



**ETSAB**  
Visiting  
Studio

2014  
—2015

**Ricardo  
Bak  
Gordon**



Ricardo Bak Gordon  
ETSAB Visiting Studio  
2014  
— 2015

— **Forewords ·2·** Jordi Ros, ETSAB Director. Ramon Torra, AMB Manager. Luisa Solsona, Noemí Martínez, AMB — **Programme ·6·** Ricardo Bak Gordon, Visiting Professor. Eduardo Cadaval, ETSAB Lecturer — **Works ·10·** Maria Amat, Albert García-Alzórriz, Ana Hernández, Núria Moliner, Christian Schlanderer — **Lecture ·22·** Shared Looks on the Landscape, by Ricardo Bak Gordon — **Biographies ·36·** Ricardo Bak Gordon, Eduardo Cadaval

1

— Forewords

The main feature that defines the ETSAB is the particular profile of their teachers, whom reconciles academy and professional activity in one. Conversely, one of the historical shortcomings of the School has been the absence of the figure of the Visiting Professor, whether due to linguistic limitations, ideological warnings or economic difficulties. Thanks to some agreements subscribed with the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (AMB) and the Barcelona City Council, the intersection of this double finding gave rise to the so-called ETSAB Visiting Studio, semi-annual workshops included in the fifth academic year in the Degree Programme.

During this first four years —chronologically—, Anupama Kundoo, Ricardo Bak Gordon, Stephen Bates, Olivier Philippe and Michel Hössler (Agence TER), Carme Pigem and Ramon Vilalta (RCR), Dietmar Eberle, Tony Fretton and Andrea Deplazes shared their experience with us. As illustrious proper names, they found the best partners among the young ETSAB teachers, for leading remarkable teaching duos. They were Carles Crosas, Eduardo Cadaval, Héctor Mendoza, Ángel Solanellas, Pilar Calderon, Judith Leclerc and Estel Ortega. To all of them, people and institutions, I must express recognition and gratitude for making possible these first editions.

I have the privilege and satisfaction to introduce with these words the ETSAB Visiting Studio Collection, led by the AMB. We are deeply thankful to this institution and, in particular, to its manager Ramon Torra for his continued confidence in this exciting academic adventure, which I suspect it could become part of the future academic life of our School.

## **JORDI ROS BALLESTEROS**

Dr. Architect, ETSAB Director 2013 — 2017  
Barcelona School of Architecture  
October 2019

Once again, the ETSAB, in collaboration with the AMB, promotes Visiting Studio, a workshop that stems from the close cooperation between the UPC and the Barcelona Metropolitan Area with the aim of adding new visions, from different places, to the studies in Architecture.

These new methodological visions and resources will enable to expand learning tools, as it usually happens in Schools of Architecture in other countries.

This workshop will be taught by a visiting lecturer, a professor from a European university. It is addressed to senior students, future architects about to start their professional career.

The topic proposed is based on a real commission, a project that is being drafted by one of the teams of architects from either the Public Space or the Urban Planning departments. The AMB provides knowledge of the site and its territorial context, the definition of the programme, and the professional experience forged through many years of work in the construction of public space and metropolitan facilities.

Students, tutored by an internationally reputed architect, contribute with different open-minded reflections and academic solutions to the topic raised.

Thus, from this workshop, aimed at sharing knowledge, many stimulating and enriching multidirectional exchanges arise. In the review sessions, thanks to the different profiles of professional practice, students receive new inputs in the process of planning and designing the city, whereas AMB architects are inspired by multiple ways of seeing and understanding public space, as the element capable of structuring and providing cohesion to the metropolitan territory.

## **RAMON M. TORRA I XICOY**

Architect, General Manager  
Barcelona Metropolitan Area  
October 2019

The first Visiting Studio experience happened to be in a time where the public library model was being revisited. The AMB contributed to the general reflection with a non-tested new programme: the reading rooms, which became the starting point for the exercise.

The AMB Public Space department had been studying the programme of the reading rooms, which were defined as local and small-scale public facilities closely involved with the public space where they were located.

Two options were proposed regarding the site. The first one was located by the Passeig dels Ferrocarrils, a green axis that crosses the Almeda neighbourhood following the old railroad tracks; it comprised the Almeda train station and a centre for the elderly. The second one, just 200 metres far from the first, was a public facility which comprised a community centre and a care centre, situated in Almeda Square, on the edge between the residential and the industrial fabrics.

The final review session highlighted the rigour and thoroughness of the workshop led by professor Bak Gordon. Each exercise was composed of a site model, a portrait-oriented dinA1 board with graphic information and, as a novelty, a portrait-oriented dinA1 perspective where students were challenged to synthesize the main design ideas as a collage. The different images revealed the architect's constant concerns: the relationship between the building and its surroundings (infrastructure, topography, vegetation) and the transition between the exterior and the interior (materiality, building enclosure, lighting).

The new facility, planned on a site classified as green space, revealed itself as an extension of the public space that surrounds and defines it. Thus, reading rooms were designed as genuine covered public spaces, plain and innovative, capable of regenerating and revitalising the area of the city where they are located.

### **LUISA SOLSONA GILABERT**

Architect, Barcelona Metropolitan Area

### **NOEMÍ MARTINEZ GARCIA**

Architect, Head of Projects and Urban Design Section, Barcelona Metropolitan Area  
October 2019

2

— Programme

1961



1965



1970



1977



# Reading Rooms

by Ricardo Bak Gordon and Eduardo Cadaval

The entity AMB (Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona) proposes two “case study” areas, to fill with an equipment based on lecture rooms programme. This exercise will take part at the 2014/15 Projects Course at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Barcelona (ETSAB). All the previous documentation, cartography and technical plans have been given to the students from the AMB Agency. Every student may take one of the two sites proposed, after an accurate process of analyse and synthesis of the problems and weakness of the area.

