

# A conversation with Jarauta

Murcia, 16th October 2024

**Miguel Luengo:** Good afternoon, Paco. Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. I've prepared a script with some questions that I think we can disregard right from the start, does that sound good to you?

**Francisco Jarauta:** Thank you. Perhaps we can refer to the book you have with you (the exhibition catalog from Gran Canarias exhibition, Fig.1), which was partly financed by the FRAC in Orléans. I strongly suggest you consider it your home and visit often. Initially, the goal was to present a history that would encompass nearly a hundred interviews with individuals who, at that time, represented the movement in its broadest terms. Much of that archive belongs to FRAC's collection and is a splendid document for continuing these discussions. Some interviews lasted an afternoon, while others spanned a week because wonderful empathy would begin to form, and we'd engage in various activities. We managed to have the catalog produced in Valencia, using their typography, which is excellent,



Fig.1 - Cover of *Arquitectura Radical*. Catalogue of the exhibition held at the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. 5th March-5th May 2002.

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Invited Editorial 

and later brought it directly to the Canary Islands, to the Atlantic Center of Contemporary Art.

Your script includes a question about the potential return of the radical spirit in today's world, and this is a crucial issue from both a critical and politico-ethical perspective. Perhaps the question is: why? Not only regarding architecture but also broader cultural parameters. The return to the '60s and '70s, and practically up to '75, has re-inspired many new questions that challenge various disciplines - art, architecture, and design, which could be seen as three professionalized spaces. Nowadays, cultural references have completely changed, but those years, from the late '60s to the mid-'70s, are decisive. Up to 1968, one could say it was the last barricade - a moment of resistance against what could be considered the legitimacy of the American Life model, or New American Life, which was beginning to expand through liberal political-economic forms. On the other hand, there was a crucial renewal of utopian thought as posed by the Situationists. These people, situationally "after," including Debord and his peers, and particularly the Dutch contingent, had significant influence from the perspective of their struggle. Especially Constant, who really grounded the ideas. I was very close to Constant, visiting him in Amsterdam about twenty times and especially engaging with him in the first community that appeared in Alba, near Turin. That's where Gallizio and all his friends started, but the intellectual leader was always Debord, who set the framework.

I love that Sottsass appears right away because he fascinates me. I vividly remember a day when I asked him about Constant: "What question comes to your mind most often?" He replied: "No... I'm old now... no special questions... there's noise... but yes, one question troubles me: Why did certain ideas turn out to be impossible?" That's the turning point, the intellectual tension that Constant fundamentally brings. He obviously

tackled themes like sentimental cartographies, rethinking the city, using German Expressionist cinema models - he was very eclectic and drew from everything he encountered. A very active, sponge-like individual.

Debord is a different figure altogether - a sociologist educated under prominent mentors whom he quickly dismissed. He positioned himself in a perspective similar to Lefebvre and others at the time, addressing issues like the problem of the city, the transformation of urban spaces, the new public sphere, and the emerging societal forms. It was a time when, without any connection, two books with the same title were published in the same year: *Post-Industrial Society* by Daniel Bell at Harvard and *La Société Post-Industrielle* by Alain Touraine (a close friend of mine). I once asked Touraine: "Did you know Bell?" Of course, he did, but they never discussed the topic. That moment is significant because it highlights the intellectual context from which both Situationism and radical architecture emerged.

It was a period of deciding what kind of societies would shape the future. At that time, Communist parties held considerable social power. The intelligentsia was predominantly left-wing, and there were very few thinkers who openly identified as conservatives. One exception was Raymond Aron in France, who, for Touraine, was an undisputed master. But there came a time when being right-wing wasn't viable because the debate was framed as "out-out." Either the legitimacy of the existing system was preserved, or a new path was opened - what we might call the rise of liberalism.

How does this relate to the questions you raised? You've expressed it wonderfully. You even cite Branzi, another great friend of mine. I've spent countless hours with Branzi, a disciple of Dorflès, who lived to 113.

Debord had a different reputation. He was highly respected intellectually but had an active, intense radicalism. He ultimately

took his own life, and there's a legend around him that some have tried to cultivate. For instance, the Galicians once asked me to curate an exhibition on Debord. I declined because it would have been too monographic and risked idealizing the case. It needed to include European Situationism, incorporating the friends of radical architecture.

