



RECETAS URBANAS 2018

Affection as a Subversive Architectural Form

**Elvira Dyangani Ose
and Raúl Muñoz de la Vega
in conversation**

Elvira Dyangani Ose: There is something more profuse in the trajectory of *Recetas Urbanas* (Urban Prescriptions) than their projects: the people who intervene in them. Strangers and acquaintances. People from the neighbourhood and beyond. Faces, voices, people. The conversations, the laughter, an occasional shout... all of the above have perhaps as much or even more presence than the noise of drills and hammers. Impromptu questions, stopping all tasks to share an opinion or to take a decision, as well as explaining the aim of a job using an anecdote. And, of course: music, music, music. If there were no structure to be built, the atmosphere would be that of a crowded bar on a Sunday afternoon drinking a 'carajillo' with the concern of having a 'siesta' breathing down our necks. Fast-paced rhythm meets wandering moments in which it seems that absolutely nothing happens. There is a rare collective intimacy in it. A way of building community made into a process that is established in each project. One would think that in the exercise of such a form of architecture there is a challenging spontaneity, but everything is part of an orchestration, which is as meditated as it is wildly free.

The formulation of any urban prescription implies an act of generosity—both from the studio and each of the individuals taking part in its development—transformed into a political gesture, which establishes itself as the condition of possibility

for the generation of a social space. A space that defies what was originally imposed by the political powers that regulate public administration. A social space that vindicates our capacity to intervene, our participatory role, our responsibility in decision-making processes, our capacity as active agents of change. All this while, as Cirugeda establishes, combining an active citizenry with a quality democratic management.

To this end, Recetas Urbanas' proposal of an *anarchitecture* could be observed as the enunciation of what philosopher Henri Lefebvre defines as a *differential space*. *Differential space* is arguably the most activist aspect of his theory of the Right to the City, in which he argues for the need to combat the violent homogeneity of power through *appropriation*.¹ Recetas Urbanas' projects propose subverting the bureaucratic homogeneity that governs our cities and their users' manuals, offering citizens the possibility of taking over a politically dominated technocratic space. Their projects concern both the representation of architecture as much as its theorisation, suggesting that in the practice of everyday, in our social graces, in our desires, in our participation, architecture can express itself as activism, as the catalyst of a profound transformation of administrative, social, political, and educational policies.

Raúl Muñoz de la Vega: I believe that in that sense of participation—active at different levels, lies a key concept. Architect and theorist Henri Sanoff defines the difference between representative and participatory democracy to explain, by analogy, his proposal of architecture and collective urban design. Instead of a representative design—delegated, indirect and inactive—, he proposes a participatory one—active and of direct involvement². In this respect, Recetas Urbanas' collective processes demand a much greater involvement and commitment of the citizen, whereas other models of architecture and town planning do not. And then again, he or she had never been offered so much in return.

More often than not, the studio's processes have a catalyst effect: bringing together desires and expectations, strengthening voices of groups and communities so often weakened,

succeeding in meeting unfulfilled necessities, and rendering certain demands visible. However, that transformative power embedded in many of Recetas Urbanas' prescriptions is not only geared towards citizens, it is also intended to reach public authorities and government bodies, encouraging reflection and the reformulation of their policies and actions on various fronts. Although the studio is often forced to operate in illegal or *alegal* contexts, and seemingly against the public authorities, this does not simply ignite an anti-authoritarian positioning, but rather these strategies, which are carried out without the initial cooperation of the authorities, raise awareness all the while expecting to receive support at a later stage.

In this respect, the projects *Aula Abierta Granada*, *La Escuela Crece* and *Trincheras* exemplify the evolution on how different institutional and government bodies have reacted to the studio's projects. *Aula Abierta Granada* emerged from the desire of students from different schools at the University of Granada to have a student-run space for studio-based practices and debates. The Dean's Office had to be convinced to support the initiative and its potential did not fully materialise due to the rigidity of the institution. As a consequence many of the educational proposals generated in *Aula Abierta* could not be implemented.

With *Aula Abierta Granada* as a precedent, projects such as *La Escuela Crece* and *Trincheras* were instigated by the government bodies of, respectively, the Higher School of Design of Madrid and the Dean's Office of the Fine Arts School in Málaga. Here the institutions provided the necessary means to take on the theoretical knowledge and know-how that came out of the collective building processes.

All Recetas Urbanas' projects lacking institutional or public support at an earlier stage constitute a body of knowledge that Cirugeda denominates *jurisprudencia construida* (built-up jurisprudence). This compilation of previous procedures, this body of knowledge proves that alternative solutions are feasible and effective when facing the mistrust and stagnant bureaucratic culture that so often prevails in public administrations.

Furthermore, it is an antidote to overcome the conformism and discouragement that citizens hold.

EDO: In that sense built-up jurisprudence is an absolute, limitless form of subversion, which establishes each prescription as the condition of the possibility for a new development to emerge, determined by its capacity to adapt to a new scenario, regardless of the specificity of each particular context.

This repertory of previous case studies, this body of knowledge, as you point out, constitutes the representation of *Difference*, a countercultural human revolution bringing together collectives and individuals, managing desires while disrupting administrative policies. It is this formulation of affection as a political act, this network of affective alliances as a form of subversive architecture, that I consider the most important contribution of the studio to the architectural and artistic field but, just as important, to social politics.

Something that comes to mind is the fact that in Recetas Urbanas' architecture, projects lacking initial support from the public authorities, as well as those carried out in artistic contexts—mostly temporary initiatives, e.g. the *Institutional Prosthesis* and *House of Words*—resonate vividly with what sociologist AbdouMaliq Simone calls 'people as infrastructure'. Simone suggests that cities become more productive and effective spaces as a result of the social relationships that are established in them. According to Simone, social, political and economic practices are crucial in the making of capacity for social formation, and to prepare specific players to reach and extend themselves across a more expansive world, and enact the possibilities of urban becoming.³

In this sense, the prescriptions generate a social space, an organic and temporary community, suggesting micro-scenarios that could serve as case-studies for a potential social and administrative transformation at a larger scale. That is to say, the prescriptions do not respond exclusively to the specific context they intervene on but rather generate a typology that

allows its implementation in other contexts. *Recetas Urbanas'* projects incorporate collective experiences and memories into architecture and its design. And that is when architecture turns into questioning, turns into *tekné*, where citizens' approach to a legal and judiciary framework is formulated, triggering renewed paths for self-governance.

