Richter Dahl Rocha & Associés

Toward an Integral Practice of Architecture
Un alto en el camino

Ignacio Dahl Rocha
Un alto en el camino

As architects, we know that the publication of a book is always a good occasion for "un alto en el camino," as one says in Spanish, a stop along the way to reflect upon our work. In this instance there is also the fact that 2013 marks the twentieth anniversary of the founding of our studio in Lausanne, which gives it special significance. The aim of this book is to present the fundamental elements of our discipline, which exemplify the notion of "architecture as an integral experience" as one says in Spanish, a stop along the road of our profession. It is for young architects, for whom this book, a collective project in itself, is destined. The concept for the book does not correspond to that of the students who have come to us for the first time: it is destined for them that this book, a collective project in itself, is destined. The concept for the book does not correspond to that of the traditional monograph. The presentation of the work and the texts that accompany them are organised in relation to a set of themes that interest us, and which we would like to emphasise here. These themes synthesise the recurrent preoccupations that have motivated our practice and our reflections on it over the years.

In this retrospective glance, which takes in two decades of professional practice, the temporal dimension of the studio becomes more apparent as a long-term collective project that actively integrates successive generations of young architects. It is for them that this book, a collective project in itself, is destined. The concept for the book does not correspond to that of the traditional monograph. The presentation of the work and the texts that accompany them are organised in relation to a set of themes that interest us, and which we would like to emphasise here. These themes synthesise the recurrent preoccupations that have motivated our practice and our reflections on it over the years. The book is divided into two parts which are preceded by an introductory chapter that attempts to situate our work in its professional and disciplinary context. This chapter also presents a project profile summarising our various explorations of various pathways within the discipline as well as beyond it. It includes significant renovations and transformations of historical buildings. It also includes a number of competitions and unrealised projects. This part of the book concludes with a project profile devoted to the new Quartier Nord on the campus of the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), the SwissTech Convention Center, still under construction but slated for completion in spring 2014, and the newly completed student housing complex on the same site. Challenges inherent in the task of placemaking on an expanding campus, the exploration of new technological solutions for the convention center, and the evolution of ideas about student housing for the Quartier Nord rounds off the presentation of our work in prospective terms.

The second part of the book, dedicated to "Enquiries," foregrounds our explorations of various pathways within the discipline as well as beyond it. It includes significant renovations and transformations of historical buildings. We have also brought together a selection of experiments in building systems and architectural language. Lastly, the chapter devoted to typology presents our work in plans and sections intended to reveal enduring relationships among our projects with respect to type, and thus to give an overarching view of the oeuvre.

About the title of this book, for us the word "toward" implies something of the dynamic and unfinished nature of the experience that drives us ever onward and intimated the lessons we have learned as well as those we have yet to learn. It also refers to the road on which this book invites us to make a stop in order to evaluate what has been achieved up to now, and on that basis, to continue on our way. The term "integral" explicitly evokes the many different aspects of the architectural experience, human, disciplinary, professional, and academic, which appear in different ways and to varying degrees throughout this book. The persistence of the notion of "practice," literally embedded as it is in this book, reminds us of the essence and the nature of our profession, and has the virtue of dissuading us from any temptation to turn our reflections about the practice into a "theory" of architecture. Above all, the idea of architecture as an integral experience articulates a vision with which we identify, and a personal commitment that we constantly renew in our day-to-day work, an inclusive attitude of non-refusal, which attempts to grasp as much of ungraspable reality as possible, remaining alert to the constant search for balance and beauty to give coherence and meaning to the complex matrix of facts and values that belong to architecture.

In fact, Jorge Francisco Liernur takes up the theme of the title in depth in his preamble to this book. Liernur, who has followed our work from the beginning, and whose critical view of it comes closest to grasping what we have been trying to do in our practice, has written several essays on the subject which for us have been very relevant. In recognition of this, and in response, we conclude this volume with a reading of an essay he wrote for a monograph on our studio published in 2007. Along with Liernur, Francisco Mangado, Pierre Millaix, and Catherine Bille have contributed to the collective preamble that follows. All of them have been involved in our work in different ways, bringing to it their very different perspectives, and their texts constitute a hard and indispensable preamble in the spirit of this book.
On two previous occasions, I’ve written about the reasons I admire the oeuvre of Richter Dahl Rocha. The works presented in this book merely confirm those arguments, and even increase my appreciation of them, if that is possible. On the other hand, it seems particularly worthwhile at this juncture to ponder the title of the present publication, as I believe it sums up what took me many pages to explain in the past.

In my mind, ‘Towards an Integral Practice of Architecture’ is not, as will become obvious in the unfolding of the book, merely a paraphrasing of Vers une architecture (‘Towards an Architecture’); rather, it intends to re-appropriate the meaning Le Corbusier himself had in mind. As Jean-Louis Cohen has so aptly pointed out, ‘the closer version for the 1923 edition of Vers une architecture, with its view down the promenade of the Aquitania, intimates motion ‘toward’ the bow of the ship. The window opened in the rectangle of the cover designates a horizon at which the hopes expressed in the book would converge.’ The graphic metaphor highlights an important aspect of Le Corbusier’s intent, namely, to situate his transatlantic-modern book proposition as a vehicle moving in the direction of its objective. The adoption of this idea entailed a significant displacement with regard to the first title he thought of giving the book, ‘Architecture or Revolution,’ not that with later translations of the book, such as those of the 1927 English edition, or the Japanese edition of 1929, which presented it as Toward a New Architecture and Toward an Architectural Revolution, respectively. A certain violence was done to his idea.

An endless series of paraphrases built upon nouns, verbs, adjectives, or additional prepositions followed that synthetic 1923 idea, capitalising on its suggestiveness. From Painting Toward Architecture by Henry Russell Hitchcock (1936), to Verso una Architettura de Pietro Bernini (2001), by way of Towards a Social Architecture by Andrew Saint (1987), the manifesto ‘Towards an Architecture of Humility’ by Johann Palaissam (1988), Toward Absolute Architecture by David Gissen De Long (1988) (which refers to the work of Bruce Goff), ‘Towards an Architecture of Suspicion by Faramaz Yazdaman (2002), or Toward a Ludic Architecture by Steffen P. Waltz (2010), publications that invoke Le Corbusier’s initial proposition have continued to appear, and the book you have before you has the privilege of being the latest in this line, while we await what is to follow.

Except for the fact that this time, between proposition and noun the authors have not inserted a modifier, but on the contrary, have added two words that call for architecture’s rehabilitation as a totality. This is what they are referring to when they use the terms ‘integral practice.’ With this, Richter Dahl Rocha asserts the position that architecture as ‘an integral practice’ currently doesn’t exist, or at least it would appear to be in the process of coexisting. This critical position hark back to a line of thought which in Spanish was adumbrated early on with the publication of Oriol Bohigas’ influential Contre une architecture adjetivée (Against an Adjectivized Architecture) of 1969. It is precisely this recuperation of Architecture (not court in its manifold dimensions, social, ecological, constructional, morphological, ludic, and economic, that Richter Dahl Rocha proposes to carry out in the name of ‘integral practice’ as we witness a seemingly irreversible dispersion of the discipline’s central meaning.

Perhaps a more succinct title might have simply been ‘Towards an Architecture.’ For those of us who are enamoured of the ineffable fact of the discipline’s presence in the infinite plane of the human, it is nothing short of encouraging that, with explicit semantic volition, Richter Dahl Rocha would take this moment to remind us that trying to recuperate that condition of presence is still a project toward which our daily work can be directed. And indeed, the oeuvre and the ideas presented herein confirm that the effort is worth it.

Jorge Francisco Liernur received his architecture degree from the Universidad de Buenos Aires. He did postgraduate studies with Marta Seta at the Instituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, and with Thomas Bedaux at the Königsthronstuhl at the Technische Hochschule (TH), Zürich. He has been a visiting scholar at universities in the United States and Europe: Harvard University, Princeton University, Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), Columbia University; Universidad de Navarra, Universitat de Barcelona; La Sapienza Università di Roma, Politecnico di Milano; Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH), Zürich, Technische Universität (TU), Berlin; Universidad Simón Bolívar; Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas; and Universidad Católica, Santiago. His publications include Architecture in Latin America: Writings on XXth Century Architecture in Latin America, 1929-1949 and The Shadow of the Avant-Garde: Hannes Meyer in Mexico. He has also published essays in Arquitectura Viva, Der Architekt and AA Files. He teaches at the Centro de Estudios de Arquitectura Contemporánea, Universidad Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires, and is a researcher of the Argentine National Council for Research on Science and Technology, and a guest curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He has been a visiting scholar and lecturer at universities in the United States and Europe: Harvard University, Princeton University, Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), Columbia University; Universidad de Navarra, Universitat de Barcelona; La Sapienza Università di Roma, Politecnico di Milano; Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (ETH), Zürich, Technische Universität (TU), Berlin; Universidad Simón Bolívar; Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas; and Universidad Católica, Santiago. His publications include Architecture in XXth Century Argentina. The Southern Scenario: On the Works of Le Corbusier and his Disciples in Argentina, Writings on XXth Century Architecture in Latin America: Architecture in Latin America, 1929-1949 and The Shadow of the Avant-Garde: Hannes Meyer in Mexico.
Enquiring with intensity

Preamble by Francisco Mangado

I would like to begin by saying that, in general, I am interested in things that are done in a manner that is consistent with their nature. Can this be said about a publication on the work of an architecture studio? Are there parallels between how a book is presented and what it contains? Not always, of course, but we certainly have before us a case in which there is such a correspondence. Building on this notion, I would like to take this occasion to reflect on the essential attributes of this publication, with the conviction that to a great extent there is a reciprocity between the book and the character of the architectural work it presents. The title of Ignacio Dahl Rocha’s prose, “Un alto en el camino,” perfectly captures the nature of a publication which, unlike the typical monograph (so often light on content and superficial in treatment), is deliberately taken by the authors as a pretext for examining what they have been doing these last twenty years: a retrospective glance that simultaneously clarifies the road still to be travelled.

What we have here is essentially a reflective book that is a reminder for architects – at least those with aspirations to leadership in the professional or academic realm – of the benefits of taking a publication on their work as an opportunity to engage in self-criticism, which is nothing if not constructive. It demonstrates both intelligence and courage: intelligence, in the sense of turning the task of making a book into a thoughtful pause for analysis and judgment, something particularly necessary in a world ruled by haste and a plethora of superficial information, where work is performed without reflection, and the resort to style rather than thought and ideals. But they also express their doubts and concerns, and take their practice as a service, on the problem of identity, on beauty in architecture, on aesthetic or reflective considerations with respect to time, on architecture’s relation to art, and also on more urgent issues like sustainability, to name just a few of the subjects tackled in the book. All of these tests are brought together to define a theoretical corpus that reveals the rigor and reasoning behind the work of Richter Dahl Rocha. In sum, we can say that this book goes beyond the scope of the monograph to become a publication about architecture in the broadest sense, one in which a certain atemporal splendor and profundity of approach reveal the personal objectives of the architects in the sense of their determination to use self-criticism as an essential tool for rethinking and improving architecture.

But I would like to come back to the point of the correspondence between the two projects: the book and the nature of those projects, in order to express my conviction that the value and virtue of the book are inherent as well in the body of work it presents. The works and projects featured here represent an architecture that, in all its diversity, cannot be stereotyped; there is no code that stands in for deeper reflection or is stubbornly reiterated, regardless of the specific nature of a project or its situation. On the contrary, the architectural works of Richter Dahl Rocha are the result of an analytic exercise which, based on an unwavering substratum of shared concerns, tenaciously devotes particular attention to each and every factor that might influence a project. Along with this interest in the particular, their work demonstrates a delicate balance between the rational and the intuitive, with descriptive and synthetic thinking being brought together in the project. One could speak of the existence of a confident and refined intuition, which, with great subtlety, and over these many years, has functioned as the engine of the architects’ work. It is attentive to the act of building and to material resolution, preoccupied with programmatic content, responding to certain fundamentals in its formal manifestation, and clearly concerned about content and specificity, all of which results in a design process that has the capacity to pose questions and doubts which offer a more vulnerable, more contemplative, and therefore richer and more intelligent architecture.

Francisco Mangado was born in Navarra, Spain, in 1957, and earned his degree in architecture from the Universidad de Navarra in 1982. He was a guest at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, the Yale University School of Architecture, and the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). He is a member of the architecture faculty in the master’s program (MDA) as well as professor of the School of Architecture of the University of Navarra. Francisco Mangado practices architecture in Pamplona. Among other distinctions, he has been awarded the Ibero-Arabic Architecture Award, the Premio Architécto, the Premio Arquitectura de la Ciudad de Pamplona, the Premio Arquitectura y Sociedad, the Premio Garcia Mercadal, the Copper Medal and the Premio Arquitectura Española in 2009 from the Consejo Superior de Colegios de Arquitectos de España (CSCAE). He was named an international fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RI) in 2011, and an honorary fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 2013. In June 2016, he founded the Fundación Supervivientes.
A client’s reflections

Throughout history, it has been the client who brings to the table a building project corresponding to a need that must be satisfied through its realisation. The function of the project is central. This constraint of functionality clearly distinguishes the “client” who commissions a building from the “patron” who commissions a work from an artist for purely aesthetic reasons.

All building projects demand solutions that take into account the program, that is, the function of the building, the financial constraints, and the aesthetic aspect. The notion of durability is equally important, not only in terms of construction, but also with respect to the lifespan and management of the building. Too many architectural projects are the result of a compromise among these criteria which satisfies none of them to the fullest extent, and thus, sadly, leads to a banal result. The fixed demands of the program, building regulations, and budgetary constraints are difficult to reconcile. It is essentially an exercise in comprehension, synthesis, and creativity. On the part of an architect, it requires a variety of competencies that must coalesce in a team composed of diverse yet complementary sensibilities.

Fundamentally, a project must be the expression of functionality and technical solutions. In reality, certain recent buildings remind us that not all architectural projects adhere to this principle, some being too obsessed with making a fashion statement, or excessively interested in novelty with no other goal than making a mark or showcasing one or another of the architects or the prestige of the client, the architects also refuse to indulge in power, neither that function is clearly expressed (which by no means rules out the innovative gesture), then the solution that follows will be clear and the building will stand the test of time. To accept this is a form of wisdom and humility.

I would like to make some personal remarks about relations between Richter Dahl Rocha and their clients. First of all, they always find the balance between rigorous research and innovative solutions, assisting the pitfalls of the fashion system. Novelties that have genuine utility will not prevent intense creativity, but here, creative innovation is always coherent with the other aspects of the project. Particular care is taken with construction details, an attitude indispensable to ensuring a building’s longevity.

The strong sense of teamwork on which this office was founded prevents the emergence of egoism that can be encountered elsewhere. Consequently, each building or project is the work of Richter Dahl Rocha, and not any one individual. I am particularly impressed by the respect for human relations in general, which is literally predominant in the office; this is something that a client can sense. It is a great strength to be able to take everything seriously without taking oneself seriously. These architects are capable of patience, never imposing their own point of view, and always ready to call their projects into question, until such time as all participants and contributors, including planning authorities and the public, subscribe to their architectural solution. No matter what the scale of the project or prestige of the client, the architects also refuse to indulge in power, tempting as it is in this profession. No partner or collaborator derives any advantage to the detriment of others: the work is realised with the highest professional integrity and ethical standards. Thus, the office of Richter Dahl Rocha manages the tour de force of demonstrating exemplary finesse in the practice of architecture itself, while remaining attentive to human relations and respecting everyone involved in the process. Over these many years that we have worked together, it has always been a great pleasure for me to collaborate with them on our common projects.

