

Post-Pandemic Cities #11.

An affective line

Mauro Gilfournier. Affectives Architectures

Thank you MUSAC. Thank you Kristine, Eneas. Thank you for joining me. You have all been great company during this quarter. Resounding at different times, in an inspiration that has been fuelling these three months since you requested the recording. In a way, it saddens me to have to record this, because it means that this process will be over... and yet another will begin.

It is mid-April, what we hope is now the last part of a pandemic that we are slowly vaccinating against. I am speaking to you from my home, from outside the city of Madrid. On one side, the city is laid out like an object that I can almost touch with my finger. A panoramic object but one that is impenetrable to the eye. Through Casa de Campo, I can reach two places in the city with my imagination.

One is a terrace in the centre of Madrid that, little by little, turns green and takes root; its habitat is multiple and diverse all the time. It is an exciting project where some plants accompany the growth of their inhabitant.

The other is a very cared for space, where we share moments of work, calm, healthy meals and after-dinner hours. In it, little by little, the need to design a garden that is productive rather than human is revealed. A place to contemplate the beauty of reproduction, of simultaneous growth. Our children grow up in cities, but with whom do they grow up? We age, but accompanied by whom or what? On the basis of these examples I thought about the following questions. Can we create an environment that, in addition to allowing ourselves to grow as people, allows other beings to grow? Other living things? What are we capable of caring for and sustaining?

The pandemic is an urban impasse, a period of time in which we must attend to something that goes beyond ourselves, and that makes us question ourselves. Where do we want to live? Who do we want to live with? From the affective architectures, we have drawn up a plan for 2021 that asked us: in this emergency situation, who do I want to accompany me? Who do I not want to accompany me? What objects have I taken with me in this pandemic year? What fears inhabit me to make decisions about my life, about that of others? In addition, what promises do I make to myself that I know I'm not going to be able to keep or that don't even do me any good. Of course, all of these questions have material, spatial and urban reflections. All these questions lead to the value or denial of one of the important questions, individually and as a planetary society. Where are we?

The pandemic has already caught me in a personal and professional impasse, which has allowed me to face it by questioning "Where am I?" A place of personal and territorial enrichment. Valuing my own home first, and recognising myself in a place that shelters me. Then there is the area in front of my house. A previously reviled wasteland, now it is a place that I view as a location that grows and changes as I change. A possibility for the city. Perhaps the only one for a resilient becoming. Behind this open field, one can access the Casa de Campo and there, together, she and I, we lived throughout the loneliness of this period. There were also the walks that the law did not allow us to take, the inaccessible possibility of storm Filomena, and today the care taken in the work of picking and chopping up all those branches and trees that could not stand the onslaught of snow.

The reforested pine landscape could not handle Filomena because it is an unreal landscape. It is a mirror of ourselves as a society. A patriarchal plantation, I would say. The pine seems to be the only male of the possible species in the Iberian ecosystem, if it is not capable of harbouring other species and other bio-complicities in the ecological succession.

In this process and this time since the affective architectures, we have developed a programme for the 21st century's cities and territories that are actually based on not growing as humans through the urbanism that we are familiar with, so that others can grow. Our programme, called #cambium, is an urban, political and affective agenda that seeks, for example, the right for the forest to be a place from which to design the city. Where the forest and the city are not antagonistic entities. Where the urban is not the exclusion of the wild, and the forest is not a refugee camp for plant species, as Emanuele Coccia would say. A forest so diverse, where Filomena is not an engine of destruction, but instead the energy of intense life that nourishes the plateau's winter with water. A forest where EVERYTHING forms part of it, roads, infrastructures, neighbourhoods, people, etc. A city in which all its citizens have the right to a space to connect with what is alive and what grows close to home, and not just homogeneous and deserted parks. My privilege of having the open field in front of my house can be a prompt for the city that is to come.

From this territory in which I live, on the outskirts of Madrid, I imagine the terrace and the garden inside the city and the spaces outside it with the same intensity. And I think during this text of the city of León, and of the towns beyond the city of León. And I am able to understand that the post-pandemic city is a line that links the small terrace in the centre of Madrid with a small town of León. And "small" is important here, because the world is narrated on the basis of great feats, but it is built from the fragility of our small acts. Therefore, the post-pandemic city for me is a continuous line that connects the aforementioned terrace in the centre of Madrid with a town in León. Developing this thread can make cities, towns and territories more liveable places in the near future.

And how do we do this?

My work as an architect has been transforming for years to stop understanding space based on those spatial categories of exteriority that have marked us so much, that outside our body is a house, and then the street and the square, the public space, the city, the territory and nature described in *The Horla* by Guy de Maupassant. This has also given rise to disciplines based on the size and scale of things, from the fashion or interior designer, to the architect, the urban planner or the landscaper or geographer. And to be able to begin to understand that our work has more to do with the links that we want to reproduce than with the scales of "Where do we do it?" And in this way, where are we designing from? This becomes a binding question.

ABOUT THE DESIGN

Cities and urban territories have a possibility that has not been explored in much depth, which is to think of others. Design does not exist but is linked to the life of others. This means that the design process is not only for the benefit of people, but that the life of other beings, trees, animals, insects is also design. Everything, so that the city and the urban do not exhaust their possibilities of existing.

