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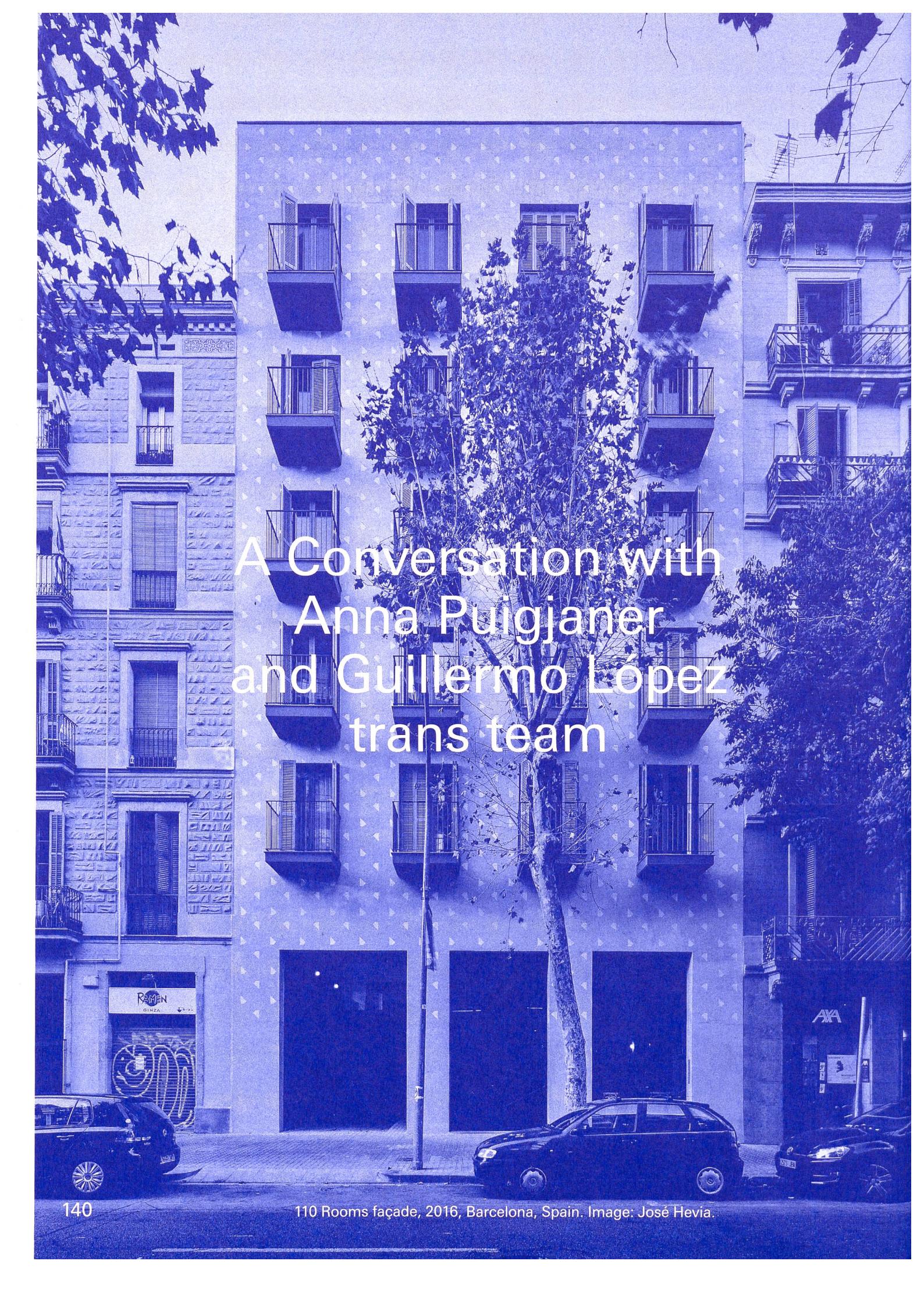
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A Conversation with Anna Puigjaner and Guillermo López trans team

It's 11 am on a Wednesday. Anna Puigjaner, Guillermo López and their newly born son meet us for coffee and a long conversation about time, care and architecture. Their work at MAIO and their research address urgent topics in architecture and question our construct of the domestic space and reproductive labor in relation to the urban fabric.

