

“Radical Pedagogies”, an inquiry onto architectural education

Paula Vilaplana de Miguel

The 400-page volume, edited by Beatriz Colomina, Ignacio G. Galán, Anna-María Meister and Evangelos Kotsioris and published by MIT Press this year, brings together, through a multiplicity of authors and case studies from all over the planet, a multifaceted catalogue of pedagogical experiences and educational experiments that explore known and unknown territories in the teaching of architecture and the conception of academic curricula between 1933 and 1987.

“How does one learn architecture?”. Evangelos Kotsioris, assistant curator at the Museum of Modern Art and one of the editors behind *Radical Pedagogies*, asked this question in his introductory remarks during the presentation of the book at the museum this past September. This apparently innocent question is at the core of the 400-page volume edited by Beatriz Colomina, Ignacio G. Galán, and Anna-Maria Meister alongside Kotsioris, published by The MIT Press in 2022. The multitude and heterogeneity of experiences presented in *Radical Pedagogies* refute the very possibility of resolving that inquiry. What the book offers, instead, is an almost encyclopedic catalog of pedagogical adventures, successes, defeats, challenges, and incursions into uncharted territories from the margins of architectural [in] discipline. The *Radical Pedagogies* project refutes any univocal definition of what the architecture curriculum is — or should be. It does so through a massive collection of experiences spanning from 1933 through 1987 with case studies distributed around the globe. Most of the episodes related in the book are centered in the 1960s and 1970s—a testament to the revolutionary drive post-1968 in which architecture schools participated, too. The only constant in the book is the realization that architectural pedagogy has consistently made room for experimentation — a drive unfolded across continents, decades, and ideological pursuits.

As with the case studies it investigates, this research has taken many forms to date: exhibitions, publications, catalogs, symposia, workshops, debates ... and ultimately a book, a colophon to a colossal mass of discoveries. Previous iterations of *Radical Pedagogies* had been showcased at the 3rd Lisbon Architecture Triennale, the 14th

Venice Architecture Biennale, and the 7th Warsaw Under Construction Festival to cite a few. The editorial team also learned throughout the process of making the book and the long span of the research behind it helped incorporate, nuance, and strengthen the discussions the book brings to the table. A radical academic endeavor in itself, the project started more than 10 years ago as a Ph.D. seminar at Princeton University led by Beatriz Colomina, who prior to this book had conducted another splendid and revelatory research-turned-book, *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines*, which is to some extent intimately related to this new volume.

Even with its structure, the book challenges the idea of uniformity and offers three pathways to approach the subject, with three different indexes that the reader can refer to. The first path is structured around chapters, fourteen of them in all, including “Counter Hegemonies”, “Alternative Modernizations”, “Schooled by the Building”, “Media Experiments”, “Material Ecologies”, and “Subject and Body Matters”. A second reading of the book is presented by date, in particular, through 5 decades: starting in the 1930s all the way into the 1980s. Then, a geography-based approach refuses colonial dichotomies like North/South and East/West and is instead organized by longitudes, a dynamic, travel reference point, setting the reader in motion as one follows new case studies in a truly global repertoire. The many locations the book takes us to include Algiers, Palestine, Nigeria, Yugoslavia, South Africa, Pakistan, India, China, New Zealand. The pursuit of experimental architectural curricula is a transnational and multinational phenomenon.

Despite the optimism that travels the pages of the book, the editors of *Radical Pedagogies* are at the same time aware of the volatility of these experiences. Rather than praising and idealizing these enterprises, the book works as a reminder of the value inherent to the short-paced rhythm of these dynamic exchanges. For instance, in the introduction of the book, the editors recall a discussion between professor Giancarlo de Carlo — an anarchist — and his students after taking over the Milan Triennale in 1968. Everything is up for discussion and can be contested.

One can sense the passion and enthusiasm behind the making of the book, a contagious spirit that spread through the many channels the book traveled, helping spread the voice. The result was an overwhelming response by contributors, enabling the rich and polyphonic character of the catalogue. The constellation of authors contributing to the book is astonishing, and one will recognize an array of stellar contributors, whose short texts are extremely pleasurable to parse. For instance, Martino Stierli writes about the innovations in architectural representation and disciplinary mingling carried out by Denise Scott-Brown, Robert Venturi, and Steve Izenou in their revolutionary *Learning From Las Vegas* studio at Yale. Beatriz Colomina picks

