EVERYONE AN EXPERT

by Andrés Jaque

On making Peter Eisenman transparent.

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Design and research tend to be seen as independent or even alternate practices. Often, they are thought of as consecutive activities, as if architectural facts only emerge as outcomes of research once a design is complete. The very role buildings play in the production of collective research is rarely regarded as something of significance. Adding to this artificial distinction, often only research done by professional researchers is valued as worthy of consideration. The ways unofficial researchers use description, data collection, archiving, evaluation, comparison, and narration to orient their actions in ordinary life or to produce knowledge tend to be ignored. What is it that we call research when we talk of architecture? With this text I will describe an experiment in which I took part more than ten years ago when all these distinctions were intentionally blurred.

12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. Andrés Jaque/Office for Political Innovation. 2002.

12 ACTIONS TO MAKE PETER EISENMAN TRANSPARENT

In 2002 the architectural practice I coordinate (Office for Political Innovation) was hired for quite a peculiar commission: the design of a wooden fence to conceal the massive site of Peter Eisenman Architects' Cidade da Cultura de Galicia, then under construction. The enormous movement of earth that the construction required had turned the previously green and peaceful site in Monte Gaiás into a landscape of mud and noisy machinery. For many people, the building site was ugly and too visible. Members of the region's government decided that the fast and radical transformation of a landscape so well-known by the people of Galicia could lead to a critical debate that would jeopardize the execution of the architectural project and the popularity of the government. The government officials agreed that hiding the process behind a wooden fence was the best strategy to prevent public debate.

The importance of the Cidade da Cultura as a collective experiment needs further explanation. In 2010, talking about Cidade da Cultura on the occasion of the opening of an important section of the complex, Peter Eisenman stated: "I don't think this building is about the future of architecture. I think it is about the future of Galicia. That is its great value. It will also transform the way Galicia relates to the world..."[1] With a final cost of 475.9 million euros (5.66 times the cost of the Guggenheim Bilbao, [2] a comparable publicly funded project completed in the neighboring Basque Country region in 1997), Cidade da Cultura can certainly be considered Galicia's most important architectural experiment in

recent decades, or at least the one that has consumed the greatest number of public resources. The fact that the building site was divided into eight parts, each awarded to one of the eight most important construction companies operating in the region, followed a basic goal: to make sure that the companies with the greatest capacity to engage in building innovation were involved in the project. The exceptional dimension of the construction and its geometrical complexity made necessary the mobilization of more than a hundred engineers to develop the more than fifteen thousand detail plans. [3] Just to give a sense of the mobilization of materials the project required, the local stone providers, in a region known for exporting stone to the world, were not able to respond to Cidade da Cultura's demand for granite in the final stages of construction, and additional shipments had to be sent from Brazil. A significant number of industrial patents were developed during the process, including, for example, patents for adaptable cable conduit systems and for secondary ceiling structures. Cidade da Cultura constituted a massive experiment in which the knowledge of the region was challenged and developed to an exceptional degree. The building, as it embodies the results of that experiment, can be considered the material archive of the evolution of the collective intelligence that the project mobilized, where we can discover the patents, the innovations in its detailing, the work of the eight companies and the exceptional public investment that the project gathered.

Even though rethinking a wooden fence can be seen as a minor contribution, it gains a great political significance if we consider the role that the government expected the fence to play. The fence was part of a plan to shape the participation in the Cidade da Cultura by the society that had founded and was being transformed by this massive experiment.

Any experimental research carries risks with it. Its results are necessarily uncertain, and the effects it will have on society are unpredictable. In this case, an architectural research project was developed to enable sectors of society to perform a series of critical tasks, such as witnessing, collecting evidence, narrating, posing questions, raising issues, and evaluating alternatives. This research project was a reaction to the uncertainty and the risks that the construction process contained, risks that included increases in the budget, differences in users' behavior from what was planned, and the possibility that the economic development meant to be triggered by the process would never happen.

Sixty days after our first meeting, we presented our proposal. We stated that the site was not ugly and not really visible. Mud was not less visually interesting than grass. And, from our point of view, there was no need for a fence. The site was already concealed because it could hardly be understood by anyone not directly involved in its management. Its experimental potential, and the monumental material research that was carried out in it, was mainly hidden from the society affected by it. We called our proposal 12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. It consisted of twelve strategies intended to provide active roles to the general public so the public could experience the site and gain access to the experiments that the construction was already triggering. The general goal was to open the "blackbox" [4] of the process of constructing the Cidade da Cultura, so a broad diversity of social actors could participate in the project's experimental and research capital, producing an extension of its intellectual footprint and maximizing its capacity to incorporate a larger representation of the variety of Galicia's society.

