful notions of landscape to face our present. That's why I always think it's easier to talk about counterculture.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

-I think so. Younger generations in architecture schools are facing new problems with the representation of cities. They don't have maps or visualizations about cities being abandoned. I absolutely agree that we need to take into account new representations of cities.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-Bringing objects to these logistical ruins is to admit they are dead, and hence you can do forensic analysis on them. These are ruins of different crimes and we can know the crimes better by analyzing the ruins. These are new goals for architecture. We don't intend to produce ruins, but we can probably understand ruins better.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

-The forensic parallelism is really good because there you can analyze who committed the crime. You don't give new life to a corpse; otherwise you'll be producing zombies.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

-We should understand that architecture is always a dead body. From its beginning it is in a permanent state of being used. It's not that somebody killed it, it was already dead from the start, so it's not becoming a zombie. During these last years of worldwide crises, we learned that form is apolitical ... architecture is unprogrammed ...

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

-It's not ideological but it is political.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-Form is not ideological?

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

-No, it's not. It's political but not ideological. It can be politicized but you cannot attach it to a sick way of understanding politics.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-It's the product of ideology. It is not simply always

(EBP)

-Another problem has not only to do with the state of ruin but with the way we understand architectural practice. We are missing the porosity, we are talking about limits, but I'm also talking about the practice in the sense that we used to think about the architect as the problem solver—doing something with those ruins—and perhaps ... no, I am sure ... we are not problem solvers. In a state of porosity we can interact with all the actors in the city, and this is the only way that a permanent ruin can be rebuilt or reworked, not as a masterpiece. I think instead of the limits, perhaps it is more important to talk about the porosity and this diffuse ... *límites gaseosos* ...

(AP)

-... the blurred limits ... in the landscape and in architectural practice, because they coexist.

(JM)

-So, how can we be directly working to test those particular limits of reinvention in Amadora? How can we change our perspective and produce such a blurring so that we can see other things? Because we have evidence of these other things' existence. Why can't I see the landscape of counterculture?

Most of these places have fairly decent public uses, and they have strong community ties. Culturally, they construct both a common identity and a culture that is less normative. And still we cannot see any relation between that and architecture.

(EBP)

-It's a very complex situation and it's not only about architecture. Shopping malls are becoming ubiquitous because of globalization, so I think it's very presumptuous for architectural practice to think that we can understand all these phenomena and that we can solve this just through practice. We have the peripheries, globalization, our children watching the same programs on TV ... the same shopping

its image because it can be the image of a very different ideology.

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

-Ideological in the sense that Terragni would do modern architecture at the same time that Melnikov would do modern architecture ...

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-That was the general project of the neo-avant-garde. Remove the avant-garde from politics so you can play around with its shapes. What was the problem?

You didn't have the drama of form, you had shapes. That's why Rossi is not the same thing as Peter Eisenman. You get formal operations from sterilizing the avant-garde, you don't get a formal logic—a logical construction of form—you get a logical construction of the process of achieving form. Certain avant-garde projects look very process-based, while others look like they couldn't care less about the process. But if we go back, they all loved factories because factories were simultaneously monumental and purpose-based. That's the wonderful tragedy of factories. That's what fascinated Terragni, Melnikov, and Le Corbusier; they were all looking at production.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

-It's the power of symbols, the symbol of these kinds of infrastructures. And that's perhaps why certain discourses of Simone Weil couldn't happen, because of the idea of dismantling and disintegrating the place of labor in the urban fabric. It could have an image and therefore it could have a symbol, but nowadays it seems that for labor and production—thanks to our new digital world—a symbol isn't needed at all.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-The postindustrial got into your cell phone?

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

-All my labor is here!

mall ... Communication, networks, etc., all have to do with it. It's not as simple as seeing why we as architects cannot see that or cannot solve that. It's more difficult. It's a good challenge. There are no certainties.

(JM)

-I think there are always limits to representation. We can produce a discourse that justifies and even understands, but can we relate things? Can we connect the things or should we not, because as we connect, we regress? That's the problem. I'm not sure that there aren't blurrier things in the middle.

(GL)

-Maybe it's a matter of design, but not in an abstract way. On the city outskirts some things happen that wouldn't in the center, because there's a balance between formal and informal. Maybe this absence of design allows things to happen, things that otherwise wouldn't happen. It allows for the unexpected.

But when we talk of ruins, what are we talking about? Something useless? Is the ruin an empty building or just its remains? The leftovers of something that cannot be perfectly used? What is a ruin?