The future I have in mind for this office envisions its intrinsic values and ethics continuing to be upheld and transmitted to future generations as they develop new projects that are innovative, beautiful, and balanced, exuding a certain serenity. The success of the architects, duly recognised by their clients, is a direct result of a boundless commitment to these standards and a willingness to place themselves in the service of the common good over these last twenty years.

Preamble by Pierre Milliet

Pierre Milliet is president of the Solvalor Fund Management SA. He studied architecture for two years at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), and afterward he enrolled in studies at the École des Hautes Études Commerciales (HEC), where he received a degree in economics. After working in real estate banking (Commerzbanque, Habita SA, et al.) for six years, he founded in 1977, with Blandine de Kermarrec, and a daughter of Pierre Milliet, the real estate banking firm Milliet de Kermarrec. He is also a member of the French Real Estate Association (ASRF). Since 1984, he has been president of the Solvalor Immobilier Fund of the Solvalor Asset Management SA, a banking firm in Lausanne. Passionate about architecture, he is involved both privately and professionally with many real estate development projects.
Encounter at the inauguration of their newly renovated offices at Avenue Dapples 54...

The light and ethereal “bridge,” a piece of glass engraved by Baldwin Guggisberg, a metaphor, the key to the articulation of their office suspended between the building constructed in 1930 and an attached industrial shed. The dynamic transformation of this space plunges visitors into a universe where the dream of architecture is still very much present. Among photographs of the built works of Richter Dahl Rocha, there are many works of art, the atmosphere redolent with the life of this office steeped in artistic expression, where aesthetic thinking is totally integrated from project to realisation.

These entwinements, these projects forge an architecture that is human, contemporary, and luminous. One can detect three generations of constructive attitudes and propositions in the architectural work of these last twenty years. Perhaps it is a matter of the input of new collaborators? Perhaps it is the capacity to conceive projects that adapt immediately to the parameters of sustainable development and to elaborate their form? To transform a facade wall into a glazed skin, to integrate the coloured solar cells developed in the laboratories of Michael Grätzel and his collaborators at the EPFL: to be invited to work in this context is truly singular and captivating.

A continuity between balance and functionality is de rigueur here, where by their choice of materials, details, and volumes the architects bestow a sense of calm on their structures. The confidence they exude is palpable. In this atmosphere, I sense a concern for, and awareness of others which has been instilled by the two founders – somewhere between the aura of an extended family, the love of icons, the love of art.

And now the explorations of the last six years have culminated in a new quarter on a university campus, by way of other projects for housing complexes and transformations of commercial spaces. To me this seems to be all of a piece with the spirit that infuses the three sites of their offices: Avenue Dapples, rue du Jura, both in Lausanne, and calle Montevideo in Buenos Aires. It is largely due to an immense effort of digital imagination that these three entities are connected, functioning at times as an unit, and at other times in tandem. I have the sense that I want to remain close to each one of these archipelagos of creativity. The inclination and the intention dedicated to the encounter, the social aesthetic: void, this is what enthralls me in our practice, which began with the installation of Le Lapidaire at La Verrière in Montreux in 2004, continued through several competitions, and now these multiple interventions in the Quartier Nord of the EPFL campus, or this one intervention, depending on the scale at which one sees the new convention center and student housing. To have the honour of conceiving artistic interventions for the foyer of the SwissTech Convention Center and the adjacent student housing complex, where views are proliferated by the interplay between facade/landscape, facade/glass, facade/pigment, roof/ shell, spinal column/stained glass, and glazing/energy.

As a visual artist, to create work for this architecture, at the same time as the architects themselves are creating and realising it, is to contribute to a whole. To integrate the art from the atelier into constructed space, and then into public space is to create, an apprenticeship. Since the last half of twentieth, the integration of the givens of sustainable development and the rethinking of form has been one of the irreversible transformations in constructible solutions. Aesthetic thought grounded in a consciousness of the other: the energy of the two founders is perpetuated in the attitude toward human connections, in which respective contributions are constantly renewed and thus complete one another in a harmonious and functional continuum.

The invitation

Preamble by Catherine Bolle

Toward an Integral Practice of Architecture

Ignacio Dahl Rocha
Toward a professional model

Over many years of practice, certain preoccupations have emerged gradually to become what we might call our pet subjects or themes. These themes are what essentially motivated us to undertake the reflections in this book. They draw sustenance from two sources: reflection on our professional practice, on one hand, and, on the other, a broader vision that informs our work within its historical and cultural context—in short, architecture as a discipline. It is not our intention to articulate any sort of “theory” of architecture to justify our work, but rather to describe our way of understanding and making architecture with the hope of elucidating the meaning of what we do. The position we address in this book might seem to fall into what are normally called the practical and theoretical domains of architecture, but our intention is not to see these as two distinct fields of operation that need to be reconciled; instead, we see them as two complementary approaches to the work itself.

The themes around which this book is organised have arisen as part of the unique experience, or we might say the universe, we have always been in the process of fabricating, which is manifested consciously and unconsciously in our work. This universe revolves around a set of preferences and sensibilities that go to form our own patrimony as a collective creative subject, which we have a vested interest in understanding since, as we will see, they play a leading role in the “selective” moment of the creative process. Although these reflections may make claims with respect to the discipline of architecture in general, our universe has its own time and place, and necessarily deals with the vast but limited part of architecture it has fallen to us to address. As various critical writings on our work have noted, the particular histories of the founders and members of RDR are also important when it comes to understanding the multicultural nature of our universe.

The greater part of our architecture unfolds in the geographical and cultural context of French Switzerland, although many of its subtleties are nourished by our collective international experience, personal, professional, and academic. It is essentially a body of work in the field of architecture which we have had the opportunity to enrich with projects on an urban-scale, and at the opposite extreme, experiences in the fields of furniture, interior design, industrial design, graphic design, and collaborations with architects, artists, and landscape designers. Most of our commissions come from private-sector clients and funding, and despite the great diversity of building types we have undertaken, our work is not restricted to prestige buildings, but rather represents the profession as a whole, in 360 degrees. Our professional model has emerged from the nature and conditions of the local context, in which architects enjoy a relatively great degree of prominence, and may find themselves entrusted with a set of responsibilities during the construction process that is wide-ranging in comparison to that of architects working in other countries. In our case, we have elected to build into our practice professional services that range from the conception of the project to the management and administration of the building work. This includes services that might be undertaken by a construction company, and has to do with the desire to have maximum control over the whole process in order to guarantee the quality of the final product.

This model also corresponds to a particular studio size, one that enables us to take on projects of a certain scope and complexity. The challenge has been to respond to the organisational demands that come with the increasing scale of professional practice without, for all that, abandoning the “artisanal” quality of the work.

Over the course of 20 years, as the studio expanded from 19 collaborators in 1993 to 58 in 2003, and almost 100 in 2013, the apparent contradiction between the inevitability of growth and our persistent desire to remain close to the design work to ensure its quality called for strategies that would not compromise the integral approach with which we began. From the aesthetic, technical, and human points of view, this approach has guaranteed that the fragmentation and dispersion occasioned by the ever-increasing specialisation of professional skills and project management would not bring us to our limits. We have always placed great importance on a mode of practice wherein the partners participate actively in the design work, and our great challenge has been to strike a balance between the need for rigor and professional “efficiency,” and the desire to maintain a stimulating environment conducive to architectural creativity. These demands have led us to experiment with and develop design methods that favour what we call “collective creativity.” The efforts we have made to shape this professional model were recognised in 2012 when the Swiss Venture Club awarded us their Prix SVC as the second most innovative company in French-speaking Switzerland, a distinction that is unusual for an architecture studio.

In keeping with our view of architecture, our professional model aspires to a broad and inclusive vision of practice, and is characterized by an effort to tackle all aspects of it, professional as well as disciplinary, with the same degree of excellence. This attempt at an integration on the part of the studio seeks to go beyond the professional as an object in order to link it to the historical and institutional trajectories of the discipline, thus granting it a wider meaning as a cultural fact.

One of the aims of this integral model is to transcend stereotyped, reductionist visions that distinguish between models of professional practice “committed” to creativity, critical thinking, and research, and others “devoted” to the demands of market efficiency, profitability, and representativeness, associated respectively with so-called “auteur” and “corporate” architectures. One of the symptoms of disintegration within the discipline is the stereotype of the architect as an eccentric sniper or presumptuous individual. While in the last few decades architects have regained social prominence in their new role as purveyors of “prestige brand-names” capable of responding to the needs of “marketing” with “stand-out” buildings, in reality, this represents a minuscule development with respect to the totality of the built environment and is not the type of “integration” we are referring to. In fact, as we see it, the integration of the architect ought to be based on an awareness of architecture as a vocation of service, and upon the great potential of one of the architect’s more typical and natural “metiers” as a cultural fact.

Indeed, the capacity for synthesis that architects bring to complex problems of a technical as well as a cultural kind becomes more rare as contemporary culture becomes more specialised, and as such grants us a relative advantage with respect to other professions.

RDR: Identity, Values, and Organisation

Founded in 1993, the Richter Dahl Rocha studio grew out of a friendship that began in 1981 at Yale University, where Jacques Richter and I pursued postgraduate studies. Incorporated into the team at an early date were Bernadette Canessa and Christoph Reinhart. They became associates of the office in 1999. In 2001, with the participation of Bruno Emmer and Barbara Mayans, who had been directly linked to the studio for a number of years, RDR Architects was founded in Buenos Aires. The three studios work in close collaboration and complement one another by means of permanent cultural and human exchange as well as through the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

As a group representing many nationalities, we share a vision of professional practice and of the discipline that is essentially about an individual experience relatively rare in a profession typically based on teams. In the discipline of architecture, as in many others, the individual is enriched by our diverse individual experiences and perspectives. The relatively rapid and sustained growth of our studio has been enabled by the participation of an independent team whose work was conceived in 2002 to handle works of commission. In 2007, RDR Studio grew to seven design teams supported by an administrative team. In order to improve the services we provide, and due to the sheer volume of our activities, an independent team was organised in 2007 to handle construction, with Fabrizio Giacometti assuming leadership and becoming an associate director of the office eventually called for reflection, consultation, and eventually adaptation of its organisation on various occasions. As in the last few years, the office has been occupied by a variety of services in the design field. In 2008, Claudia Dell’Ariccia has been appointed as director of the office. Jacques Richter and I pursued postgraduate studies. Incorporated into the team at an early date were Bernadette Canessa and Christoph Reinhart. They became associates of the office in 1999. In 2001, with the participation of Bruno Emmer and Barbara Mayans, who had been directly linked to the studio for a number of years, RDR Architects was founded in Buenos Aires. The three studios work in close collaboration and complement one another by means of permanent cultural and human exchange as well as through the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

As a group representing many nationalities, we share a vision of professional practice and of the discipline that is essentially about an individual experience relatively rare in a profession typically based on teams. In the discipline of architecture, as in many others, the individual is enriched by our diverse individual experiences and perspectives. The relatively rapid and sustained growth of our studio has been enabled by the participation of an independent team whose work was conceived in 2002 to handle works of commission. In 2007, RDR Studio grew to seven design teams supported by an administrative team. In order to improve the services we provide, and due to the sheer volume of our activities, an independent team was organised in 2007 to handle construction, with Fabrizio Giacometti assuming leadership and becoming an associate director of the office eventually called for reflection, consultation, and eventually adaptation of its organisation on various occasions. As in the last few years, the office has been occupied by a variety of services in the design field. In 2008, Claudia Dell’Ariccia has been appointed as director of the office. Jacques Richter and I pursued postgraduate studies. Incorporated into the team at an early date were Bernadette Canessa and Christoph Reinhart. They became associates of the office in 1999. In 2001, with the participation of Bruno Emmer and Barbara Mayans, who had been directly linked to the studio for a number of years, RDR Architects was founded in Buenos Aires. The three studios work in close collaboration and complement one another by means of permanent cultural and human exchange as well as through the transfer of knowledge and expertise.
The act of reflecting on our practice in the course of writing this book became an occasion to think about our collective identity, values, and goals. And when, in the context of a strategic workshop in Champéry in 2011, we were asked by consultants to produce a synthesis, we defined our vision as an “integral practice that strikes a balance between creativity and professionalism in order to place architecture in the service of everyone’s well-being.” In this scenario, the ideas that clearly appeared were our concern for the human factors and our collective understanding of architecture as a vocation of service. This also articulates the ethical dimension of our practice. The “well-being of everyone” includes the human development of the office as a whole, and each of our collaborators on an individual basis. It includes to no lesser degree the users of our buildings and our clients, as well as all those people and companies with whom we collaborate to bring our work into being.

For us, the question now is, does the model we have been developing up to this point have a future? Is it worthwhile to insist on a professional model founded on an integral vision, from a human and a technical point of view, when the forces of specialisation and globalisation are overwhelming us? According to which we operate. Their priority had become knowing how not to be eliminated in the first round of a competition and in the process of planning and building last for less and less time; the buildings, too. In short, we find ourselves running faster and faster without really knowing where to, while architecture remains a cultural evolution in which the information overload and increasing specialisation of knowledge pushes the scope and complexity of the universe of architecture beyond the traditional competencies of the architect. And as information and specialised knowledge become evermore umbride, our participation in the general process of work is being reduced, even potentially eliminated, and it is not clear whether communication technologies allow us to offset the negative effects of the tendency to fragmentation and disintegration within our profession. In the face of this, how do we achieve balance between the need to circumscribe and specialise in a particular aspect of our work, and thus stay in the game, and the option to prioritise our role as “orchestra conductor” to ensure that architects will continue to be engaged with the development of the built environment at large. This brings us to a corollary question: Is it possible to avoid the sense of alienation that results when the architect is excluded from full participation in this process? Is there a future for the model we think of as “artisanal” and to some extent localised geographically, even though it is international in its make-up and scope, in which we strive for direct participation, not only with our clients and the users of our buildings, but also with the craftsmen and fabricators and the whole machinery of the construction industry? In a recent discussion with a young and talented architect, the subject of our professional model came up, and we heard the same question put another way: How is it possible that we are the emerging model for their practice. What could be called a “global” model on one hand solved the problem of a shortage of work in their local context, offering them the opportunity to win international competitions, but on the other hand imposed the rules of a game very different from the ones to which we are accustomed? Moving from the subject of our professional model to some reflections on the discipline of architecture, it is important to begin by situating our work within the context of contemporary culture. Of necessity, we do so from a panoramic perspective, and in a state of bewilderment and uncertainty with respect to the incessant transformations of that cultural context, which succeed one another at a dizzying rate. These changes affect the discipline in general, as well as the quality of professional life. Among the positive developments, it goes without saying that the passion for what we do has been enhanced by developments in computing and communication, a domain with seemingly unlimited horizons offering unprecedented stimulation, with instantaneous and nearly total access to information. The field of construction has likewise been greatly enhanced by developments in materials, technologies, and robotics applied to industrial tasks. Nevertheless, many advances in contemporary culture have led to “imbalance” which in our view have a negative effect on architecture.