## Guidelines for analyse

- Which site requires the most an equipment like this and adds some value to the environment?
- In terms of public space, which of both areas will notably improve the urbanity with the intervention?

## Almeda's Square (*plaça de l'Almeda*)

The Almeda's Square is placed 200m far from the Ferrocarrils Avenue (Passeig dels Ferrocarrils). The intersection between the economic pole street - Tirso de Molina - and Sant Ferran's Steet (Carrer Sant Ferran), generates this square as the West limit from a residential area. The equipment has to fit in a solar that surrounds another equipment with a completely different program. It's a Healthcare and Civic Centre with a dancing court and a playground.

## The object to be imagined

A reading room is a local equipment with small scale (between 500-700m<sup>2</sup>), closely linked to the public space in which it is located.

It is a social space, of encounter among all members of the community, without age, sex, race, religion, nationality, language or social class distinction.

It is a center of study, training and learning, both individual and collective. An indiscriminate access point to information, through new technologies and reading developments.

It is a center of cultural activity, opened to initiatives in favor to the exchange of ideas and dialogue, reading clubs, social gatherings, talks, etc.

This Equipment has to take part of Library of Cornellà Network Programme. This means, participating of the loan service of books, magazines and multimedia material, between all libraries of the municipe, despite having a deficient documental fond.

## THE PROGRAMME

The reading rooms programme is poorly experimented and that's the reason why our proposal is intentionally open to be the subject of reflection and debate.

As a starting point, it is proposed to organize the program in 4 main areas:

### **1. Reception and promotion area**

It is the most dynamic area of the building. It must allow the organization of exhibitions, conferences, training activities etc. In addition to this, It must be able to operate independently with the other spaces of the building, allowing the flexibility with the hours of use. It is composed by:

- An access Hall
- A control and security point with – Information and loan books service
- A press, newspaper and reviews area with reading spaces
- Multifunctional room for 30-50 users and storage annex room

### **2. Read and study area**

It must answer the training and leisure needs of the users promoting the reading and study practices as an habit. The space must be flexible, easily compartmentalized, allowing both individual and collective uses. It must include:

- 50 or 70 reading points (formal and informal) with informatics connection
- Vending area
- Outdoor reading spaces – Patios

### **3. Internal services and work area**

It is the area for management and administration (2-4 people). The internal work area will have the following spaces:

- Direction office
- Staff offices and workspaces
- Storage room
- Deposit (books, reviews, culture material...)

### **4. Logistics and communication area**

- Services
- Maintenance and cleaning rooms
- Installations

3

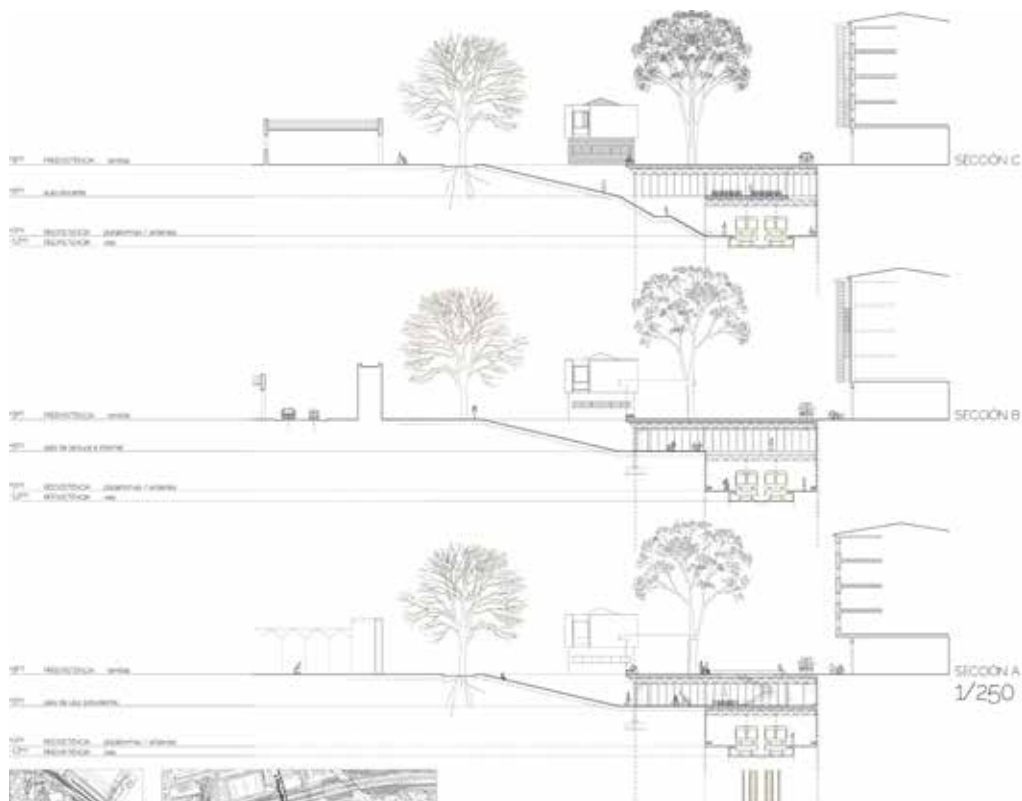
— Works



Participants: Maria Amat, Sebastià Febrer Socias, Rafael Capó Quetglas, Pablo del Campo Montoliu, Angel García Lobo, Albert García-Alzorri, Guardiola, María Giménez Grau, Ana Hernández, Núria Moliner, Javier Morera Mingueza, Iñigo Peñalva Ercilla, Beatriz Saladich Nebot, and Christian Schlanderer