Branzi is a cultured, refined man who thrived in Milan's society of the '60s - a chic bourgeoisie that had built its own discourse. They were liberals but also great innovators, imagining the new avant-garde. There was an extraordinary leader, Maldonado, who had enemies everywhere but was the only one invited to Zurich's Polytechnic (ETH) and Stuttgart. They reopened Ulm's design school, originally founded by Max Bill. The German automotive industry, located between Stuttgart and Ulm, needed great industrial design leaders. These were the luminaries. To this day, ETH Zurich has a space dedicated to Max Bill.

Branzi, however, was more Milanese, working with the industry. All the major furniture brands of the time emerged then and were very successful. This gave rise to what was called the *seminario de L'École*, resembling the bourgeois interiors of Milan in the 1970s - lamps, chairs, armchairs, *tutto*.

**ML:** However, in my interview with Branzi, the construction of identity and the discipline of someone who has chosen to build a discourse where architecture cannot serve power is still present. Therefore, architecture must not be dictated by it (as is often the case). He cites Tafuri. Branzi used to criticize Natalini a lot back then.

**FJ:** I'm delighted to hear that because I've been to his studio. Natalini was a bit Calvinist, whereas Branzi was a *uomo di mondo* - someone who could boast the freedom of bourgeois intellectual thought.

**ML:** Or the freedom that comes from deciding not to build, while Natalini was accused of sketching the Continuous Monument and

later constructing postmodern buildings.

**FJ:** Tremendous. That's where you really see a *contradictio in terminis*, but also an anti-coherence. Branzi behaves like an intellectual, one of the great theorists of architecture who moves between the school of Rome and the school of Venice. In the end, Tafuri becomes the great guru of the historical model to be applied to history, but his focus starts from the Renaissance - though not the later Renaissance. Italy doesn't have great texts on the 19th and 20th centuries; Tafuri's best work, his defining models, are rooted in the *Quattrocento* and *Cinquecento*. But of course, by confusing people, they end up producing a Sansovino. (Tafuri's partner wrote her major thesis on Sansovino.) And yet, if there's something truly beautiful, the most stunning sight in Venice, it's the portico in front of the Ducal Palace, seeing Venice spin. It's astonishing. Peter (Cook?) used to say that the history of Venice is the history of a great betrayal because Venice should never have ceased being Byzantine and Gothic - it should never have fallen into Palladio's paganism. May the British ritual of Palladianism spare us.

**ML:** Natalini regarded Superstudio as a Situationist group, but beyond the formal connections, I'm not so sure. Could you elaborate on this hypothesis of Radical Architecture's connection with Situationism?

**FJ:** I believe there's an appropriation of the concept by the radicals, and they bring it into a domain that the Situationists had not really explored: architecture. The Situationists were more concerned with forms of life, the emergence of a new social order - that's what interested them. However, the aspects directly tied to architecture as a practical endeavor don't appear in their thought. They understood that architecture plays a prominent role in shaping ways of life, and that's the step Radical Architecture takes forward. This is why all of them, despite lacking what one might call a primarily intellectual foundation, had an

extraordinary cultural depth. Gianni Pettena, for example - these were great travelers. They exchanged locations, but I think the discovery of architecture as a problem belonged to Radical Architecture.

**ML:** Because Constant, within Situationism, proposed projects that were absolutely architectural, don't you think?

**FJ:** Let's say they were architectural in their consequences, but as actual projects, they ended up being experimental. Constant himself said he loved photography as a compositional element. His cartographies were essentially drawings designed to situate the cases, but they lacked that strength and were never truly a necessary interlocutor for 1970s architecture.

**ML:** Your text mentions Archigram. Perhaps they can be interpreted not so much from those critical premises - deeply intertwined with the social and cultural - but as straddling positivism and the technological utilization seen in Viollet-le-Duc or Laugier's work, in projects like the legendary *Plug-In City* and the more ironic *Walking City*. Yet you consider them purely radical, as they incorporate that social and cultural collective component.

**FJ:** They always did. Even as a school, they maintained theses that completely crossed and problematized the legitimacy models of the time. The British model is very particular - they have a unique respect for technological elements. Their early studies were the ones that pushed things forward. They didn't mind designing airports or supermarkets. Rogers is the most convincing among them - but of course, he doesn't belong to what we'd call the radicals by any stretch. There's a distinct matrix operating within British architecture, which then directly flows, through Archigram, into spaces like Peter Cook's building in Graz. For Peter, constructing that model, that city diagram, is possibly the most brilliant aspect of all Radical Architecture - though this movement is *Made in Italy*. Celant gave it the name, and that's final.

Celant loved naming things; now there's a major exhibition on Arte Povera in Paris that aligns with this.