The most obvious symptoms of these imbalances are expressed in the apparent inability of our discipline to improve the quality of the built environment. Ironically, the architecture that is often considered to be the most “advanced,” and is most valued by the media, the marketplace, and even the academy, demonstrates little interest in this very basic problem, instead allowing itself to be absorbed in narcissism, adopting a solipsistic attitude. In fact, rather than concern themselves with the needs and well-being of their users, architects often serve only themselves and the market, with its insatiable demand for novelty and seduction. Much of today’s architecture is known and judged by the consumption of images in the mass media rather than actual experience on the part of users and occupants. Innovation for its own sake has become an obsession, and the constant demand for novelty frantically accelerates the natural tempo of architecture. The processes of planning and building last for less and less time; the buildings, too. In short, we find ourselves running faster and faster without really knowing where to, while architecture gives ground as an object of culture and in its ability to endure, adopting the rules of the fashion system in which buildings become commodities. It is also worth noting that we consider to be positive advances in computing and building technologies have also given rise to the cult of an architecture of complexity for-complexity’s sake which frequently defies common sense, and deploys such an ostentatious quantity of means that its ends are forgotten. The ease with which material and intellectual resources are squandered in contemporary architecture starkly contrasts with the qualitative and quantitative poverty of the greater share of the built environment. This situation turns out to be particularly contradictory in a culture that with very good reason lays claim to the urgency of sustainable development.

It is important to emphasise that it is not a matter of opposing the phenomena against which we find ourselves resisting. Rather, we have adopted an attitude that calls into question the interpretation of these phenomena, and above all rejects their excesses. In our practice, when we are confronted with such outcomes, we ask ourselves how they affect our work. We view them as architecture out of balance, and our response is to revalorise the opposite notion, that of balance. In a culture that tends toward the obvious and the excessive, the notion of balance does not seem much interest and yet the writing is on the wall. Whereas we fully embrace innovation as a vital necessity and a tremendous stimulus to creativity, how can we not be disturbed by the distortions that fuel a frantic rush toward the new? And even if the benefits of the mass media are undeniable, how can we avoid being dismayed when we see architecture reduced to the status of images to be consumed? And are the technical advances in the conception and fabrication of buildings is another domain of undeniable value to architecture, and yet how can we ignore the abuse of its potential, the cult of complexity, and the squandering of means that accompanies the formalist excesses characterising much contemporary architecture? Though we are exhilarated...
by the infinite universe of design and visual art brought to us by the mass media, at the same time, we are uneasy when we see this overabundance leading to indiscriminate consumption, which invariably diminishes our ability to appreciate things and our capacity to maintain a critical attitude toward them. The consequences of such egregious imbalances are transforming our discipline. The less optimistic don’t hesitate to rule out architecture’s disappearance, at least architecture as we know it today, in the form it has existed for centuries. We remain attentive and alert to these changes in order to understand and to incorporate them into our work.

Architecture as Service to Society

All the same, we are aware that, as protagonists, it is difficult for us to distinguish transformations of a superficial nature and more profound ones. In the face of the cultural dispersion that characterises our times, what should our position be? Which values will endure? On what basis principles can we continue the practice and teaching of architecture? We believe that during such moments of dizzying change and transformation, only an attitude of maximum openness can allow us to deeply understand what is happening around us. However, a general principle that ought to be a common denominator and point of departure when it comes to redirecting the debate about architecture is the notion of architecture as a service to society. Paradoxically, and however obvious it may seem, this ethical dimension does not appear to find a meaningful place in debates on contemporary architecture, and the subject does not give the impression of really moving avant-garde designers, who appear to be in thrall to their own complacency. The lessons we learn through our daily practice in dealing with these imbalances also suggest that a hypothesis that a commitment to architecture as a service would suffice to redress many of them. We hope that our work and the reflections that accompany it will illustrate this stand.

The Culture of Ingenuity

While it is not the objective of these reflections to analyse the nature and origin of imbalances in the culture of architecture, an interpretation that has proven highly illuminating to us in our attempt to understand the cultural problems affecting architecture today is Spanish philosopher José Antonio Marín’s El ingenio y refutación del ingenio (Eulogy and Refutation of Ingenuity). It is surprising to follow his interpretation of ingenuity, which, as the title suggests, begins with a eulogy and ends in refutation. Marina associates ingenuity with the culture of laughter, parody, irony, and cynicism. For him, the aesthetic of ingenuity is that of the dispencer, infinite proliferation, indiscriminate abundance. Paradoxically, the only “permanent” value with which it can be identified is novelty. To this can be added profusion, speed, and wit, tinged with contempt for tradition and received knowledge. Like contemporary art, which Marina considers ingenuous, its goal is not to create beauty, but rather liberty. The ingenuous process does not produce great works. He feels drawn to the extravagant, the fake, the equivocal, and the insolent, yet is not a revolutionary, a destroyer of the established order; rather, he is a transgressor, an eccentric who thrives on surprise and scandal. Contemporary society is based on an ingenuous culture. However, Marina finds a guard by arguing that ingenuity is not a direction, but rather an ambivalent way of life. For him, the ingenuous intelligence generates a system, the internal logic of which produces a way of being and of creating culture. He confesses: “I was seeking to analyse an intellectual skill, a rhetorical game, in short, an aesthetic issue, and I came face to face with metaphysics and morality only upon realizing that ingenuity is an existential project, a life system.”1 Marina defines it in the following way: “Ingenuity is the project the intelligence devises in order to live playfully. Its goal is to arrive at a detached freedom, safe from veneration and the norm. Its method, the generalised devaluation of reality. The purpose of ingenuity is to liberate the intelligence from the reality that oppresses it. It does not aspire to the denial of reality, but rather to play with it, to no purpose other than its own satisfaction and gameplay. To that end, it fragments and arbitrarily disassociates things. Instead, and even when reality is ungraspable, we seek to embrace it in a broader and deeper way, as a collective force opposed to cultural fragmentation and dedicated to cohesion and meaning. To do this requires, along with an inclusive attitude, a never-ending search for balance between the facts and the values that make up this reality. A practical application of this vision allows us to acknowledge that the nature and number of problems we choose to engage or to ignore in our experience of architecture have a definitive impact on the result. We understand that the practice of any discipline entails conceptualizing and breaking up a body of knowledge, but we know that the many ways in which these operations of “dissecting reality” are carried out do not represent objective methods for tackling reality, but rather our own subjective way of understanding and making architecture. We must admit that an awareness of the importance of this issue has been strengthened as a critical reaction to another contemporary tendency: Architecture in thrill to desire for astonishment succumbs to the temptation to guarantee an interesting or novel result by emphasising, and at times even sacralising certain aspects of the problem and playing down others. This almost always occurs to the detriment of the consistency of the building. We understand that exploring architecture by foregrounding some of its aspects or directly circumscribing parts of it and renouncing others is necessary, and has the virtue of opening up new horizons in our creative work and research. However, it also carries the risk that this process of learning or research will be innocently generalised and unscrupulously applied in practice, whereas a balanced and inclusive attitude is fundamental. When urgencies were political, questions of project design were superfluous or bourgeois; in the heyday of methodology or semiotics, there lay the path, we thought. Today it’s moment of ecology and computer modelling. Taking one or another parameter as a focus pushes us to think and to progress, provided we don’t misread the fundamental architectural problem.

Our experience allows us to affirm that an architecture which consciously chooses the path of inclusion and balance, of non-refusal to confront all kinds of “constraints”, whether technical, programmatic, or symbolic, and places human beings before the architectural object at the center of its preoccupations, is not choosing the “creatively” less ambitious path. On the contrary, we grant that it is the more difficult path, but we believe it is the one that potentially leads to the maximum critical and creative depth. The more the project grasps such an ultimately ungraspable reality, the more it benefits from those “constraints,” giving them new critical meaning and a positive cast; and the more that reality is embraced, thus avoiding the temptation to superficially “enhance itself” with “extravagances,” the more ethical and aesthetic weight it acquires.

1 José Antonio Marín, El ingenio y refutación del ingenio (Bogotá: Angaranda, 1993). At the same time, it has been translated into English, passages are quoted it in translation.
Between Beauty and Astonishment

Here we embark on the presentation of our work in the context of a reflection on the notion of Beauty. We are well aware that both the word and its meaning have been denaturalized by contemporary architectural culture. In spite of this, as practitioners of it, we have sought to concern ourselves with this subject, which occupies an important place in our work and in our thinking about the work. In his essay "On Taste" published some years ago, Jorge Francisco Liernur wrote of it that "no other glue than that of the search for beauty articulates the complex set of levels of demand, desire, and meaning, and that meaning to go to form it." 1

Obviously, and this is what we wish to emphasize, architectural beauty is invoked in this widest sense, and it is thus that we understand it. The quest for beauty refers not only to the domain of aesthetics, but also to the quest for the meaning of architecture as a cultural act. Liernur raised the issue of beauty in that sense, interpreting it on both the aesthetic and socio-cultural levels, and in the passage cited here, the word "glue" evokes the idea of the "binding agent of meaning." Beauty also encompasses the ineffable, the mystery inherent in architectural creativity as with all of its arts. It includes all that of which, as Wittgenstein reminded us, cannot say "it is," which is, finally, that "the ultimate, ultimate," as Heidegger would have it, "is there as a secret reason that we do what we do." 2 While at the same time acknowledging the search for broader meaning and the intimate subjectivity of the ineffable which this search necessarily entails. On the same occasion, I summed up this metaphorical allusion to our work with a reference to architecture's "location for service," as the "first and most urgent reason" for our engagement with it. 3

But what does it mean to say that beauty invades the ultimate meaning of our work in a culture in which beauty itself has been dekuned? Which beauty are we speaking of? And can we still speak of aesthetic ideals in this era of "the abject and unstoppable polytheism of Beauty," which Umberto Eco identified with the consumption and provocation? To which secular beliefs and fetishes do we resort in order to give meaning to our architecture?

Between the Banal and the Rhetorical

Our "aesthetic ideal," the one which, like so many other architects, we have chosen to adopt, is nothing more than that which is introduced from the modern movement. Its essence might be defined as the search for architectural beauty in the act of construction itself. We also understand construction in its widest meaning, and not only from a technical point of view. In that sense, architectural beauty is inseparable from the social function and from construction, and is in that the aesthetics that interest us appear strongly linked with the ethical and the moral. The protagonists of the modern movement placed great emphasis on this ethical dimension in the social, functional, and technological meaning of the new architecture, but paradoxically, they did not explicitly recognize a search for beauty. "It is not our purpose to liberate building activity [Baunäht] from aesthetic speculation and make building [Baunäht] again what alone it should be, namely, BAUTEK," wrote Mies van der Rohe in 1931, 4 though his work would reach the most sublime level of what we call the poetics of construction. For us, this paradox in itself has always possessed a mysterious, urgent reason for our engagement with it. 5

Coming back to the current cultural context and its imbalances, on the basis of these reflections about our own section of this book: while they may be understood by some to be a matter of fashion, skins belong to the evolution and technical evolution that brings about structural changes and the symbolisms that every culture produces over time. Despite our mistrust of the fashion system, we have grasped the legitimacy of and thoroughly embraced many recent developments. For example, the prevalent phenomenon of skins to which we devote a section of this book: while they may be understood by some to be a matter of fashion, skins belong to the evolution of construction, and – of global importance today – environmental concerns.

The Decline of the Poetics of Construction

Notwithstanding the great diversity of languages explored by the full spectrum of avant-garde tendencies, they nevertheless share several motivations and features. These characteristics, which are the ones that define the "state-of-the-art" architecture and gradually distance them from the language of modernism. By way of comparison, this language, after evolving for almost a century and a half since having resisted the onslaught of various "isms," begins to take on a nostalgic cast. The question of the direction of these linguistic novelties suggests that it is necessary to distinguish the legitimate innovations deriving from technological or programmatic changes from those that respond to the phenomenon of fashion. The constitution of these linguistic languages is complex, and it takes a close look at both the spatial and technical evolution that brings about structural changes and the symbolisms that every culture produces over time to define the lineal evolution of the culture of architecture. Despite the initial and always picturesque gestures of the language of architecture, we have thus embraced many recent developments. For example, the prevalent phenomenon of skins to which we devote a section of this book: while they may be understood by some to be a matter of fashion, skins belong to the evolution of construction, and – of global importance today – environmental concerns.

Coming back to the current cultural context and its imbalances, on the basis of these reflections about our own body of work, we will firstly hypothesize that the avant-garde no longer takes an interest in the metaphoric


4 Mies van der Rohe, "Building," trans. Inez Zalduendo (Basel, Berlin, Boston: Birkhäuser, 2007). In the course of writing the texts for this book, in my re-reading of Liernur I returned to the same reflections about our own section of this book: while they may be understood by some to be a matter of fashion, skins belong to the evolution and technical evolution that brings about structural changes and the symbolisms that every culture produces over time. Despite our mistrust of the fashion system, we have grasped the legitimacy of and thoroughly embraced many recent developments. For example, the prevalent phenomenon of skins to which we devote a section of this book: while they may be understood by some to be a matter of fashion, skins belong to the evolution of construction, and – of global importance today – environmental concerns.


7 See Jacques Richter and Ignacio Dahl Rocha, "The Impossible Silence," 107, with slight modifications to the English translation.


10 Mies van der Rohe, "Building," trans. Inez Zalduendo (Basel, Berlin, Boston: Birkhäuser, 2007). In the course of writing the texts for this book, in my re-reading of Liernur I returned to the same reflections about our own section of this book: while they may be understood by some to be a matter of fashion, skins belong to the evolution and technical evolution that brings about structural changes and the symbolisms that every culture produces over time. Despite our mistrust of the fashion system, we have grasped the legitimacy of and thoroughly embraced many recent developments. For example, the prevalent phenomenon of skins to which we devote a section of this book: while they may be understood by some to be a matter of fashion, skins belong to the evolution of construction, and – of global importance today – environmental concerns.

The Hound & Horn 1 (1927): 28-35 passim.

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potential of construction, which throughout the history of architecture has been the referent. Construction is, in the best of cases, the means of giving material form to projects conceived using other strategies for generating meaning or symbolism. The new languages radicalise their abstract character, and no longer invoke the poetic expression inherent in the articulation of traditional constructional elements like beams, cornices, windows, louvers, and so forth. For contemporary aesthetics, these constructional elements tend toward figurative allusion, and thus get in the way. Architects attempt to conceal or disguise them behind the building envelope, which is clad in a skin, and to foreground instead the abstract and sculptural nature of the general volumetrics of the “object.” We use the term “object” here, and not building, given that this radical abstraction entails the loss of the quality of architectural “character” that historically identified the different types of “buildings” as such. The modern movement was traditionally associated with abstract art, but despite coining a new language, it retained a figurative quality in its allusions to the “machine aesthetic,” and above all, in its metaphorical allusion to construction. Today, faced with the loss of interest in construction as a source of symbolic meaning in architecture, we realise that perhaps this is one of the undeclared but lasting attributes of the modern movement, the one that gave it that air of neutrality and indifference with respect to the unresolved problem of language which still seduces many of us.

