# La arquitectura, ¡también!

Bajo este título inclusivo el director de la Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, **Francis Rambert**, nos explicaba in situ la exposición que documenta los hechos de mayo del 68, trasladados al ámbito de la arquitectura. La definitiva ruptura con la Academia de Bellas Artes incorporó a la enseñanza de la arquitectura una visión social e histórica, urbana y pluridisciplinar, hasta entonces enfocada a cuestiones de tipo formal.

A rebufo de esta sacudida surge, con algunos titubeos, una arquitectura más atenta a la ciudad, pero también una serie de propuestas experimentales que hoy vuelven a estar de actualidad. Recogemos en nuestras páginas una de ellas, la "Instant City" celebrada en 1971 en la Isla de Ibiza, **Carlos Ferrater.** Producto de la contestación al estatus-quo profesional y político, una serie de estructuras hinchables, autoconstruidas, teje una ciudad, instantánea y efímera, soporte de una nueva manera de relacionarse.

Parece como si las paradojas a las que se enfrentara la generación anterior, representada aquí por el Grupo R, derivaran en el estallido del modelo establecido. El artículo de **Carolina García** "Sun and Shadow" destaca algunas de ellas a través de las obras de Sostres y Breuer. Las contraposiciones entre los dos arquitectos y entre términos y conceptos reflejan una arquitectura en cierta descomposición, superada la contundencia de la modernidad funcionalista.

También en los 50 como extensión a los postulados del Team X, una serie de arquitectos y profesores desde la revista Archigram en Londres imaginan una utopía mecanicista y urbana materializada más tarde con la construcción del Pompidou. Cedric Price, personaje polifacético, había dibujado el universo festivo del Fun Palace (1961). El profesor de París la Villette, el canadiense **Jim Njoo**, nos aporta de su tesis doctoral una semblanza del arquitecto inglés desde su menos conocida condición de periodista.

La consideración de la sociedad y de la ciudad como ingredientes seminales permanece hoy en nuestros medios académicos. Recogemos en nuestras páginas la tesina de **María Villanova** que contempla la ciudad como un gran escenario fílmico. Como sucede en el libro de **Carla Sentieri** sobre la calle Jaime Roig, Valencia, reseñado por **Raúl Castellanos**. Una secuencia de implantaciones urbanas y arquitecturas de los años 70 de gran interés.

**Alain Bourdin**, sociólogo, urbanista y profesor, nos señala la preponderancia de los procesos urbanos sobre el proyecto, a través de un profundo análisis del concepto de *gentry-ficación* (Ruth Glass, 1964). Un tema de nuevo a caballo entre los años 60 y la actualidad.

En el cuestionamiento de los límites de la disciplina, entra de lleno la entrevista a **Cecil Balmon**d. Tras la conversación con Javier Manterola (Palimpsesto#5), recuperamos la voz del ingeniero, aquí indisociable a la del arquitecto. Muchas de sus obras realizadas a dúo con Siza, Koolhaas o Ito son el producto de un conocimiento compartido –diferente de aquella transferencia de conocimiento que puntúa en el universo académico-, y cuestionan, también hoy, las fronteras entre las disciplinas, un terreno intermedio, fértil y prolijo.

El profesor **Enric Granell** cierra este número 18 desde la mirada múltiple que requiere la arquitectura, glosando el viaje de estudio como fuente insustituible de aprendizaje. Aquello que no se ve en los libros -ni en las revistas- alimenta nuestras alforjas para seguir viajando y aprendiendo. Y, ¡también es arquitectura!


PALIMPSESTO

LA ARQUITECTURA, ¡TAMBIÉN!

#18 Año 07. Otoño 2018 (20 páginas) ISSN 2014-1505
Revista semestral de temática arquitectónica