**ML:** Like the Smithsons' *primitive hut*?

**FJ:** Of course. The Smithsons were the dream everyone dreamed at Whitechapel.

**ML:** Thinking about legitimacy models - and, for once, addressing one of the questions in the script (laughs) - Branzi and many others say that Radical Architecture isn't a homogeneous movement, much less a style. Instead, it's more about sharing a state of mind. Perhaps within this critique of legitimacy models, it's very different to be a radical in England than in Italy or Austria. Is that why their productions are so diverse?

**FJ:** Imagine Vienna in this context. The various schools they call radical present very few common parameters. It's a mindset, an intellectual framework for thinking. Vienna is particularly interesting here because it's a city with deeply conservative architecture like the Ring, paired with a modernism that held no interest. I've seen it repeatedly and still feel the same, except for its fundamentally museological canons. For instance, when they placed that glass building in front of St. Stephen's Cathedral - what happened? Admirable resistance, because I insist that Austrians are extremely conservative.

**ML:** Thinking of that shared state of mind: Coop Himmelblau, Haus-Rucker-Co, etc., versus projects also labeled as radical, like the more conceptual *Continuous Monument* or *No-Stop City*. The Austrians actually build and construct things - albeit inflatable ones. What's your opinion?

**FJ:** They're very technological. They introduced, firsthand, a technological recovery that other architecture wasn't producing, and they did so effectively.

**ML:** Why effectively?

**FJ:** Effectively because they weren't indebted to the rationalism

of the modern movement, nor did they prioritize function. Instead, they created machines. The idea of the *machine* dates back to the 1920s and was transferred across all fields. At one point, the Bauhaus's internal debate was precisely whether to focus more on machines or on what we might call classical form. Classical form was chosen. The apartments Gropius designed for professors - what's modern about them? It's as if they were comfort houses with a touch of Saxon forest scenery. Not bad, though.

**ML:** But the Austrians explicitly and even aggressively use technology with a critical component, sometimes parodying it. Projects like *Face Space* by Haus-Rucker-Co come to mind, where one wears a helmet and expressions are transferred through colored lights. This appears to be a technological veneration, yet I see it as a critique of mass media and technology itself. What's your take on Austrian irony?

**FJ:** It goes beyond irony; it becomes a paradox where what seems logical ends up unnecessary. Yet there's a display of performative objects - fixed, powerful - but it's not architecture for living.

**ML:** Perhaps not only is it not architecture for living, but it's not architecture at all. Many criticisms (perhaps superficial) claim Radical Architecture is superfluous or anecdotal, transgressing classical definitions of the discipline. Essentially: "If you want to teach these things in class, fine, but let's get back to cubic meters of concrete - that's architecture." What do you think about the "non-architecture" of someone like Gianni Pettena, and his book *The Anarchitect*?

**FJ:** The *Anarchitect* - there was a debate in the '70s and '80s at the Politecnico di Milano, where the great masters were present. Pettena is an outsider. Just look at the exhibitions at the Triennale, even in the '80s. There, you'll find an extraordinary figure, respected by everyone: Sottsass. He traveled to India, Japan, returned, made his drawings, and exhibited them at the Triennale, ridiculing all the great architecture masters. There

are other architectures and magical moments, like when he invented the Valentina typewriter - all those great writing machines, the Underwoods, those war machines formatted in a German key, distributed worldwide, even appearing in American noir films. Even judicial protocols had to be done with those machines. But Pettena went in another direction. Gianni isn't very convincing. The *Anarchitect* mostly develops landscapes, even ruins. For example, he wrote a text about ruins for the Valencia Biennale catalog? In the final section, there's something extraordinary. Pettena created a piece almost 30 meters high. There was this French architect - one of the lightweight structure specialists - who came without anything. He borrowed materials from a construction site and built something remarkable with bovedillas, glass panes, and rolls of toilet paper. It was provocative - a true heir to these ideas, questioning who would inhabit such a structure.

**ML:** I was thinking about Sottsass's role as a mentor, both for Pettena and others. I believe the debt they owe Sottsass is quite significant, right?

**FJ:** Incomparable! Sottsass is an extraordinary figure recognized by everyone. His anti-system stance - because he's a classic anti-system figure - comes with this cosmopolitan, chic outlook. He selects elements that captivate him most. He's not a figure weighed down by intellectual debts to anyone. He travels extensively, always bringing surprises. For example, Sottsass's invention of the Valentina is fascinating because, at that time, Olivetti was a cornerstone company for studying innovation in Italian industry across all fields. Even Le Corbusier designed a factory for Olivetti. It was a company accused of being "Catholic," which personally bothered me a lot. It was run by an advanced industrial bourgeoisie that understood innovation was key. When they commissioned Sottsass, he tailored his work to fit the needs of the individual workspace. Gone were the days of heavy German Underwood typewriters.

