# Editorial

Estimulado por la llamada al diálogo como instrumento de proyecto y de arquitectura (Juan Herreros #16), este número de Palimpsesto teje múltiples relaciones entre las distintas aportaciones publicadas. Si los artículos de Ana Espinosa sobre las casas de Somosaguas de Carvajal y de Raúl Martínez sobre los diagramas programáticos y sensoriales, emplean de la manera más nítida el método comparativo para su desarrollo, ambos se inclinan hacia una visión antropológica de la disciplina donde el factor humano prevalece sobre el dogma. La posición casi introspectiva de algunas de estas reflexiones subyace también en el texto de Alberto Campo Baeza sobre la investigación en arquitectura, donde ordena sus pensamientos y defiende el papel del proyecto como instrumento crítico e investigador.

Diálogo contemporáneo con el pasado que encontramos en la visión sobre el patrimonio que presentan Carlos Ferrater en su nota sobre el gótico catalán y el equipo formado por Bosch, Ballester y Marcenac en su análisis de las propuestas para la regeneración del espacio de los foros imperiales de Roma. La fuerza y modernidad del espacio de la *Llotja de Mar*, hoy envuelta en el Neoclásico ilustrado, fue el escenario de una clase emprendedora cívica y urbana mientras que el foro acogía a todo un Imperio.

Sin esta condición patrimonial, el diálogo con lo existente es la base de la interesantísima propuesta de la sala polivalente del Liceo Francés de Valencia de Orts-Trullenque. Aquí se entabla la relación con las preexistencias con astucia, sencillez y desde una sensibilidad mediterránea.

Es ésta una arquitectura que Marta Pelegrín podría identificar como de la "Disposición". Un instrumento operativo que desentraña en su trabajo y -sostiene- comparten arquitectos europeos como Lacaton (#6), Herreros (#16) o Roger Riewe desde su despacho con Florian Riegler, al que entrevista para nuestra publicación. Su arquitectura, interpretada como telón de fondo de la ciudad y de la actividad, esconde detrás su naturalidad un sofisticado proceso intelectual que no es ajeno ni al oficio ni a la técnica.

Igualmente audaz -aquí hermosa y casi inquietante- es la intervención de Anna & Eugeni Bach en el pabellón de Mies en Barcelona. Una pátina blanca, cuyo montaje y desmontaje queda registrado, depura la materialidad y otorga al pabellón una condición onírica.

Por último, publicamos dos textos de 1986, "Ensayos sobre el desorden. La ciudad Histórica" de Xavier Rubert de Ventós y "Bordes blandos" de Jan Gehl (traducido aquí al castellano). Más allá de la coincidencia cronológica, ambos ahondan en el sentido de lo cívico, el primero en la ciudad, el segundo en sus costuras. Defienden la necesidad de los espacios de actividad informal, en los bordes de la privacidad según Gehl, en los residuos de la ciudad burguesa según Rubert de Ventós. La profundidad de su texto, su vigencia, traslada al escenario urbano la oportunidad del desorden como espacio creativo y optimista para la programación de los nuevos usos de la sociedad contemporánea. "Un desorden […] frágil y precario, y que la intervención pública tiende a regimentar transformando sus márgenes en pura violencia."

# PALIMPSESTO

## DESÓRDENES

V.O. PALIMPSESTO respeta el idioma original de los autores.

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# Interview with
# Roger Riewe

## Marta Pelegrín

*While I was writing my PHD I went to Austria and shared residency with researchers at the TU-Graz, where Professor R. Riewe directed the Architecture Technology Institute. This allowed me to rummage around through archives and documents to use towards the thesis, "Architecture as Disposition: an approach to architectural design at the European backstage in the turn of the century". In July 2016 I carried out an interview that we've recently completed and updated, meeting R. Riewe at the Architecture and Society Seminar in Barcelona, hold in November 2017. We are grateful for his generous commitment.*

**P** On early projects

About your origins. Why did you choose to study architecture? And how did you establish as a practice?