TT In one of your lectures, you mention that «What is comfortable or not comfortable, what we consider good and bad in housing, is a social construction that changes through time.» Could you tell us about your research project called «Kitchenless City» on apartments with shared kitchens and how we can learn from it in the future?

AP For us to pursue research and write about it is a way of looking at things to learn about today. The way we perceive the past is always through the eyes of the present. For our research we started by analyzing a few western housing typologies of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. During this period, the modern categories that we know nowadays, such as the spaces to sleep, specific domestic places for work, or leisure, or the idea of form related to program, were not yet that clearly defined. Many revolutionary ideas came into being in an attempt to respond to social problems – mostly in reaction to the impact of the second industrial revolution. At that time, there was a push for social and labor changes that, for instance, enabled women to enter the labor market at large. Due to this development, the domestic sphere started to change radically. The problems that we are still facing nowadays – like the dichotomies of life and work, or the combination of domestic work with outside-home work – started to crystallize.

GL Anna's PhD is based on Manhattan and seminal works such as «The Grand Domestic Revolution» by Dolores Hayden, which are key to understanding her research. Ideological approaches like Charles Fourier's and Robert Owen's came from Europe to the United States in a moment where everything was open to new possibilities. The research reflects on how these utopian ideologies were transformed and involuntarily embedded within a capitalist logic, in order to understand their effect on the city and some hybrid typologies that they resulted in.

AP We started that research around 2007 – just before the economic crisis. At that time the culture of sharing was still not so broadly appropriated and commodified by certain companies. For us it was important to unveil how this typology from the 19th century, the kitchenless apartments – that allegedly claimed to have a lack of ideology, or that at least did not want to be associated with social utopias and socialism – were promoting collectivity as an asset. We found it interesting to claim that collectivity is not only related to one specific type of ideology but can fit in a diverse and complex socio-economic framework. Of course, it does not mean that typology is apolitical *per se*, rather, that it has the strength to be re-politicized and historicized under different narratives. Nowadays, almost 15 years after the early 2000s financial crisis, we have seen how, under late capitalism, collectivity has been commodified and reified into a profitable and extractive by-product, something we can clearly see, for example, in apps and initiatives that promote «sharing» as an economical asset lacking any social return, like WeLive, WeWork, and the like.

TT How did you observe the kitchen as a shared, collective space during the pandemic years?

AP At the beginning of Corona, there was a moment where it seemed that shared kitchens would disappear. But surprisingly, the opposite happened. The awareness of the need for a social infrastructure grew during the pandemic emergency.

GL «Kitchenless City» talks about kitchens that were related to the scale of a building. But the ones we have been researching in the last years, the so-called «urban kitchens», are completely public and deal with a wider scale and broader effects. Some of them are public, institutionally speaking, – so they are related financially or logically to the government – and some of them are a part of a public social network. We have done research in the cities of Lima, Mexico City and Tokyo. In Tokyo, one can find more than 100 urban kitchens, and in the case of Lima they can be counted by thousands. At the beginning of Corona, these kitchens neither knew how to operate under restrictions nor how to establish protocols, but after the



A Care Yoshikawa, t e c o architects, 2014, Saitama, Japan. Image: Anna Puigjaner
 C MAIO portrait. Image: Adrià Cañameras

B San Remo Hotel, Edward L. Angell architect, 1891, New York, USA. The Real Estate Record & Builders' Guide, 20 December 1890, p. 31
 D Urban kitchen, 2022, Barcelona, Spain. Image: José Hevia

first months of panic, most of them started to run as usual again, being even more necessary and successful than before.

TT For you personally and professionally, when did this idea of the collective kitchen come up?

AP When you start a research project you are not aware of what will emerge from it. It takes time to understand it. We started by researching the Waldorf Astoria in New York, probably seduced by its amazing section, colorfully presented in Rem Koolhaas' «Delirious New York». As in many cases, it was an innocent and naive initial approach.