# Maria Amat



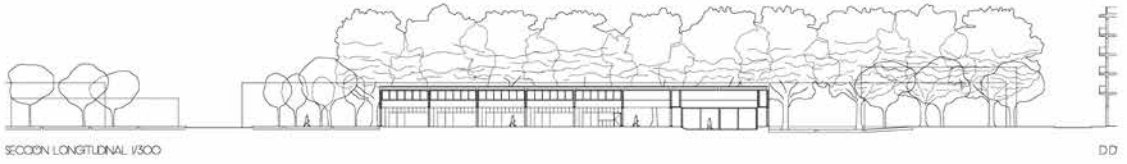
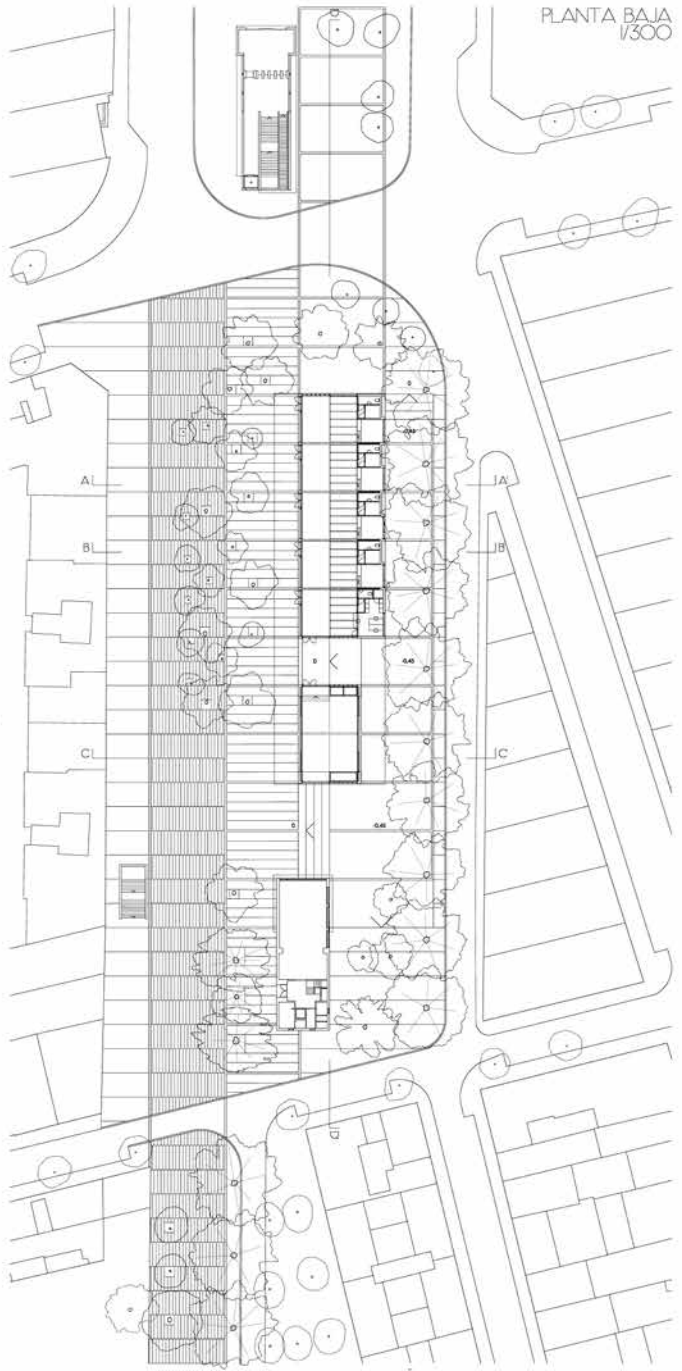
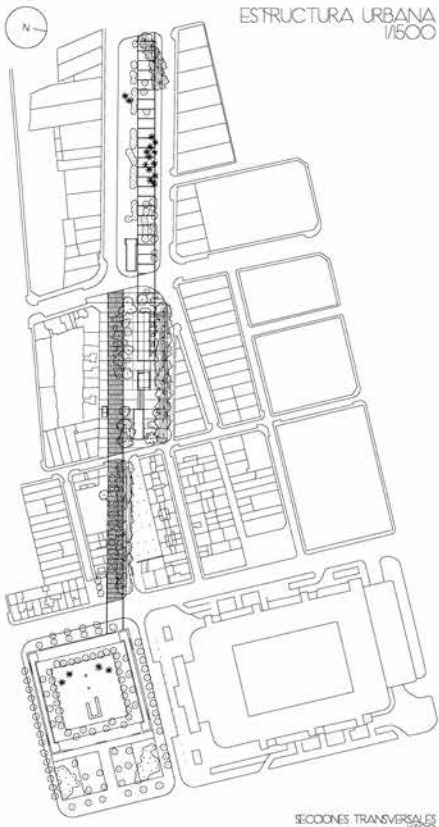