up on the topic to unveil their following endeavor, the *Learning from Levittown* studio. This seminar, extremely unpopular at the time, equated the suburban home to the commercial strip and anticipated some of the discussions relating to the intrusion of media in the domestic realm which would unfold decades later in architectural discourse. Felicity Scott examines a rare and often overshadowed episode in the history of MoMA under the tenure of Emilio Ambasz. Mabel Wilson reflects on the aftermath of Resurrection City, an encampment designed for the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, DC, in 1968. Ayala Levin details the unlearning and adaptations of colonial rule in design pedagogies in Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Rhodesia, and Kenya in the early 1960s. Andrea J. Merrett writes about the Women's School of Planning and Architecture (WSPA), which enabled a nationwide network of women to fulfill their interest in the built environment despite the gender-imbalanced nature of the discipline at the moment. The school promoted pedagogical mechanisms like critical fantasy to encourage its students to envision alternative, liberatory realities. Samia Henni explores the attempt to teach architecture through practice itself at the Ecole Polytechnique d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme in Algiers following the independence of the country from France in 1962. Farhan Karum nuances the assimilation of modern style in East Pakistan through the work of Richard E. Vrooman and Daniel C. Dunham. Evangelos Kotsioris explores the impact of the Laboratory for Computer Graphics and Spatial Analysis at Harvard University as a precursor of graphic information systems for architectural mapping and analysis.

Two of episodes centered in Spain retrieve the way dissent was crafted through the experimental curriculums in architecture schools during the last years of the Francoist regime. Josep M. Rovira writes about the imprint of Rafael Moneo, Ignasi de Sola Morales, Josep Quetglas, Manuel de Sola Morales at the Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona. The Spanish authorities closed the ETSAB after 1968, a testament to the revolutionary risk that the school represented. Diana Cristobal Olave writes about the Centro de Calculo de la Universidad de Madrid from 1966 through 1975 and the changes prompted by the gift of an IBM 7090 computer to the school. This episode speaks of the interweaving of creativity and algorithms and the push into experimentation under an apparent technocratic curriculum. Rovira and Cristobal Olave are not the only Spanish contributors to the book: Ignacio G. Galán, one of the book editors, recovers the experiments led a the team formed by Alberto Cruz and Godofredo Iommi at the Escuela e Instituto de Arquitectura in Valparaíso, Chile. In search of a specific grammar for architecture, the school initiated a series of experiments in subjective embodiments in which students and faculty took the city as a site for poetic explorations. Ivan López Munuera expands on his years-long research on parties as

spaces for critical subversion with the analysis of the history of the Gay People at Columbia and their “First Friday” parties. Parties, as Ivan López Munuera argues, are often vilified as acritical and banal celebrations, but they have nevertheless proved to be a site for the activation of radical politics. This is wonderfully illustrated through the actions of the Gay People at Columbia (GPC), the first campus gay club in the United States, emerged in a moment when sodomy was still illegal in the state of New York. As López Munuera points out, the extensive research unfolded in *Radical Pedagogies* allows us to see a broader picture of different genealogies and places of emancipation and critical solidarity, and recognize these as collective processes that encompass a wide range of geographies, bodies, and dissonances. In that sense, the book is an invaluable window into contemporary scholarship, offering a glimpse into the most stimulant voices in architecture academia right now.

In summary, *Radical Pedagogies* is a precious testament to the continuous efforts of architectural pedagogy to examine itself critically and of its commitment to experimentation. The timeline the book spans proves that this impulse is at the very core of architectural pedagogy, and has been a constant drive throughout the whole 20th century. The book also refutes any notion of experimentation as a western construct, or the result of isolated heroic chapters of history. Instead, it insists that the history of architectural innovation has been weaved through geographies, generations, and diverse bodies. In the midst of a global health, ecological and political crisis rereading and learning about these moments through contemporary lenses is crucial. Research projects such as *Radical Pedagogies* invite us to ask what the role of architecture schools in shaping architects as engaged practitioners is today. As Evangelos Kotsioris pointed out in his presentation of the book at MoMA, the questions the book raise are of particular value “at a moment when cultural institutions at large ask themselves how to recalibrate their traditional educational missions in favor of public and civic engagement, and new modes of active and exploratory learning.”

Biography

Paula Vilaplana de Miguel is a curator, designer, and scholar based in New York. Her work focuses on exhibition spaces and cultural initiatives, with an emphasis on media, technology, and bodily practices. Her work has been published at *The New York Review of Architecture*, the *Invisible Culture Magazine* at Rochester University, *Arquine*, and the *Het Nieuwe Instituut* and her projects have been featured in press internationally.

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