It seems that we are talking about imprints, symptoms, or manifestations of a larger thing. It sounds as if we are talking about the birth of something. Beyond the shrinking cities, where is the population moving to? The ruin is just the representation of a bigger problem going on. One of the most interesting and provoking problems we have to face as architects is the mystification of some parts of the world. Nowadays, we can think of an autonomous life in the country, while being connected worldwide. This intensification is not a problem, but it deals with bigger areas and buildings that will be left behind by this movement.

(JM)

-Those are still effects. This periphery isn't low density; it's high density.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

-It's in our cell phone, it's not related to architectural form anymore.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-Are we feeding the cities with cell phones?

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

-This doesn't mean that other ways of production are over ...

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

-They are not over; they are shifting, shifting a lot.

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

-It's not that industrial production disappeared, but it was dislocated. Now we have immaterial networks.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-They are not immaterial. That's why on Wall Street you want to have your headquarters as close to the cable as possible. That's why the landscape of Mexico City is so polarized, because immaterial networks have material constraints.

Saskia Sassen has been explaining that. The moment you think you can immaterialize something, you are making a kind of faux pas in analyzing how things circulate. But there is a general reorganization of our infrastructures.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

-And more because production in Europe has decreased. Much has been displaced to Asia and other countries.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-It's still a good question to ask: What is the form of this? It may be that this particular form is different. It's hard to see. We do have to work to discover what particular form these things have ... the form, the consequence, the agency ...

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

-I don't think it's easy. It's changing so fast that the moment you can describe the form, there will be another form. You may be searching now to realize the form and the

(AP)

-When you were describing Amadora, I was thinking, what is the problem with it? I understand that maybe it doesn't follow our concept of beauty, or what we understand as beauty nowadays, but it works. People are happy there, right? What is the problem with this neighborhood?

(JM)

-It is the limit of representation. How much of what we can see is a limit of our own perception? Or, how much can we all agree that there is something that is not simply an invention of our imagination? How do we deal with it? We don't have to solve it. Where is the middle between solving everything and seeing that everything is solved?

(EBP)

-In architectural practice, we're already witnessing this "in between." I think of groups like Artéria. They have a very different way of working than previous generations. Perhaps this is a way to go: go to the places and try to get to know the context and act. It may be that we are witnessing things, but we don't have the mental framework or the words to describe what is happening. If you go someplace and look at actors, working together with this porosity that we talked about before ... I don't mean it's the only way to go, but it's a positive way to start and it's already happening. Also, cities are amazingly complex, and these kinds of situations don't change from one day to the next. We also need a little bit of perspective and time to see what will happen.

(GL)

-Ten years ago Poblenou was a bunch of ruins. Nowadays it's one of the biggest real estate markets for investors in Barcelona. Ruins were just an excuse.

(JM)

-That's why the keys are suburb and culture. You always have counterculture in a dense or sprawl suburb. You

consequences; and at that moment the form and the consequences will be different from another moment because we are living in an accelerated way of understanding politics, economics, and all these networks. This affects the way we perceive and understand space, landscape, cities, industry ...

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-If you want to be cynical, that is the very definition of postindustrial. Industries were based in programmed obsolescence. We are postindustrial because we interiorized the program of obsolescence, even in our own ideas.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

-Nowadays we are anxious because we don't get immobilized by that idea; but you feel porous thinking while producing, because you are aware of that reality. It is not immobile, but it's like an anxiety, a social anxiety. I'm talking as an architect. In our practice we are constantly forcing ourselves to be up-to-date because everything is changing so fast. I don't think it's immobility; it is the opposite, which is bad as well.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-Isn't that an ideological construct? Why do we accept that idea? That change is condemning. Collectively we don't believe in progress anymore, we don't think that the lives of our children will be better than ours, and we don't think our lives will be easier than our parents'.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

-Change is not the same as progress.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

-We disassembled the construction of progress. Can't we do the same with this continuous change? Isn't it an ideological construct as well? "All that is solid melts into air," that damned old sentence we reinstate, feeling anxious about thinking it. I'm unsettled with the very idea that suddenly we take acceleration for granted, not as ideology but as fact.

That's why I think that talking about postindustrial landscapes is actually grounded; it's just damned factories,

look at Poblenou: from rags to riches, in real estate terms; and you look at Amadora: Is this thing part of the landscape or does it become landscape because we can enjoy it? What would happen if you were to go to Amadora and say, "Oh! Isn't this beautiful?"—and then you would have a landscape.