I grew up with architecture, building and construction due to the fact that my father was a structural engineer, building contractor and architect, all these roles together. Therefore, for me, architecture has always been not only about designing but also about the building, construction and technology aspects. The house where I lived and grew up in was in South Africa, and my father designed it himself. So, I grew up with architecture surrounding me in my own home, but also with many visits to construction sites.

After my Studies in Germany, I worked in an office for one year in Graz and in this office I met my partner Florian Riegler and from then we started entering competitions, winning the first one, but were not able to build it. After that we founded our own office with the intention of getting work by winning competitions, we didn't win any more competitions for a long time, and we didn't have any money. That was the beginning of the office.

You participated at the Vienna Museums Quartier, one of the greatest competitions held in Austria that could be nowadays considered a palimpsest about the strategies followed by important teams in the late 80s, early 90s, such as O. M. Ungers, H. Hollein, Fumihiko Maki, or F. Venezia and R. Moneo, and young architects as Herzog & De Meuron and Ortner & Ortner. Do you remember the importance of that competition?
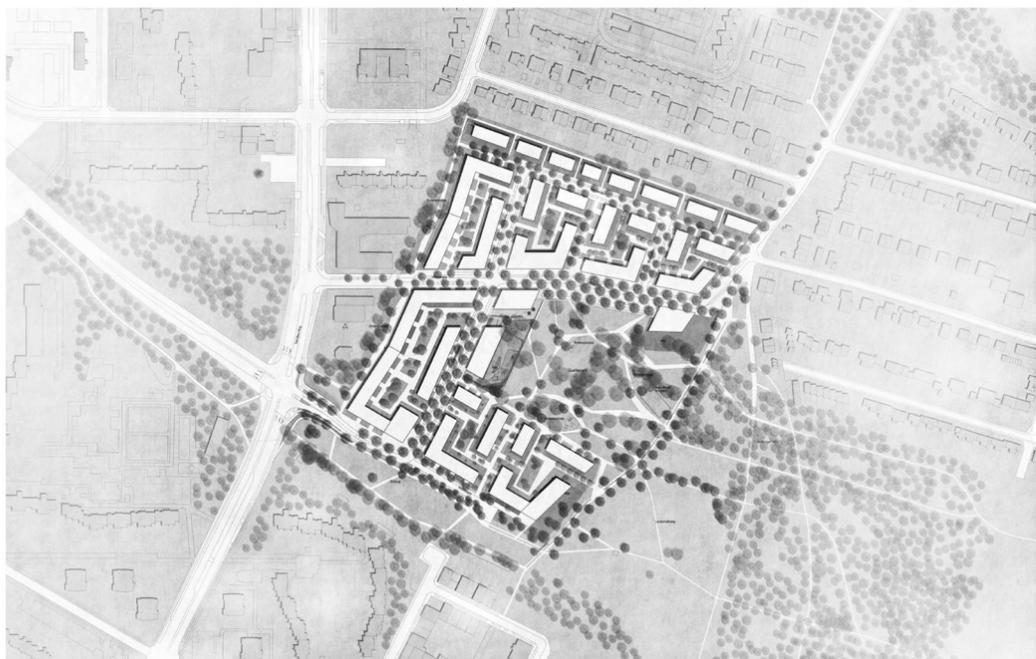
Yes, the competition created a lot of discussion: it was a very political move, setting up a Museum in the former Royal Stables area, for which the brief was always changing, in front of the Maria Theresien Platzt, and the Natural History and the Art History Museums. Among more than hundred entries, there were only two entries that were completely different from the rest, that didn't hide behind the main existing façade. We proposed a new building that related to the surrounding buildings in height, dimensions and proportions, while creating a new urban space; a building that created a kind of urban matrix with the two other big museums. The Viennese said it was a little too radical.

This time the design project worked as a strategy: program vs function, interdisciplinary versus specificity, technique versus technology, participation versus user, process versus crystallization of the design. To do so in the early turn of the century was maybe radical, now it has become more common, do you agree with that?

When we start designing, we start talking about the project, in terms of what the conditions will be, how will the space be utilised and what will the occupancy of the space be like. We think of different scenarios in which the space could be utilised and this can last for, say, a week, maybe two weeks. Our design process begins with everyone reading the brief and the requirements and then we sit together and talk about the project; how can we imagine a virtualization of that, that's the most important.