In any case, by reducing the dependency of construction on its technical, functional, and symbolic aspects, by anaesthetising any doubts about the capacity of language to convey meaning, and by reducing their interest in what they could learn from the history of architecture, the avant-garde clears the path in order to respond to their greatest obsession, the rapid succession of the new, so that they can perpetually surprise us with their formal inventions. The strategies of composition that give form to these buildings, converted into eye-catching sculptural objects, are literally infinite, arbitrary, and even not recognisable as strategies. The very notion of composition understood as a tool of conception and control of form and space undergoes an uncertain evolution, and it is difficult to evaluate the degree of awareness, mastery, and sensibility that these formalisms wield.

These architectures make use of the extraordinary ability of the new technology to generate complex forms, but they get the means mixed-up with the end product. The result is an aesthetic in which there are always supposedly good reasons for the volumes to have waveform or at least non-orthogonal surfaces, loads must not express their gravitational descent, but give the impression of levitating, and above all, tribute must be paid to complexity in order to avoid going unnoticed by the specialised media. In this admirable deployment of formal exploration, the most skillful finally achieve an acceptable compromise between the technical and the functional in their projects, but the majority succumb to rhetorical formalisms. From the aesthetic point of view, these new languages are more concerned with astonishment than beauty. They are born of an aesthetic sensibility that registers only the conspicuous, the aggressive, the strident, the glaringly obvious, which has an insatiable need for shock and provocation, and which is losing the ability to appreciate with serenity and profundity the hidden meanings that architecture might veil and unveil. This aesthetic sensibility does not know the pleasure of moderation, nuance, and subtlety.
From Tectonics to Skins
Ignacio Dahl Rocha

**Construction and the Language of Architecture**

Our intent here is to emphasise and illustrate the theme of the relationship between construction and the language of architecture. We have remained particularly alert to this relationship as an argument about architectural meaning in general, and as aesthetic expression in particular. If we have insisted on seeking beauty in the very act of building, this is not to say that we believe there is a causal relationship between construction and architectural language. We realise the language of architecture does not derive directly from a technical or functional logic. Rather, the relationship between construction and architectural language is of a metaphorical nature. Aesthetic intent establishes symbolic relations with construction, and may either coincide with functional and technical logics or depart from them. What it cannot do is ignore the dialogue. Ignoring the dialogue with construction means voiding architectural form of its essential content, and leads to what we call rhetoric or formalism. In the intensity of this dialogue resides the consistency of the work, and in its metaphorical nature, the potential for beauty.

**The “Dematerialisation” of Construction**

What Kenneth Frampton has described as the “dematerialisation” of architecture is a process construction has been undergoing since the end of the eighteenth century. As architecture has evolved from traditional or monolithic systems, this process has manifested itself in the ever-increasing number and lightness of the components of the construction system. During the last few decades, in Switzerland as well as in the rest of the industrialised world, we have experienced an acceleration of this process fuelled by technological progress. This includes advances in glass technology, its structural use, and the notable improvement of its thermal performance as a constituent element of the building envelope. Other recent technological developments in the domain of construction that relate to our theme are the diversity, quality, resistance, and lightness of thermal insulation materials and facade claddings offered by the building industry, including the evolution of adhesives that are replacing mechanical connections as the last vestiges of a figurative aesthetic. It is also important to note advances in digital technology and robotics which are facilitating the design and manufacture of nonstandard components and reducing the necessity of parts that belongs to a prefabricated building system, and permit us to envision the industrialisation of a system involving a multiplicity of parts, all of which could be different. The same developments facilitate the design and construction of complex formal systems, and in this sense have broken new ground in terms of architectural expression. Their secondary effects, as we have said, include abuses deriving from this potential, abuses which in many instances seek to justify the illusion of preserving traditional architectural expression, as if genuine masonry walls were involved. As far as aesthetic expression is concerned, the distribution of “solids” and “voids” on the facade is fundamental. This idea of an architectural composition based on the proportion and formal articulation of building components.

**The Aesthetics of Sustainable Development**

A significant force in the evolution of modes of construction is technical requirements related to the environmental sustainability of the materials, although in the case of architecture, this is reduced to a matter of cost and efficiency. As far as aesthetic expression is concerned, the distribution of “solids” and “voids” on the facade is fundamentally determined by the need to ensure the economic and efficient use of materials. Today, in the context of sustainability, this is often achieved through the use of lightweight materials, which are more economic and efficient than traditional materials. The aesthetic of buildings thus tends to become a question of skins, that is to say, the main problem is how to clothe the building. In this case, what dominates the architectural expression is a logic of design involving superficial textures instead of the traditional expression of the tectonic. There is a weakening of the traditional idea of an architectural composition based on the proportion and formal articulation of building components. Instead, what is emphasised are the “flexible” qualities of materials, patterns, colors, transparencies, and reflections which the new technology makes possible, and for which the building industry develops a range of products. As we have mentioned, these new languages are characterised by the search for radical abstract expression, and so any constructional element may turn into a dissimant figurative allusion. As with works of art, this formal abstraction is offset by a revalorisation of the expressive nature of the materials, although in the case of architecture, this is reduced to a matter of cost and efficiency. As far as aesthetic expression is concerned, the distribution of “solids” and “voids” on the facade is fundamental. This idea of an architectural composition based on the proportion and formal articulation of building components.
clad with a layer of continuous lightweight insulation. Their language metaphorically alludes to a construction system even though it does not completely coincide with the way they are built. For example, with Œil-du-Centre (2006–11) in Lausanne, La Vernière (2001–05) in Montreux, and the student housing complex for the EPFL Quartier Nord (2008–13) in Écublens, banded cladding expresses the slabs of the mezzanine floors, although insulation may be installed between them. With the buildings that comprise the EPFL Quartier de l’Innovation (2006–11), also in Écublens, the main issue is not the expression of floor slabs, but the expression of the “fenêtre en longueur” type, and to reinforce its presence within the composition, the parapet appears as a great joint. The effect of lightness, conveyed through the banded composition, is maintained by the varied serigraphic treatment of the glass panes. For the facades of the buildings that comprise the UBS Rhône block (2010–15) in Geneva, in search of a language that would harmonise with the traditional urban context, we proposed a reinterpretation of the traditional post and lintel system. In light of our reflections on current tendencies, the Nestlé Wellnes Centre (2005–06) in Vevey stands out as a particular case in which the structure is the main protagonist of the building’s expression, and establishes a relation with the magnificent concrete pilotes of Jean Tschumi’s mid-century building. These in turn draw their inspiration from “brutalist” architecture, whose language was strongly inspired by construction. In this instance, constructional logic and aesthetic volition are blurred in a single expression.

Solar Protection as Architectural Expression

As is often the case in contemporary architecture, whenever an abstract language is being sought, there is a tendency to repress certain building elements. In the case of Route de Berne 46 (2001–05) or the IMD Nestlé Building (2002–06), both in Lausanne, it is precisely the opposite. Like so many other modern buildings, solar protection elements turn out to be fundamental to the architectural expression. With the IMD Nestlé Building, in order to arrive at a simple abstract language, instead of avoiding louvers altogether, as we did with Flon Les Mercier (2006–08) in the center of Lausanne, the facade was composed almost exclusively of a standard system of louvers, in which they become the main aesthetic element. Eaves provide other options for protecting facades and have played an essential role in the composition of many of our buildings, like the IMD New Meeting Place (2002–05) in Lausanne, and the restaurant for the Bobst Headquarters (2010–12) in Mex.

Skins

Taken together, skins represent dematerialisation in its most developed form, and belong to a formal strategy, as we have already intimated, which instead of emphasising the aesthetic expression of the building components, adopts the expressive capacity of the surface as its main protagonist. In each instance, different reasons have led us to choose this type of solution. With the facades we designed for SIGMA-Chavornay (2010–14) or the SwissTech Convention Center in the EPFL-Quartier Nord (2008–13), in keeping with the constructional logic of the buildings, the skins appear to be revetments of the opaque surfaces. In the case of Clinique La Source (2007–09) in Lausanne, in order to emphasise its horizontal proportions, the new skin permits the structure supporting it to be revealed. On the other hand, by virtue of its transparency, the existing windows can be concealed, thus guaranteeing its abstract character without impeding the passage of natural light. With Flon Les Mercier, a curtain wall that seeks to look like a skin provides a response to the aesthetic ambition of maximum simplicity and abstraction of the volumes of these buildings. To that end, we serigraphed the glass panels, whose graphic motif blends in with their construction joints. The serigraphy plays its part in minimising solar gain, thus avoiding the use of louvers on the exterior facade, which would have interfered with the aesthetic result we intended.
Enlightening Endurability

Christoph Leibniz

On the Typological Approach1

Since the concept of “type” was established by Quatremère de Quincy at the end of the eighteenth century, and applied by Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand in the nineteenth century,2 the typological approach has been a continuous source of interest and research for architects, whether in theoretical work, teaching, or actual building. Even today, the profusion of articles, articles, and compendia on the subject testifies to the discipline’s enduring interest in the subject.4 According to Rafael Moneo’s observation that “to raise the question of typology in architecture is to raise the question of the nature of the architectural work itself,” it appears a meaningful task. However, for each generation, a definition of the essence of architecture and an explanation of all its attendant problems.5 Beyond a doctrinaire approach to the term “type,” and drawing on its documentary and referential potential, the field of typology at large has witnessed a resurgence of interest, in particular in the related notions of hybridisation and mixing of forms.6 This brings us to the two-fold condition of the typological approach as an instrument of knowledge and in conceptual and pragmatic terms.

At this time when architecture is besieged by doubts that go so far as to question its very future, we believe that the typological approach continues to be instructive. To begin with, it affirms that our work exists in a historical continuum, which seems to mean a more matter of evolutions and reflections than of leaps or ruptures. In its discursive approach, typological analysis enables us to detect the nuances and modulations of this slow evolution.

In this frame of reference, we place the reflection on typological innovation. Typology, conceived as a system of relations,7 constitutes an attempt to understand the complexity of dwelling, in which is a convergence of cultural and social models, representations, historical and professional models, constructive, aesthetic parameters, and regulatory constraints.

Urban Form and Type: The Logics of the Creation of Form

One of the fundamental contributions of Italian research on typology during the 1960s was its emphasis on diachronical rather than causal relations between urban and architectural form, morphogenesis, and typology. This attention to the generation of form, of the city vis-à-vis the object, vis-à-vis urban morphology constitutes one of the themes of reflection in our projects. This projectmatic takes us to the heart of what defines the specificity of our discipline, that is, the notion of scale. In our practice, there is a back-and-forth movement between scales, from the building to the city, from urban form, to object, from ensemble, and from ensemble to neighbourhood. This interaction between type and urban morphology is one of the “materials” with which we work, and the understanding of it enables us to reframe the conditions of the creation of forms.

Two logics are at work in this form-making process: an internal logic, which pushes the object toward the exterior, and an external logic, which, at the scale of the parcel or urban fabric, acts upon urban form.

1 Throughout this chapter we lean on the French terms: on one hand, curiosity-based (vis-à-vis) and forse and susceptibility, in recognition of the specific specificity of these terms to evoke transience. On the other hand, we use the words “vis-à-vis” and “morphogenesis” as a French typological approach (vis-à-vis architectural form, morphogenesis, and typology).

2 Although one of the leading types is that of a building with its workshops or chambers and services. However, it is impossible to avoid the perception of this specificity, linked to the fact of the building’s function vis-à-vis the urban fabric.

3 In the case of “building lot” (LOT) or the site of the building footprint to the site of the parcel.

4 The signature trait of Richter & Dahl Rocha’s work is the legibility with which each project expresses the program for which it was conceived. This legibility is based on a simplicity of form that allows the distinctive characteristics of each project to be manifestly what they say they are,” Jorge Francisco Liernur, “Acerca de la delicadeza: consideraciones sobre la obra de Richter & Dahl Rocha,” published in LA CASA DE LA OFICINA: COMO UNA ESPECTACULOSA CONSTRUCCIÓN, 2011, 29–32.

5 The concept of composition is historically one of “composition, non-composition.” According to Moneo, “architecture and construction are described as organic: Clinique La Prairie (2001–05), and the Propriété Bellerive (2011), insofar as they share the specificity of being intimately linked to the natural and topographical context of their sites.

6 The great majority of our projects share the common modality of having been developed within a precise and generally homogeneous regulatory and legal framework, that of Switzerland and more specifically the canton of Vaud. Whether they are expressed through neighbourhood plans, as with Tract-Machines (2018–2019), Tour de l’Avenir (2012), Avenue de la Vallerie (1991–95), and the Quartier des Ultris (1998–2009), or through regulations, the regulatory structures governing our projects are precise and above all binding. They condition and even directly determine the form of the buildings. There is, consequently, a close correlation between the overall typology defined by the urban plan and the potential typological developments which were given its dimensions (notably, in the case of housing, depth) limit the typological options. In our practice, we have experienced this as an impediment to typological development and innovation. However, in some cases, the designer of the project is allowed a certain amount of room to maneuver, notably when there is a difference.

7 "The signature trait of Richter & Dahl Rocha’s work is the legibility with which each project expresses the program for which it was conceived..."" — Quoting Francisco Liernur, "Acerca de la delicadeza: consideraciones sobre la obra de Richter & Dahl Rocha," published in LA CASA DE LA OFICINA: COMO UNA ESPECTACULOSA CONSTRUCCIÓN, 2011, 29–32.


9 "The signature trait of Richter & Dahl Rocha’s work is the legibility with which each project expresses the program for which it was conceived..."" — Quoting Francisco Liernur, "Acerca de la delicadeza: consideraciones sobre la obra de Richter & Dahl Rocha," published in LA CASA DE LA OFICINA: COMO UNA ESPECTACULOSA CONSTRUCCIÓN, 2011, 29–32.
between the rights to build defined by the regulations and the theoretical constructible area defined by the plan (building perimeter, maximum height). This was the case with both Quartier des Uttins and Grand-Pré Sud (2012–14). In other projects, more restraints do not offer such latitude, the investor may appropriate that freedom, renaming some of his rights to build in order to improve the quality of the urban project, for example the creation of a public space in the form of an esplanade, as with l’îlot-du-Centre, or a restriction of the plan, as with Les Uttins G, or the height, like the IMD Executive Learning Center (1999–2002). In certain projects, we use a regulatory constraint to develop a typological diversification, as we did in Les Uttins D, where the voids between the buildings dictated by the neighbourhood plan were given the form of generous, covered outdoor spaces linking and articulating the built volumes. These few examples show that the degree of freedom offered by the regulatory framework can be conducive to innovation or the combination and hybridisation of types, and that many a time of ventures have a positive effect on the typological richness and quality of dwellings.