When doing research, it is helpful to change your scope, and at some moment I tried to understand why Waldorf Astoria appears as it does, why did somebody think that this typology could be successful. I discovered that the typology was already 60 years old, and far away from being exceptional, it had a bearing on hundreds of other similar buildings – but just not as «extraordinary» as the Waldorf Astoria depicted by Koolhaas. From that point onwards my reading of «Delirious New York» changed radically. I realized that we had been reading Manhattan through the eyes of Rem Koolhaas, where New York was a huge grid populated by autonomous objects: i.e., envelopes containing extraordinary mixed programs in height and amazingly stacked sections. If we see what he was doing in OMA at the moment, we can understand that the book was actually not only his own manifesto of New York, but of their own work at the time. For us, New York was not merely a sum of extraordinary buildings placed in a grid, but rather a set of relationships that needed to happen in order for the city to emerge and operate on an ordinary, daily basis, without excluding fundamental and often invisibilized parts of life such as reproductive labor. And these relationships are facilitated through architecture. Recently, Dan Miller and Wright Kennedy, together with a group of investigators from Columbia University, Leah Meisterlin and Laura Kurgan among others, developed an online platform in which you can access the information of who was living in a specific building of Manhattan through the 19th and early 20th century. They basically used the data of the census that was digitized a few years back, and mapped it. When we were doing this research, I found out that the people occupying many of the studied buildings were much more diverse than expected. Now I even know that some of the domestic workers that used to work in these infrastructures also used to live in the same building

typology, but a few blocks further away. It might be, for instance, that one person was living in one building with a collective kitchen and working in a collective kitchen in another building. All buildings were interconnected. In our eyes this whole reality of the city, facilitated by laws that eased their economic viability, are not as simple as detached, autonomous, envelopes filled with mixed used and overwhelming sections.

TT The construct of women in the domestic sphere, and their role in reproductive labor intensified with the growth of a capitalist society. How do you see collective rooms and shared services as a potential place of resistance and empowerment of women and equality in race and class?

AP We don't pretend to bring solutions with our research. We rather try to unveil a problem that is already there and was made invisible through architecture. The modern kitchen allegedly aimed to help us to cook faster and more easily, but at the same time masked reproductive labor – think of the segregated, unipersonal space of the «Frankfurter Küche». Through our research, we wanted to put forward this idea by claiming that if reproductive labor has been made invisible through architecture, this can also be re-addressed and changed by the discipline itself. Through research, we wanted to offer alternative ways of living beyond what we understand as the modern house and the idea of a private home and the nuclear family. It is true that sharing can be a way of looking for fairer ways of dealing with domestic labor. But it is not the only one – and we should be careful, because sharing can be as exploitative as not-sharing. For instance, in the 70s, authors such as Mariarosa della Costa or Silvia Federici claimed that reproductive labor should be waged as productive labor. Nowadays we are in a different scenario, and we are aware that the trade between labor and value does not necessarily have to be quantified through money. The kitchens that we have been researching on in Lima, are run by a group of up to 15 women each. Many of them argue that they don't want to be paid monetarily, because that would mean they would enter a capitalist logic that they do not want to be part of. They aim to recuperate the pre-colonial culture, called «Minka», where trade is not conducted through money but through other means of exchange. The communities in the city of Lima, especially in the «Cerros», are still operating in many cases, based on these social systems.

TT How would you imagine having an urban kitchen in Barcelona?

AP In Barcelona we are trying to set up a network of public kitchens that would be related to food waste and care cooperatives – «Cooperatives de Cures». These cooperatives are not defined by an architectural infrastructure, but rather by people within their neighborhood that are brought together to cooperate and offer care work. Of course, they usually occupy a space, and that is the moment where architecture becomes valuable.

GL The food waste association (Plataforma Aprofitem els Aliments) is a group that promotes the reuse of wasted food in the city by introducing cooking as a communal action. There are already a large number of communities with an urban kitchen, but they live independently of each other. We think it would be helpful to create a network, not only to generate awareness of each other's existence, but also to implement the reuse of food and to open new ways of understanding how a kitchen could become a pedagogical tool with a wider social scope.

TT In our first question we asked you about the notion of comfort and domesticity that changed overtime. Could you tell us what role time plays in your design proposals?

AP Time has always been a strong driver for the development of our work, probably because we started our office mostly with ephemeral architecture. As such, we have been questioning the term itself, since the beginning of our professional careers. Ephemeral is always a relative term: It can last one hour, one week or one-hundred years depending on how you perceive it. When we started the practice, we did not want to understand building as an end in itself – or at least not as we were taught. That attitude was probably created because of the crisis that made us pay more attention to the societal impact of architecture.