Sottsass made the Valentina out of plastic. I still remember a large exhibition dedicated to Sottsass in the basement of the Beaubourg, featuring an enlarged Olivetti typewriter. People worshipped it. Sottsass even beat American designers working on similar formats to the punch. Later, he worked for an exceptional, playful industrial designer. But Sottsass himself became untouchable.

**ML:** Even though Sottsass is untouchable, he sponsored theoretical "products" like the Safari divan, which carried the implication that it was so fabulous you didn't deserve it - meaning it wasn't just a couch. It demanded self-improvement to earn the right to buy it. In this phase that feels almost baroque - if not outright non-classical - where you're crossing boundaries, what are your thoughts?

**FJ:** There's a distinctly neo-baroque sensibility that was very active at that time. I even organized a seminar on Neo-Baroque at the Círculo de Bellas Artes, attended by prominent figures like Calabrese. At that moment, this tendency, especially present in Italian furniture design, was in full swing.

**ML:** That tendency also includes Andrea Branzi's "Trojan horse," doesn't it? How those products infiltrate the calm, settled world of design to destroy it from within. This reminds me of a question I've been meaning to ask you, Paco: Is the radical mental state still present today?

**FJ:** I don't think so. From a sociological standpoint, we're in an era of neo-functionalism that has little in common with the rigorous design innovation of the 1970s and '80s. Back then, there was a *tour de force* in favor of significant formal innovation. Dorflès has written extensively on this. Now there's a liquidation of the superfluous, with an imposed canon sought after by companies that dominate the market. The Danes are holding their ground - unlike the Dutch, who've been pushed toward office furniture to stay relevant. Today, they're the strongest players. Our friend

Santiago, the designer behind the Tamtam lamp, proposed a design for one of the top Dutch companies. Santiago is a groundbreaking figure - he even designed all the lighting for the Seville Expo. However, there was a cultural disconnect with the Dutch company, and negotiations fell apart. But then, the company's board of directors called him back, saying his project had been approved. He was tasked with designing furniture, compartmentalizing the bureau space into open configurations. Think about what that openness means: the relationship it creates in terms of communication. At some point, this very concept of

communication takes over the entire space of social relationships. Communication produces the social, and this condition of generating the social is structured through what we could call performative ideas. Meanwhile, the Nordic furniture industry thrives by pragmatically addressing basic needs without upsetting the new subject who demands certain aesthetic-formal standards. It creates functional spaces while evoking a "Do you like it?" reaction. If the answer is "Yes," the discussion ends there.

**ML:** If communication produces the social, and we accept that we're living in a hyperconnected, hyper-

communicative era, then maybe we are in a radical period. Don't you think?

**FJ:** In that sense, we are moving forward. Right now, the major corporations are discussing in-depth how societies will look in 2050. You can consult five prominent reports on this, and they all agree on one thing: the most active vector will be *communication, communication, and communication*. Today, investment in communication is growing exponentially. However, its future direction is unclear, as it supports research processes unrelated to communication itself. Historically, the most significant development is the grand alliance between cutting-edge technology and financial capital. There's no time to waste anymore - there's an intertwining of sectors like healthcare. Pharmaceutical investment is staggering. If you want a snapshot of the 22nd century, take a walk through Basel. Along the Rhine, you'll see all the headquarters of major pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer, their buildings illuminated at night in a spectral way.

**ML:** Basel was one of the cities, if I'm not mistaken, that hosted the *Restless Spheres* by Coop Himmelblau - a critique of those dormant cities, much like Archigram did with the *Instant City*. But I'm really interested in this idea of communication producing the social. It's not just that they've realized it, but the scale has changed, the communication channels have shifted - with mobile phones, social networks... Do you think this could impact the "production of the social"?

**FJ:** We're only in the initial stages of this process. Imagine the content of that communication being 12,000 or 15,000 times greater than what we're experiencing now. We are mere beginners, small experimenters at the dawn of this domination by communication flows. That's why it's not just about talking about *fake news* - everything will be fake news. They are simulations. Baudrillard's *simulacrum* comes to mind - I spoke

about it at a seminar in Paris. His ideas are incredibly powerful. When we talk about simulacra, we know they're not real; they fundamentally stand in for reality.