(EBP)

-The problem we have nowadays is related to language. It is the simplification between the center and the periphery. Fifteen years ago China was the periphery, now it is the center. So, for the people that work and live in Amadora, Amadora is the center. Why do we call it the periphery? It's a problem of understanding the concepts and how they are changing in the current moment.

(JM)

-But the center is by definition where power is.

(EBP)

-Power is spaceless ...

(GL)

-Power is everywhere but not in the center anymore ... Since there's no center and the representation of the center is no longer focused in one point.

You were talking about counterculture. How can we correlate counterculture with a spatial concept? That's where the problem is. For instance, Anonymous ... Can we consider them counterculture? Or not? There are a lot of things going on just because of this ambiguity between physical space and digital space. It is more and more difficult to link some things with spatial ...

(EBP)

-... spatial coordinates.

(AP)

-It's true that we have in our minds this kind of romantic idea of the periphery as a place where anything can happen. It's true that these things are shifting ...

pipes, oil. There is oil on top of tourists, on top of a fisherman's village, on top of highways, on top of old Roman settlements. There is a very interesting discourse coming out by a Portuguese geographer, Álvaro Domingues, who calls it "transgenic landscape." In a literal sense, it's transgenic because it has the same genes as the landscape we know, but re-sequenced. The order was changed, that's why it's transgenic, which is, to some degree, the limit.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—I was thinking about how we conceptualize our work according to certain time frames. It is true that, until now, we have been building all these infrastructures based on oil, for example. But we are also facing that moment when oil will end, and we will rely on other sources of energy. In a free world, we need to think about what will happen in twenty, thirty years. When we think about this postindustrial landscape, we have to overcome the shortsightedness of our architectural work, since we are used to responding to the next five years.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—It's really nice to think further. It can be a solution to this kind of anxiety we have nowadays. Just thinking thirty years into the future gives you kind of a calm situation, a rationality that goes beyond normative tendencies and the super-fast world that we're living now.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—Not only because it goes beyond tendencies but also because it avoids useless work. It is a waste to produce things that will be used for only two or three years and will become ruins in five. This is ideological, because we have been taught to produce, produce, produce, within a very short time frame. Perhaps it is not only a question of talking about the postindustrial landscape ruins; this topic goes further into education. How can we transform these mental frameworks we have and try to think in another way?

(JM)

—"Anything can happen." But not all of these are nice things ...

(AP)

—The idea of periphery is a cliché. These kind of ...

(EBP)

—... romantic places.

(GL)

—Here in Barcelona there was a survey that demonstrated that the map of risk does not match the map of where we think risk is. For instance, people mark on a map of the city the places that they consider dangerous. And then we have the real facts of where crimes are perpetrated. You overlap those maps, and they don't fit at all. There's the reality of cities and how we imagine the reality of cities.

(JM)

—That is the basic ecology of crime! If crime happened where people expect it to happen, then it wouldn't happen at all!

(EBP)

—It's also a result of clichés such as "a place with a migrant population is more dangerous," or "it's more dangerous with lower economic classes because they need to rob to survive." So we have these clichés, and the reality is that it is systemically dangerous everywhere. What do you consider danger: having a gun to your head or being evicted from your house?

(JM)

—I'm not a specialist in crime, but if I were going to mug someone, I wouldn't choose a poor neighborhood to do it. It would be a waste of a good crime. I would be better off mugging a rich person. That's where the limits are. Danger and reward go together, but primarily we are talking about a conflictive edge, be it the difference between the psychogeography of crime and the map of crime. Understanding cities as spaces of conflict is very

different from understanding them as spaces of pacification. You have more peace the closer you are to power because that's the job of power, to discipline. There are tons of terrifying reasons for counterculture to happen where there is less power. There is an edge, there is friction, there is conflict, and that leaves us in a very bizarre situation. We can evoke uselessness? Fantastic! We can produce very good reasons to be absolutely useless, but isn't that a waste of education, time, and energy? Architects being able to explain why they should be doing something else?

(AP)

—We can come back later to the idea of a relationship between discipline and counterculture. I want to point out there's something we are not talking about in our discussion, and it's hidden between the lines. There's a deep relationship between economics and counterculture because the periphery that we are talking about is a specific periphery. For instance, in Barcelona we have a very rich periphery. And there's no counterculture at all because everything is well defined, well established, under strict regulation, etc. We are talking about a periphery where there's no control. I don't know if I feel very comfortable with the idea that counterculture has to be related to low income.