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1/6000



# Albert García-Alzórriz



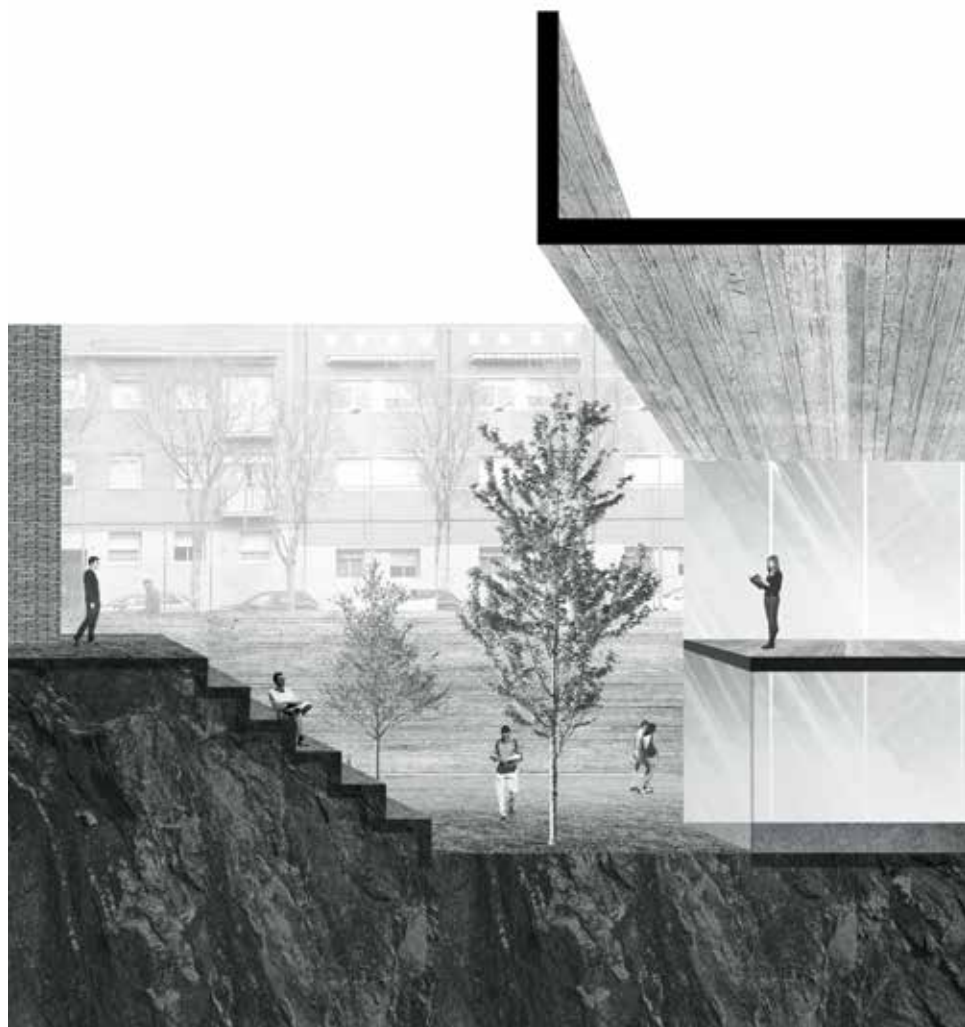


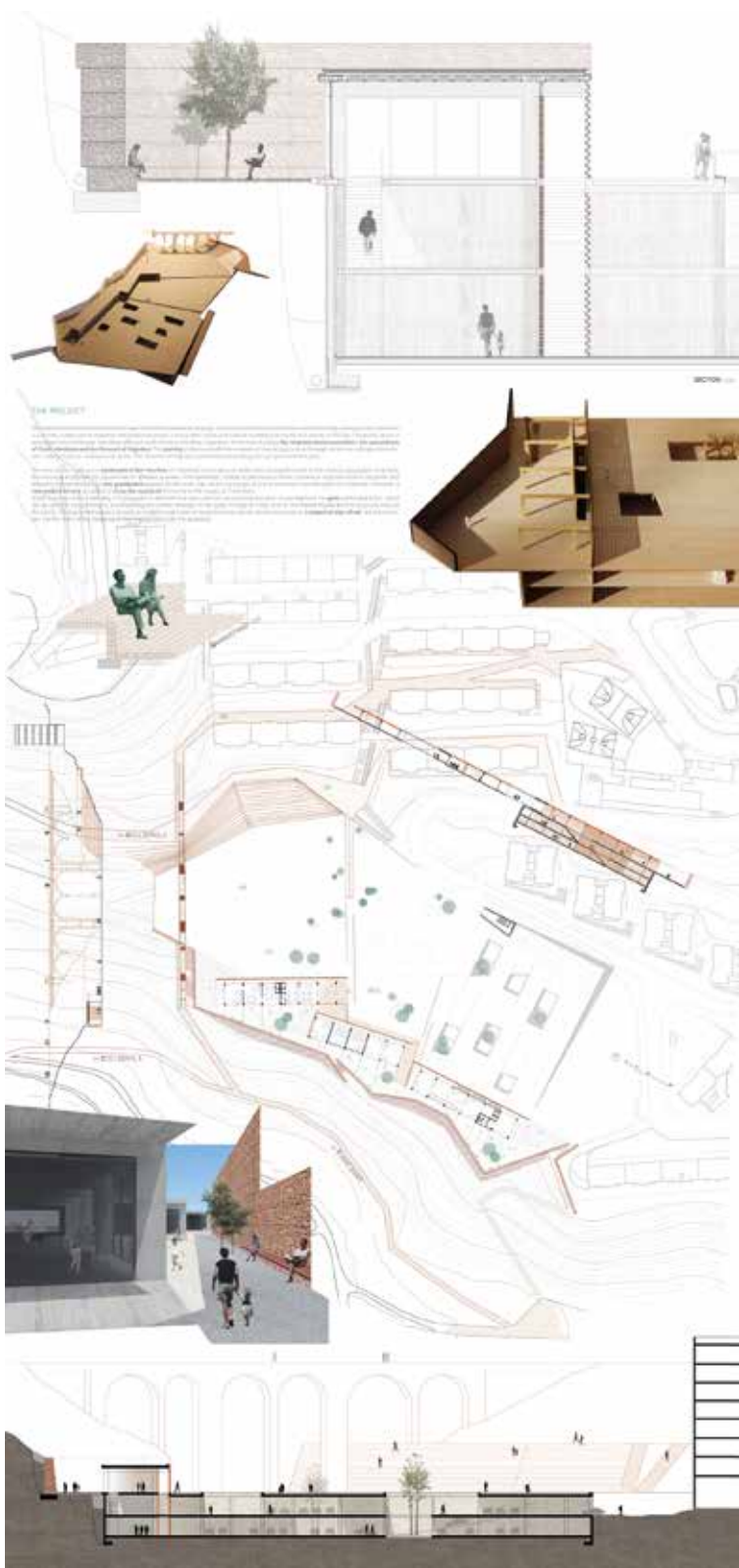
# Ana Hernández





# Núria Moliner

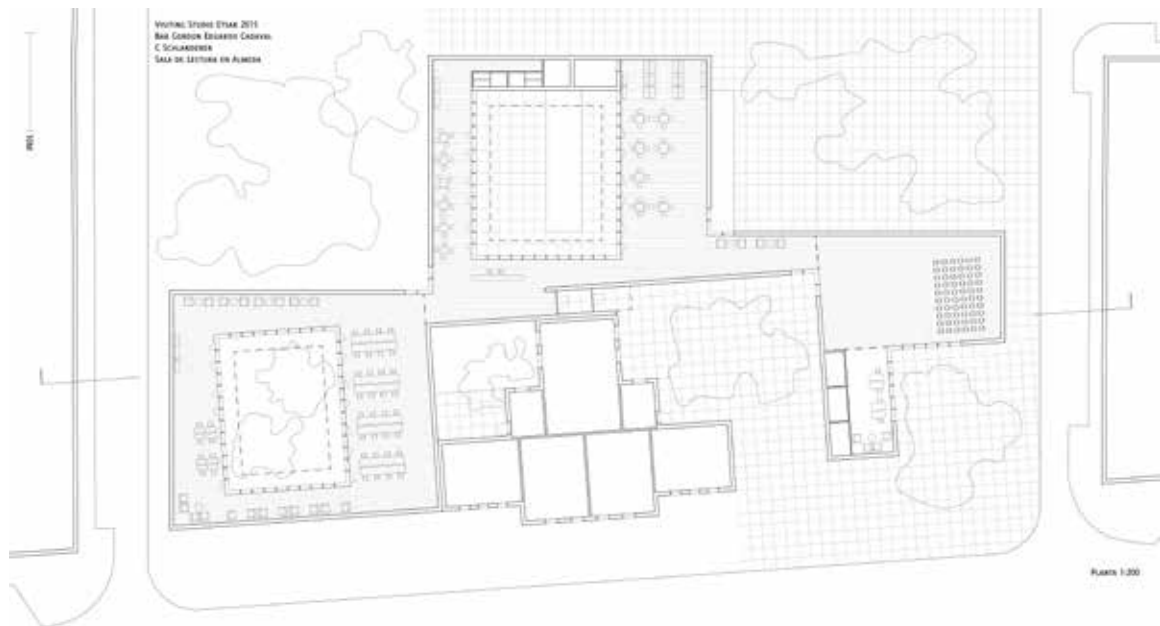




# Christian Schlanderer



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 SALA DE LETTURA IN PUNTO



Plano 1:200



Sección 1:200



EMPLAZAMIENTO 1:500

4

— Lectures

# *Shared Looks on the Landscape*

**5 February 2015**



**by Ricardo Bak Gordon**

I will explain how we raise the questions of the project in our study and how we usually answer with a strategy that is clear. This is something very interesting for us: a subjective equation, because the place and the programme are the main tools of a project.

Although the same programme and place are shared when a project is developed, the answers it causes among all its collaborators are always different and that should make us think about. In fact, it is a subjective response. In other words, the programme seems only the same, but it is actually not since it is filtered out through everything we have studied, lived and felt, as a personal reading. Also the look at the place: the way in which each one feels it, takes ownership of it and looks at it.

Before starting to see some projects, I want to show you a couple of images.