There is no project that better illustrates the idea of the prescription as a micro-scenario for the reformulation of the social than the *Cañada Real Social and Community Centre*—which also means the return of *Recetas Urbanas* to an area they had already intervened in 2009 with other members of the network, *Arquitecturas Colectivas*. This is, perhaps, their most complex project to date. Here the studio combines a sustainable building that brings together structures and other materials from previous projects and a proposal for a space in which members of several associations and local residents will gather—we should not forget that *Cañada Real* is a neighbourhood that integrates individuals from multiple origins and economic backgrounds. The greatest challenge resides not in the use of the resulting space, but in the community's capacity to propose, already at the construction stage, a different social space, one of caring and affection, in which these collectives will live together and engage with the various political forces involved in the conception and realization of the project.

Furthermore, *House of Words* as a hybrid between the *Institutional Prosthesis* and the *Aula Abierta*, implied a questioning of the social in the terms mentioned above. It involved more than seventy people from all over the world, who contributed to the design and construction of a place they would not use, but which would welcome others as its main aim. The studio, in collaboration with the artist Loulou Cherinet, devised a space for participation, reflection and gathering that would host the symposium of the biennial and its accompanying programme. But it also aimed to question and subvert the notion of 'outsider-ship' [in Swedish, 'utanförskap'] that the local Conservative Party coined in 2006 to define certain foreigners as intruders, determining that they were outside the *status quo*, under *alegal* conditions.

Cherinet generated an open and pluralistic dialogue in which she examined the impact of the policy and media's rhetoric in referring to such communities. However, the emphasis of the project was on the collective process that preceded it, which gave rise to what would become a space of coexistence for members of those communities and the audience of the biennial, producing a temporary—and conceptual—sense of homeliness that the Swedish public administration was incapable of granting. It offered the warmth of a stranger, a network of unexpected affection without limits or categories of belonging.

A network of affection apparent in other *Recetas Urbanas* projects, which make use of organic and informal strategies occurring in our day-to-day experience, in addition to an exhaustive investigation on the social and administrative policies that govern each particular context, without which the scope of the subversion of any form of legality would not be possible.

RMV: So which tools do citizens have to affect or subvert a certain legality? Who is allowed to participate in processes of law-making? From which perspectives is the law being conceived? During my years at Law School it was difficult to find somebody willing to answer these questions. Today, with this still in mind, I wonder if this is why it was easy to observe something familiar in the queries behind several of Cirugeda's prescriptions. Some projects, such as *Kuvas SC* or *Andamio*, are attempts to understand and test how citizens interact with government entities, how permeable the law is to being questioned by the citizenry and transformed to generate situations that even though they are a social need are neglected by the authorities.

In this sense, most of the urban prescriptions comprise a proposal for a legal amendment. The subversive power behind them goes beyond the mere questioning of a *status quo*, as the manner in which the studio uses architecture enables new social situations that allow them to re-evaluate legality both from a theoretical perspective and through a practical approach. Unlike other ways of critical analysis, they do not just identify a problem but also provide a possible solution, which is already

materialized. Thus, public authorities are forced to react against a consummate reality and not just a theoretical proposition.

EDO: That power to subvert reality is also a crucial aspect in the studio's work as it not only encourages the development of new legislation and mechanisms that have an impact on tenders and open calls, but also works as a formula to question architecture itself and its training. Projects such as *La Escuela Crece* meant questioning and subsequently changing the educational curriculum and increased the capacity of teachers and students to intervene in the decision-making processes of their educational centres, expanding the given limits and forcing them to be porous to the potential of their imagination.

RMV: Perhaps without being fully aware, during his college years Cirugeda was testing out the educational methodology that he would later develop in projects such as *La Escuela Crece*—an alternative and horizontal education that encourages the collective production of knowledge and is based on practical research.

The apathy he acquired towards the official education at his architecture school in Seville —where he never completed his studies—was mostly due to the verticality with which architecture was taught and *thought*, from teacher to student and architect to citizenry, the rigidity and academic bureaucracy in this institution, the lack of encouragement for academic critique and the disconnection between college and real life and how cities actually work. At the end of the day, architecture, just as happens in Law and Medicine, situated out of the realm of social sciences, have traditionally lacked the necessary space for critical thinking in academia.

EDO: His strong and constant appeal for transdisciplinary work seems evident, or perhaps even his need to escape any kind of definition or label trying to categorize the studio or Cirugeda himself. When he was producing works of art before he became an architect, he did not want to be considered an artist. His exhibitions were no such thing: they were gatherings,

happenings, something that took place every time someone came into the space he had chosen to be his temporary studio. That was the case, for instance, with his intervention at the Finnish Pavilion in Seville. It also happened without exception when anyone visited him in *La Casita* in the years that Cirugeda occupied it with different collectives. It is impossible to deny the artistic licence he holds in his approach to architecture, far from the rigidity he experienced in his college years.

His individual projects transformed some mad ideas into a reality by the relentless questioning of his immediate context: turning a kitchen table into a work of art, expanding Pepe's apartment, and creating the outline of a household that would be dispersed in the empty rooms of his neighbours' flats. Cirugeda's and Recetas Urbanas' architecture is first and foremost an architecture of complicity—one that in addition to his relatives and neighbours, nowadays involves all kinds of volunteers: social workers, artists, architects, teachers, cultural agents, lawyers, community leaders, disenfranchised citizens, members of unrepresented communities, who all together constitute what Cirugeda calls 'the loonies' army', an *army* that generates a map of affections as the ultimate form of subversion.

NOTES:

1. Henri Lefebvre suggests the Right to the City as a claim that 'manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the *oeuvre*, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city.' Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of the Space* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), p. 231.

2. Henry Sanoff, *Integrating Programming, Evaluation and Participation in Design. A Theory Z Approach* (New York: Routledge Revivals, 1992).