(EBP)

—Let's talk about a countercultural place like Drop City. It wasn't even in the periphery as we know it; it was in the Colorado plains and had a mix of artistic architecture. This is when architectural practice can overlap with other practices. Sometimes this promiscuity is important because it is where something emerges.

(JM)

—Dropping out and producing counterculture are very different things. The dropouts tried to survive as well as they could with the detritus of the system. Just chop the top off cars and

make wonderful domes; just be very skillful going high-low-tech and getting enough residue from the system in order to survive. That is different from the empowerment of a counterculture happening where you still have a little bit of class consciousness.

(GL)

—To affect reality you have to be in reality. Drop Cities were isolated, and for this reason they had no power to change anything.

(AP)

—It was the same with Robert Owen or Charles Fourier. All of their proposals were in the middle of nowhere, so they were not really countercultural. They were just another world that was not addressing reality.

(JM)

—Counterculture is not outside main culture, it's an edge that is able to reorganize that main culture.

(AP)

—That was why I was feeling uncomfortable with the idea of relating it to a certain economy, because counterculture shouldn't be related to an economy. It's just a counterculture.

(EBP)

—That can happen everywhere.

(AP)

—Should happen everywhere.

(GL)

—I'm again a little bit uncomfortable with the word "counterculture" because here in Barcelona, for instance, we had the Movimiento 15-M, and a lot of people gathered into the squares. I think the interesting thing is that some people wanted to change things, but they were not counterculture. They wanted to be a different culture. It is interesting that they got into the institutions, and now they can effect change. Now they're the institution, the same one that they were criticizing. Right now it's very interesting

CRITICAL EXPERIMENT



(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—I have a problem with Letters to the Mayor. The “conversation” is just one sided. We write letters to the mayor but we don’t have any answers ...

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—I got an answer back, and actually it’s kind of interesting. Our letter was asking the mayor to have places outside of the law. I was asking to have the kind of landscapes that we were talking about today in Barcelona: spaces outside of control. So that things can happen.

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

—Maybe this needs some explanation, because we were working within the European Union, and you realize how over-regulated everything is. If you have to do something here, you have to follow millions of rules. It’s a kind of overdesign of public space, and it’s not only about form. It’s about laws, rules, norms. We were talking about counterculture, and that relates to the idea. In the places where rules are less well defined or there is no control, maybe some other things start to arise.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—In the project Letters to the Mayor, the topic is how we communicate with power. The problem is you cannot communicate with anyone if it’s coming only from one side. This is not communication. It’s talking, or writing ... How can we get politicians, or Power, to get involved in this conversation?

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

—In this institutional way, trying to change things is a kind of *entretien*. The other way would be to form a

in Barcelona with Ada Colau and all the citizens who organized themselves in order to change things. And now they have the power, they are the institution they criticized, and they have to manage things. They have to deal with subway workers’ strikes; they have to face a reality they wouldn’t even think about when they were outside of it. It’s interesting when counterculture turns into culture.

(EBP)

—Perhaps counterculture is not against culture in general terms but against a certain kind of institutional, politically manipulated culture, not against culture as a concept.

(JM)

—In the 1970s and 1980s, when Kenneth Frampton proposed an architecture of resistance with global critical regionalism, he was dismantling the model of center/periphery. The periphery is not a center with less intensity; it’s a different thing. Actually, it’s a perspective with paradigmatic value that reorganizes the center. In that sense critical regionalism was very countercultural. It was immobile, of course: to be able to reorganize the center you have to be away from it. What is the big advantage of that? “I’ll be very smart in being away from the center.” What am I gaining with that?

THE POWER OF EXPERIMENT



(JM)

—The challenge is set in the proposal “Formulate, Formalize, Perform.” There are two things—Formulate/Formalize and Perform—and we are all being asked to take a stance. We were talking about getting rid of normative tendencies when we were all educated in other tendencies. If you don’t have a clear stance on something, you can’t survive. What is your idea? What do you stand for? What is your *tendenza*? It is a way of legitimating a particular thing and apparently this trickles down to education.

We teach students a solid grasp of the present, and formalizing and performing will give you the experience. The experience will probably teach you that tendencies are a way of trapping you in a useless late present. That’s what happens with fashion. If you follow tendencies, the odds that you are old-fashioned in a permanent way are very high. How do you tackle one of these real ecological concerns in architecture schools? Like life, architecture is in permanent transformation; architecture changes in a way you can benefit from. It is only through experiment that new and old practices arise from ideas about the future to create a shared vision of society.

