

Against architecture, by Franco La Cecla

Vasco Nobre Lopes

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The "praxis" of architect is possibly one of the most critical actions in society, both positively and negatively, given its real and social impact on community life. Any project prepared by an architect is consequent, and the spectrum of their action is almost immeasurable.

The book *Against Architecture* by the anthropologist Franco La Cecla (1950) harshly criticises current architectural practice. It raises and provokes debate that confronting social responsibility in constructed urban environments and the authorial and global practice assumed by some architects.

La Cecla argues that, in general, architects are very concerned about their demand, seeking "authorial" recognition and revealing a disproportionate concern for their clients, resulting in little or no consciousness of the social, cultural or political implications that this entails or even the potential of their work as agents of change in society.

"And if the architects were not artists? Why impose a responsibility on them that they do not have? (...) Architects produce the "cherry", despite their work being increasingly essential to the marketing of products, brands, agencies of fashion and tourism or the spectacle for which they work. Anyway, the archistars are nothing more than artists in the service of the powerful of today, useful for establishing "trends", useful for surprising and attracting the public with findings that are not even buildings but staging, huge billboard advertisings crumpled to form museums... headquarters of communication agencies and the occasional spectacular disneyfied neighbourhood. So why involve them? After all, they do the work of a humble modern artist: play with the forms and shapes in the space granted to them, nothing more than a formal exercise, maintaining the gymnastics of good taste" (p. 31).

The considerations that La Cecla uncompromisingly reports, which are sometimes satirical, are the result of the experience of his career and of his relationship with architects. It is like a logbook, connecting seemingly divergent themes or opposite poles, but he creates arguments in favour of his position in relation to architecture.

The mega realism of Rem Koolhaas and his *ArchiPrada* branding is harshly criticised in this book for the exploitation of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) and the

brandisation of architecture. It then advances through themes, such as the crisis experienced in 2005 in the suburbs of Paris:

" When the crisis broke out in France, it became evident that not only ordinary citizens, but also adetti ai lavori – journalists, architects, administrators, politicians – are not able to defend the existence of the peripheries and, at most, the acceptable debate concerns the way to intervene to demolish or correct the structural effects " (p. 92).

In the chapter *Crema Catalana*, an incursion into Barcelona is made, namely the Sagrera project commissioned by the Barcelona General at the invitation of Josep Acebillo. Here, La Cecla tried to print the project to human dimensions in order to reveal the "way of life" of a neighbourhood and its environment, Sagrera/Sant` Andreu, Verneda/San Martin and surrounding areas.

Again, his criticism is the end result of the project, because in spite of its initial research work, the result was a set of policies to be implemented by the Barcelona General. These were never put into place in favour of the evolution of the territory. The model that was eventually implemented was not in the spirit and way of living of Catalan, nor with its vitality.

Several other experiences are reported throughout the book, including his relationship with Renzo Piano and his project for the University of Columbia in the neighbourhood of Harlem. In the passage by Tirana, Milan and Palermo, a comparative look at the city of Bangalore is taken:

"Cities are subject to a Medi(se)tização under the name of cultural activities, major events a voracious vacuum transform into an image pure of services that miss, the house that is unbuilt, the parks that are forgotten. Milan, Palermo and Naples are models perhaps even more advanced than Bangalore, because they represent the dissolution of the city as a physical entity and its replacement (in the agonising presence of the city) by its sellable simulacrum" (p.122).

Throughout his book, Franco La Cecla weaves in numerous comparisons and generalisations that are sometimes little justified and not always detailed. So there is little reference to youth practices of architecture that are currently being developed, which eventually will be more radical than those of renowned architects referred to by the author.

"...Attentive, lively, deep, connoisseurs of forms of life and types of dwelling, the concrete visionaries, scientists of the human "(p.127).

Against Architecture concludes with a vitality of impetus. It is true that throughout the book the author criticises, with heavy artillery, architecture and their acting agents, denouncing projects that do not benefit the city or inhabitants. Nevertheless, in the last chapter, *The margins of Alegeria*, La Cecla writes with optimism, claiming the invention of the city together with a new discipline. This discipline is no more than architecture in a "pure" state, sustained by knowledge, not distorted by the erroneous motives of aggressive economics.



If this new discipline is the real praxis of architecture, means that this took a step back and put his hand on consciousness, returning to be a form to project in the future with all and for all.

"The city is an outstanding place of circulation of a consistent material flowing like a river between the banks of joy" (P.127).

Translation: LA CECLA, Franco - *Against architecture*. (Trad: John Soares) Lisbon: Kaleidoscope 2011.