3. AbdouMaliq Simone, 'People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg', in *Public Culture* 16(3), (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 407–429.

Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño

INSTRUMENTO de Ratificación de la Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño, adoptada por la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas el 20 de noviembre de 1989.

Artículo 31

1. Los Estados Partes reconocen el derecho del niño al descanso y el esparcimiento, al juego y a las actividades recreativas propias de su edad y a participar libremente en la vida cultural y en las artes.
2. Los Estados Partes respetarán y promoverán el derecho del niño a participar plenamente en la vida cultural y artística y propiciarán oportunidades apropiadas, en condiciones de igualdad, de participar en la vida cultural, artística, recreativa y de esparcimiento.

Convention on Children's Rights

INSTRUMENT for the Ratification of the Convention on Children's Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989.

Clause 31

1. State Parties acknowledge children's rights to rest and leisure, games and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to freely take part in cultural life and the arts.
2. State Parties shall respect and promote children's rights to fully take part in cultural and artistic life and shall provide appropriate opportunities for taking part in cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities under conditions of equality.



Construcción participativa de elementos estructurales del *Aula de Convivencia*. Dos Hermanas, 2016.

Participative construction of the structural elements for the *Community Room*. Dos Hermanas, 2016.





Alumnos del CEIP Europa participando en la obra de su *Aula de Convivencia*. Dos Hermanas, 2016.

Students of the Europa State School participating in the construction of their *Community Room*. Dos Hermanas, 2016.



-CONTRATACIÓN.*
 -INTERESADOS (2).
 -EDUCACIÓN.
 -PROY. OBRAS.
 -PATRIMONIO.
 -INTERVENCIÓN.
 -TESORERÍA.
 -ARCHIVO.



EXCMO. AYUNTAMIENTO DE DOS HERMANAS

La Junta de Gobierno Local, en sesión celebrada el día treinta y uno de julio de dos mil quince, adoptó acuerdo cuyo tenor literal es el siguiente:

3.10 a

20º(1099).- APROBACIÓN DE PROYECTOS “AULA DE CONVIVENCIA EN CEIP EUROPA” Y NOMBRAMIENTO DE DIRECCIÓN FACULTATIVA Y COORDINACIÓN DE SEGURIDAD Y SALUD DE LA OBRA.- Por la Teniente de Alcalde Delegada de Igualdad y Educación, Sra. Naharro Cardeñosa se informa que se va a proceder a la construcción de un Aula de Convivencia en el CEIP Europa.

La Junta de Gobierno Local, en sesión celebrada el 19 de junio de 2015, adjudicó el contrato menor de servicio al Arquitecto D. Santiago Cirugeda Parejo, colegiado nº 5457 del Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Sevilla (COAS), para la redacción de los Proyectos Básico y de Ejecución del “Aula del Convivencia del CEIP Europa”.

Por la Arquitecta Municipal, Victoria Bejarano Barrera, en informe emitido el 28 de julio de 2015 se informa que en cumplimiento del citado acuerdo se han presentados los Proyectos Básico y de Ejecución encomendados, con visado nº 15/001279 – T003, de 23 de julio de 2015 del Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Sevilla que contemplan las obras del Aula de Convivencia. El proyecto de ejecución incluye el Estudio Básico de Seguridad y Salud redactado

Este Proyecto es singular debido a que se dan circunstancias no habituales, que el arquitecto denomina “... en régimen de construcción participativa, didáctica y educativa”:

- a) Padres y alumnos/as del colegio colaborarán en la ejecución de las obras.
- b) Los materiales serán, siempre que se pueda, reutilizados.

Con todo ello, se abarata mucho el precio total de la obra (hasta un 50% según el Arquitecto).

El presupuesto estimado de ejecución de material de las obras es de 98.831,04 €, incrementándose con 12.848,04 € de gastos generales (13% PEM) y 5.929,86 € de beneficio industrial (6% PEM). Aplicando el 21% de IVA, el presupuesto total asciende a la cantidad de 142.305,82 €

De conformidad con lo establecido en la Disposición Adicional Segunda del RDL 3/2011, de 14 de noviembre, por el que se aprueba el TRLCSP, se elevan a la Junta de Gobierno Local las siguientes propuestas:

...

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One of the best things about working on our projects is that you have the chance to get in touch with active and proactive people; people of all ages, some even very young, who want to get involved and make a contribution. Respecting this creativity and spirit of contribution is one of the keys to the work we do. This in itself is a form of activism against the social trend that strives to drown people's concerns with the 'go and do your homework!' discourse. This is what happens when you are still a child or teenager and already feel the need to propose, to act, to change the world around you. The answer is always the same: 'Go and do your homework! It'll be time for you to do things when you've finished school'. But it's just a trap, because when you finish school and you feel free to start building a path, it's the same old story with university; 'Go and do your homework! Choose a degree and when you finish it, you'll have the chance to do whatever you want'. Then comes the day when you finish your degree, and then society continues to dictate at the same pace: 'Go and do your homework! Find a job and get some work experience, because until you have it, none of your proposals will be worth anything'. And so the time comes when the child has been tamed, is tied to a job he hates and a life that does not satisfy him and the desire to change the world around him has died like a bud that was never allowed to blossom.

← Acuerdo de Junta de Gobierno
Local otorgando la licencia de obras
del *Aula de Convivencia*.

Agreement of the Local Government
Board granting the construction permit
for the *Community Room*.

One of the best things about working on our projects is that they are in themselves a space that welcomes all contributions. Many of them have involved children and teenagers who want to collaborate and invent. On our own small scale this is achieved: young and old can propose under equal conditions, because even though every project has a technical part that is irreplaceable, they are also nourished by the ideas, feelings and emotions of a community. These generous contributions do not require academic qualifications, nor do they involve a gender profile or age limit.

When I was a child I didn't like football, but I had other concerns. One of the things that amused me the most—I would have been about seven or eight years old—was to visit all the floors in the building at the time when people would leave their rubbish just outside their apartment door. I would go up to the seventh floor and from there I would work my way downwards, checking the junk that the neighbours were throwing away, looking for materials for some kind of little construction. My mother called it 'doing the rounds'. She even reminded me if I forgot: 'Haven't you done the rounds today?' And I replied very diligently: 'Yes, Mum, I'm going right now'. And I'd come back loaded with trash that I kept in an empty apartment that my grandmother had in the same building. There I carried out my little projects, with a toolbox I made of wood.