The affective architectures that I propose make sense when one thinks that the process of life and design are the same thing. To live is to design. Designing infrastructures as complete systems that should serve our changing lives.

"As architects and designers, we must be able to practice calm listening that makes it possible for other beings to design as well"

Change is letting other people, beings, and living things design collaboratively. Listen calmly, so that what others say, do, express and feel is the driving force behind our design. Species design, take care of each other. Learn to listen on the spot so others can design. We should also listen from the fragility of life in the pandemic. Our role is to listen and pay attention and be present. For affective architectures, that is designing.

This is why I think affective architectures are more necessary than ever. And it needs to be said today, given the rise of emotions in a public, political and economic space dominated by emotional capitalism, designed to increase productivity, predictability and performance. It is today that we need enough attention so as not to succumb to the emotional contamination that we are immersed in on a daily basis. Based on what has been called critical affective theory, but above all based on opening to the possibility of experiencing an idea: reducing unrelated ties can help us reduce the consumption of finite planetary resources to inhabit an abundance of new affective resources that are yet to be discovered. The affective is today a form of resistance to unrelated emotionality; in search of strong and constant emotions. Affective architectures are the journey that I embark on, with all its consequences, as a proposal for being in the world. A way to inhabit my life practice in the experience of affecting the bond of life. To be with it, inside and outside of me.

Affective architectures are my way of naming the ecology of the affects that we manufacture when we decide to spatialise ourselves in the world. It is a round trip between the materiality of our houses, our offices, our cities and the place from which we make individual and collective decisions that link our spatial and material processes in a given place, be this geographic or digital. It establishes dialogues and commitments with what I call affective materialism, where the question about space once again becomes a binding question. What body am I capable of inhabiting? What houses inhabit me? Is there a city or an urban environment that can sustain me and that does not drain my biological energy?

For this reason, designing is paying attention, listening, to detect the affective realities that we perceive in ourselves and our surroundings. Drawing what we observe is investigating, it is making drawing a tool of intuition. From there, inhabiting the intentions on the basis of which we do things, all of them; for there is never a single intention. Finally, it is a caring process to open ourselves to new territories.

We know today that architecture also forms us. The material affects us. If this is the case, can we work on developing an affective materialism? Can we think of a material architecture that helps us grow together as a society? And if we are talking about matter, we can also talk about energy, information, knowledge. Biological energy such as that which our body consumes to carry out this or that action. The city today is a place that drains our energy and barely returns it to us. We must modify this energy relationship. The countryside does this too, fields do not exist as city exteriors, like a theme park where we go to buy cheeses and walk outdoors in rural tourism estates. We need balance in all the entities along this continuous line that we inhabit in this conversation between the terrace in the centre of Madrid and that town in the province of León. This change is also material, which for me is an evolution, and I realise that architecture is affective matter. It is affective with the ground it steps on, with the air that surrounds it, with the water it uses or the energy it utilises. It is affective with the people who are, with those who travel through it; with the guests, with those that rarely visit. It also has the memory of those who inhabited it marked in its matter. Architecture is affective with the beings that wander through it, those that cross through it; with those who are near, and with those who are far. With what is present and with what is excluded; with what it cares for and with what it harms. Architecture builds emotional distances with beings and people. Sometimes, it is advisable to move away, other times it is necessary to approach; but you always have to be aware of the distances we build. We design the distance between things. Building distances from the noise around us, we bring distances closer to living things that we cannot feel if we do not listen carefully. In my case, observation and listening make the projects.

I believe that the post-pandemic city is that continuous line that joins a terrace in the centre of Madrid with a town in León. This thread can make cities, towns and territories liveable places in the near future. It involves unravelling that skein of links that make us up to see which real links we want to stay linked to and which ones we do not. Once frayed, it means building from one's own place and, in relation to other entities, bodies, objects, houses, cities, drawing up binding questions. I think that some environments, cities, territories, different ones arise from this place, where:

- Infrastructures are designed to serve life.
- Things can grow simultaneously.

Today we get frustrated at home and our bodies are confined inside, but this is not totally true. There is something a little worse: a continuous house-telephone-brain is formed that causes us as much collective damage as the virus itself and does not allow us to be calm. The amount of information that circulates in the pandemic is precisely what makes the affective possibility of inhabiting that other place to be calm disappear.

The continuous thread of actions that we can build from the small terrace in the centre of Madrid to the small town in León; we need to build it from calm and tranquillity. And today, that is almost a privilege given the structuring conditions that we are living in in this pandemic capitalism. But like other privileges, it is a privilege to be conquered, because from this privilege linked to life, to the cosmos, to ourselves, we can create a more liveable environment. A different place to live.

Thank you to all the people around me for allowing me these reflections: Tirso, María, Marta and many others. Thank you to Eneas and Kristine, to MUSAC, in this process. And now thank you to all of you for listening and being there. Thank you.

Mauro Gil-Fournier. Arquitecturas Afectivas Madrid, April 2021