Dirección
Carlos Ferrater y Alberto Peñín

Redacción y diseño gráfico
Cecília Obiol

Editorial y traducción "El arquitecto como narrador" y "Mai 68" AP

Agradecimientos
Elena Fernández Salas, Enric Granell, Francis Rambert

Colaboradores en este número
Cecil Balmond

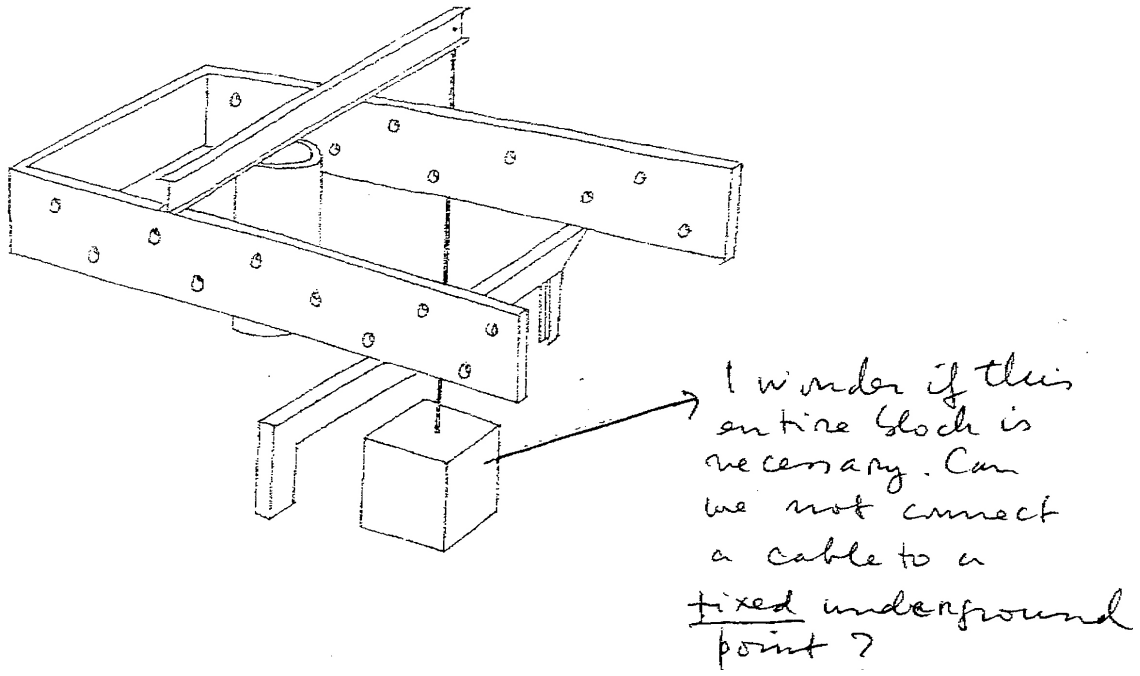
Edición
Cátedra Blanca - E.T.S.A.Barcelona - UPC
palimpsesto@cbbarcelona.com

Impresión
Vanguard Gràfic

Depósito Legal B-5689-2011
ISSN 2014-1505
e-ISSN 2014-9751

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




∧ Villa in Bordeaux, 1998. Rem Koolhaas and Cecil Balmond
Structural scheme with Koolhaas' notes

# Interview with Cecil Balmond


Alberto Peñín



DOI: 10.5821/palimpsesto.18.5683


## P Beginnings

How did you decide to be a structural engineer?

As with so much of my career, the trajectory wasn't planned per se. My decision was informed by a series of incremental factors – principally my fascination with configuration and process - the systems shaping the cosmos and the world around us. In terms of design, I always saw structure as the hidden language determining object, it fascinated me. How mathematics and physics are in themselves systems of organization to be engaged with and understood.

Which would be the main references you had in your studies? Were they all engineers?

I studied the conventional members of the structural engineering curriculum, but to be honest I was reticent to let these references influence or shape my thinking beyond a certain point. I spent just as much time looking outside the syllabus to philosophy, art, and quantum physics. One could say I was searching beyond the boundaries of definition even then.

What did you get from a figure as Peter Rice?

His wider interpretation of the engineer as part philosopher, part mathematician, part inventor.

## P Cross discipline

How would you define yourself? A designer, an architect, an engineer, an artist…Do you think to be in a way "unclassifiable", living in the border of disciplines, is a condition for innovation?

I am reluctant to define myself as the process of definition is, by its very nature, reductive. I like to think expansively, why look through a microscope when there is so much of the world to see? One could say I am what I need to be depending on the situation. However I do not feel that one must not adhere to definition in order to innovate. Anyone can innovate at any moment; it's about the implementation of change – the transformation of patterns, relationships, ideas, concepts, behaviors. This methodology exists both within and outside definition. Innovation is not inextricably tied to either.

Art and engineering have always been in relation in the modern theory. Sigfried Giedion in his "Space Time and architecture" states how, not only the modern architecture but also the Art, share procedures with science. Do you think this is still possible today with the increasing complexity of technique? Would this be a risk of again a separation between architects and engineers as it happened -as Giedion stated- in the first half of 19th century?

The overlap between disciplines is being explored more and more. They are co-existing systems that actually feedback into each other, one influencing the other and so on. The economy, efficiency and possibility stimulated from the phenomena leads me to feel that a more concrete distinction between engineering and architecture will probably not manifest.

In your opinion which is the position that science should occupy in the scope of a designer comparatively to intuition?

The two exist simultaneously. They engage one another, locked in a push and pull, a tension.

## P Theories

What is the role of your theoretical thoughts in books as *Informal* or *Element*?

^ Serpentine Gallery temporary pavilion in London, June 2002
Toyo Ito and Cecil Balmond

They don't have one clear role. It depends on the context. Within my books they could say they serve as organizational principles, breaking down my design process into wider theoretical ideas. One could also say they simply provide an alternate perspective that could perhaps influence someone else's design approach.

The non - lineal theories could be an excuse to build any kind of formal architectonic decision without a rational consistence?

Not really as non-linear thought is still a rational process. It is a way of thinking based more on the simultaneous multiplicity of hypotheses - prediction without a fixed outcome. The process can still be formulaic and follow a methodological rigor.