(EBP)

—Architectural knowledge shifts according to needs—this is a lie! This is the problem with architecture now. We, the architects, are not responding to today’s needs. We are responding to the needs of thirty years ago. I don’t subscribe to that.

(JM)

—That’s when architects studied, I guess. What does it mean that thirty years ago we were educated properly, and we still think that our education prepared us to deal with the world today?

(GL)

—When you’re teaching students, you educate them for a profession, yet you have no clue what it’s going to be, or how architecture will be, ten years into the future when they will practice. You need a crystal ball to watch the future. Sure you teach some content, but it’s not about content; it’s about attitude.

(EBP)

—You need to teach the attitude and not only the contents.

(GL)

—Tendencies are not bad, but they’re not powerful. The power of architecture is about other things. You can talk about all kinds of architecture and different styles. Even historic architecture has nothing to do with styles; nevertheless, we continue using it. The buildings are still powerful, independently of the culture that produced them. Architecture is bigger than these contingencies.

(AP)

—Architecture is somehow atemporal. You can answer to specific needs but ...

(EBP)

—I don’t think architecture is atemporal. Not like an idea is atemporal ...

counterculture, which is not a dialogue. It's trying to break into something or make things work.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—Barcelona is the city that became famous because architects actually conveyed their views to Power. They could make Power see the city through their eyes.

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

—In a very institutional way, they were culture, not counterculture.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—Because they were part of the city council, that's a big difference. They were not talking with the city council; they were the city council.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—That was a whole group, which included architects and other citizens who came together and took a long-term view. We want to get this communication done by means of a letter between now and tomorrow? How can this work? In that way, we have witnessed that we have no communication. They are acting politicians; they have no other option than to invite a person to the Congress and to listen. I think the way to communicate with Power nowadays is by doing things, not this traditional way of talking or writing.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—When you're sending letters to the mayor, you wonder if he is ever going to read them. But if you can say what you have to say to the mayor, suddenly it's a public statement.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—It acts like an open letter.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—It helps, I guess. Collective construction. Even the impasses.

(AP)

—There are other things that make architecture atemporal, don't you think?

(EBP)

—Like what?

(AP)

—"Form" is atemporal.

(EBP)

—Form? Form is a concept. The form of yesterday is not the same that is used now.

(JM)

—Here we go platonic, in terms of education. Form would be stable, which would be the solid that tries to approximate an ideal. But how do you take that culture and cross it with sustainability and experimental education? We pride ourselves on doing that. We don't want to replicate ...

(GL)

—What's wrong with replication? What's wrong with copies? It's not that bad, and it's not about gesturing, it's about other things.

(EBP)

—We go back to the attitude and not the solution, because the sustainable needs of today are not the same. We were talking about the difference between using oil or water for electricity. Students need to have an attitude of constant learning to understand this complexity to not only say, "OK, we are facing global warming," or, "OK, the temperature has risen and now we need to build differently." That is true but it's not the only problem we are dealing with ... We are designing electric cars but I don't think it's a good solution because the source of energy is the same. And it's an old model based on cars. How can we apply this to architecture?

(AP)

—That is a responsibility of architectural schools as well, to change attitudes toward things.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—It's needed. It's needed that we, as architects, talk about politics and talk to mayors. Talking is needed, but I agree we have to go beyond that.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—I'm not saying this is useless, it's a starting point, but after writing, how do you manage to communicate?

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—That's the question. The right to claim that you want Power to be a bit less powerful. You ask them to exert themselves less in the public space.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—What are you talking about when you talk about power? Political power? In the case of public space, the privatization of public space relates to economic power. I think there are different ways to get this communication done.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—What is more efficient in the long run? Is it to be critical or to find common ground? To write the mayor proposing something that he can actually do? Isn't that an important space? A designed space?

(GUILLERMO LÓPEZ)

—It is more nuanced. We were not asking those in power to exert less power. We were just asking them, for instance, to allow an axis that bisects two poles to play some other role. I cannot figure out how that would diminish power; it's just about the possibility of allowing things to happen. To suppress rules which do not affect power. It was not about the executive capacity of teams or the city council to do things, but to allow more possibilities for things to happen in a specific place. It was about rules and norms that are detached from executive power.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—In our city, we have arrived at a point where rules are defined not just for citizens' comfort or to regulate

(JM)

—Isn't that the power of experiment?

(GL)

—I don't know. It's not about solutions but rather about thinking about the questions. For instance, what should our students be designing? Shouldn't they be thinking about what will happen with highways, what will happen with petrol stations, what will happen with many things in fifty years? So maybe the question should be focused on this future. Not just on designing a house but also on how a house should be in fifty years.

