

Now, today, in a radius of two kilometers

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There is a rare synchronicity in the moment we live. Almost for the first time, something is happening to us together and at the same time. We are all in the same boat, each one from a situation where class relations have been revealed in an even cruder way. But also what seemed impossible has become possible overnight. The pandemic has opened a crack in reality, the blanket of obviousness that covers everything has been torn. It has happened to us like Jim Carey, the main character of the film *The Truman Show*, who ends up ripping the set where he lives. We have realized that the setting in which we live can be separated from the structure that supports it, that the economy can be stopped in one just one strike, that the inertias that we imagined do not exist. The emergency brake that Walter Benjamin was demanding has been applied.

Until now it was easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Let's remember those images of Asian tourists crossing the San Marco Square in Venice with water up to their waists, trying to save their Gucci bags. Today it seems that things have turned around, and it is almost as easy for us to imagine the end of capitalism as well. In fact, this is the starting point of some encounters that we have had these days in the small village of Lachaud in central France. This initiative is called *Matériaux pour les écoles de la Terre*.

During this summer, in many places there are encounters of this type, but this year it also seems that it is possible to think of something like a generalized change of desire. It seems that the pandemic is giving us the opportunity to start over.

Precisely at a time when technology had been absent us from the place where we were, it turns out that space has broken into our lives in a very concrete way. We have been aware of the proxemia between bodies, of the space that separates us and unites us to others. Starting with that meter, meter and a half, or five meters. We have also been aware of the volume of our breath or the trail we leave behind when walking.

Paradoxically, distancing has achieved what decades of environmental struggle has not done, showing us in our own flesh to what extent we are, as Yayo Herrero would say, radically interdependent, how we are part of a chain of scales between the micro of viruses and bacteria and the macro of the territory and the climate.

In this context, we can perceive that architecture always occupies a scale in between what exists, which causes architecture to be affected, on the one hand, by the bodies that build and inhabit it, and on the other, by the territory in which it is located. We could understand architecture as an area around our bodies, which is crossed by all kinds



of flows and meanings, both cultural and material. Well, in this intermediate position, there is a possibility that I think, has been little explored until now and that is that architecture can make visible, precisely, that interdependence of everything that surrounds us.

In fact, during confinement we have had a peculiar experience of our homes and what it is like to inhabit it. The house has behaved like a submarine from which we perceived the world. We have felt its volume, its walls, its orientation towards the sun, its narrowness and corners. There have even been online dance classes that have focused on rediscovering those little forgotten spaces in the house with new eyes.

Perhaps they have made us want to open a hole in the street, to capture more sun or see more of the horizon. Or maybe it happened to us like the character in the movie *Themroc*, played by Michel Piccoli, in which a worker who was fired from a factory arrives at his building and, taking a mace, begins to open a huge hole towards the neighborhood courtyard. This action ends up spreading and transforming that courtyard. In reality, the opening of this hole, born of anger but also of joy, is nothing more than an invitation to open spaces of life.

Perhaps during confinement we have realized that the house is, in addition to a shelter against the elements, a framework from which to observe the world; a conceptual shelter that exerts an enormous influence that it exerts on us. In fact, there has been talk of the cabin syndrome. And it is because every lived space confronts us with the origin of architecture and living.

In the etymology of *building* we will find that it originally means *to inhabit*, in addition to other meanings, such as shelter and cultivate. Living and building are therefore twinned, in fact it is the way we inhabit that originally led us to build.

Well, this has been the starting point of an exercise we did at the Madrid School of Architecture, where I was commissioned to do a workshop.

The exercise was entitled *The Observatory*, and we did it during the weeks of the lockdown. It consisted of taking over an area of the house and operating transformations in it that intensified the relations between the interior and the exterior. There were students who occupied part of the kitchen and the window with gadgets, or who transformed their bedrooms and their relationship with the street. A student colonized the bathtub of the house for several days and transformed it into a living ecosystem that gave rise to testing other forms of life that would emerge during the pandemic. The exercise consisted of filming this situation creating a narrative, and these videos can be seen in their blogs attached here.

We worked on these interior fictions—at home—but we also made fictions about how the city would transform. For this we somewhat imagined ourselves in the worst that could happen to us from this health and ecological crisis that we are going through, and then



we put ourselves in the best. In the end, these exercises tried to radically situate ourselves in the moment we were living in order to give a way out to what was happening to us.