GL For me, the interesting thing about time is to relate it to the limits of design. To what extent can you design something and expect that there will be a corresponding result? Our project in Barcelona «110 Rooms» is related to a traditional way of understanding time. During the design process we were looking at traditional typologies from Barcelona in which you cannot really recognize the program of a room by its size, because they all have similar dimensions. We were very interested in this idea of generic spatial characteristics in order to leave open the potentialities of what can happen in each space. I think it is beautiful to see how you can enable the future to go far beyond your capacity as an architect.

AP Time is also related to an environmental awareness. Resources are limited, so everything we do is related to its life span and how it will evolve through time. We started to understand from the very beginning of our practice that a project is not finished by the end of its construction, but is part of a chain of events – events that happened before and that will happen after. We hope to relate it to what was there before and to what can happen after.

GL Actually, speaking about time, sometimes we invite students to see the movie «Der Lauf der Dinge» by Fischli/Weiss. One event is the consequence of another – it is never-ending action and endless accumulation. The most interesting part of this work are the cut-out scenes. Probably 95 percent of the try-outs were not working and we are more interested in them than in the finished product. The final cut is amazing, because it contains all of these try-outs, even if they remain silent. It is presented as a linear result, but it contains a huge amount of non-linearity within it. It is amazing to think about architecture in these terms.

TT Your new chair is called «Architecture and Care». Care work and architecture are both strongly related to the passing of time. Can you tell us how you see time as a factor in your upcoming teaching?

AP At our chair we will talk a lot about time. We will address how architecture has been extensively employed to empower normative bodies, excluding wider ways of being and other diverse realities such as aging bodies, for instance. When we think about aging, we think of an elderly person, possibly over 65 – but aging is not only that. Aging can happen at any life moment. We want to question all those social and architectural assumptions that we take for granted, and sometimes produce biases. What do «accessibility», «social justice», «inclusion» and «vulnerability» mean in architecture? We want to go beyond preset assumptions and deal with the idea of time from this perspective. Of course, those terms are a central core in architecture and social justice, and even if the questions they pose for architecture might be difficult to answer, this is precisely what academia stands for: We are interested in pushing the boundaries of what we nowadays understand as social justice and gender justice in architecture, to candidly discuss what we can do from the discipline to redefine these limits. We are here to raise questions and to be critical.

The example of the kitchen is just a tool – a McGuffin so to say – to render an existing

scenario visible or to make an endemic status quo apparent. Why do we relate daily care labor to the domestic space? Why are many aspects within the domestic space, like cooking, cleaning, caring for the other, made almost invisible, hence generally not considered part of a health insurance system? What would happen if those spaces were to be part of the urban structure and became visible? These are genuine architectural matters, since those spaces have been systematically designed to remain invisible. What would happen if we started to design them as part of the public infrastructure of the city and all those spaces of care became a central part of how we organize the city and its architecture? Our goal is to teach an understanding of architecture beyond the object, an architecture that is powerfully embedded in and part of the urban environment. You cannot detach architecture from the city and from other complex interconnections. There is a form of complexity that we have to acknowledge, which also has to do with how the idea of family and kinship has evolved, culturally, with all its socio-economic biases. All these considerations can allow us to understand the power of architecture as a pedagogical tool. Space is not neutral. Whatever we define and design, will influence how people use it and behave in it. This is why architecture is so important in our daily lives.

Anna Puigjaner and Guillermo López are architects, researchers, editors and co-founders of MAIO. MAIO is an architectural office based in Barcelona that explores spatial systems that allow variation and change through time. MAIO's projects embrace the changing complexity of everyday-life while providing a resilient, compromised and clear architectural response. Both Anna Puigjaner and Guillermo López have been part of the editorial board of the magazine «Quaderns d'Arquitectura i Urbanisme». They have lectured at GSAPP, Columbia University, Madrid School of Architecture ETSAM-UPM, among other universities. Anna Puigjaner's project on «Kitchenless Cities» was a finalist of the Rolex Mentor & Protégé Initiative, and was awarded with the 2016 Wheelwright Prize, Harvard GSD. Since 2023 she has been a professor at the Chair of Architecture and Care at ETH Zurich.