Since I really loved doing things with my hands, the first great job of my childhood was to try and build a lathe to model clay. It was an ambitious project, but I was helped by the motor of an old fan, which, screwed on to a piece of Meccano *Metaling*, and this in turn to a wooden board, might make the invention work. I already saw myself as a genius, and to use it for the first time I bought a lump of clay and



Herramientas para autoconstrucción en vaso de piscina en desuso. Madrid, 2015.

Tools for self-construction in a disused swimming pool. Madrid, 2015.

put it on display in my mother's kitchen with great expectation in the family. At first, it worked. The problem was that it started to spin at a tremendous speed, because I hadn't realised that the revolutions of a clay lathe were not the same as those of a fan ... The whole kitchen got filthy with clay, but my mother felt sorry for me in my frustration. To make up for the damage she gave me a round table that she bought on Calle Feria to put the clay on, to which I attached a stick, and I connected a device to it with a wooden pedal. It was another disaster. This time I couldn't get enough inertia to model the clay. My brief adventure with clay came to an end here and I have never tried it again in my life. But when I remember the story I think of how attentive my mother was to the nonsense I used to make and how much she supported me in all my failures.

My father supported me too, though in his own way. I come from a family of several generations of military personnel. It may seem paradoxical, but throughout my childhood, while I was doing my little things with

what I found in the rubbish, it was pretty clear to me that when I grew up I wanted to be a soldier. I studied in military schools, went to military camps and had a folder lined with pictures of tanks and other weapons, so after school I prepared my entrance exam for the Officers' Academy. It was a very tough test, and I kept myself busy while I was studying by drawing pictures of things that came to mind. My father was already worried about me drawing so much. He panicked when he thought I could end up studying Fine Arts, and all by himself he managed to find a compromise solution and suggested that I studied Architecture. 'You're no good for a soldier', he said, 'because you're not going to stop questioning everything. When they give you an order, you're going to start rethinking and making suggestions. You don't join the army to make suggestions. You join to obey'. And that's how I started my degree, with no vocation whatsoever. No wonder it took me 13 years to finish it.

The best thing about university was that it got me in touch with other people who were also a little bit lost, like me. Especially during the early years, I didn't find much motivation in the studies and ended up living in New York for a few months. It was only later, when the model projects began with Professor Juanjo Vázquez, that I started to have fun. It was like going back to what I did as a child, collecting different materials and finding an excuse to make something with them. The first model I delivered was perfectly comparable to any of the pieces made of rubbish that had come out of the clandestine workshop in my grandmother's empty flat. A bit more technical, true, but deep down equally intuitive. The professors were surprised by the strange pieces I handed in; at that stage of the journey, Juanjo Vázquez gave me all the freedom I needed to do whatever I wanted and I am still grateful to him today.

A politically active group with a very communist profile had been formed at the School of Architecture, with the support of Paco Márquez and other sympathetic professors. It functioned as a creative political commune and at one point I was invited to join. They told me about renting a house in the Alameda de Hércules¹, for very little money, an old and half-ruined—but large—house, to turn it into a centre for meetings and projects. I had always wanted to have a space to build, so without thinking twice I said yes and we went to repair the *Casita* on Calle Joaquín Costa so we could get down to work as soon as possible. I had no idea then that, more than twenty years later, still renting it, my architectural studio would be in the same *Casita* on Joaquín Costa that is also my home today.

But we were still a long way from that. We had just opened the space and although we were all very different from each other (Jaime el Gamba, Cristina Goberna, Carlos Morales, Pepe Arce, Raúl Cantizano etc.), *La Casita* inherited in its beginnings the political party structure that the commune at the School had had. There were assemblies every five minutes and they were mandatory. In the end, it turned out that my father was right when he said that I would have problems with discipline, even though he was thinking about another kind of regime. I was interested in politics, but I also wanted to go drinking and be with my friends, which the central apparatus of the party did not like very much. One night I even heard them criticise my lack of commitment at a meeting I hadn't been to because I had been drinking Cuba libres with my friend Fran Campos on the ground floor. I decided to go up and explain things, and that catalysed the resignation of almost the entire power structure three months later. Those of us who stayed felt a great relief and that was when we started to work well.



‘¡Ponte guapo Isidoro!’,
proyecto participativo en colegio
público. Sevilla, 2011.

‘¡Ponte guapo Isidoro!’,
participative project at a state
school. Seville, 2011.



The next six years were really amazing. *La Casita* was alive with creativity. The spaces changed their function and appearance at any time and without notice. There were times when you would go away and leave a blueprint half-done and when you came back you would find it finished in a totally different way. We experimented a lot, even with the projects and models we presented in class. It wasn't that we didn't take the degree seriously—we did—but we laughed at the procedures. It was a really interesting time and great training for everyone. Not only were there architects, but also musicians, artists and people who still didn't really know what they were ... The model worked so well that some people copied it and other spaces opened up with groups of people who wanted to rethink everything.

After those first six years of work, projects and parties, the bathrooms at *La Casita* were all worn out and we had to go to pee in the bars. *La Alameda* at that time was a very different neighbourhood from what it is today, deeply spoilt by drugs and everything that goes with this. People were finishing their degree and wanted to go abroad. At that time all that everyone wanted was to travel. The group fell apart and *La Casita* was closed. The following year, when I went in with my friend Ignacio Pretel with the intention of getting my hands on it and turning it into a new personal space, we found it totally abandoned. In the fridge we found a lonely pizza with more than an inch of mould on it. But that's where we went to live; Ignacio, who went out every morning dressed as a lawyer in a suit and tie, and me, who stayed at *La Casita* drawing in my underwear.

That's how I lived until I finished my degree, which took me 13 years. It seems like a lot for a six-year curriculum, but I like to think of it as one of our works of art: when you open the door to the process



Taller Nenoarquitectura en MUSAC.
León, 2018.