It is not about having images or building precedents to refer to, but rather to begin thinking in terms of how many people would there be, 1000 or 10000 people, how many is that in an hour, just imagine would it be the place to have a café or maybe a public space? Then finally we start drawing and sketching an idea, which is always very interesting because both partners are brainstorming and working at the same time, so what is produced is essentially the same sketch, never in architectural terms like is this façade made from brick or glass… all that comes later, it is so unimportant, all other aspects are more important.

What role do the advisors and the other engineers and even the landscape or urban designers and collaborators play there? In the competition phase ,later in the design phase and the construction?

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Well it depends on the size and also the type of competition. We set up teams, we always work in teams and I would say the first move for the designer in a competition is always done by the architects and then we start conversation with the engineers, planners, landscapers and so on. We don't begin by talking to everybody all at once. That would actually be opening the field too much. We have a pool of structural engineers, a pool of landscape architects and a pool of mechanical engineers, from which we can choose. For every competition we can choose who we think would work best together.

Would you describe then your process as being deductive more than inductive? Going from the details to making bigger decisions instead of the other way around, first concentrating on the bigger decisions and then on the smaller details, or neither nor?

Both scales at the same time. The methodology is actually a direct encounter, and to be very clear in the reaction. So when questioning something the answers have to be very clear. We question the briefs all the time. So when we see it, we question, why? And actually, by questioning it we finally come up with our ideas. It is not only pragmatism, I would say it is a direct encounter.

The nineties is a favourable context, it is possible to discern a swerve or a change in the way a number of architectural practices design. These architectural projects and built works distance themselves from *theories* regarding *formal, signifying and autonomous* architectural production (called *postmodernism, deconstructivsm,* or *Grazer Schule* in your neighbourhood). Regarding one of the first awarded works - the "Cultural Centre Wolkenstein" – CCW -, Dietmar Steiner entitled your work as " *Architecture as a position: the appropriate balance between task, programme, content and architectural solution*". Do you think that kind of early attitude towards such projects is still alive in your office?

Yes, that attitude or position description was important in that context, but working in this way doesn't mean we didn't deliberately try to make a radical project. It's just as normal as possible, but other people maybe think it is radical. Sometimes people don't want to hear the truth, they want something fake or like something comfortable and then they are given something radical.

## P On relation with materials and industry

From the beginning you've spoken about "*low tech*" architecture, referring to the immediate relationship between design and construction. What is the difference between that and "raw material"?

There is actually some ambivalence surrounding that term because *low tech* itself cannot be low tech, it is always high tech. It is the way you see it and perceive it, because you have to put a lot of brain power into the details or into the façade which is *low tech*, so it is more about the inventiveness. So with *low tech* it can look very simple, it looks very plain, but actually it can be very complex.

Regarding the use of *raw material*, we're interested in how you use material, to create things in a slightly different way than normal, than usual. This actually enriches the perception because suddenly you notice, looks like "as if". For example, if we say we want to make a façade with "bad quality concrete", as we asked the contractor to do at the Institutes for Information Technology at the Graz University of Technology, that façades were built with in situ cast black-coloured concrete. It is not load bearing concrete, rather only a cladding; we wanted to show it as such, a kind of "curtain wall".

Would it be somehow contradictory, the former statement that you just said, answers and proposals should be as straight ahead as possible? Having to express something different is not that straightforward, is it?

Well, the direct way of thinking is never straight-forward, it's just a very fast method, right? Because when we go on to use a material, it is about the aesthetics of the material. We don't want to aestheticize it like in *high tech* projects, aestheticizing of the detail. This is not our approach, we want to actually see a building as it was found, as if it were the original and maybe only the architect would be able to notice that there are differences, something special going on. But the normal people would say I've noticed something special about this building too.

Whenever you work away, are you interested in learning how the local industry works in order to adapt your design or details to suit that way of working or is it not possible or preferable?