This is an image of an unfinished and simple construction, but for me it is very important such a metaphor for the attitude of man as builder and transformer of places. Architecture has this virtue of transforming nature almost against nature itself, of assuming its maximum artificiality. [fig. 1]



Fig. 1. Unfinished construction

We can see another image of a sculpture by the Portuguese artist Pedro Cabrita Reix, *A room for a poet* (2000). Here is everything I think about architecture -with a work that only has one door and one window- it is everyone's house: there is a poetic vision among all of us when we live in the city or other places, it seems we cannot do anything that doesn't have a poetic look. [fig. 2]

When I started studying in Porto I looked a lot at the art of the time and I was impressed with some works of art and their ability to occupy a place and define what is positive and negative of a territory;



Fig. 2. Pedro Cabrita Reix, *A room for a poet*, 2000

in other words, the synthetic capacity that they can achieve. At the same time, I discovered this work, the first prize of the Mies van der Rohe awards, the Bank of Viana do Conde of Álvaro Siza, which has the same synthetic capacity as the Ellsworth Kelly painting (*Curve III*, 1973), with all the commitments of architecture, which are even more complex than painting since it is synthesis in itself. [fig. 3]

I'm going to show you a house in Algarve. The Algarve was transformed a lot with tourist constructions in the 80s and 90s. That is why I thought of how to describe traditional architecture of the south of Portugal, which

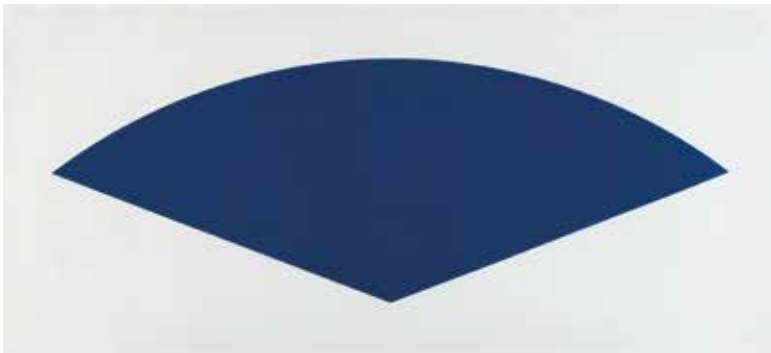


Fig. 3. Ellsworth Kelly,  
*Blue Curve State III*, 1989

is not only of Portugal but of the entire Mediterranean, with very artificial constructions, radically simple geometries, in the way it is posed in nature: it is

a small house with a golden special that must not be touched and the aim is find out how to rebuild all that.

I want to remark as something even more important the feeling of building a wall, of being close to tectonics, letting flow the temperature, the light, the shadow, the texture of things. All is very simple, but I was very interested in it, along with the importance of the window as a metaphor. Also is interesting a very simple geometry of small hollows to protect from heat [fig. 4] or very light structures of transition spaces between inside and outside, of bamboo

materials, which you can change from year to year; these structures create one of the sweetest atmospheres that you can ever have. We can see this presence of the house in contrast to its very typical landscape of its demarcation.

Another point worth is the choice of materials inside: you can choose a very sensory ceramic. There is something, the light, the matter, the stairs, all of them are very simple, but at the same time very intense. It is what interest me about architecture, the fact that can give you a very intense feeling.



Fig. 4. House in Boliqueime, Loulé, 2000

[...]

Here we have another house in the Algarve, also in the interior, but not in the mountain, with a plot that looks only at its specific and very natural limits, introspectively. That is why I was interested in thinking about the artificiality of building in this place. In this way, we built a 20 x 20 m platform in the physical center of the property. Then we built a single wall on the platform, which goes around the limit and defines what is inside and outside, as well as the rhythm of the internal spaces of the house. It was necessary to open the hollows to pass outside and it had been decided to open them only on the courtyards and never on the perimeter walls, so that the interior - exterior relationship were more intense. [fig. 5]



Fig. 5. House in Quelfes, Olhão, 2007

The interior spaces must be subdivided, with light wooden structural elements that do not touch the main wall. To be able to emphasize the limits of the plot, a certain deformation of the geometry of the house that forces you to look at the limits of your property and complete the

courtyards with a very light shadow structure that continues with the geometry. A very simple house but where you can choose more sun or shade during different times of the day. The shadow structures are always very atmospheric and produce this effect that is very simple and sensory. Inside, this deformation of the geometry makes, sometimes, the house seem vertical, as if you had different houses built inside the house itself.

I am showing you now another small house north of Lisbon, rural, on a very narrow road that has an importance intrinsically, on a high topographic line, which touches the maximum altitude points.

The town where it is found is also very simple, where each of the houses does not have any very particular importance in itself, but in the whole itself; it is very nice. This is the atmosphere.

We made a very small house, but it has this particularity that touches on two different levels. You enter for a medium level, you go down to the floor of the common steps and

you end up in the private area of the rooms. You also have another floor which allows you understand – something that you would never understand it if it were not – that it has a geometry which is committed to what is happening on one side and another.

I have always been impressed by the idea of the hollow (window, door, etc.)

through which the infinite world exists. In a house like this, gaps are placed where they have to be, they must build a composition; this gap is the strong relationship between inside and outside, very dramatic from the human point of view. [fig. 6]



Fig. 6. House in Sobral da Lagoa, Óbuidos, 2008

The hollow is a metaphor for itself. I thought I wanted to make some particular windows that each one could transmit something, could participate in something. So, we made some windows very similar to each other, with a painted wooden cover, a chromatic and dynamic contribution to the village.

The main aim is to integrate the house into the environment, from several sides, so that from a particular moment it blends with its surrounding as if it had always been part of it.

We can see another example with two houses within a block, a large yard in Lisbon, which has made me think

a lot about this city within the city, about a place or places that are not used or are used in a wrong manner, that are not known, that traditional cities (with squares, streets and blocks) have hidden. It is another city that can be enjoyed and transformed into public cities. But in Lisbon there is no “legal” tradition of inhabiting the interior of blocks. Then they admit and build things that are not known to be there.