Do you think the evolution of structures and its relationship with architecture will still have to do with new materials? Iron and concrete changed the architecture in the 19th and beginning of 20th century. Is there any kind of continuity nowadays to those epic days…?

It depends on one's perspective. I believe that number itself is the new materiality. Data is organizational, systemic and functional – like structure. Algorithm generates structural stability with repetitive iterations in space. One functional move in isolation is unstable, multiple moves form solid structural intent. We need to start appreciating material in the abstract.

## P Procedures

Which is the role of the computer in your work? Does it explain intuition or does it substitute it?

There are many misconceptions surrounding this relationship. The computer is a tool – nothing more. Let's look at things a different way – imagine the computer is a paintbrush. The brush produces very different results, whether it is in the hands of a Bacon, Rothko or Picasso as opposed to a total novice. It possesses no preprogrammed sense of aesthetics or artistic sensibility. The outcome depends on the user. The artist understands the nuances and capabilities of the brush, its weight, its range of movement, how it responds to pressure and so on. With this knowledge Picasso Bacon or Rothko can manipulate the tool to produce the abstract idea in their head.

In summation the computer itself is only a vehicle. The artist or designer infuses the tool with purpose and meaning, ultimately controlling the output.

Is there always a right solution to take or there are always different decisions?

For me design is hypothesis – a philosophy of practice as experiment. There are no set outcomes only predictions. This means there are no definitive concepts of right and wrong, rather there are multiple probabilities to be calculated. Ideas are not based on principles of rigid hierarchies but rather an intense exploration of the immediate.

## P Geometry, Art and Industry

What was the purpose of the creation of the "Advanced Geometric Unit" at Arup's?

I wanted to bring together an eclectic mix of minds and skill sets. To create an interdisciplinary network of people with the specific aim of interrogating geometry, shifting from the inert Phileban solids to a more kinetic and animate sense of geometry. The Advanced Geometric Unit was the manifestation of design as hypothesis in its purest form.

What role plays context, the place, in those geometrical and artistic experiments?

It is difficult to define their roles exactly. But what is clear is that context, place, problem, necessity are inextricably tied to, and often determine, the chosen design methodology. It is a mysterious connection that is in a constant state of flux.

## P Your architects

You worked with many architects: Stirling, Moneo, Koolhaas, Siza, Souto, Shigeru Ban, Toyo Ito. Has your type of collaboration evolved through time? At a certain point, you change your role from a problem solver to a creator of new paths to design.

The problem is that if engineering is seen only as a technical calculating effort then it has nothing to do with invention or creativity. This is false. Structural engineering more over is so un-intimate that I prefer to use the word structure. It's more about rhythm, fluctuations or episodes in space; this is what structures do… Structure itself is the driving force that makes the architecture.

I never particularly compromised these principles. I chose to work with architects that understood this perspective and embraced it. They encouraged an open

*I believe that number itself is the new materiality. Data is organizational, systemic and functional – like structure. Algorithm generates structural stability with repetitive iterations in space. One functional move in isolation is unstable, multiple moves form solid structural intent. We need to start appreciating material in the abstract.*

investigation between engineering and architecture and art and their inputs were the fertile ground. As with all creativity there are no boundaries and their design imagination directly influenced my own explorations into space, mater, organization and potential outcome. With more completed jobs came more respect for my approach and capabilities, which lead to more projects and so on.

Congress Expo at Lille, Serpentine Pavilion in London, Kunsthaal in Rotterdam, Paris, China, Bordeaux… Rem Koolhaas work cannot be explained without your contribution. What do you think is your main contribution to the work of this key architect?

You would have to ask him!! I can say that our process was dialogue. Our thoughts propelled things forward in a constant exchange – fluidity from a natural chemistry. We brought the best out of each other perhaps.

Reading Mr.Kommendant relation with Louis Kahn, there are many counterexamples: James Stirling used to say "I never let the engineer to place the column". What would be the future of these collaborations?

It is hard to predict the future, as every project is unique with own set of internalities and externalities. What one can say is that the relationship between architect and engineer isn't static, rather it is ever changing. A nexus evolving in sync with cultural, philosophical, contextual and disciplinary change.

Can architecture be reduced to an algorithm? When you worked with Ito at Serpentine, was it strictly a laboratory or after mathematics there is also manipulation?

I feel it is problematic to think in such clear-cut definitive terms. Architecture can, in some instances, be reduced to algorithm in the sense that an algorithm is a feedback condition, so an architectural outcome is unique to the starting motif, and the character of the solution is 'locked' into the first idea. However, in the case of the Ito Serpentine project, we extended the lines of such an algorithmic trace, cut the corners and folded the edges creating a new box typology. This was the manipulation.

## P University

What would you do if you were the director of a School of Architecture?

In general terms I would create a wider interdisciplinary curriculum, exposing students to multiple and diverse spheres of inquiry and study. We would look at things holistically confronting the irreducibly complex (and yet not complicated) nature of the world.

I would also expose students to as many real world briefs and opportunities as soon as possible within their studies. As we all know, there is a massive difference between the hypothetical pages of a textbook and working reality.