Aggregation and form: from unit to ensemble

The possibility of producing urban form through the architectural project allows greater scope for research or innovation, and more coherence and quality for urban space, as with our projects for Au Pré-du-Canal, begun in 1994, Plan de Quartier des Cadres (2008–13), Les Mouettes Rod (2011), and Les Planches (2012). This raises the question of how the regulation is to be given concrete form in order to ensure the required urban coherence, while leaving room for future builders to manoeuvre, with a view to ‘multi-party’ construction or successive phases of construction, in other words, the question of open or closed planning. When the scale of the project and interventor wants an isolated object to a group of buildings constituting an ensemble, or even a neighbourhood, the shift in scale reveals, more than in other cases, the need to work with the formal and morphological relations between buildings, in particular, the project for intermediary spaces, that is, the relation between public space (external space) and private space (the built), between void and solid. This scale of intervention brings into play the notions of unity and diversity, coherence and differentiation, in other words, the problematic of architectural and formal identity.

Dwelling and Type: Spatial Structure and Circulation

Just as urban form ensures the mediation of public and private space, at the level of architectural form, type, in terms of spatial structure, regulates relations between the individual and the family unit or social context.

From public space to private sphere: access, circulation, distribution

The question of access to housing, from the public space of the street to the heart of the dwelling, embraces the theme of the itinerary and its spatial sequences, the deployment of transitional spaces through which the inhabitant moves from the most public to the most private, across the thresholds of the semi-public and semi-private. This problematic, historically neglected by the narrowly functionalist approach, is crucial to contemporary thinking about the dematerialisation and qualitative improvement of collective housing.

Access — The handling of access paths and spaces between buildings provides an opportunity to work on empty space, and to introduce itineraries that serve as transitional zones and places of sociality and reflection, which are very different from monofunctional circulation spaces, for example in l’îlot-du-Centre, Tract-Flaches, and Champs-Meurin Nord (2008–13). With the Quartier des Uttins, the access sequences of the four housing blocks comprise a variety of functional spaces, moving from the residential street (public) to the access gallery (semi-public) to the building entrance, which opens onto an internal street (semi-private) linking the vertical circulation units leading to the landings on each floor.

Vertical circulation — There is no need to stress the importance of the quality of vertical circulation systems, and of their position in the building or their relation to the horizontal distribution system of the individual units. They contribute to the quality of reception and comfort. However, the imperatives of compactness and economy often cause vertical circulation cores to be positioned at the heart of the building, with no natural lighting. In order to avoid this negative outcome, the circulation space can be widened to create a hall lift from above, with

Chemin des Peupliers (2010–13), Grand-Pré Sud, Les Fiches Nord (2011–15), and Quartier des Croës; a loggia can be created to provide a second source of daylight, as with Avenue de Sainte-Luce (2012–15) in Yverdon; or a light well can be opened up, as with Les Fiches (2013–15). In an atrium, like that of Chemin de Montelly (2013), vertical circulation is exploited to help create a spatial event which establishes this as a place for social exchange.

Horizontal distribution — from landing to access gallery — The most common mode of distribution in contemporary residential production, and our own projects are no exception, is a core for vertical circulation which gives access to a landing serving one to four apartments, since the constraints of orientation and exposure to sunlight limit the number of units that can be served by a single shaft. In the case of the plot, the compact form of the building and the centrality of the stairs condition the type of distribution: the landing can be extended, making possible a central nucleation of spatial relations per unit, as with Les Fiches Nord, Grand-Pré Sud, and the Quartier des Croës. Two types of distribution also offer access to a large number of dwelling units from a single vertical circulation core: access galleries, whether open or closed, and the atrium. The theme of the access gallery is a recurrent feature in debates or research on matters of modern housing, and in thinking about distribution systems. In a history marked by adherence as well as rejection, architectural, economic, stylistic and ideological questions of interest. In climates such as ours, it is hard for external access galleries to play a role as spaces of encounter and exchange (they are usually and logically positioned on the north facade), which in part explains the fact that buildings with access galleries are relatively rare in contemporary housing construction in the region. However, access gallery-based distribution systems are not totally absent from our thinking, as evidenced by unbuilt projects like Au Pré-du-Canal, where the gallery providing access to the dwelling units links several buildings and is used as a public space, as with Avenue de Gilamont (2010–15), or completed projects like Avenue de Béthuys (2007–09). In the new EPFL Quartier Nord student housing (2008–13), as well as our project for the adjacent student housing complex, Les Traînées, the access gallery is inhabited: it constitutes a living space. In the case of atrium type distribution, central distribution, whether or not combined with a system of internal corridors — constitutes an interesting solution in terms of access. In this case, the atrium functions as a space of distribution and encounter, and as a vector for natural light at the heart of a building which is generally deep to the benefit, notably, of service and distribution spaces.

The plan and the internal structuring of the dwelling

The question of access and distribution in residential buildings brings us to the theme of distribution within individual dwelling units, and consequently their organisation and internal structure, as expressed in plan, which is related and connected to the exterior form and distributor spaces.

Internal circulation and distribution — There are two types of internal circulation: closed or open-sac, in which living and service spaces are separated by a corridor, or a hall, and open, circular or radial, offering a diversity of itineraries among and between the various spaces. In the case of looped circulation, the internal distribution may circumvent or envelop the bathrooms, as with Chemin des Peupliers, a block combining bathrooms and kitchen, as an intersection point for the inhabitants, but also intersect in the interior, as with Avenue de Sainte-Luce (1992–96), or a vertical circulation core, like the attic of Les Uttins G. The tendency toward the open plan, with open rather than closed circulation, reflects a will to optimise the use of the ground floor, thereby creating a diverse range of living spaces, which in part explains the fact that external access galleries are relatively rare in contemporary housing construction in the region. However, access gallery-based distribution systems are not totally absent from our thinking, as evidenced by unbuilt projects like Au Pré-du-Canal, where the gallery providing access to the dwelling units links several buildings and is used as a public space, as with Avenue de Gilamont (2010–15), or completed projects like Avenue de Béthuys (2007–09). In the new EPFL Quartier Nord student housing (2008–13), as well as our project for the adjacent student housing complex, Les Traînées, the access gallery is inhabited: it constitutes a living space. In the case of atrium type distribution, central distribution, whether or not combined with a system of internal corridors — constitutes an interesting solution in terms of access. In this case, the atrium functions as a space of distribution and encounter, and as a vector for natural light at the heart of a building which is generally deep to the benefit, notably, of service and distribution spaces.

Day and night / common and private zoning – The distinction, or even the dichotomy between the day and night zones of a dwelling constitutes a functional opposition that can frequently be found in the discourse on housing for the project and for analysis. However, to speak of “day and night” is ultimately reductive. What is at stake in this opposition is the order of factors determining relations between the private, intimate sphere of each inhabitant, and the space of contact and interaction represented by common spaces. According to functionalist tradition and logic, there is a correspondence between day and night “zoning” and the orientation (exposure) of housing. Conventionally, in an apartment oriented east-west, the day zone is positioned on the west facade and the bedrooms on the east facade. To this approach is added the desire for the day zone to be positioned to take advantage of the best view. When the context is particularly prominent (for example, facing a park, like the residential buildings of the Quartier des Uttins), the position of the day zone will tend to the imperative of the view, to the detriment of orientation. The project for Avenue de Sainte-Luce, in an urban situation where the nature and scale of the development and its rhythm of daily necessity weighs, proposed an innovation to counteract this pattern: alternating the orientation of pavilion apartments, ignoring the distinction between a street facade and courtyard facade, while combining the loggias with living spaces.

Depth and orientation – The history of the development of collective housing is one of the evolution of depth (Evolution of Modes of Life and the Architectures of Housing), the SWHome® liberate zones which can be divided-up at will, like our Les Uttins D; once the choice has been made, the plan conception of the building and the position of the sanitary cores and technical shafts define “fixed points” that practical, economic, and regulatory constraints, along with the assumptions of public and private investors tend to stretch the configuration of the dwelling after its construction, over time.

The conceptual stage, and flexibility in terms of actual use, which permits the inhabitant to modify the size or the dwelling’s ability to respond over time to unforeseeable events or changes in the needs of the inhabitants, or even to the multiplication of compact polygonal forms like our Les Fiches Nord and Grand-Pré Sud projects, the amount of natural light brought into a deep building. The imperatives of energy-conservation increasingly stretch the depth of housing plans once again increased. The treatment of depth is inseparable from the effort to secure natural lighting and the organisation, in an increasingly distended space, of the common and private living spaces and their relations in terms of articulation and connection. In our practice, a constraint can be the planning regulations, densification requirements, or the desire to optimise the relation between building length and depth (economic and energy optimisation, compactness) have led us to explore the relation between depth and type, by means of five formal operations: cutting, exemplified by Les Uttins F and G and Chemin de l’Ochettaz, hollowing, in La Verrière, Avenue de Glémont, Les Fiches, Chemin de Bée (2011), and Chemin de Montilly, perforating as with the Parc Gustave and Léonard Hentsch, LMI Building (2010–14), stretching, as in Dos Patios, and articulating, as with Chemin des Peupliers and Les Planches, in order to optimise the amount of natural light brought into a deep building. The imperatives of energy-conservation increasingly favour compact buildings, and are thus leading to the disappearance of overly articulated or disjointed forms, or even to the multiplication of compact polyploidal forms like our Les Fiches Nord and Grand-Pré Sud projects, and the tendency toward the ideal form in terms of energy use: the circle. This tendency illustrates the relation between depth and orientation (exposure) of housing. Conventionally, in an apartment oriented east-west, the day zone is positioned facing a park, like the residential buildings of the Quartier des Uttins), the position of the day zone will respond to the day and night / common and private zoning.

Flexibility of plan and evolution – Another recurrent theme in architectural reflection on housing is that of the dwelling’s ability to respond to unforeseeable events or changes in the needs of the inhabitants, whether functional, familial, or economic. From the start, research on flexibility in collective housing has explored insinuable solutions to this problem. These can be divided into two categories: flexibility of plan during the conceptual stage, and flexibility in terms of actual use, which permits the inhabitant to modify the size or configuration of the dwelling after its construction, over time.

In reality, and in contrast to the often-published examples which in fact are more the exception than the rule, practical, economic, and regulatory constraints, along with the assumptions of public and private investors tend to stretch the configuration of the building, and the position of the sanitary cores and technical shafts define “fixed points” that liberate zones which can be divided-up at will, like our Les Uttins D; once the choice has been made, the plan becomes fixed. Another, more modern form of flexibility, intervening at the conceptual stage, is that which makes it possible to vary the size of two contiguous apartments by attributing one or two bedrooms to one of them. Here, it is worth pointing out that for internal and external the concept of open-related housing was carried out in our office in the late 1980s and early 1990s, leading to the development of the SWHome® Housing System. Developed from the winning project presented at EUROPA 1 (1989–90), Evolution des modes de vie et architectures du logement (Evolution of Modes of Life and the Architectures of Housing), the SWHome® concept was conceived to promote affordable modular, flexible, and open-ended apartment housing that could be transformed by occupants according to a logic that was “more do-it-yourself than self-build.”

The section, duplex, semi-duplex or Raumplan – Corollary to the valorisation of urban life and its consequence, the densification of the city, one tendency of contemporary research on housing concerns introducing the quality and spatial generosity of individual housing into collective housing. One of the means applied here is the volumetric treatment of spaces which, without going quite as far as Adolf Loos’ Raumplan, takes the architectural form of horizontal juxtaposition. In this typology, based on the (lateral or transversal) combination of spaces with varying ceiling heights, generally with greater height in the living rooms like at La Verrière, Torre Bajo Belgrano (2011), or l’îlot Sainte-Luc, illustrates one line of contemporary research. This innovative, if less obvious evocation of the house type. This can lead to two different applications: horizontal juxtaposition, as with projects including Chemin de Lierazon, and SWHome® Valmont, or vertical juxtaposition, as with Avenue de Béthune, of duplex units, or the typological mix allowed by the integration of the duplex into ensembles combining single- and multi-storey apartments with, for example, Les Uttins E, the LMI Building on Parc Gustave and Léonard Hentsch, Im Forster “Le Garage” (2007–11), Avenue de Glémont, and Champs-Mouvier Nord.

Another form of section differentiation exists in split-level treatment of the plan. With Chemin de la Crétaz (2004–08), the sectional difference occurs at the level of the stairwell, volumetrically articulating two buildings and leaving one staircase going across the other. The (lateral or transversal) combination of spaces with varying ceiling heights, generally with greater height in the living rooms like at La Verrière, Torre Bajo Belgrano (2011), or l’îlot Sainte-Luc, illustrates one line of contemporary research. This innovative, if less obvious evocation of the house type. This can lead to two different applications: horizontal juxtaposition, as with projects including Chemin de Lierazon, and SWHome® Valmont, or vertical juxtaposition, as with Avenue de Béthune, of duplex units, or the typological mix allowed by the integration of the duplex into ensembles combining single- and multi-storey apartments with, for example, Les Uttins E, the LMI Building on Parc Gustave and Léonard Hentsch, Im Forster “Le Garage” (2007–11), Avenue de Glémont, and Champs-Mouvier Nord.

Office Space: Standard, Non-standard, and Flexible Space for Work

Idea about morphogenesis in housing can also be extended to office buildings. In this domain, too, the form of the building results from the interaction of internal and external logics, and its differentiation and combination of spatial types, and to the assemblage of functional and programmatic criteria, external logics respond to the constraints of urban form itself, whether these result from regulatory frameworks or an urban project.

Types of space

In our work we have proposed types of office space which are typically found in tertiary programs: the cellular office, the group office, the combined office, and the open-plan office. The repetition and combination of these types of office space is what defines the character of each administrative building. The layout of individual or group offices on a linear scheme can produce compact, rational plans, like for example Venues 3 (2007–09), the extension of which leads to bare buildings, either single, like Route de Berne 46 (2001–05), or combined, as in Dos Patios, and resulting in more complex forms, like Rue de la Galatée (2011) and Bobot Headquarters, with the jump in scale logical in terms of the organisational structure of the spaces with varying ceiling heights, generally with greater height in the living rooms like at La Verrière, Torre Bajo Belgrano (2011), or l’îlot Sainte-Luc, illustrates one line of contemporary research. This innovative, if less obvious evocation of the house type. This can lead to two different applications: horizontal juxtaposition, as with projects including Chemin de Lierazon, and SWHome® Valmont, or vertical juxtaposition, as with Avenue de Béthune, of duplex units, or the typological mix allowed by the integration of the duplex into ensembles combining single- and multi-storey apartments with, for example, Les Uttins E, the LMI Building on Parc Gustave and Léonard Hentsch, Im Forster “Le Garage” (2007–11), Avenue de Glémont, and Champs-Mouvier Nord.