Neno Architecture Workshop
at MUSAC. León, 2018.

of affection, and you want grown-ups and children to take part, the result is longer, but infinitely more beautiful. My degree was enriched by what we did on the street and in *La Casita* over those years; it was filled with experiences much greater than exams, models and projects. And what we do today with the projects we work on is the same. In fact, we've never done anything else since this started rolling, because as soon as one finishes the next one starts. That's why it makes me laugh when my friend Raúl Muñoz de la Vega asks me: 'Santi, when is the party over?' I shrug my shoulders, because I see no end to it. Even though there are times when you get tired at every party, it's always worth staying until the end.

1. The Alameda de Hércules is a large public park in the historical centre of Seville. It is the oldest public park in Spain and Europe. It has changed a lot since the 1990s, from a decadent area to one where locals choose to spend the whole day.

**Ley 22/1988, de 28 de julio,
de Costas.**

Artículo 95

1. Sin perjuicio de la sanción penal o administrativa que se imponga, el infractor estará obligado a la restitución de las cosas y reposición a su estado anterior, con la indemnización de daños irreparables y perjuicios causados, en el plazo que en cada caso se fije en la resolución correspondiente.

**Law 22/1988, dated 28 July,
concerning Coasts**

Clause 95

1. Without prejudice to the criminal or administrative penalty that may be imposed, offenders shall be obliged to replace items and restore them to their previous state, with the penalty of irreparable damage and in the terms that are fixed in each case in the corresponding resolution.

In 2007 I was invited to Fuerteventura to take part in a meeting with other artists and architects to carry out an intervention on the land, something similar to Land Art with a critical perspective. Although this kind of residence usually inspires you directly on the go, it was very clear to me from the outset that the intervention would have to focus on the processes of real estate speculation that had been the mainstay of the Spanish economy in recent years, and that had been particularly devastating in the Canary Islands, where this fever had been made even worse by the boom of tourism. We all know the kind of tourism that Spain enjoys and suffers, promoted by policies that have claimed bricks and mortar, tarmac and paella as an economic driving force of doubtful sustainability, the failure of which has unfortunately been evident for some years now. In the case of Fuerteventura, it is not only a matter of the destruction of the natural landscape by planning abuse, but also in terms of what the massive introduction of the tourist population means for the social fabric of the island, condemning the local population to work in the hotel and catering sectors and eliminating the diversity of the labour market that is necessary for development. It was clear to me that the community's recovery of the stolen land should be at the forefront of the intervention, whatever it was going to be.

With this idea in mind, I went to Google Earth to examine the island and discovered a strange infrastructure located in the northwest corner of

the island, between El Cotillo and La Caleta del Marrajo, which on the map looked a bit like a scar on the ground. When I enlarged the image I saw that it was actually sections of a four-lane road with a roundabout in the middle, isolated in the midst of some sand dunes. By searching a bit more I found out that it had been part of an ambitious town planning project, including a golf course and luxury hotels, which had been paralyzed thanks to opposition by a group of local activists. The resort was never built, but the development of the area before the buildings were put up, including the road, lighting, connections and sanitation network, had been put in place, and as on so many other occasions, the skeleton was now like a wound on the land left to its own devices, because nobody wanted to pay the costs of demolition. It was actually even worse: tourists were using this illegal stretch of road to get to the protected beaches in the north of the island, even though it had never been officially opened and did not have the necessary fixtures to make it usable. The work we proposed for the Fuerteventura meeting was precisely to make this situation visible.

The intervention actually consisted of two parts. The first, the 'official' one we presented to the other artists and members of the institution that had invited us, consisted of printing and installing large fences similar to those placed on building sites, informing of a project—completely invented—to demolish the road and preserve the environment with European Union funds. The poster, which we designed in both Spanish and German (in recent years Germans have bought over a million properties on the island and there is a growing German population with great purchasing power), showed data from a supposed study, provided a fictitious budget and spoke of an imminent start to the work. We were very careful not to cross the barrier of faking documents, so we used writing that

was similar, but not identical, to the official style of the Fuerteventura Council, and manipulated the acronyms and names of the participating organisations so that it looked authentic, although if you looked closely you could clearly see that it was not. On the other hand, not all the data we included in the study was false: we provided details on the impact of the road on the flora and fauna in the area that came from real scientific publications and it was thereby integrated into the artistic intervention. This, we assumed, would draw the attention of the local authorities to the infrastructure and might in consequence even lead to action.

Things didn't stop there. There was another part to the project, a secret and invisible part, that the event organiser and the other artists didn't know about until the last moment; in fact nobody knew about it except myself (and Ignacio Pretel, my friend and lawyer). The idea was to accompany the installation of the fences and signs with a real destruction of the road, quite literally taking out a strip of paving across the four lanes, which would prevent traffic from driving on it. This would give out the message that the demolition was for real, it was not just political publicity. But it wasn't as easy as that. I wanted to cut through the road physically, and this was difficult to do discreetly and in silence. My first plan was to go to a hardware store and buy a good quality pickaxe, hoping that the road wasn't too hard. One night, while the others were out partying, I went alone to a point on the road near the hotel and started digging with the pickaxe. I remember feeling a little apprehensive and even a bit sad, especially because of the loneliness I felt, which I am not used to at work, but then the road started to give way and in just over an hour I managed to destroy more than a square metre. The plan was underway. Over the next few days, I got some

abandoned traffic cones from the island's construction sites, with the idea of placing them in that section of the road as the demolition continued. The cones were too light for the Canary Island wind, so I had to put concrete in them, using the bathtub in the hotel room that the artistic commission was paying for to mix the cement. It was already no easy task to sneak the hollow cones into place, and now it was even more grotesque to take them out full of solid concrete, with a coiled rod protruding from all sides, hidden under a towel that I needed both arms to carry because the cones weighed a ton. The receptionist at the hotel looked at me in horror several times.