**ML:** So, are we within the *society of the spectacle*, then?

**FJ:** Of course, Debord's *society of the spectacle*. He introduces it from a macro perspective. We're heading in that direction. Even before him, Baudelaire was fascinated by the aura of the commodity. There's nothing like strolling down the boulevard - not for the enjoyment of the flâneur observing the area, but as a space designed for commerce. But, of course, Baudelaire would say, "Everything becomes a commodity," and in the end, he was exiled to Brussels, saying, "Everything turns into melancholy, but at the beginning, everything is a commodity."

**ML:** I was thinking about Radical Architecture - perhaps tentatively - but the importance it places on communication is also essential. These aren't experiments meant for the private use or enjoyment of a select few. If we think about Le Corbusier, that great propagandist of communication, perhaps communication - or even a certain hypertrophy of communication - is also significant for the radicals.

**FJ:** Even so, the parameters have changed qualitatively. The current communication input is infinitely greater. What happens is that, from the perspective of the struggle - because they knew they were fighting for something - they wanted to give visibility to their work. Virilio is excellent in this regard. He captures the essence of *dromology* - the study of speed - and insists, "Don't go slow; go fast." Virilio believed the most significant anthropological achievement was to domicile *vitesse* (speed). There used to be a Japanese cosmetics shop in Saint Germain, and one day a week, Virilio would don a white coat and apply makeup to customers. He was radically avant-garde and saw everything as being on the brink. If Hiroshima happened, anything could happen. He even spoke of the biological bomb. There's a

certain radicalism in these figures, but I think communication has completely shifted parameters. Now it's a machine. We need to revisit the concept of the *machine*.

**ML:** Do you think the concept of the machine is worth revisiting - even in battalions or guerrilla warfare on a small scale? Can it be instrumentalized?

**FJ:** That's a good question for Sennett. He believes small communities must organize themselves around struggle, not survival. You fight with your ideas, your projects, your experiences. Experience is a formidable weapon. Education is key - educating is about positioning someone within the horizon of this type of creative experience. You destabilize the house, opening yourself to another space. And that space is time. The classics would say, *Tempus templum*: time is the house.

**ML:** And what do you think of Koolhaas as a radical or post-radical architect?

**FJ:** I adore Rem. He's an incredibly powerful architect who has done remarkable things.

**ML:** As an architect who constructs buildings or in the realm of thought?

**FJ:** I think he's provided necessary reflections. *Delirious New York* is fantastic - it speaks volumes. The British of the '50s and '60s taught us a lot. English Pop deconstructed many issues, as Hamilton did with his radicalism. He was an impressive artist who influenced all of them. Of course, Koolhaas comes from a different tradition but is also quite radical. He has embraced the laws of advanced capitalism. His partners aren't confessors of conscience - he's aggressive and forceful. Neither Nouvel nor anyone else compares. Koolhaas is just different.

**ML:** But doesn't he share that critical ethos? I remember his project investigating preservation in Beijing, which fascinates me. He created a timeline of preservation's history since the Industrial Revolution and concluded that, at the current rate, we'll soon be

conserving buildings that haven't even been constructed yet. From there, he proposed a conservation plan for Beijing involving a homogeneous grid, preserving only the central 10%, regardless of what's there.

**FJ:** Let's say that fits within this radical constellation - a way of thinking where facts impose their own rules. A building like China's CCTV headquarters in Beijing provokes vehement reactions. For me, it creates significant formal resistance. The visual impact I experienced when I first saw it (I didn't go inside, just saw it) was overwhelming. What I like most about Koolhaas is his style of writing. His transversal analyses allow you to think. Obviously, he's taught many people. For example, his essay for *Mutations* is excellent. I admire him, though he's grown fatigued. His firm has largely withdrawn from Germany but has constructed many buildings in Frankfurt related to the financial world.

**ML:** I wouldn't want to end this without asking you whether Radical Architecture should be studied - not as a historical movement, like Gothic architecture, but whether it is - or could or should be - present today. Or, on the contrary, should it be archived?

**FJ:** Absolutely not to be archived. It's present in many forms. The problem is the lack of timely adaptations. I believe there's a *spree* - an intellectual stance - that enables a direct critique of architectural forms and problems. We could still interrogate it today. It's increasingly present in seminars and exhibitions, such as Pettena's at the FRAC in Orléans. There are young radicals like Jaque, Cirugeda, and perhaps even you. José María Pérez is a fantastic, well-educated figure. Then there's another young architect who is also a meteorologist and works at the faculty in Seville.

**ML:** Paco, infinite and radical thanks. I truly appreciate it.

**FJ:** Thank you - it's been a pleasure. Let's stay in touch.



Fig.2 - Picture of the interview by Beatriz Ballesteros Sánchez.