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Innovative Residential Architecture (Innovative Residential Architecture)

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Type and form

The combination of individual offices and open-space areas raises the question of the building depth and, as a corollary, the optimisation of natural light in a deep building; in spite of the generalisation of computer work stations, positions by windows remain the most popular. In the case of medium- to large-scale floors, the plan form can be inflected to bring natural light deep into the building, as we did with Swisscom Prilly (2011) and Banca Ciudad Headquarters; unfold in order to spread out a relatively narrow strip, like Rue de la Galaise; or hollowed-out in order to create spaces that bring light into an atrium like the Golay Buchel Headquarters (1991–97), the EPFL Quartier de l’Innovation, Banca Ciudad Headquarters, and the WCC Campus (2011–12), a closed courtyard like the Kudelski Headquarters (2008), Delta Project, and Billet Headquarters, or an open courtyard like Entre-Doux-Ultes and DIMP-WOP (2000). In several projects, the form results from a desire for the building to engage in a dialogue with its surroundings. For example, the projects for the EPFL Quartier de l’Innovation (2006–11) and the WCC Campus propose simple, compact forms (cubes, cylinders) freely laid out in a park, as if on a campus. Banca Ciudad Headquarters, responds to the orthogonality of the urban fabric on its south side, while the opposite facade yields to embrace an extension of the public park; on the other hand, Propriété Bellerive in Rolle derives its low, organic form from the need and desire to merge with the site and be open to the landscape.

Flexibility, formal and informal

The importance of flexibility in the design of office space is well established. This constitutes a prerequisite for any project and is expressed by modular systems in terms of the constructive network (structure, partitioning, facades) and technology. Flexibility in terms of the potential for modifying or combining modules (opening and merging of individual spaces as group open-plan spaces) is key. The evolution of modes of teamwork leads to a new approach to the relation between formal (individual or group) working spaces and informal spaces of encounter and exchange. For example, in the layout of the building for Logitech Corporation in the EPFL Quartier de l’Innovation, spaces for meeting and informal work and for the stimulation of interpersonal relations and creativity open off the atrium, reinforcing its character as the building’s central, defining public space.

Type, Professional Practice, and Social Practice

The projects presented here all explore permanent, recurring themes in the design of dwellings and office space. For dwellings, that involves access and paths toward, through, and between buildings, inter-personal relations in the neighbourhood and within the building, management of relations between public and private areas, individual and community; the answer to the inhabitant’s search for meaning and need for comfort and safety, and the dwelling’s relation to its environment. For office space, it entails equilibrium between served and servant spaces, the relation between individual and group work, between communication and withdrawal, and modularity as an answer to the need for flexibility. Each building aims for coherence in its particular articulation of these themes, the combination of which is a response to the particular context of the project, its program, situation, and public. When a given theme is emphasised, it is not to the detriment of another aspect or another quality. In the best cases, several qualities will be expressed simultaneously, their congruence helping to enrich the project, as for example with the Quartier des Uttins, La Verrière, L’Îlot-du-Centre, and others.

As we have learned from the history of housing since the turn of the century, in itself housing is not a field of radical innovation.13 It is a field in which innovation springs from the exploration of nuances. In the tertiary sector, although the dynamic of functional change is more pronounced, and in spite of research and reflection on new forms of work and their incorporation in the architectural project, real typological innovation is a slow process. As we have seen, the typological approach proceeds by breaking up reality then recomposing its object of study by bringing the different elements into relation. It offers an approach to the complexity of the system of architecture, a system in which internal relations and the interactions among elements are ultimately more important than the constitutive elements themselves. In an effort to distil the nature of our architecture, one could say that this relational process reveals the principle on which our practice is founded: balance, between the technical and the economic (professionalism), the social and the functional (service), the symbolic and the aesthetic (beauty).
On the Temporal Dimension

Our experience with renovation projects represents an important chapter in our work. At the theoretical level, they have nourished our thinking about an issue we take to be important when it comes to understanding many aspects of our profession, and that is, the temporal dimension of architecture. A central issue in relation to this theme is the capacity of architecture and the city to endure as physical and cultural entities, as witnesses to the continuity of the successive generations of a society. Running counter to this is the profusion of ephemera promoted by the dynamic of perpetual novelty inherent in the fashion system, and in consumer culture in general.

We share a vision of architecture which is conscious of these phenomena and takes a stand with respect to them, inasmuch as it is not interested not only in the durability of the building or the urban fabric as physical objects, but also in its aesthetic validity, which has to do with the neutrality and timelessness of architectonic language and the quest for a way forward that does not refuse a dialogue with history.

Concerns stemming from the broad notion of sustainable development, an increasingly significant domain, have also raised our awareness of the temporal dimension in architecture, placing emphasis on its technical aspects. Setting aside the controversy over whether it is the central issue or should be relegated to the status of a technical matter, the relatively recent focus on environmental sustainability has had impact on architecture at all levels and has led to the emergence of a veritable body of specific knowledge with a precise and urgent objective. Never before has architecture had to address its negative impact on the environment. As a complement to the scientific and technological advances it has spurred in diverse fields, we hope sustainable development will also take renewed advantage of the wisdom and common sense of vernacular building traditions.

For architecture, one of the most important outcomes of the contemporary focus on sustainability has been to awaken us to the notion of time, expanding our consciousness and understanding of the construction process. Concerns stemming from the broad notion of sustainable development, an increasingly significant domain, have also raised our awareness of the temporal dimension in architecture, placing emphasis on its technical aspects. Setting aside the controversy over whether it is the central issue or should be relegated to the status of a technical matter, the relatively recent focus on environmental sustainability has had impact on architecture at all levels and has led to the emergence of a veritable body of specific knowledge with a precise and urgent objective. Never before has architecture had to address its negative impact on the environment. As a complement to the scientific and technological advances it has spurred in diverse fields, we hope sustainable development will also take renewed advantage of the wisdom and common sense of vernacular building traditions.

The Nestlé headquarters “En Bergère” in Vevey (1996–2000), our first intervention of any real consequence, was a rich and highly complex engagement that unfolded over time, enabling us to tackle the major issues inherent in the processes of preservation and transformation, issues which have continued to emerge in subsequent projects at all levels. In many ways, it became the “primer” for the other projects we undertook from that point onward, and we are still drawing upon the experience. Despite belonging to the heritage of modern architecture, the projects for Nestlé are inscribed within the long tradition of buildings and ensembles of buildings that are realised through successive interventions over time. In fact, these projects are the result of the work of three generations of architects spanning over half a century, each of whom decided, in keeping with the criteria and values of the time, how to intervene on this unique site, and what to bequeath to the next generation.

The first generation had to take the decision to demolish the old Grand Hôtel de Vevey, built in the late nineteenth century. Applying contemporary preservationist criteria, Jean Tschumi’s Nestlé building would perhaps not have been built on that site. Fifteen years later, in 1976, the next generation, Martin Bürchardt and Frédéric Brugger, constructed a second building, a barre positioned perpendicular to, and the same size as, the first. Bürchardt and Brugger emphasised the sound implantation of the building rather than its relationship to the existing one, in terms of language and functional integration. In our case, as the third generation of architects addressing this site beginning in 1996, it was a given that we would approach the intervention in a manner consistent with the original building, which had been landmarked in 1985. Our objective was also to address the coherence of the entire site. Initial discussions revolved around the compromise between the necessity to preserve the building “museumologically,” and the necessary transformations that would allow the building to extend its life. In the end, only the load-bearing structure and unique elements like the cantilevered entrance canopy, marble floors, Chambord stairway, a few revetments, and original furnishings were preserved. The work included interventions of all kinds, from massive demolition, to restorations (as in the case of the exteriors and facades), designs inspired by period furnishings, reconstructions that simulate the original appearance (as in the case of the entire curtain wall system of the facades), and completely new elements such as the Liaison Space connecting the two existing buildings and the oculus Tschumi envisaged to bring light in over the Chambord stairway, but which he never designed.

For us, each of these interventions raised matters of principle at the theoretical level, like for instance the question of preserving the physical material or the substance of the building, or the appropriateness of preserving the aesthetics of the facade, even though it was technically and functionally completely transformed. Aesthetic issues also arose, like, for example, whether new elements ought to be identified as such, or blend in with the original elements. The commission to design the Nestlé WellNes Centre (2005–08), the last of our interventions, raised the issue of what, finally, the relationship of a new building ought to be with respect to the two existing ones. Ours was to privilege the integration of the new building by recontextualising the introduction of a new language and proposing a design with an identity of its own, albeit one inspired by the themes of the original building.

As we have presented a project profile on the Nestlé experience, what follows here is a selection of other renovation works that characterise the various problems we have confronted and the approaches we have taken. Credit Suisse Lion d’Or (2001–06) in Lausanne and Arenales (2011–12) in Buenos Aires exemplify interventions in buildings which, over the course of successive renovations, had lost the greater part of their original interior facades and ornament. In these cases, we chose to take the value of their spatial structure as a starting point. UBS Rhône (2010–15) in Geneva represents a typical renovation of an industrial building on a dense city block in which the commercial and public functions of the ground floor spaces are given a new lease on life, while the upper floors are renovated to accommodate administrative offices. The merits of the preserved facades inspire the contemporary language of the new ones. Rue du Jura (2001–04) and Dapples S4 (1999) in Lausanne, along with the Alcorta campus of the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella (2005–13) in Buenos Aires belong to the milieu of recycling of industrial structures in the context of an urban fabric. In all three instances, the original facades have been preserved and the industrial character of the interiors preserved to capitalise on the generosity of their spaces, while at the same time adapting them to entirely new functions. Finally, EPFL, Les Bôis Chambard (2006–12) in Buchillon stands as an atypical case, in which the architectural value of the existing structure resided primarily in the exterior character of the house and its relationship to the unique landscape. Of negligible value, the interior of this private villa was completely emptied and adapted to its more public function as an intimate seminar center, while a completely new element was introduced to capitalise on the generosity of its spaces, while at the same time adapting them to entirely new functions. Finally, EPFL, Les Bôis Chambard (2006–12) in Buchillon stands as an atypical case, in which the architectural value of the existing structure resided primarily in the exterior character of the house and its relationship to the unique landscape. Of negligible value, the interior of this private villa was completely emptied and adapted to its more public function as an intimate seminar center, while a completely new element was introduced to capitalise on the generosity of its spaces, while at the same time adapting them to entirely new functions.
Encounters
Ignacio Dahl Rocha

As we have already suggested, the evolution of architecture demands that the architect, hitherto educated as an “enlightened builder,” or as Adolf Loos put it, “a bricklayer who has learned Latin,” has recourse to skills and expressive tools beyond those of architecture as we understand it up to this point. Today the architect is obliged to expand his or her horizons and to enhance and even transform the traditional competencies of the discipline in dialogue with other fields. Moving from our engagement on the fundamentals of architecture into the domain of enquiries beyond the discipline is especially important for us to acknowledge certain encounters in the fields of art and design. Here, we present a number of those encounters. RDR Design has played a leading role in an independent team, one that is akin embedded in the architecture studio. The team was created in 2004 to build on the important experience gained during the renovation and transformation of the Nestlé Headquarters in Vevey, among other projects for the company. The challenges there included the design of interiors, office furniture systems, as well as custom furnishings for various parts of the building, product display strategies, graphic design, and industrial design, represented here by the experience with Cletre in the design of partition wall systems. These experiences led us into various fields of design and architecture. Today we have been since that time, with a particular interest in how we can creatively intervene in the context of industrial processes in our design process, in other words, to learn to design a product for mass production, in contrast to architecture, which consists in the construction of prototypes. RDR Design collaborates in a variety of ways on architectural projects, and in response to the frequent need for the combined expertise of architects and graphic designers, we developed what we call “archiprojects” to describe certain hybrid encounters. There have been a number of occasions when the architecture studio has engaged the world of art, working together with artists including Baldwin and Guggisberg for the renovation and transformation of the RDR offices at Avenue Dapprich 54 in Lausanne and the engraved glass panel for the lobby of the Nestlé Headquarters building in Vevey; Jean-Luc Manz for the Golay Buchel Headquarters Building in Lausanne; Daniel Schlaepfer for the Clinique La Prairie in Clarens-Montreux, the Nestlé WellNes Centre in Vevey, and Flon Les Mercier in Lausanne, among others. In the case of the artist Catherine Bolle, beginning in 2004 we have been engaged with a series of collaborations which are presented in the following pages. In all of these instances, our enquiries have been aimed at broadening our experience of architecture by exploring with the artist the world of the intuitive and the sentient.

Little Sister
An earlier version of the text that follows here was written for a recent monograph on Catherine Bolle’s work, and because it offers a window onto the way we have approached the process of working with artists and underscores the importance of such collaborations in our practice, we wanted to include it in this book.

From an idealistic point of view, one could say that architecture is the little sister of the arts. The fact that it is required to serve a function, in this case to accommodate the varied activities of human beings, prevents architecture from playing the role in this activity as an independent team, one that is akin embedded in the architecture studio. The team was created in 2004 to build on the important experience gained during the renovation and transformation of the Nestlé Headquarters in Vevey, among other projects for the company. The challenges there included the design of interiors, office furniture systems, as well as custom furnishings for various parts of the building, product display strategies, graphic design, and industrial design, represented here by the experience with Cletre in the design of partition wall systems. These experiences led us into various fields of design and architecture. Today we have been since that time, with a particular interest in how we can creatively intervene in the context of industrial processes in our design process, in other words, to learn to design a product for mass production, in contrast to architecture, which consists in the construction of prototypes. RDR Design collaborates in a variety of ways on architectural projects, and in response to the frequent need for the combined expertise of architects and graphic designers, we developed what we call “archiprojects” to describe certain hybrid encounters. There have been a number of occasions when the architecture studio has engaged the world of art, working together with artists including Baldwin and Guggisberg for the renovation and transformation of the RDR offices at Avenue Dapprich 54 in Lausanne and the engraved glass panel for the lobby of the Nestlé Headquarters building in Vevey; Jean-Luc Manz for the Golay Buchel Headquarters Building in Lausanne; Daniel Schlaepfer for the Clinique La Prairie in Clarens-Montreux, the Nestlé WellNes Centre in Vevey, and Flon Les Mercier in Lausanne, among others. In the case of the artist Catherine Bolle, beginning in 2004 we have been engaged with a series of collaborations which are presented in the following pages. In all of these instances, our enquiries have been aimed at broadening our experience of architecture by exploring with the artist the world of the intuitive and the sentient.

From the beginning of the 1990s, Catherine collaborated with various architects. In our case, in 2005 we embarked with her on what would become a very rich series of experiments which are still unfolding. Le Lapidaire de la Cour des Comptes is a long history of harmonious coexistence, art and architecture, theatre, poetry, and the expressiveness of the scenographic arts, this was the way that architecture put itself forward as a meeting place for all the visual arts. Spanning a long history of harmonious coexistence, art and architecture arrived at the point of total fusion. At the dawn of the twentieth century, however, Adolf Loos abruptly declared that architecture was not an art. In his “Ornament and Crime” (1909), he painted a stark picture of the death of art and architecture as we understand them at that time. In the process, he reacted against the aberrations of eclectic architecture and the applied vehicle. The site both as an object in and of itself, and in terms of its interaction of the space it inhabits, to instances where works varies from the selection of an artwork that was not conceived for the site, but whose presence enhances it as a place of work, in the latter case. The works of Catherine Bolle, beginning in 2004 we have been engaged with a series of collaborations which are presented in the following pages. In all of these instances, our enquiries have been aimed at broadening our experience of architecture by exploring with the artist the world of the intuitive and the sentient.

