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**Research Title** **From the Draftboard to the Building Site:  
 how to inhabit collectively the architecture project**



The current research is centered on the study of architectural practice as a collective process, specifically as a social and labor practice. The selected focus is on architectural practices that embrace a critical revision of its production relations, by adopting diverse participatory and collaborative instruments in the design and building processes, aiming at a social and political agency of architectural practice.

### 1. ARCHITECTURE AS A PRACTICE

Architecture as a practice has been studied by authors such as Robert Gutman (1997), Judith Blau (1984), Dana Cuff (1995) in the USA, and by Albena Yaneva (2009) in Europe, addressing mainly architecture firms of different dimensions, working within the market economy. There are, though, other practices working for non-profit organizations or grassroots movements (in Latin American countries, but also in Europe and in the USA), that experiment collaborative and participatory methodologies, aiming at a more horizontal and inclusive design and building process (Awan, Schneider, Till 2011). Some of these practices have gained a relative media exposure in the last 10 years in architecture publications and exhibitions, linked to the resurgence of the debate on the social and political role of the discipline.

### 2. ARCHITECTURE AS SOCIAL AND COLLECTIVE PRACTICE

The quest for a social architectural practice has been triggered in the 1960's by committed architects such as Giancarlo de Carlo (1969), Lucien Kroll or John F.C. Turner, among others, who developed participatory design processes with the future dwellers of collective housing projects in Europe and Latin America (Jones 2005). In Portugal, following the Carnage Revolution in 1974, the architect and secretary of state Nuno Portas launched an innovative public housing program called SAAL, that promoted the construction of circa 170 housing projects through participatory design processes between architects and local dwellers associations (Banderinha 2007). Similar programs were also launched in Uruguay (FUCVAM) and in Brazil (FUNAPS comunitário e MCMV Entidades), linked to grassroots movements and housing cooperatives, in which architects played a structural role in the participative design processes (Vilaça, Constante 2016). With the objective of bringing architecture closer to the biggest part of the population, architects working in these contexts questioned the discipline, namely its design and communication tools and its production relations. In this realm, the contribution of the Brazilian architect and critic Sergio Ferro (Khoury 2003) and his essay "The Building Site and the Drawing" (Ferro 1976) is of major relevance, shedding a light on the gap between the design and building processes in common architectural practices. Ferro, who analyses architecture from a political economy perspective, will draw a critique of the role that architects play in the precarious labor conditions to which construction workers are submitted. Ferro's position does not end at the revision of production relations in the design process but continues into the building site. In further essays, Sergio Ferro will propose the complete revision of production relations in the design and building processes, where architects, engineers, construction workers and dwellers should work together as a team, as a collective worker.

### 3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this research is to question the possibility of renewing architectural practice through the reconfiguration of its production relations and to characterize its consequences in the disciplinary knowledge. What do architects learn from the collective process of decision? What's the impact of this process on the definition of constructive systems and spatial configurations? Understanding architecture as a social and labor practice, requires the appropriation of research tools from the field of design and labor ethnography. The work of Bruno Latour (2005) and Albena Yaneva (2008) considers the ethnography of a social phenomenon as a network of human and non-human actors with equal relevance, a perspective which I propose to adopt in the analysis of the architecture project by considering a network of human and non-human agents, such as models, drawings, images (Latour, Yaneva 2008).

### 4. PROPOSED CASE STUDIES

The main body of this research is based on the participant observation of ongoing projects of selected practices, with the purpose of characterizing the planning tools and protocols used in the collective design processes. One of the case studies is the collective USINA, based in São Paulo, a group of architects that give technical assistance to housing grassroots movements in the area of São Paulo, and are strongly influenced by the vision of Sergio Ferro. USINA has over 25 years of experience in this field, having planned and built thousands of houses using participatory methods with self-governed workgroups, also called as mutirões. In France, the work of Patrick Bouchain and his office Construire (Bouchain 2006) is also a proposed case study, due to the experimental work regarding the building site planning and more recently in rehabilitation projects. And in Portugal, the work of the Portuguese collective from Lisbon Ateliernob will be of relevance to understand the reconfiguration of production relations with public institutions.

Through the description of the diverse case studies, based on an ethnographic analysis of the working methods, it is my intention to take conclusions regarding its design and building process and its contribution to the opening of the discipline to a broader public, and by consequence to the enrichment of disciplinary knowledge, aiming to prove the relevance of the critical revision of production relations to architectural production.



1. Villaggio Matteoti, Terni, Italy, 1969 Giancarlo de Carlo © Pinterest <http://architectuul.com>



2. Plenary with Inhabitants from Porto during the SAAL Housing Operations, 1975. Image © Sérgio Fernandez



3. The violent labor conditions of Brasilia's building site were part of Sergio Ferro's critique on architectural practice. Image © Marcel Gautherot



4. Construction of Mutirão Juta Nova Esperança, Usina, Sao Paulo, 1994-1999, Image © Usina CTAH

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