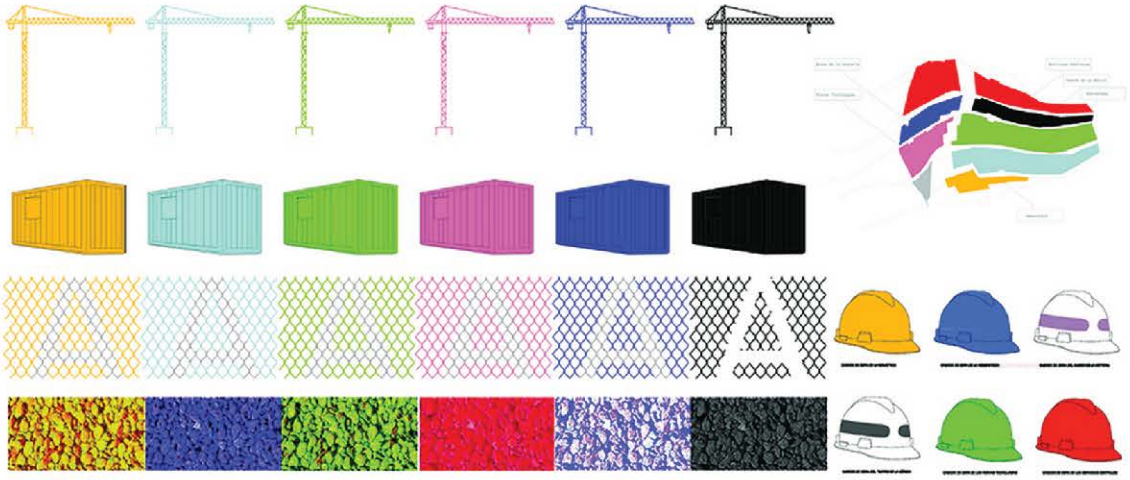
Parque urbano Obra Cidade da Cultura
Se define un recorrido con equipamientos públicos para que la obra pueda ser utilizada por los vivitantes como un parque urbano. Ademas de visitar la obra, que en la Cidade da Cultura puedan runirse, tomar el sol o hacer deporte.

2

Public transportation and urban facilities to render the building site as an open-to-the-public space. 12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. Andrés Jaque/Office for Political Innovation. 2002.

The twelve actions were grouped into three different categories according to their goals.

The first category would group those actions meant to provide “access” to publics not directly involved in the works of the construction of the Cidade da Cultura. Basic actions within this category included the provision of a bus line connecting the building site to the main public transport nodes. More complex actions included the celebration of open house days with tours giving access for visitors into security enclosures and the organization of public events that would attract publics to the most important moments of the works, such as the completion of a significant element of Eisenman’s topography or of the cladding of a building.



Cada obra un color
Un código de colores asignados a las diferentes constructoras hace visibles e identificables en la obra los trabajadores, equipos y recintos asociados a cada una de las empresas constructoras.

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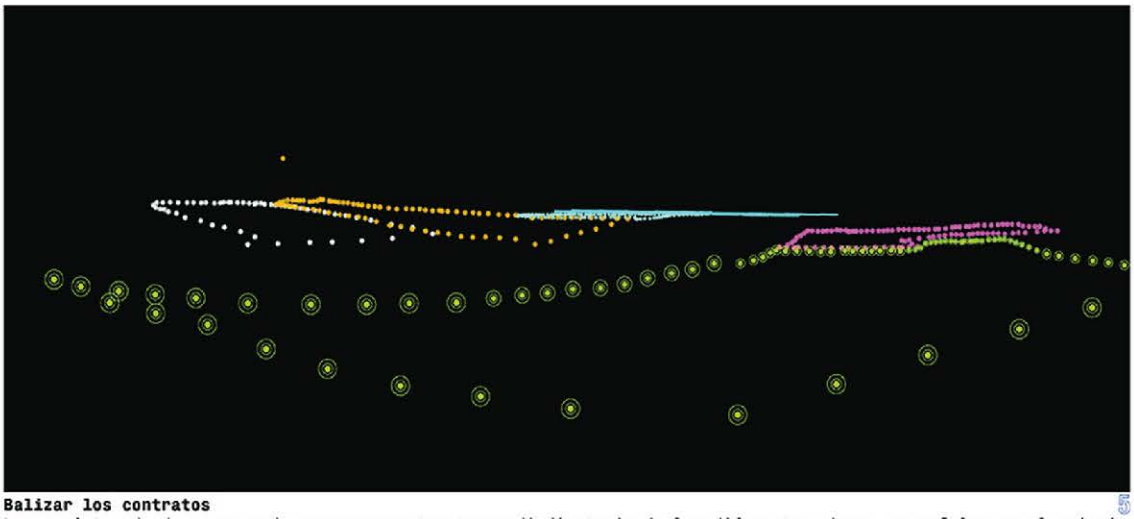
Color codes to make transparent the sectors and resources mobilized by each construction company. 12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. Andrés Jaque/Office for Political Innovation. 2002.