(JM)

—So, we should teach students to deal with ecological tragedy instead of trying to teach them to prevent ecological tragedy?

(EBP)

—To be aware of ecology?

(JM)

—To avoid it as quickly as possible. If we do have an ecological tragedy, we will have that wonderful apocalypse, and there will be no people. And then what to do with gas stations won't be a problem!

(EBP)

—I'm repeating myself, but we are again addressing the architect's big ego. We cannot avoid ecological tragedy. We can work on it, but ecological tragedy is about economics, social issues ... It's a mistake to tell students they can avoid ecological tragedy.

(AP)

—I'm trying to understand the concept of experiment. One of the mistakes in architectural education is that one tends to formalize first and then use, perform, and understand, and then see what shape or form will come from that. From the very beginning we can talk about how to shift or to transform the statement "Formulate, Formalize, Perform."

their behavior but also for other unrelated motives.
That's why we were asking to have flexibility.

(JOAQUIM MORENO)

—What we are all saying is that if you write a letter to the mayor, you'd be better off proposing than asking, because if you ask, you imply a communication that you probably don't believe exists. You can use the opportunity to propose and make it an open proposal, of general interest, a simple example that seemingly everybody can agree or disagree with.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—There is a good example here in Barcelona. The new mayor opened a website for citizens to upload proposals. If you register, you can vote on them. The ones that get the most votes pass. I don't know if it will work or not, but it's a way to make these proposals open. Everybody can see the proposals. It can be a lousy proposal and it will get no votes, or it can be a good one. You can also use these platforms to make proposals more visible and to engage more people and have them participate. You are asking if a proposal will be supported by a group.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—Before doing the process, they thought it was going to be different. The results that came out were totally unexpected, so these participation processes are still under review ...

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—I don't mean critical participation as a trend. I mean to give visibility to the other side, to give Power a kind of map of interests or requests from people. For a politician or someone in power it is good to have this kind of mapping to see neighborhood interests. People, of course, can dismiss a lot of proposals. It gives a broader vision of the city that you are working on.

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—For me, Letters to the Mayor was quite an interesting

(JM)

—It's Godard's famous experiment: "My films have a beginning, a middle, and an end but not necessarily in that order." It's probably a valuable contribution: Can we change the order of the factors? Would that make it experimental? Probably. Would that make it experiential? Quite likely.

(AP)

—I was told about an architectural school that is exactly following the first course at the Bauhaus. The studio's first exercise was just to lie down together, all the students in the class, one next to the other one. The first student in the row had to roll and touch the next, and so forth; this rhythm of bodies repeatedly smashing. That was design, a way of starting to understand space, to understand order, to understand bodies in space ...

(EBP)

—Negotiation.

(JM)

—And then along comes Theo Van Doesburg and tells them, "Hmm ..."

(GL)

—I like this idea of "performing" because we are very used to thinking of things and designing them. Performing, or doing, is detached from the discipline as we were taught it. Maybe it's nice that students start with these exercises and afterward they can formalize, and finally they can formalize. It has to do with what you were saying about Godard. Maybe just changing the starting point. You start performing and then you might understand some things that otherwise you would never think of.

(AP)

—It has happened here—we started performing on the streets in order to talk about architecture. So we first started gathering in the streets. Performing. Not with the idea of talking about the discipline itself but just to gather. So we did end up talking

way to put one's finger on the hot spot. Nowadays it's mandatory for architecture to talk about politics, and we should talk to the mayor.

(ETHEL BARAONA POHL)

—More to the point, how can we move forward? It has been going on for years ... And we are talking about proposals to think or discuss. But how can we move forward? It's a fantastic starting point but how can we have a louder voice? How can we have ...

(ANNA PUIGJANER)

—... a real conversation.

about the discipline, thanks to these performances in the street.

(EBP)

—The question emerges in a natural way. Nicholas Negroponte said that in architecture schools we need to design the questions and not the answers. It's a very old and basic rule, but it was forgotten for many years.

(JM)

—The first client shows up in the office and the architect says, "I have a wonderful question for you. I designed a fantastic question for you ..."

(GL)

—"How many bedrooms?"

(AP)

—I like your idea about changing the order of things ...

(JM)

—We can take a protocol and shuffle it.

(AP)

—And that perhaps is the experiment in architecture.

(JM)

—This requires a lot of conceptualization.

The Form of Form

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