Over the course of history, the relationship of art to architecture has been expressed in different ways. In the classical world, sculpture and painting shared ideals of beauty with architecture and in the context of intense collaborations adopted numerous and varied forms. Generally speaking, the ideals of classical beauty were applied to the visual arts as well as architectural composition and language. At a more specific level, architecture joined together with sculpture in the development of ornament and the classical orders that form the basis of the language of architecture. Finally, at a more intimate level, sculpture and painting contributed, without losing their individual identities, to the architectural opus. Not unlike opera, which brings together music, dance, theatre, poetry, and the expressiveness of the scenographic arts, this was the way that architecture put itself forward as a meeting place for all the visual arts. Spanning a long history of harmonious coexistence, art and architecture arrived at the point of total fusion. At the dawn of the twentieth century, however, Adolf Loos abruptly declared that architecture was not an art.
between these two extremes, we would put La Verrière, where the intent was to compose with an architectural project that seeks to revalorise an outdoor space by reinforcing the articulation between the three buildings that comprise this residential complex. The principal component is a mural 20 metres long, bent at a 90-degree angle. The mural abuts an existing building and sits above a horizontal plane partly spanned by a reflecting pool. Catherine drew her inspiration from the urban and mineral character of the site in proposing a work that is composed of three layers of acrylic paneling, on which she combined printing and painting techniques. For this, she used stone dust from the Alps from which comes the title of the work, La Lapaldaire. The space surrounding the work is covered with pabbles collected from streams in the same Alpine region. In this first collaborative work, materiality came to the fore as the theme in common between the work of the artist and that of the architects. For both, the work only attains its full meaning when the abstraction of the formal composition materializes physically. In the project for student housing in the EPFL Quartier Nord, the intervention conceived with Catherine was meant to lend a distinctive and personal character to the circulation corridors which were conceived as spaces for casual encounters among students, where we sought to create an atmosphere that would be both intimate and lively, corresponding to their function. The work materialised in the revetment of the exterior access galleries surrounding the courtyard, and for this, we proposed the use of fibre-cement panels. These panels are a standard commercial product available in a given range of colours. The option of restricting the artwork to off-the-shelf materials belongs to a recurring theme in our collaboration with Catherine, this particular work making a significant contribution in that respect.

Catherine is an artist whose oeuvre has a very strong visual identity, one which despite its great variety is easily recognizable. Be it in a canvas, a series of acrylic panels, folded paper, or one of her translucent boxes, her language seems so much her own, her personal touch so unmistakable, notwithstanding the abstraction of the visual language, what we might call her calligraphy. In the case of interventions by artists in works of architecture, the scale and modes of production typically hamper or seriously obstruct the potential for artisanal work. In such a situation it is necessary to choose between the reproduction of the manual work and its abandonment altogether.

In Catherine’s case, the latter option introduced an important challenge insofar as it effectively meant forsaking her calligraphy. She was prepared to accept this. In her magnificent stairway, created in collaboration with the architect Vincent Mangeat, is a good example of a work in which her aesthetic was manifested in the absence of calligraphy. Here, we could also mention another aspect of the same problem, pertaining to those elements of a building which are installed in public space. This involves the conundrum of the pertinence and significance of an intervention as personal and intimate as the calligraphy of an artist, when it is rendered at the scale of public space. The design for the access galleries of Quartier Nord were Catherine’s direct response to this problem. In this instance, she agreed to fabricate her work using around 800 identical, mass-produced panels available in predetermined colours. However the prospect of restricting herself to combining off-the-shelf components didn’t convince her, and she proposed an intervention which, within the bounds of the non-artisanal mode of production originally projected, still afforded her the necessary latitude to create poetry. A simple hand-application of sheen pigment not completely covering the whole panel immediately enlivens the inert surfaces and introduced subtle nuances of colour and light to modify the commercially-available colours of the panels according to her vision. As if by magic, proceeding from industrial panels, objects which on their own account were to be basic and impersonal, and using a minimum of means, Catherine found a way to seduce us once again with her visual poetry: she may have accepted the challenge to forego her signature calligraphy, but she didn’t lose her talent behind.

Finally, the project for Quartier Energimatt (2008) in Basel has enabled us to explore with Catherine a tendency in architecture where an interesting space for interdisciplinary work opens up. Today, architecture, which had once again with her visual poetry: she may have accepted the challenge to forego her signature calligraphy, but she didn’t lose her talent behind.

construction elements which up to now determined the architectural expression of the building. In order to adapt to these new demands, we can collaborate with artists and learn from them. The project for Basel consisted in designing the skin for a building to accommodate a shopping complex and a hotel, the facades of which have an imposing presence above a striking public space in a new neighbourhood occupying the area of the former Badischer Bahnhof railway yards in Basel. We proposed a facade composed of laminated glass panels serigraphed on their outer surfaces. The serigraphy reproduces motifs painted by Catherine especially for this building. Thus, it represented an opportunity to develop a handful of original artistic motifs in considerable numbers. Of course, the artist did not confine herself to providing these original motifs, but together with the architects participated actively in the conception and development of the overall design of the facade. Despite the serial construction, the elaboration of subtle variations in motif, texture, and colour conceived in small-scale resulted in unexpected aesthetic possibilities in the expression of the facades at an urban scale. An example of this was the discovery that from a distance, the organic motifs of the original drawings endowed the facade with a particular texture and colour which, without forgetting the reflective quality of the glass, were capable of evoking the red stone facades typical of the city. In this way, the artist’s calligraphy, essentially an intimate, personal motif, took on new meaning by being expressed in a public context.

We began these reflections by pondering the question of the evolution of the relationship between art and architecture and the ways in which this interdisciplinary relationship might evolve. In that respect, our collaboration with Catherine is an open-ended one. Not only has it not come to an end, but there is even no urgency to look so far ahead, only to open up new horizons and to stimulate all who participate. For us as architects, this collaboration has taught us to recuperate an acute aesthetic sensibility that the demands of our profession tend to erode. It also teaches us to learn to recognise and to accept the value of the ineffable in the creative process; to enjoy the moments of solitude and anxiety in the face of aesthetic decisions which transcend the rationality of technique; to create without justifying ourselves. In short, it helps us to extend the boundaries of our architectural thinking. This doesn’t mean taking the path of the arbitrary, the rhetorical, or the excessive, as is so common among the contemporary avant-gardes, but rather encountering a denser and more profound dimension on the poetic side of our discipline.

In our case, the collaboration between artist and architect is in itself a collective work, a reciprocal exchange, in which we invite artists to escape the self-absorption of studio work and to delve instead into collective work. To do this, we must encourage them to give up a tiny bit of their freedom with respect to the outcome of the work, as well as the creative process the artist is obliged to share. Perhaps it is also a way of getting out of the gallery and conquering public space, of participating in the collective construction of the city as a physical and cultural entity.
Invention and Selection
Ignacio Dahl Rocha

Creativeity and Innovation
For this chapter we have reserved a few observations on the subject of creativity and innovation in architecture in general, and in design processes in particular. For us, this is a particularly sensitive subject, and while we have insisted on persevering in our search for various kinds of balance in our practice, creativity and innovation are issues that we think call for special attention. There is no doubt that having the possibility to innovate is one of the great motivations for architects. At the same time, we are uneasy about being "obliged" to do so. In order to elaborate on this seemingly heretical confession, it may be helpful to distinguish between two manifestations of the notion of innovation. First is innovation in its noblest form, as the response to an essential human impulse to create. We think of innovation as the outcome of a successful creative process, or what we call sustainable innovation. Its importance in our profession is a given, and likewise, the stimulation and pleasure that the creative process brings. The trouble with innovation in this noblest sense is that it has to be self-evident: the problem is not technological or a wipeout of the status quo, but rather the necessity to measure. As Jorge Francisco Liernur put it, "Many of the prominent figures in contemporary architecture seem to be in a frenetic rush to turn the discipline into one more instrument in a world dominated by the accelerated consumption of images."

The second force that lays claim to innovation for its own sake is a cultural phenomenon, one that stems in one way or another from the demands of the market economy. As part of the dynamic of consumption and competition, the most obvious example of this phenomenon is so-called "architecture of the spectacle," which, by now a commonplace which at times verges on the obsessive, not only distorts the goals of architecture, but in many cases also devalues the creative process altogether as it culminates in what Jorge Francisco Liernur has called "innovations" that are superficial.

The Trouble with Innovation
Two forces pressure us with the demand for innovation as an end in itself. First, there are expectations—our own, and those of others—that we will deliver an original and "genius" performance in our work. As a matter of fact, a work of architecture, in spite of being a service to society, is also a way for the auteur-architect to satisfy the ego, that is, to demonstrate that he is different, and if possible, better than other architects. The needs of the ego are not necessarily in conflict with good architecture, but when satisfying the ego becomes a priority, one runs the risk that the balance between the two, along with the mission entrusted to us by society, will be undermined, leading to the dubious results we all have observed. José Antonio Coderch reminded us as long ago as 1960 that "it is not genius we need now," and bearing in mind the fact that genius is not a goal can help us to find this balance.

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Innovation as a demand associated with consumerism goes hand in hand with the phenomenon of premature obsolescence. With the same implacable logic, the novelty that supersedes whatever existed before will be pushed aside by another one in due course, thus generating a vicious circle that would exhaust the cycle of a building, and can be explained only by the logic of consumerism. We know that the "sustainable" management of physical obsolescence in a building can be achieved by respecting the life cycles of each of its parts. What is less "sustainable" is a building that is still physically stable to lose aesthetic validity, or when it must be replaced by another one whose raison d'être is simply its newness. The opposite of this phenomenon, timeless, the ability to resist time and the need of intervention, is no longer a feature in contemporary architecture which also concerns us in our practice, and which will be discussed further in my reflection on Liernur’s essay.

Another aspect of architecture that overshadows the obsession with the new, apart from beauty, is the simple but intense pleasure of doing things well. A building that achieves excellence in many respects yet is not predicated on newness does not arouse much interest today. The design process for the IMD Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller Center (2005–08) in Lasuenas represents a case in which, from the beginning, we imposed our own vision for the design of the building to be achieved by means of a traditional architectural solution, in fact, the solution that best responded to practical needs turned out to be the most aesthetically convincing one as well, and we often cite this building as being representative of our aesthetic ideals. The design of the SwissTech Convention (2008–14) is an example of the opposite scenario, in which the demand for novelty was part of the brief. From the outset, SwissTech was envisioned as an emblematic building, so our design process involved a deliberate search for a sculptural form with strong unity and identity, but the solution managed to emerge from the spatial and structural logic of the project itself.

The Design Process
The processes of architectural design continue to increase in complexity due to the great quantity and diversity of specialized information that they involve, while at the same time it has increased the need for quality and efficiency in the processes of architectural production and organisation of team work and interdisciplinary collaboration in order to tackle these effectively. Alongside these developments, advances in information technology keep pace, providing the new tools needed to address them. At an organisational level, new technologies propose exchange platforms and building models as a basis for shared work in which different specialists can intervene without increasing the time needed to do the work. Other models permit the optimisation of the design process by simulating alternatives, in terms of architectural form as well as the physical behaviour of buildings, or by analysing information about the actual utilisation of the building in order to incorporate what has been learned in future projects. Another huge advance has been the creation of programs that enable forms to be generated and which are capable of resolving complex geometries. These tools, in addition to the astonishing progress made in the virtual modelling of buildings, have had a significant influence on the evolution of contemporary architecture.

Enthusiasm for the advances implied by all of this, and the almost unlimited possibilities for evolution in the technical and quantifiable aspects of project design have led to instances in which these powerful programs are used not just to resolve individual problems, but in the overall design of architecture. These forays, among which we could cite the example of so-called parametric architecture, are of great experimental value, but at the same time, the results reveal their limits. Paradoxically, despite the fact that such programs have been developed to objectively the process of design and to optimise the response to the particular conditions of the project, they
The notion of exploring the path of collective creativity has led us, more and more frequently, to turn to the study of variants as a systematic methodology. Although in reality such methods turn out to be complex hybridisations, we could describe the process that privileges the elaboration of variants as being the opposite of one that proceeds from a strongly intuitive position. In general, the latter process is the result of individual talent and privileges the inventive moment. It usually provides more original responses, but is difficult to share. The variant method is based on elaborating different solutions for a given problem, which can be fuelled by brainstorming, and allows, step by step, for subsequent analysis, discussion at various stages of the process, and a collective selection of the final solution. The main trouble with this method is that the solutions agreed upon are usually more hybrid and have less "personality" than those that arise from processes in which individual creativity predominates.

The Place of the Inefficient

In our reflections, we have devoted an important part of this book to the notion of beauty, which as we have said, reserves a place for the inefficient, for all that "we cannot speak," but which is perhaps the most important of all. If we are to be consistent, when thinking about creativity and the design process, this is one aspect that cannot be ignored. As we mentioned earlier, creativity is very often the result of a process that we do not fully control, although we are aware of it. The blank page may generate a positive creative anxiety of sorts, or on the contrary, an anguish which, along with the pressure of a lack of time, causes us to resort to default solutions. A state of alertness and confidence favours this creative moment, which averts the anguish of the tabula rasa, and which, while it accepts a certain measure of anxiety as a stimulus, adopts a partly passive attitude toward the situation, as if the "spark" might occur spontaneously. Another characteristic of our way of tackling the design process is to let the creative process flow unimpeded, to discuss parameters and constraints, letting the analysis mature without rushing to impose external formal strategies, so that the form emerges from the problem itself. These are extremely intense moments in architecture, when the designer, whether individual or collective, tries to minimise the traces of his own hand, as if the work was born by its own means. In poetry, as Rafael Alberti has suggested, one should not notice the making of it.

Sustainable Creativity

At the beginning of these reflections, we made reference to our preoccupation with establishing conditions that are conducive to the development of collective creativity in circumstances where the urgent needs of the profession also have their own priorities, which do not always proceed in the same direction. This preoccupation has led us to confront, in collaboration with consultants from outside, the task of revising the working methods and organisation of the studio by placing the emphasis on the specific issues incumbent upon creative activity like ours. From this analysis and these first reflections, which will serve as a basis for advancing in that direction, and which may be summed up in the notion of "sustainable creativity." By this, we mean creativity linked to the reality of the problem posed, and with the ambition of innovation as the successful outcome of the creative process and not as an end in itself.

The first question this poses is that of balance between the value of experience and knowledge on one hand, and spontaneity and innocence on the other, as the means of liberating creative potential. A condition of creativity, it was suggested, would be "knowing what one is talking about;" namely, relying on the depth of the particular knowledge that is required in a given situation – calling to mind gist of the Adiós Locos' story about the master rough" are subjected to in-depth critical discussion among a team which acts as a "collective creative subject." It is under these circumstances that the collective creative subject has the opportunity to construct a personality or identity of its own, something which has traditionally been reserved for the creative individual.

In the "inventive moment," individual genius predominates in its fundamental contribution and underlines the importance of tuning in and being at one with the inspiration that arrives. In the "selective moment," the role of individual genius in the process of design is obviously diminished. As if to deny this, paradoxically, contemporary culture tends to elevate the cult of the individual creator, and it is precisely this tendency which makes it possible to imagine an evolution of architecture as just another industrial product. In this hypothetical scenario, the figures of the architect might survive in the form of a "brand" personifying a product, even though in actuality he would have little presence or agency in its conception and production, both processes having been effectively depersonalised.