You should look at the vertical limit, behind the back of the buildings, and then look also at a place connecting with the royal city as a capillary structure. Obviously, in this project I understood that the gaps, the spaces that are not built, are the protagonists. It was for that reason why I began to design the voids, the center of the great voids, bearing in mind how these dramatic vertical limits can be resisted; there are two very clear options: first of all that the ground level be very horizontal by contrast; and secondly that the materiality



Fig. 7. Two houses in St Isabel, Lisbon, 2010

be robust enough to withstand this pressure, such as reinforced concrete. [fig.7] We can see a groundfloor with the functional spaces of the several houses, a first courtyard shared by both houses and then the rest of the courtyards for the other houses.

Changing the subject, I was working with a very interesting programme of the Portuguese government: the modernization of Portuguese high schools and that had a very interesting topic. Portugal was until 1974 a dictatorship, after the revolution, from one day to the next,

secondary schooling became compulsory; therefore, an enormous amount of centers, of pavilions, in the interior, the coast, the north and the south were made, with few means, fast and running. Very simple pavilions that were enough for the arrival but that in 2005 were very bad, had the minimum infrastructure. So many workshops of architects and engineers in Portugal we have worked a lot in these pavilions, but I was fortunate to work on a first project, pilot of this programme that aimed not only to improve the existing heritage, but to provide new library rooms, auditoriums, computer rooms, new informal common studying spaces. The idea was a programme inspired by another programme in England, which was developed with Tony Blair, called “Buildings School for the Future” with an interesting school base like a “Learning Street”, like a road where you can find all the fundamentals activities in the school. It is about avoiding it looks as a pavilion but as a single building. [fig. 8]

How to do it? First we must find the physical place to raise 3000 or 4000 m<sup>2</sup> of construction. Then we must find out how to confront the existing. We built a building that is once again a wall that walks where it

can, that seeks a space to be implanted, with a contrasting geometry, different from the pavilions. Always there is this idea that, although it is a public building you can still have doors and windows. We have understood that it was possible, windows with special relationships with the interior steps and an infinite wall with no beginning or end and still walking.



Fig. 8. Dinis Secondary School, Lisbon, 2008

The same wall revolts, it is shown inside as the limit of this “Learning Street” road where you find existing buildings, but also new equipment, such as the library and auditorium. On the other hand, there is a relationship with the roof level, and it is the pavement of the school that moves, which goes down with the topography, reaching a double height here. It is also important the construction option in the interior, a little more technical, in the sense of showing how this roof is built, without hiding the infrastructure, structure, ventilation, air conditioning, etc. It is almost an educational option. Then, we find several informal work spaces that can be related within the steps of the school. This idea of connections is very important.

On the other hand, in this other school in Porto the problem was the same; we return once more here to the beginning of our conversation: the place is not the same for all of us. Although I studied in Porto many years before and had an impression of Porto as a cold place, rainy, with a terrible climate, when I stayed in Porto for this project, I realized that I should react in front of that memory. Again, we had to look for that physical place for school.

In the end we found that, although the main entrance of the school is this, there is a secondary entrance here and we faced the challenge of looking for the access to a 4000 m<sup>2</sup> building. But the most important thing was to propose a space that was not requested by the programme: a large covered outdoor space where the entire school could come together. Another very important thing for us: the criticism of the preliminary programme, made from a very technical point of view of the spaces that are needed. But then it is your look with which you conclude that the most important thing for this programme to be completed, or truly build is something that has not been requested.

We have made the proposal a large covered square to the center of the school where the most important steps of the school, the cafeteria, library, etc., where all the flows of the school converge. As we have a complex topography, we have thought of two heights: a superior one, in contact with the pavement that can change and a clearer one that can dialogue throughout the school. The cross sections, with this type of very long building, are very variable. Here you can see the building that goes into the topography with different relations with the gardens until it reaches the central square, which has this dramatic relationship with the greens: it is all made of a prestressed concrete, without any pillar and an asymmetric structure very dynamic [fig. 9]. It means a great dare also with the color that appears in a very intense way: you leave class and perhaps you have the need to break with this space capable of creating this vibration.

We change the subject now, with a factory, which allows me to raise the challenge of acquiring knowledge in the face of new programmes; in other words, there are topics on which we know nothing, and from one day to the next you know a lot about this topic. It happened to me with the oil factory. My memory was the women of the Alentejo shaking the branches. And soon I knew that there are super intensive olive groves, that olive trees could not grow up more than 3 m high, that there are some machines that are put in the middle and take out the olives. But after understanding all this maybe you look at the landscape wondering if it is possible that the factory can have simple geometries, artificial white and circular like the other constructions of this landscape, if there is any reason why this could not continue to be like this; then you understand that you can really keep it up. You have to study a lot about the oil

manufacturing process, during the year, which is done for 3 months a year, in the coldest months when you have more wind and rain, which is done for 24 hours during these 3 months, outside and that you must have protected areas.