But things didn't quite work out as I had planned. The second night I went with my rented car, which was covered in more dust than a cement mixer, and my brand-new pickaxe, to the road that I was going to cut, and it turned out that it was much tougher than where I had done the test. On the first stroke the pickaxe handle broke. I went to buy three more—the guy at the hardware store did not even try to conceal

Trop José R.R. TLF. [redacted]

Sr. Santiago.		Número <input type="text"/>		
Vale por: 1 traslado de máquina al Colillo y 1 hora de trabajo sacando el asfalto de carretera.				
# 925#				
pagado				
15	de	3	de	07
Firma:		José R.R.		

Recibo por el servicio de excavación.
Fuerteventura, 2007.

Receipt for the excavation service.
Fuerteventura, 2007.



Selfie durante la 'performance'.
Fuerteventura, 2007.

Selfie during the 'performance'.
Fuerteventura, 2007.

his growing suspicions—and they all broke one after the other. It was clear that the road was different and would not give way to violence. I fell into a crisis and started to drive around in my car, until I came across a nearby construction site where there was an excavator with a very nice man inside it. I told him I was an architect and invented the most incredible story: we were about to demolish the road but before the public tender we were going to do a presentation and we needed the excavator for the initial cut. I don't know if he totally bought it, but he asked if we had all the permits, and as I said we did, the next day he showed up like clockwork with the excavator. We were all there; the sign people putting up the fences, the excavator guy asking for the permits and me putting concrete-filled traffic cones all over the place, while cars pulled over to the side as they went along the illegal road. It was quite a show.

The excavator man, who kept asking about the permits, decided to believe me when I told him that the police were already on their way with them. He shrugged his shoulders and asked, 'Where should I start cutting?' I have to admit that I was scared to death. At any moment the police could show up and I was there cutting a stretch of road with a guy on a mechanical excavator and another two putting up five-metre fences, and all without permission. In the end it was all over much quicker than expected, because the machine was fast and in less than an hour it opened up a strip that cut three of the four lanes (I decided to leave the fourth one open just in case there was an emergency). In the meantime no one showed up, and I kept feigning impatience at the delay of the police with the papers. Half-hidden I took a photo of myself, which turned out to be the first selfie in my life; I had no idea that ten years later it would become so fashionable. When the excavator was finished I paid the man and thanked him, and he gave me a receipt stating as the concept 'transfer of machinery to El Cotillo and an hour's work pulling cement up from the road'. When they all left, I stuck my pickaxe into one side of the road, got in my car and drove off to the other side. My lawyer friend was reassured when I told him that everything had gone well, and I breathed deeply because it had been a very tense morning.

Even though I had no intention of making too much noise about it, I ended up telling the people working on the other interventions, and they saw it as something positive, a way of drawing attention to the illegality of the situation. Of course the word spread and reached the ears of Town Planning, who screamed blue murder and wanted to sue me for having cut up a public road under the veil of a cultural event. They even called me a scoundrel. But that was the worst of it, because they themselves understood

that as the road was illegal and had no signposts, I had simply committed one illegality on top of another. In fact, the Town Planning technicians themselves acknowledged that they wanted to demolish it, but they had no idea which budget item to allocate it to and they would need help to finance it. Well, I don't know if they got the financing, but a few days later, back in Seville, I had a call from the people in the Fuerteventura group who had stopped the resort in the first place, and they congratulated me on what I had done. When I told them the whole story, they asked me for the number of the excavator man, because they wanted to pay him to keep going with the job. I gladly gave them his phone number, but I don't know if they finally managed to reach an agreement with the Council for this new intervention. I hope they did.

**Regulación sobre la
Colaboración entre Ciudadanos
y Ayuntamiento para el cuidado
y la Regeneración de Bienes
Comunes Urbanos.**

Artículo 4
(Ciudadanos activos)

1. La intervención para el cuidado y de regeneración de los bienes comunes urbanos, entendida como una manifestación concreta de participación en la vida de la comunidad y un instrumento para el pleno desarrollo.

**Regulation on the
collaboration between
citizens and the City Council
to care for and regenerate
common urban assets.**

Clause 4
(Active citizens)

1. Intervention for the care and regeneration of common urban assets, understood as a specific manifestation of participation in community life and as an instrument for the full development.



Voluntarios en la obra del
House of Words. Gotemburgo, 2015.

Volunteers at the construction of
House of Words. Gothenburg, 2015.





cálculos, ni nada de nada, porque al darse por hecho que se trataba de una obra de arte nos concedieron libertad para hacer lo que quisiéramos. Esto lo ponemos muy en crisis desde Recetas Urbanas, porque lo que nosotros reivindicamos son derechos que todo el mundo pueda ejercer para relacionarse con su entorno y modificarlo, y no que en el nombre del arte algunos individuos adquieran en virtud de su currículum determinados beneficios de los que otros se ven privados. Esta dicotomía problemática resume y explica en parte nuestra relación complicada con



Proceso de construcción del proyecto *House of Words*. Gotemburgo, 2015.

[Construction process of the *House of Words* project. Gothenburg, 2015.](#)

el mundo del arte. Yo siempre he respetado que el arte, en última instancia, pueda ser un fin en sí mismo, pero no es lo que hacemos nosotros. Será por eso que nunca hemos sido ni nos hemos considerado artistas, aunque haya quienes quieran ver en nuestro trabajo motivo o material de estudio o de exposición desde ese un punto de vista. Lo que hacemos nosotros surge siempre de las necesidades de una comunidad y tiene su fin en ellas. Y, si algo nos queda, es la experiencia del proceso y del camino, y eso es algo que ningún museo puede conservar.

The work of Recetas Urbanas as a team comes into intermittent contact with the world of art. Since the beginnings in *La Casita* I have had an on-off relationship with art, but whenever we have interacted with it we have done so with the idea and intention of taking advantage of it: to make it useful, because at the end of the day we are a studio of architects, not artists. In fact, there have been periods when we have done nothing even remotely artistic, and when we were called by the GIBCA (Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art), we had been in one of these periods for some years.

Elvira Dyangani Ose, who had been appointed curator of the biennial, had known us for a long time. She called us to design a pavilion that she called the *House of Words*¹, a space reminiscent of Africa, which was actually a version of the *Aula Abierta* (Open Classroom)², a project that she had come across in Granada, and that ended up as part of *La Carpa* in Seville until the sad moment came to dismantle it. In fact, it was the same materials that came out of *La Carpa* that gave life to the *House of Words*, moved to a new location in Sweden.