The importance of technological advances would be misinterpreted were we to see in them the solution to the problem of the built domain, since as we know all too well, this includes a cultural dimension which goes way beyond technology. In the same sense, it is important that enthusiasm for these remarkable advances does not lead to contempt for intuitive forms of knowledge as something primitive that must be superseded. On the contrary, it is as important to master and understand these intuitive and artisanal methods, as it is the new devices of design, and the challenge is to incorporate them in the collective creative process.

The Challenge of Collective Creativity

At a purely practical level, new technologies are being incorporated into professional work as effective tools, and at the present time, for us it is a matter of deciding whether or not to entrust formal decisions to the computer, than a challenge to develop new modes of participation and organisation to deal with design work undertaken by teams. In our case, the challenge has been to adapt the dynamic of the design process gradually, in response to the increasing complexity, scale, and number of projects, and the growing size of the office. This dynamic has evolved over the last two decades from a studio model, in which the substance of the creative process occurred at the level of the individual designer, to an office in which we have attempted to found a collective creative process. By "collective creativity," we mean a process in which various individuals participate at key moments in the design process. Not all of the work of the team involves this sort of experience. A team may develop design processes in which the key moments are the outcome of individual creativity. Experiences of collective creativity pose a challenge not unlike the one posed by the teaching of architecture, that is, to realise the rationalisation to the greatest extent possible a process that is ultimately subjective. It is worth noting in passing that the "strategies" employed in this collective process are crucial to the outcome, hence the importance of understanding them fully in order to adapt them to our needs and objectives. In general, architects consciously or unconsciously keep some of the reasons and causes behind a design idea to themselves, and it is important for the success of the collective process to make the effort to identify and share these.

In trying to understand the collective creative process, the distinction José Antonio Marina has drawn between the "inventive" and the "selective" moment is illuminating. In the "inventive moment," individual genius predominates and its fundamental contribution is undeniable. It is worth, however, taking time to focus on the potential of the selective moment, which overlaps with the inventive, but is an activity that can be rationalised and therefore more easily shared. In the selective moment, ideas that arise spontaneously during the inventive moment are evaluated, analysed, discussed, and validated or rejected. This is the moment when ideas in the
craftsmen who, when presented with a new design by an artist, remarked to the effect that, “If I know so little about my trade, I, too, would have fantasies.” The second question refers to the relationship between designers and their work, and the importance of being fully integrated in the creative process and receiving the feedback necessary to stimulate creativity. In our case, this means that although they might intervene in only a part of the process, it is important for architects to take an interest in the process as a whole, and above all, to gain an understanding of the buildings as it has been realised and in terms of its actual use. The third question, it seems, is the “temps” of creativity. We agree that a lack of time works against creativity, but at the same time we know that during the creative process, it is frequently under the pressure of a deadline that hesitations give way to valid ideas. It is important that one not act hastily, but rather take one’s time, especially in the early stages of the process. What is also important is the need to control anxiety, and to know when to draw to a halt, if necessary, and to take distance. This taking of distance is also conducive to a serene vision of the road that has been travelled, and to the possibility of incorporating new ideas that have emerged from the process itself.

A corollary risk, albeit one which is not limited to the matter of temps, is that of succumbing too rapidly to the search for solutions or responses to a given problem instead of concentrating from the start on asking the right questions. This is directly related to the need for a good cachet des charges, or brief, as a starting point for getting the creative process off to a good start. Finally, we realise that one of the main forces working against creativity is the demotivation caused by the pressures and tribulations of day-to-day activity.

The Teaching of Architecture

Like so many other architects, our engagement with higher education is an important complement to our professional activities. In schools of architecture, many professionals like ourselves come together to teach and share experiences. These schools are the place where discussions and research in the discipline naturally take place, since the demands of day-to-day work do not always provide the time or the conditions necessary for such activities. In addition to the great stimulus that is derived from sharing and discussing our experiences, the relationship with the academic world helps us to maintain a permanent state of critical awareness and to foment an investigative spirit in our work. In return, our professional activity enables us to offer the experience of the kind of information and raw material indispensable to teaching, research, and theory.

Among the benefits this exchange has brought, we wish to mention first the permanent process of learning involved in the teaching of architectural design. As we have mentioned, the demands of collective creativity, the fact of having to share, and to share the process of design with students, obliges us to make a continuous effort to understand and to rationalise a process we have profoundly internalised as an intuitive tool. It is a process comparable to psychoanalysis, which attempts to understand the conscious and unconscious motivations of a behaviour process, in order to be able to restrain it. Going back to this experience, we believe there to be a possibility that computers might act “creatively” on design, they would do so on the basis of a profound understanding of these mechanisms. For the time being, science has not managed to explain the mysteries of creativity.

Relations between the professional and academic worlds also provide us with an opportunity to nourish practice with reflection, and vice versa. These schools are the place where discussions and research in the discipline naturally take place, since the demands of day-to-day work do not always provide the time or the conditions necessary for such activities. In addition to the great stimulus that is derived from sharing and discussing our experiences, the relationship with the academic world helps us to maintain a permanent state of critical awareness and to foment an investigative spirit in our work. In return, our professional activity enables us to offer the experience of the kind of information and raw material indispensable to teaching, research, and theory.

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Reading Liernur

Ignacio Dahl Rocha
In the spirit of the integral vision that inspires it, we would not consider this book complete without mentioning the contribution of the critic and historian Jorge Francisco Liernur, who has followed our work with generous consideration. In the introduction to his essay, Liernur establishes the fundamental criticism, one that constitutes a lucid and overarching commentary on the work that has evolved: “The vast majority of architects in the world, that is to say all but a few rare exceptions, are not called upon to propose unique works that embellish global cities, or which seek to fixate the promise of happiness.”

**Archaisms**

“And the interesting thing is that the one of Richter Dahl Rocha achieves the second condition: it takes on a narrative function and, starting from the image that we have described as its ‘distinction and difference,’” a resistance “based on a nostalgic originality … involves, instead, a clear awareness of the conventional basis of architecture, as a resistant otherness, a resistance ‘based on a nostalgic compulsion to propel the existence of a discipline that might otherwise seem destined to disappear’.”

The first “distinction and difference” that Liernur points up in our work with respect to the contemporary context is that “its singularity actually resides in the fact that it does not draw attention to its singularity, but almost in the same moment that we would up disregarding it as merely commercial or de-jú, it obliges us to perceive our oversight by engaging us with a subtle resource that we hadn’t noticed or grasped at first glance. Unlike the strong images that abound in contemporary architecture magazines, images capable of grabbing our attention in an obvious or aggressive way, the resistance we perceive in the work of Richter Dahl Rocha is mysterious, barely perceptible, and requires a concerted effort to be ‘incorporated.’” What he calls a “reaction of resistance” is then analysed in the context of the Swiss and Argentinean traditions of the founders of the studio, and in relation to the socioeconomic and professional context of our work. Liernur’s vision also expresses a certain besiderness in the face of what we have described as “imbalances” in the contemporary cultural context in which we operate.**

**Spectacle and Architecture**

In a chapter devoted to the theme of architecture as spectacle, Liernur describes this process of profound change in the very nature of architecture, quoting, among others, Kurt Forster, who metaphorically compares the transformation of our discipline to the moment “when reptiles grow skin and feathers on their legs and turn into birds.”

An example of these “feathers” would be the new status of image-givers architects are tending to adopt, encouraged by the demands of a society that privileges the facile consumption of images over the tangible and lasting experience of architecture.

Liernur argues that while this might be true (and in another part of his text ventures to say that “in this, one stokes the meaning of the actual existence of the discipline”), architecture’s imminent disappearance cannot be predicted on such grounds. He cites examples such as urbanism or industrial design, which once belonged to the discipline and eventually subordinated to technics. He also argues that there is a right to accept or to reject the “world of the spectacle” and cites Kenneth Frampton, for whom “architecture can only survive as a form of critical culture, as a resistant otherness,” a resistance “based on a nostalgic compulsion to propel the existence of a discipline that might otherwise seem destined to disappear.”

Reading Liernur
globalisation, this capacity or vocation for resistance is undoubtedly put to the test, and I would venture to say that it, the meaning of the very existence of the discipline is at stake.20

Liernur mentions two specific conditions of architecture that it is required to "resist": one would be the idea of form being "resistant to" the passage of time, which Adolf Loos formulated when he argued that, due to the nature of its production, architecture could not be assimilated to the processes of other commodities of transitory use; the other would be the need for "common codes" within the discipline that make, what Liernur calls architecture as institution possible. "That is why an architectural act like the one, which, in my opinion, Richter Dahl Rocha are carrying out and that it says nothing about the potentiality of permanent" by limiting itself to the pursuit of pure presence, nor fail to come to terms with the inherited past. It is this requirement that causes the work to enter into dialogue with the masterworks of the past... Every creator, according to Hannah Bock, struggles to attain the level of the masterworks that preceded him, and only in achieving this can he think about a new opening.21

"The Principle of Hope" Among the central issues laid out in the essay, there also appears the search for Beauty. I have already quoted Liernur's comment with reference to our body of work, that "no other glue than that of the search for beauty for Beauty. I have already quoted Liernur's comment with reference to our body of work, that "no other glue than that of the search for beauty is not only saying that he likes it, as he might like a plate of food, for example. If I find something beautiful, then I want to say that it's beautiful. Or as Kant would say, "I demand universal agreement."23 Liernur points out that the agreement as to human in-unison which forms the basis of Beauty has no spatial or temporal boundaries and generates a "presence" that also endows beauty with the capacity to oppose the susceptibility to consumption that defines objects as commodities. "We would not raise the question of beauty if we did not share a bewildering experience of it with other generations, and even other places." In conclusion, and before moving on to illustrate his comments with examples from our work, Liernur adds: "I think that, if the work of Richter Dahl Rocha can be accused of something by those who do not share those criteria, it is precisely its beauty. In it, one perceives a powerful desire for reunion, order, harmony, balance, proportion, stability, timeliness, measure, grace, elegance, certitude, and consequence that the buildings we consider to be beautiful arouse in us. Of course and we are suspect from the viewpoint of an important fringe element in contemporary criticism, but what for some constitutes a demerit, turns out to be for us, fortunately, for the reasons suggested above, an example of rare and necessary virtue."24

"On silence" As I mentioned in the chapter on Beauty, one of the most significant contributions of Liernur's essay is his revaluation of balance and moderation as possibilities of intense aesthetic resonance, a phenomenon which, as he points out, run counter to contemporary aesthetic ideals. Quoting Antonio Gramsci: "It is too easy to original by doing the opposite..."25

In Barthes' terms, "the Neutral doesn't refer to impressions of greyness, of neutrality, of indifference. The Neutral – my Neutral – can refer to intense, strong, unprecedented states... the right of emotion and distance... In short, a well-behaved Eros, restrained, reserved."26 Liernur immediately reminds us that while the work of Richter Dahl Rocha does not have a violent impact on us, neither does it suggest absolute silence, in the sense of an absence of a communicativeocation,27 and here he returns to Barthes, who distinguished between the Latin words tacere, the deliberate act of remaining silent, and silere, the passive silence of objects and of natural phenomena. In light of this distinction, "the Neutral would be neither art by permanent silence, which is static, nor dogmatic, which would become the signature of an affirmation (‘I am systematically taciturn’), but an attitude which is the minimum of a speech act meant to neutralise silence as a sign... I believe that Richter Dahl Rocha’s modes operandi consists precisely of this, of attaining the silence of things (buildings) such that they offer themselves up to us in the ‘state of balance’ proper to Beauty, but by adjusting or reducing the speech act to the extreme, that is to say, remaining silent long enough to neutralise [their] silence as a sign.”28 Finally, commenting on our design for the House of Novel building, Liernur invites us to take a last step toward understanding this modes operandi, concluding his essay with the following question: "What manifestation could be more eloquent than working toward the existence of a presence whose maximum intensity is attained precisely when it is reduced to almost total absence?"29

Retomando el camino

Ignacio Dahl Rocha
In the course of these essays we have reflected on a series of changes that are transforming the discipline of architecture in a significant manner. What are the questions suggested by these reflections? Is architecture yielding to a process of mutation that will lead to something new and perhaps better, which we must comprehend and to which we must adapt? Or are we living through a time of decadence that could incite more radical reactions and give rise to cultural changes more profound than the ones we imagine? And what should be our attitude toward all of this? We find ourselves hesitant, on one hand caught up in the optimism of the sciences and technology, whose headlong rush into the future assumes humanity’s insatiable curiosity will lead to a better future, though it may take us down very different paths than those we already know; on the other hand, we contemplate the general panorama with the pessimism and nostalgia of the humanities, resisting certain tendencies in contemporary culture where we recognise the erosion of certain fundamental values of our discipline.

While this view may be interpreted as negative, even reactionary, we prefer to interpret resistance as a critical and responsible attitude, a direct expression of our vested interest in what we have called “sustainable creativity.” A certain resistance based on the historical and institutional foundations of our discipline and on a strong commitment to reality should not prevent us from “enquiring with intensity,” as Mangado has observed. On the contrary, we see it as indispensable. We cannot know if this resistance is a futile attempt to slow down an inevitable process of disciplinary evolution, or if it has the virtue of anticipating problems that not only architects, but all of society will sooner or later have to confront.

Notwithstanding its dynamism and ambition, most of contemporary architectural culture does not appear to be committed to a critical stance vis-à-vis the degradation of the built environment. It has not even advanced, as in times past, utopias or ideals that would stimulate architectural culture to put forward a determined effort to build a better world. In effect, the culture of architecture has become out of touch to the extent that the most consistent and stimulating “ideals” it offers today have more to do with the notion of “sustainable development,” in the sense of the need to reduce the “negative impact” of architecture on the environment, than with its fundamental raison d’être as the setting for human and social life, that is, for our collective existence.

As a sustainable and collective project, Richter Dahl Rohra has engaged a new generation of architects who will continue along the road that lies ahead. We count on them to discover the new “lines of enquiry.” The hypothesis that has emerged from this reflection that went into the making of this book is that the more we base ourselves on reality, the more sustainable will be the creative freedom to which we aspire, and the more firmly we anchor ourselves in the “fundamentals” of our discipline, the more room we have to exercise that freedom. In this regard, it is important to recall the observations of José Antonio Marina, in particular his comments about contemporary culture’s failure to engage with reality, its tendency to seek only escape from it, and to devalue it by means of parody, irony, and even cynicism, which finally leads to its own self-devaluation. “In effect, this freedom,” he concluded, “cannot be won with contempt.”

As Liernur’s reflections on beauty suggest, in the broadest sense, the aspiration to creative freedom is propelled by the stimulus that comes with the notion of utopia, with the hope for a better world – not only its possibility to become actual, but its power to cultivate an attitude that does not yield to the world, but makes a commitment to institutions and daily work. Taking up once again our own metaphor, the form of hope inherent in beauty has to do with what we have called architecture’s ultimate, albeit secret meaning, precisely founded on the vocation for service as its first and most urgent reason, in short, the challenge of creating a more propitious environment for human life and in doing so, if possible, to procure Beauty.