And then you must organize this complexity with a programme so synthetically realized so that it can be

transformed into a very regular building. Another thing that I wanted is the factory was inside the olive grove, which could be a culmination of the olive grove. That is why we studied a cut in the landscape that was the minimum for tractor movements and then a parking lot for visitors already placed



Fig. 9. Garcia d'Orta  
Secondary School,  
Porto, 2008

inside the olive grove; we studied also to build a kind of topographic formation, because the height of the buildings is a bit large, of 11 meters, and we thought that they could be inside the natural topography. That is the reason of the cutting of land so that they can have normal production flows. Here we have the building with two heights, one that is completely attached to the ground and the other produces the protection areas, with two wings (one for the arrival of olive tractors and the other to house the large systems). We can see very well this cut in the topography to accommodate the most functional spaces or also the entrance to the building in its central axis, since it was wanted that the building also had a museological area with some spaces also to

do gastronomy workshops, focused then for the visits and get to this first floor where you can look on both sides: seeing the production of the building or below, where are laboratories and hallways or oil deposits. [fig. 10]

These large lamps, which, more than give light to the activities, are headlamps in a metaphorical sense, because the Alentejo is a very depressed region that has lost all its inhabitants, its agriculture. Now you start returning to this place. And with this building I wanted to regulate the presence and virtues of work in the landscape, which lights up all night long...

Thank you.



Fig. 10. Oliveira da Serra Millo, Ferreira do Alentejo, 2010



5

— Biographies

# Ricardo Bak Gordon

Ricardo Bak Gordon was born in Lisbon in 1967. He graduated in 1990 at Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade Técnica de Lisboa. During his studies, he also attended Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade do Porto and Politecnico di Milano.

He is currently a visiting Design Critic at Harvard GSD.

In parallel, he is also teaching at the Integrated Master Degree (MSc) in Architecture at Instituto Superior Técnico (IST), Lisbon. He lectured (and/or attended) at several universities and institutions such as Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Escola Superior Artística do Porto, Universidade Lusíada, Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, Universidad Camilo José Cela, Madrid, Universidad de Salamanca, Colegio de Arquitectos de Cataluña, Politecnico di Milano, Università Ca' Foscari (Venice), Università degli Studi di Sassari, Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio, Hochschule Luzern, Universität Liechtenstein, Trinity College Dublin, Universidade de Brasília, Universidad de San Francisco de Quito, at the Ozone Foundation in Tokyo, IUAV di Venezia and Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Barcelona.

His activity as an architect has been developed since 1990, and in the year 2002 he created the studio Bak Gordon Arquitectos, where currently works.

He was the author of the Portugal Pavilion in Expo Zaragoza 2008, the Portugal Pavilion in São Paulo Biennale 2007 and the exhibition project of Lisbon International Architecture Trienal 2007.

His work as an architect was present in several exhibitions in Portugal, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, Germany, Czech Republic, Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil, Macau, South Korea and Japan; and was published on prestigious editions of the specialty.

He was a nominee for the Mies van der Rohe Prize in 2009 and 2011; winner of the FAD Prize 2011 (Barcelona, Spain), BIAU Prize 2012 (Cádiz, Spain), CICA Prize BA2015 (Buenos Aires, Argentina) and APCA Prize (São Paulo, Brazil). He was one of Portugal's representatives at the Venice Biennale in 2010 and 2012.

# Eduardo Cadaval

Eduardo Cadaval is a licensed architect with a BA from the National University of Mexico (with special honours) and a Master of Architecture in Urban Design from Harvard University. He is associate professor of Urbanism at the Barcelona School of Architecture, ETSAB, UPC and has been a Visiting Professor at University of Pennsylvania, and at Calgary University's Barcelona programme. Eduardo was awarded with the National Council for the Arts Young Creators Awards, from the Mexican government.

Cadaval & Solà-Morales was founded in New York City in 2003 and moved to both Barcelona & Mexico City in 2005. The studio operates as a laboratory in which research and development are key elements of the design process. The objective of the firm is to create intelligent design solutions at many different scales, from large projects to small buildings, from objects to city fractions. The studio has won numerous awards including the Bauwelt Prize (Munich), the Young Architects Prize from the Catalan Institute of Architects (Barcelona), the Design Vanguard Award (New York), a Mention of Honor for Young Architects from the IX Spanish Architecture Biennale (Madrid), The Silver Medal of the XI Mexican Architecture Biennale in two different occasions (Mexico City), the Prize of the Ibero American Architecture Biennale (Cadiz), the International FAD Prize 2016 (Barcelona) the Spotlight Prize 2016 (Houston) and the Emerging Voices Award (2017) from the Architectural League of New York.

Cadaval & Solà-Morales' work has been selected for multiple exhibitions in Europe and abroad, including among others: The official selection of the Venice Biennale 2016, the Barbara Capocchin Biennale, the Exhibition of Young Spanish Architects of Spain and the Mexican, Spanish, and Iberoamerican biennales. The work of their practice has also been published extensively worldwide in over 300 specialized magazines from more than 30 countries. Furthermore, it has been featured in some of the most prestigious global newspapers such as The New York Times, The Financial Times, Il Corriere della Sera, El Clarin, Reforma, Mercurio, La Vanguardia and El Pais.

Eduardo Cadaval and Clara Solà-Morales have taught and lectured at several highly regarded academic institutions in Europe and North America. They are both associate professors at the Barcelona School of Architecture, ETSAB, UPC. Eduardo and Clara have been visiting professors at the University of Pennsylvania and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

## **ETSAB VISITING STUDIO 1**

— **Ricardo Bak Gordon**

**Barcelona School of Architecture, ETSAB**

**Barcelona Metropolitan Area, AMB**

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### **Printing**

Impremta Pagès

© **Edition:** Barcelona School of Architecture, Barcelona

Metropolitan Area

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First edition, November 2019

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<https://etsab.upc.edu/ca/escola/cultura/publicacions>

ISBN: 978-84-9880-780-6

e-ISBN: 978-84-9880-781-3

DL: B 22820-2019

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