

Radical Future (simple, continuous, perfect or perfect continuous)

A conversation between
the Editorial Committee members

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Invited Editorial 

MLA - If Radical Architecture was, according to Maigayrou, a "current of research less concerned with the practice of the architectural profession than with reflecting on the bases, the foundations of architecture" (Jarauta, 2002) then maybe we should reflect on the fundamental nature of our duty, thus displacing the understanding of the craft from the architect's routine as a builder, towards an expanded reflection on the world and the architect's competence to interpret it and act in it.

MLN - One of the arguments of the Radical Movement has been to shift the way of looking at the role of the architect as an individual. If we look back at the roots of Radical Architecture, we realise that is made by collectives and is made for the collective. What are the qualities that defines an architectural project as "Radical"?

MLA - Radical projects manifest this confusion in practices that are rarely "constructive" but transgressive, critical, and most importantly: committed. All of this is intended to confront the world they've received by making its paradoxes visible and revealing the absurdity of a discipline that continues to insist on defining itself by formal and stylistic aspects to deviate towards a factual, operational architecture that acts on the real... even if it does not build anything (especially not building anything). What do you think?

MD - I think architecture must be about 'challenging' if it is to answer Miguel's point about 'displacing' the craft from the reflection in architecture. But such a challenge needs to be more than simply questioning, it needs to be propositional. It needs the architect to take a position and propose an alternative to the world s/he is observing and feels some dissatisfaction with.

JAB - When Prigogine (PRIGOGINE, ILYA. "El nacimiento del tiempo", 1998) describes Schödinger's concept, developed in "What is Life?" about the biological order, he said that there must be something in the mechanism of life that prevented life from decaying. Architecture is about the mechanism of life, there must be some irreversible mechanism about acting on the real. It is radical, it is irreversible, and it is not about buildings. As Prigogine describes later, in the chapter 'The creative role of time', Dynamic systems are never stable. It is proven in their theories that irreversible phenomena lead to new structures because of their irreversibility. This is related to the foundations of architecture, to the roots. We project in a dynamic system as a city.

In this radical time, the references with which architects work are references for the future. Validation occurs in the capacity of absorption and reaction with the capacities and references for the future. The practices are critical, transgressive and committed. The Imagined city affects the object, conditioning its existence. 'Radical City' adapts in its condition as a new reality and adapts and enables the possibility of the object of contemporary response to a future proposal. The result is quantifiable and evaluable by accepting and proposing the irreversibility of the actions, their collapse and their new implementation. The radical research is developed on assumptions where the terms acquire new meanings. Risk acts as a production method.

In a radical proposal, measurement precedes action on the hypothesis of the real drawing. The verification is based on the measurements of the working hypotheses that presuppose valuable actions.

The condition of the future and risk places us in front of new meanings to which the architect must respond directly: Virtual place: hyperlink of processes and situations capable of absorbing the future. Point within the virtual map that establishes new synergies with other objects, regardless of the physical relationship of proximity; Virtual matter: physical medium where actions are fixed, and others are reproduced. Urban void as an object of thought; Virtual structure: ability of the object to sustain itself and adapt to the imagined city. Physics applied to the environment; Virtual construction: Material measurement processes of the action and its transformation. Process logic.

The map of the real city and the map of the physical city complement each other in their double measurement, real and virtual. The radical architect not only acts on the phenomena of the city but measures them and projects them into the future. The veracity of the process is carried out on the investigation and the series of hypotheses. The Radical City is understood as an architectural object built on the void and is measured and quantified on its double real and virtual capacity for construction and durability.

MLN -Your reflection on the role of the radical architect focus on the role of the individual, is that still a central role? Do we still consider the architect as a "super-hero"?

MLA - I'd say definitely not. Radical architects permeate and camouflage collectively as writers, politicians, journalists... etc. It's a social role with social responsibility that goes far beyond our super heroic powers/total impotence.

MLN -An important aspect of Radical Architecture lies in the plurality of its authors and its audience. Architecture is seen as a practice to be experienced, performed, enjoyed, lived. It is mainly the result of a plurality of actions in the space performed by multiple bodies. Cities are designed for a collective body; the analogue city evolves into a non-stop city; architecture is seen as an inter-scalar object that relates to the body/ies and expands in the city infrastructure moving across boundaries, cultures and disciplines.

In the contemporary city we look at multiple dimensions, and what this implies.

Openness has been understood as the only answer to today's challenges.

There is a need – both in academia and in practice - to go back to the roots, to provide spaces for debate, to be open to plurality, to design and adapt our cities to the need of a contemporary and future society where the space is open to embrace plurality going beyond gender, nationality, race.

MD - I agree with Maria Luna on this point of plurality. I feel strongly that architecture is a social enterprise. After all, there is a reason why architects need the permission of 'society' before they can see their ideas built. But adherence to a societal norm at any time in order to be well received (and thereby built) is the antithesis of 'radical'. Radical requires courage to be different, to stand out and to proclaim a cause. Radical architecture then responds to that cause or manifesto. So, as a social enterprise, it is right that architecture presents new ideas to society, makes society think about where it is and where it is going. Architecture therefore needs to be political; it needs to show a new future. And, to do that it needs to be experimental and communicative. These are, at least, two essentials of radical architecture.

