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Office of Architecture in Barcelona

This book embraces a time for reflection, from 1970 to today. The document which follows attempts to define a new approach to the architectural project that is both personal and professional. Until 2005, my studio carried out its work in a small office with just four or five employees. On occasion we collaborated with other studios and contracted specialists to provide their expertise during the design and construction phases.

The development of Office of Architecture in Barcelona (OAB) grew out of these relationships. OAB was established in 2005 by Carlos Ferrater, Xavier Martí Galí, and Lucia and Borja Ferrater as a collective platform, one informed by our past experiences. The first results of this new entity, including the projects conceived and completed by the studio in the five years since its founding, are presented in this book.

OAB draws on the collaborative nature of my previous studio, incorporating new ways of understanding the contributions of each team member to generate richer and more varied, prepared and flexible projects. The creation of this new platform attempts to address the challenges that contemporary architecture has raised in intellectual, social, technological, and environmental spheres.

Inspired by the social nature of group work and the personal style of the studio's contributors, the contents are organized as a collection of chapters that turn the spotlight on both projects and recently built works. These convey a willingness to work in different scenarios, expanding and enriching the range of proposals in the pursuit of new avenues of formal expression. The book covers the theoretical aspects of each project, focusing on innovation, research, and the application of new technologies. At the same time, as we explore each project's development, emphasis is placed upon context, the building's objectives, and the social roots of the architect's work.

It is important to highlight the collaboration of young architects such Núria Ayala, Director of Projects at OAB, and associated architects like Alberto Peñín.

A particular set of circumstances led to the birth of this new platform, and along the way we have kept to the position that each new project represents a different experience and calls for a specially tailored approach. Furthermore, the platform is built on several basic tenets: embracing innovation and experimentation, conceptual flexibility, and a willingness to offer alternative architectural proposals.

Throughout the development of the book, we were obliged to address what we had already learned and to bear in mind that the essence of the architect does not lie in language, the delineation of a style, or procedural methodologies. Rather, it lies in the architect's unique ability to respond to the conditions of the site and the city, to recognize the social complexity of program organization, to harness the use of light as a raw material of design—with a capacity to generate space and emotion—and to affect sensory perception through materiality. When these skills are harnessed and harmoniously combined, the architect can bring the architecture closer to future users and residents.

I shall attempt to explain the circumstances that led to the formation of OAB. First came the decision of a group of young architects, members of my own family, who opted to turn the work of a studio into a collective experience.

Secondly, the new studio was conceptually enabled and strengthened through the development of a cohesive theoretical corpus, culled from the knowledge we gained from previous project experiences. This knowledge is compiled in *Synchronizing Geometry*, an exhibition that documents the preparatory procedures for our projects. Our use of open and flexible complex geometries as instruments capable of probing the intellectual

conditions and cultural history of places and landscapes allows us to create punctilious and varied responses. Deriving from the use of geometry, this implementation shapes the organizational and programmatic framework, while providing constructional mechanisms that make it possible to convert initial ideas and original concepts into built realities.

Following an invitation from IIT (Illinois Institute of Technology), OAB exhibited documents and models that illustrate theoretical concepts, while arguing for different empirical approaches to architectural research. Exhibited in the lobby of Mies van der Rohe's Crown Hall, the show has since been expanded with further documents and additional models of our experimental designs. They have since been exhibited in the architecture schools of Barcelona and Madrid; the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem; Tel Aviv University, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Bilbao, among others. This traveling exhibition is constantly updated, and will continue to travel to different institutions and universities worldwide.

The third circumstance came about from the importance and necessity of simultaneously designing both the architectural and structural solutions.

In almost all of the projects covered in *Synchronizing Geometry*, structure is understood as the spatial support of the design; sometimes the structural skeleton is even conceived as a final form of the construction. Thus, the reinforced earth walls in the Barcelona Botanical Garden, the "loadbearing" membrane as an urban façade on the Mediapro Building, the reinforced-concrete sheet that fuses the shapes of the seafront Promenade in Benidorm, the topographic roof of the Science Park in Granada, and the light diaphragm on the roof of Zaragoza- Delicias Intermodal Station, among other projects, have led us to establish a synchronic collaboration with Juan Calvo. Calvo, an engineer, whose formation was closer to Jörg Schaich and whose experience extends to large civil engineering works, particularly bridges and long-span structures, has given us the chance to incorporate our own solutions into the engineering of the building.

We decided to situate the new studio in Cerdà's Eixample in the center of Barcelona, on Carrer Balmes and Carrer Còrsega, near Avinguda Diagonal, thus establishing our activities in two separate locations.

The first, at Carrer Balmes 145, is meant to house the professional structure, and the second, at Carrer Còrsega 254, is intended to accommodate different cultural activities and academic research. This functional separation is conducive to parallel development, while minimizing mutual interference.

In Carrer Balmes the studio concentrates on original ideas, models and drawings, the basic structure of the design projects, competitions, and sometimes the technical solutions for such works. There, we try and avoid the cumbersome and bureaucratic aspects that hinder and undermine the fragility of the creative process, encouraging collaboration with partner studios and connections with the work teams who develop the construction on-site, always directed by one of the main architects. This organization allows for greater agility, flexibility, and interaction between teams.

The Gallery on Carrer Còrsega permits the organization of workshops and seminars, receives architects who are visiting Barcelona, and provides the exhibition space for our collection of models, illustrating the moments of greatest creative tension of the projects. It is also a documentation center which collates the publications, monographs, brochures, and media devoted to the work of the studio. The OAB Gallery is also home to *Palimpsesto* magazine, which publishes academic and cultural work relating to the practice of architecture.

This work structure provides for great flexibility and for good relationships between members of the team, as well as facilitating the inclusion of issues unrelated to the world of architecture that help enrich the design process.

Carlos Ferrater Lambarri

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