And I think this is a bit of what has happened to many of us. I think that confinement, followed by those outings that we were later allowed to do, have been a time when all kinds of things have crossed our minds. At least on these walks I was looking for and following the small water courses that have formed this spring, and in that kilometer or two I discovered areas that I had never been to. There, almost without wanting to, I imagined the orchards that we could make for this next spring. I also know that there have been people who have met in the woods...

We could say that in this time we have almost had an experience of the collapse that seems to be announced in our societies. And this on an individual level has led us, without raising our voices much, to reimagine how to reorganize ourselves, at least during the pandemic.

Surely in that one kilometer radius, even in urban areas, we will have seen wild plants that have surprised us and that are part of that planetary garden, that garden in movement to which the landscaper and gardener Gilles Clément alludes.

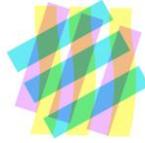
Perhaps we have been aware of that portion of the planet that we occupy, which is a very thin layer where life is possible, and which begins a few inches below our feet, and rises to a certain height above our heads. A layer that Bruno Latour has called the critical zone, alluding to its fragility and its limits. Today almost all of us have already realized, as this sociologist says, that our greatest challenge as a society is to learn new ways of living on earth.

Those new ways are a bit already enunciated. Governments and corporations, and also ourselves, delay the moment to start, because as Jorge Riechmann says: *we do not believe what we know*.

And the indices tell us that we should be reducing greenhouse emissions of the order of 7% annually already this year. Or that if we want to be realistic and take charge of the imminent end of oil, we should reduce the car fleet to 3% of the current one, that is, we should go towards a complete reorganization of our societies.

Those who are analyzing all this say that for adaptation to climate change to be done from social justice, what we would need is to apply something like a war economy that redistributes everything.

Well, in this context of chain crisis in which we are entering, we would have to recover activities that we had outsourced or that had been expropriated from us. And the action of building is one of them, and it is also part of the chain of actions that connects us with life: building, collecting, cultivating, cooking, manufacturing, weaving, tracing, drawing, taking in air, talking, inventing stories. ...



It is curious that the one who has done the most to put the tools of architecture to the test in this new context have not been precisely the architects. In the last 10 years, we have seen forms of claim appear in different parts of the planet and in very different ways. These movements can be said to have taken the tools of architecture, testing the extent to which living and building is a form of resistance. In that year 2011, the Arab Spring began with the occupation of squares, followed by many others such as the 15 M or *Nuit Debout*, etc., and almost at the same time, the ZAD (zones to defend) appeared in forests and many other places at risk.

In light of these experiences, I think that from professional architecture we should ask ourselves again about the powers of the action of building houses. How architecture is intertwined with collective desires. We need to think about what architectures fit the common world that we need to compose. We need to think about the what but above all the how.

And it is because these experiences have shown us that the tools of architecture are capable of weaving links, not between existing realities, as they did in the past, but between scattered fragments, between people who come from here and there. Showing that it is not the community that builds something but that it is the action of building that creates the community.

We should be able to feel in all architecture that we inhabit, a living planet that is in cyclical movement, that is extraordinary and fragile at the same time. And for this we should be able to do these transformations with our own hands, understanding them from the body. We should today, right now, go to recover the communal lands of the place where we are, and if they had already been sold, reclaim them, or invent new ones.

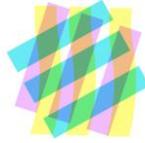
Finally, I want to read some excerpts by Marielle Macé, from a very beautiful book that came out in 2019 and is called *Our cabins (Nos cabanes)*. It is written from these camp experiences in recent years:

Making cabins: imagining ways to live in this damaged world. Finding, landing on the ground, in a fighting space.

Cabins, not to withdraw from the world, not to stand on the sidelines, not to turn away from the conditions of the present. Not a burrow in a preserved place that makes us believe that we are spinning with a primal architecture, but to stand up to this world of looting. Make cabins on the edges of cities, in your heart, in camps.

Huts to defend, huts that are themselves a plaza. Cabins that are economically and ecologically sober but rich in senses.

CIUDADES
POSPANDEMIA



POST-PANDEMIC
CITIES

Cabins to challenge precariousness, to oppose convictions, Cabins that materially claim another world to which they already appeal and put to the test.

Make huts, but of ideas instead of willow branches, with stories instead of things. As ways to rethink space, time, action, links.

Cabins to challenge this world, inhabit it in other ways, widen it...