This is very important for us and we also try to push the border every time. For example, we build facades in Austria which we cannot build in Germany due to legal aspects. We've got a long tradition of having different methods of building facades and having craftsmen working on the facades, designers on the facades, and structural engineers that take on the risks of the design as well. In Germany, there's no structural engineer working on the façade, so they use a façade from a

certified catalogue. In Austria we can design the façade, and as we have an engineer checking the façade, it can be built.

At the recently finalized Medicine Campus in Graz the façade is actually a concoction of standard profiles from a big German company used in a different way, with the addition of another layer that we designed ourselves in the office. So along with the use of this big German façade making company, we set up prefabricated elements, then we designed and constructed insulated elements in a size which has never been built before in Germany. The researches came to Graz wondering how it was possible and we showed them how we pushed the border.

Do you think it contains an added value, a culture, within it?

It's full of culture: working within the building industry, it is connected with the workers, the craftsmen. That means reciprocally training for both firm experts and craftsmen to create the projects that they are designing and building. It is always different in Austria, in Germany, or in Africa. For instance, at the New Bugesera International Airport, Kigali, Rwanda, we've got no control over the details, because the building culture is different. We won't define the design as we would in Europe, which actually would be a too colonial attitude, they'd actually refuse it. So, we propose a design manual, with just a limited amount of details which they can use to build, to enlarge, maintain and adapt the buildings for the next 20 years.

## P About infrastructures

The historian Otto A. Graf, points out the exceptional chance Otto Wagner took advantage of by designing Viennese Stadtbahn Stations in the XXth Century Turn: "The places of passage and daily encounter enabled a change and displacement in architecture paradigms: pragmatism and operability where the necessity advances the architecture: transfer stations, literally and figuratively, places with new programmes, new technical and spatial requirements and new typologies for a new century". Your first works have been most related to civil engineering and infrastructure: from your early competitions of Graz Airport (1989) and Innsbruck Railstation (1999) to the cited Airport in Kigali, among others, do you agree about the importance of infrastructure?

Yes, there's a big influence because you can study the logic of infrastructure, and design to be as clear as possible. We've learnt already through different airport designs, both Ruanda and Graz are small: 1.5 million passengers per year. Though an airport is very simple, you go in and you go out, between there's security, control, and a duty free shop. The Graz airport was to be the narrowest airport in Europe, at 38.5 meters, when the most common size is 100m, so we had to optimise and make clear the flow pattern inside it. We should not have to make a sign that says "entrance" in a space like this, but then people get nervous because the sign they expect to see is missing, as the gates were is missing. If there are no signs, then it is not an airport. (Laughs).

## P On housing

You won several awards at early Europan Housing Competitions, Amsterdam and Giubiasco, and built the internationally recognized Casa Nostra and Strassgang housing, both in Graz. Now you have recently won the project for masterplanning an area of 13 hectares in Munich with a core project "206" Munich, a design for a residential tower, commercial facilities and a kinder garden.
If infrastructure has to be as clear as possible, because it is a programme that changes constantly, would you state that housing, within the last 20 years, has changed a lot too?

Nothing is the same anymore. The German term for housing, "wohnen", is a too vague word. What is wohnen? It is nowadays all: eating, sleeping, working, watching tv and virtual connecting. Everything changes so we don't know how people live, we've got no clue. The family structure is changing, and it changes over time. Working from home has become popular, or even a necessity. The real estate price has soared, and in spite of technological advances, it cannot influence the housing price. Apartments become so small, we don't have enough flexibility of utilization anymore. We need to design non-determined spaces, and the apartments

have to be rigid enough to accomplish different methods or ways of living.

This is one of our main topics, enabling or giving a "potential virtualization" That was a guiding idea at Strassgang Housing (Graz). Because we don't believe in the user to change anything, we think we are so lazy and other people are lazy too, so when we move to some place we usually don't build all walls again, maybe we change the paint, or the floor, but we hardly demolish a wall, so we say the walls are quite static, and then there has to be a pattern that allows a fluid utilization, that offers many possibilities,…

Basically it is providing an infrastructure for construction and that everybody can utilize in an individual way. We appreciate architecture in which nothing is determined. So basically what we try is to reduce the determinacy of the space, same if it is an apartment or an airport, as far as possible, to actually have a large degree say 90% of non-determined area, that you are completely free of utilize. I think it is a matter of honesty, because we claim, we don't know how the houses problems of the user will be, we have no idea, we even don't know because of ourselves.  Although 90% of architects will say I know exactly how you are going to live, we say it another way, by providing floor plans open enough so that Americans, Africans, Moroccans, Italians, can all live there and with different habits. We avoid to define for one certain person a real space because it will never work.