The experience came as an interesting challenge right from the beginning, as the project itself was large and complex, and it forced us to implement our methodology in the context of a completely new place and with a work team that, contrary to what normally happens in self-construction, had not been trained by the end users of the space. This last point in





Proceso de construcción del proyecto Basilea. Art Basel, 2018.

Construction process of the Basilea project. Art Basel, 2018.



Convocatoria para reutilizar los materiales del proyecto *Montaña Verde*. Ambers, 2018.



Open call to reuse the materials from the project *Montaña Verde*. Antwerp, 2018.

particular turned out to be really good, because it did no more than provide proof of something we already knew: that end users are not necessarily the only people with a possible interest in taking part and getting involved in a self-construction process, and there may be other people equally excited about collaborating; and that participation in a project of this type—voluntary and regardless of the many motivations we all have when making any decision—is always a political choice.

The eight weeks of construction and the seventy-five volunteers bore fruit in the coexistence and the affective and learning processes that took place during the stage prior to the opening of the *House of Words*. We have never liked official openings at *Recetas Urbanas*, because the space itself is virtually ignored and the use made of it is anecdotal. Our real work is not the end product. It is the process

in which everyone fits in and has a place, and where everyone contributes what gives meaning and value to what we do, or at least this is how I see it. That's how Elvira understood it too, and that's why, three years later, she invited us again, this time for the *Basel*³ project that Creative Time⁴ organised for the Basel Art Fair (Art Basel). The idea was to bring all kinds of people together to build a meeting place. It was very similar to Gothenburg, but with much more funding, because Art Basel is one of the financial centres of world art, and this makes itself felt.

In fact, radical neoliberalism is so rampant at this event that many people asked us what we were doing there. We asked ourselves the same question. We decided to do it because we trusted Elvira, and because we wanted to see if things would turn out well, like in Gothenburg, and because Creative Time was there, and they had been a referent for me for twenty years, from the times when I lived in New York. Clearly it wasn't the right place for us, but the experience was worth it. First of all, it allowed us to discover in person the obscure relationship between art and money that exists in Basel; but, in addition, we benefited greatly from more than eighty thousand Euros in financing for material, which we were able to dismantle and bring to Madrid to use in other social projects when the fair ended. And, as always, we met lots of fantastic people, people willing to give generously of their work and time in terms incomprehensible for that economic capital of art.

When comparing the experiences in Switzerland and Sweden, we find, however, that they were very different. In Gothenburg, the centre where the *House of the Word*—Röda Sten Konsthall—was located, asked us to leave it there longer because it endowed the

space with life. This was not even an option in Basel, which lasted the four days of the fair and no more, although when it came to dismantling there were already some people that asked us to keep it there because, in that square privatised by Art Basel, where there was hardly any place to sit, the self-built open-air auditorium we had made could provide a permanent service and provide a meeting place for people. But there was no time to draw up the permits to get the process underway. There was another difference too, which in my opinion was much more important. The Gothenburg pavilion was the product of a real project, with a preliminary study, evacuation plans and all the papers in order. At Art Basel we didn't have to deliver a technical project or any calculations, or indeed anything at all, because they took it for granted that it was a work of art and so they gave us the freedom to do whatever we wanted. This is something we are completely opposed to at Recetas Urbanas, because what we claim are rights for everyone to relate to their environment and modify it, and not that in the name of art certain individuals acquire certain benefits by virtue of their curriculum which others are deprived of. This problematic dichotomy sums up and partly explains our complicated relationship with the world of art. I have always respected the idea that art may ultimately be an end in itself, but it is not what we do. This is why we have never been and have never considered ourselves to be artists, even if there are some who want to see in our work the motif or material for a studio or an exhibition from that point of view. What we do always arises from the needs of a community and this is its purpose. And if there is anything left for us, it is the experience of the process and the route, and this is something that no museum can preserve.

1. The *House of Words* was inspired by the traditional meeting places that exist in many African societies, used by communities for dialogue and exchange. The project consists of two parts: an architectural structure, designed by Recetas Urbanas and built by means of a collective process, and an experience generated by the artist Loulou Cherinet, whose purpose was to provide different individuals and communities with the opportunity to appropriate the space and enter into a process of debate and creation.

2. *Aula Abierta* is a self-constructed and self-managed space first built in Granada in 2004 by a group of students from the University of Granada and Recetas Urbanas, using materials extracted from the dismantling of another building that had been condemned. It was born in response to the need to obtain a physical and mental space for work and urban reflection. In January 2012 it was dismantled by the University of Granada and transported to Seville, where it was received by Recetas Urbanas. After the installation of the surface foundations, in the first week of March 2012 there was a self-construction workshop organised by the cultural management company La Matraka. It remained in the hands of Recetas Urbanas, and with the help of several groups, friends and spontaneous collaborators from different countries, it was officially opened on 19 October 2012. *Aula Abierta* Seville is part of a larger project entitled *La Carpa—Artistic Space*, a new socio-cultural space installed on a site ceded by the City Council under a public agreement, although due to poor public management it has been operating with no legal coverage.

3. The project presented by Recetas Urbanas consisted of collective work with local and international volunteers to design and build a multipurpose civic structure, using second-hand and locally sourced materials. Participants learned and taught each other through collective exchange and collaboration. During construction and before completion, the structure was open to everyone and animated by programmes and performances.

4. *Creative Time* is a non-profit art organisation based in New York. It was founded in 1973 to support the creation of innovative, site-specific and socially engaged works of art in the public sphere, particularly in empty spaces of historical and architectural interest.



Proceso de construcción de la *Montaña Verde*. Amberes, 2018.

Construction process of *Montaña Verde*. Antwerp, 2018.



Ley 45/2015, de 14 de octubre, de Voluntariado.

Artículo 5. Valores, principios y dimensiones de la acción voluntaria.

1. La acción voluntaria se basará y se desarrollará con arreglo a los siguientes valores:

a) Los que inspiran la convivencia en una sociedad democrática, participativa, justa, plural y comprometida con la igualdad, la libertad y la solidaridad.