The radical architects of the 60s, 70s and 80s had the courage to do this. Architecture needs to do so today. It must radically, not just tamely, challenge mass consumerism, the use of technology and contemporary construction methods, and in doing so present playful but thought-provoking alternative points of view. Points of view that, as Joaquin says, are not just about buildings.

I'd like to see the University of Universities 'collective' convert a (virtual) warehouse into an architecture school by day and a nightclub for the evening in the way of Gruppo 9999. We need to create the space for students and architects to express themselves as an international radical collective voice, bringing fun and radically creative responses to today's very real societal problems.

SS -Mike, I agree. I feel architecture is always political. Architectural proposals always begin as fictions, in such they are all proposals for alternative futures we might inhabit. Our designs propose a vision of the future and in so doing they will always make a political statement, whether that be one of conforming or otherwise. We can never resign from this responsibility. Radical architecture opens up this opportunity, sees it for what it is and uses it to offer a view of alternative futures, painting visions of potential alternative realities we could choose to inhabit. One of my favorite quotes is from David Graeber, "The ultimate hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make and we could just as easily make it differently". Architecture realizes the possibility of proposed future, it brings it to life, and we can choose to use that chance to make a difference.

MLA - Architecture is always fiction, right? At least until it gets serious and we need to build stuff to allocate functional needs and plural demands.

MB - The 'radical' perspective questions the role of architects: what is their place in the world? But why is this way of understanding architecture so questioning? In my opinion because, apparently, radical architecture is the furthest thing from the idea of a professional architect, harmoniously embedded in the economic and real estate mechanisms of production and reproduction of built space. For the architect, or architects in the collective

perspective, radical is 100 per cent intellectual, does not build and is not interested in the constructability of his projects. In some cases, s/he even goes so far as to deny the very idea of a project as a possible future, as anticipation, to replace it with the idea of a contingent and temporary event, however transitory. In other cases (Archigram 9 "Architecture Without Architecture"), the radicalisation even leads to the denial of architecture itself. What, then, is its real possibility to positively (or at least to condition) the human habitat? The paradox, I think, lies precisely in this possibility of indirectly but radically affecting our idea of inhabited space and its characteristics. I believe this possibility exists if we reformulate the relationship between the two terms in the play - Architecture and Radical - by overcoming their apparent separations. Utopia, radicalisation, the questioning of the seemingly acquired and established, the push towards the future, and the anticipatory vision, in fact, are the fundamental nourishment of the project (other than rejection!); they are the basic perspective of doing architecture. There is no project if there is not something to be solved that does not work in our cities, so there is no project if there is no critical thinking about the contemporary. Again, there is no project without a vision of a better future and the tension to achieve it (Maldonado, "La Speranza Progettuale"). The project-even the radical, perhaps unrealisable project-always expresses a propensity for change (projectum: to throw forward) that is based on a critical attitude and visionary capacity, without which there is no improvement whatsoever but only static preservation and reproduction of the status quo. Opposites touch each other. The ultimate in radicality can have profound effects on reality. However, this becomes possible if architects and communities maintain a close link with each other and an equally close link between the future vision and contingent reality.

AM -The reflection on the term radical in combination with architecture explored so far, is likely to be the key to observing architecture, both as a practice and as a discipline, within relevant positions regarding the interpretation of transformations and innovation.

Engaging with practices and the world through the lens of a radical stance, as Marco suggested, might be a key entry point. Certain theoretical readings in this sense provide support to this thesis if we can understand architecture – along with the design of cities, territories, landscapes, and ecosystems – as part of and instrumental to an evolutionary interpretation of our socio-(spatial)-technical systems. I refer here to the evolutionary perspective as proposed in Transition Studies, particularly the framework proposed by Frank Geels in his Multi-Level Perspective model, which highlights the interplay between niches, regimes, and landscapes as drivers of systemic change.

Transition studies, especially those focusing on ecological transition and its management applications, such as the work of Derk Loorbach, identify 'radical' as the defining attribute of innovations that create a decisive break with the existing status quo. Such innovations start from practices and establish a redefinition of rules that even extend to the cultural/value dimensions of the socio-technical systems in which we operate, systems where architecture – as a practice, with its rules and values – is an integral part.

The possibility of sustainable evolution does not lie in minor system updates but in a radical re-thinking of reference models, encompassing radical governance and radical policies to navigate the momentum we are experiencing. Here lies the paradox: within this perspective, for a real transition, radical architecture may be the only viable option. However, its radical nature will be measured not only by its disruptive innovation but also by its profound adherence to the transformation of the complex socio-economic and technical systems in which it operates.

MLA - And I'd add, definitely not to conclude the topic, that this contradictory, unofficial, playful, amateur-alike, circumstantial and unorthodox Radical strategies could be deployed again to interpret some of the seemingly extreme versions of politics, culture and social status that we are perplexedly experiencing today. Thank you so much for the conversation !