In P206 Munich high rise housing we propose an urban living room on ground floor, and on every level one area that is the size of an apartment, of which we don't know what it is. If everybody is just so individualised, we need some space for common use, so we can communicate again. It's so very important. You've got your chatrooms, you're like a digital junkie and you think you're communicating with a lot of people but you do not know how to communicate face to face anymore, you don't know how to behave in a social way anymore. We explained this to the client. At P206 Munich Housing the standards given are quite rigid. So the possibility of manoeuvring space is very scarce. Not only due to soaring real estate prizes the client tends towards smaller apartments. By introducing a communal space on every floor, people will have the possibility to put their bicycle and their beer cans there, their laundry, their children will play there. Suddenly everybody has got a lot of ideas for those communal spaces!

## P On hybrids

How do you defend as efficient and sustainable those common spaces for the current lifestyle?

Well you always get trapped in the feasibility discussion with the promotor, asking can we afford it? It might be very expensive at the first moment, but on the other hand it is also about how much profit the real estate developer makes. With 62 square meter apartments they make most profit, so apartments built most are approximately 65 m2. And 1 to 2 person apartments have become so small that there is no space for children. Due to the apartments being built we have to question if supermarkets, kindergardens, etc. will work. They will be empty during the day if there are no families and no kids around. So the client suddenly realises the hybrid, is the way to make the whole urban setting work. So far, we say only a hybrid is sustainable.

And on the other hand, there has to be a quality of living. For example, these apartments are all high rises with a circular balcony, a continuous balcony, which was too much when we told them. Is there a possibility of separating it from your neighbour, they asked? Yes, there is a door, but everybody can open this door, there is a lock on every side.

So if two agree to open the lock then it will open. If only one agrees you cannot open it. And then finally, I learnt from my own children, kids will open it first and then run around the high rise. The value and excitement is also there. I think the call for hybrid structures is an absolute necessity of our time to save the city.

To save the city?

Yes, to save the city, because we always talk about energy efficiency ecological impact and imprints and so on, but when you build monofunctional housing projects and something changes and they have to tear it down and have to put up an office building instead. An office building you cannot use for housing. And this is so expensive and so energy inefficient, which is absolutely never sustainable. So we claim that the first step is to build structures, to build houses that we never have to change. This is sustainable. How much insulation, heating, etc., doesn't solve the problem.

The historical cities actually always work and have never changed but the people have changed. The way of working has changed, the way of living has changed. The motorcar has been introduced. These housing or building structures have always been a little bit too big. So, the project remained for housing can be a kindergarten, a nursery school, or an office building. All these things are possible so that's why the buildings always stayed.

But now we cannot tell the client let's make it 10 percent bigger, they won't pay for that. There's a problem of investors or utiliser that, the investor only builds a project to sell it again, so he's not interested at all in the life cycle of it all. Architects are actually forced to think about that. Asking for more hybrid buildings. We would say why make a floor 2.4 m in high? Make it 3.2, it doesn't cost much more. There's just a few things you've got to change a little bit and then you can actually enforce many different things.

What role does the public space play in those hybrids?

The public space is always outside of course and it is the responsibility of the municipality. City-governments have not researched and invested enough in public space. So the pedestrian area is privatised already, the café has to pay for the pedestrian area and things like that which are highly critical. As a city, you cannot privatise public space. We think there has to be a social control of public space to make it work. You cannot just propose big public spaces and say this is for the public, it doesn't work. There has to be some kind of idea behind it, or social control: people stay in public space, they get involved in it, there's an interaction with public space; things that have to be developed very precisely.