Law 45/2015, dated 14 October, concerning Volunteers.

Article 5. Values, principles and dimensions of voluntary action.

1. Voluntary action shall be based on and developed according to the following values:

a) Those who inspire coexistence in a democratic, participatory, just, plural society committed to equality, freedom and solidarity.





Proceso de construcción del
Aula de Convivencia.
Sevilla, 2016.

Construction process of the
Community Room.
Seville, 2016.

'Mum, when I grow up I want to build like you do'

11

The first time they tried, they came up against a resounding NO; but they didn't give up. The second NO made them stronger, and the third one filled them with energy to keep on resisting until the barrier fell down under its own weight. It didn't fall down, so we broke it down.

The Europa Primary School in Montequinto (Dos Hermanas, Seville) had been waiting for months for work to start on a dining room, financing for which had been approved by the Regional Government of Andalusia, but then the recession broke out and the months turned into years. This was the first NO. Tired of delays and moratoriums which seemed to be leading nowhere, the headmaster called a meeting at the school with parents, to invite them to do something in the face of political apathy. The meeting bore fruit. Four mothers got really into it, set up a platform and went to the Department of Education. They were given the excuse that the project was budgeted for over four hundred thousand Euros but there was no money to actually pay for it. This was the second NO, but it didn't keep them quiet: 'If we find a cheaper project and you check that it complies with the regulations, can we do it?' The third NO became a tentative, almost reluctant yes—the authorities were convinced that doing something without following the pre-established procedures was simply impossible.

← Consulta sobre los riesgos laborales para estudiantes o voluntarios en la obra.

Query about occupational hazards for students or volunteers at the site.

Fachada del *Aula de Convivencia*.
Sevilla, 2018.

Facade of the *Community Room*.
Seville, 2018.



The school launched a public tender and Recetas Urbanas presented a bid. We suggested a work method that made costs cheaper by reusing materials and the partial employment of self-construction. The project came together right from the start, and as soon as the Regional Government of Andalusia gave us the go-ahead—after we had repeatedly fought the corresponding negative replies from the civil servants—we got down to work, thanks to some money from the Town Council of Dos Hermanas. They became the economic promoter of the project when they saw the force and decision in the project—unstoppable—from the school’s parents, who were just as stubborn about getting the dining room as their children are when they want something. They wouldn’t take no for an answer, and instead of just sitting there, they looked for an alternative.

The months of building were a real workshop of coexistence for everyone in the educational community. Parents,



children, teachers, friends, relatives, neighbours and all kinds of supporters joined in each session to help and contribute their own grain of sand and their enthusiasm. They cut wood, put screws in, sang songs, made meals for everyone, painted and coloured. The columns that held the structure up, the walls and the roof, the outside front and the inside finishing were all the fruit of the self-construction workshops. The whole concept of the space changed as we progressed, and when the Town Council financed it, it was redefined as a *Mediation Room* for joint use by the school and local residents. The community was doubtless strengthened and came closer together, and also established better relations outside, because thanks to this project they got in touch with other schools that have been through similar experiences, and a shared learning network was set up.

The *Mediation Room* in Dos Hermanas was without doubt a huge project for us, because many of the forces



Proceso de construcción del
Aula de Convivencia. Sevilla, 2016.

Construction process of the
Community Room. Sevilla, 2016.



which lie at the heart of what we do at Recetas Urbanas came together there: people's initiative, the inflexibility—or maybe the incompetence—of the public authorities, the creativity required to get over apparently insurmountable hurdles, active resistance to the idea of politicians and civil servants saying 'come back tomorrow', the creation and strengthening of a community and a team, reusing materials, and a building site understood as a space for coexistence and activity right from the first day. In addition to all this, what made this project so special was the way it fitted in with the context of the school, because its greatest achievement was that it teaches us and schoolchildren about our possibilities as citizens and our responsibility. No matter how many times they say NO, if we persevere with enthusiasm we can do it. This is the lesson that the children learnt and that they will never forget.

The dining room was finished in November 2017, but at the time when this book was written, a year later, it has not been opened yet. When we finished work, we detected some problems and drew up a report detailing all the remaining tasks, explaining which ones the Town Council was responsible for and which ones corresponded to self-construction. We had three meetings about this report, but the problems were not solved until the summer of 2018. During this time, the school management team changed. In September, at the beginning of the school year, the new board called us to a meeting to analyse the status of the project. Maybe because the new board was made up of people who had been less involved in the process, or simply because they had other ideas about how to carry out their functions and their responsibilities, the thing is that in that meeting we felt everything we had done was being viewed with mistrust and apprehension. It was even funny when they informed us that one of the windowsills was

dangerous, when this was something we hadn't put in but which had been there from beforehand. In any case, with the instructions from the meeting we held a final workshop, which was also a good excuse to meet up again and live as a community. The room was finally finished and ready to use.

In that same month of September I was invited to a congress about innovation in education organised by the Regional Government of Aragón Department of Education in Zaragoza. I was introduced to the Regional Councillor for Education in Andalusia—not only did she have absolutely no idea about what the Mediation Room in Dos Hermanas was (her counterpart from Aragón on the other hand was well aware of it, which was why we had been invited to the congress)—but she seemed really surprised, and possibly slightly concerned when I told her it was a self-construction project. She said she would like to see it—I hope she does and that her visit turns out to be a catalyst for the official opening, which has not yet taken place.

This delay is a real pity, even more so when we think that even though it is possibly one of the most significant projects that Recetas Urbanas has been lucky enough to take part in, when we look at it in perspective, it is not easy for the right conditions to come about to be able to do something like this again. And yet this is not what remains with me from this experience; more than anything else I remember Diego, who was just four years old, and who went back home after a day at the self-construction workshop in the school dining room, and said to his mother, 'Mum, when I grow up I want to build like you do'. I am sure he will, just like the rest of his class, regardless of whatever he works in. They have learnt, and so have we, that by joining forces there is quite simply nothing that they cannot build.

PERMITIDO EL PASO A TODA PERSONA AJENA A LA OBRA



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