It has not much to do with participation, has it?

No, because I think the public space is actually a mutual and common issue, and not an individual issue. And that's why I'm always very critical about the bottom up movement, because this is highly particular individual. It has nothing to do with the common idea. It is another way of neocapitalistic manoeuvres. See Berlin Tempelhof, it said no housing but when you go there, it's hard to find big plaeses, that's not enough public.

## P On heritage

What is your position with regard to heritage?

I'll illustrate it with Cultural Center St. Agnes, in Berlin, where the longest discussions were actually about the heritage, because the original building is a Church designed by Werner Düttmann. When Germany was reunified after the fall of the iron curtain, at that time there were more than 100 churches in Berlin on the market to be sold. So a prominent local art dealer bought it later in 2011 to make an Art Gallery although it's an historical monument. To protect the monuments, the rule is keep their own character, but you can also continue building a monument but you have to see the difference between old and new. And we said ok, but this building is so good that if you want to show the difference you will destroy the building. So we proposed to continue building as if it would have been the architect himself but only an architect will notice there's a difference: we'll use the same materials but the detail will be different. And a normal person will not notice it is something new.

There was not enough surface area here inside the church, we had to double the surface area to actually make it work, incorporating a new level, a heating system, pipes and all. The columns supporting the concrete slab have no foundations due to the heritage regulation, so it would be like a table which can be carried out some time in the future when not needed any more. Despite severity of rules, the complex includes also other facilities and even an apartment is going to be built into the clock tower. We took a lot of care to design all carefully, we say it is like progressive preservation of heritage.

## P On scolar

Now on your career as professor, could you be critical about the Bologna Education Process - advantages and disadvantages- it has?

On the one hand, the advantage of the Bologna Process or the agreement is the incredible increase in mobility of students and teachers, mainly students. It is important for Europe to build a European society. You have to cross the border, you have to see how other people teach, work and handle their everyday life. Social skills in another context are so very important. And this is possible due to Bologna. For bachelor or master, people leave for other universities.. But architecture studies course is not the same as, for example, an economics course, a knowledge that you learn. Architecture has to be trained, so you need more time. The students have to be more mature. So the 3+2 program is too short, it doesn't make any sense. I personally would always go for a 4+2. After the 4 years 'bachelor the students can go working and come back again to specialise themselves, to make a real master. I tell my students, in bachelor, you have to do a European programme and in masters you have to do an Asian or an American programme.

And I also tell them they have to work at the same time, to build up a portfolio. So you need 7 years or 8 years. This is what I tell them but on the other hand it is also a problem of financing. First of all the government does not want students to work anymore because they should finish their studies as fast as possible, otherwise it becomes too expensive, because they are studying too long. The university costs many thousands of euros per year per student. And that has to be paid by the tax payer. For architecture, this doesn't work. And the other thing is that the social system actually also grafts the students, they get their grant for 3 years plus one term, not for 8 terms or more. They get paid for three and a half years, maximum. If they study longer they don't get any money any more. No grant. Right? And suddenly they're stuck.

Then they have to decide themselves, ok, I want to be a great architect, so I have to start working. I have to earn my own money and then immediately you've got 5 or 6 years, not 3 years. But this is a general decision you have to take as a student, and our society has changed so much that students really feel at ease studying very fast. They think that studying fast is something positive, after 5 years, you're done, and then you're an architect. And that's a disaster for architecture students.

So when I check portfolios, if I want to hire someone, I will never go through a portfolio for a student who has only done 5 years. They go to the waste paper basket immediately. Too fast, doesn't make sense. And then the others are more interesting. What I want to see is you have to be an exchange student, you have to have done a summer school or a winter school, just to go somewhere to study with someone for a few weeks and you have to have worked. Then I think even if they work in a small office it is far more important than in more famous big offices, they have to learn what the profession really is made of.

So, would you be ready to tell us what would be your "call for papers" for the next issue from this magazine?

I think I would reinforce the thing we were talking about, a very European topic because after 20 years of shrinking cities suddenly everything is growing again. It's all about densification and hybridization. So it would be like "high density hybrids".

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