Balizar los contratos
Los recintos donde opera cada empresa constructora adjudicataria de las diferentes obras, se señalan en el paisaje con líneas de balizas de colores.

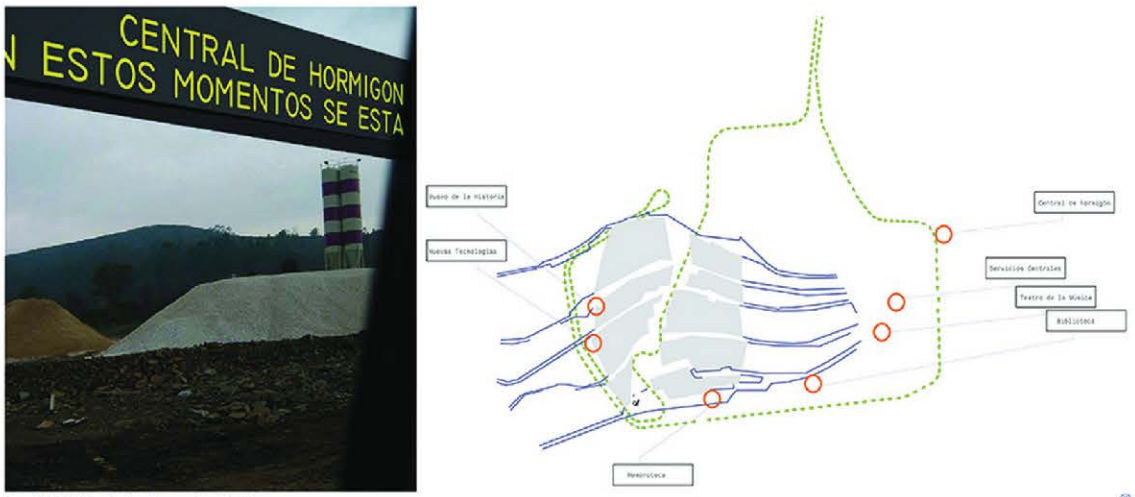
5

Color codes to make transparent the sectors awarded to each construction company. 12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. Andrés Jaque/Office for Political Innovation. 2002.

Limites territoriales de la Cidade da Cultura
Todos los transportes de entrada y salida de materiales y residuos son identificados para hacer visible en el territorio la verdadera extensión de la obra. Dónde comienzan y terminan los trabajos de la Cidade da Cultura.

7

Signage for trucks arriving and leaving the Cidade da Cultura. 12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. Andrés Jaque/Office for Political Innovation. 2002.



Legibilidad de los trabajos
Asociadas al recorrido de visitas se colocan pantallas de leds explicando a tiempo real los trabajos en ejecución.

3

LED displays with information about the ongoing works. 12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. Andrés Jaque/Office for Political Innovation. 2002.

12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. Andrés Jaque/Office for Political Innovation. 2002. Photographs by Miguel de Guzmán.

The second category comprised those actions intended to make transparent those facts that otherwise only experts would be able to read. These actions included the use of color codes to make visible the demarcations of the boundaries between the construction companies and the resources mobilized by each one of them, LED screens to explain what tasks were being executed at each moment, and balloons to indicate the amount of money already spent in each sector of the site. This category also included affixing stickers to every truck arriving or leaving the building site, by which the contents of the truck and its port of origin or destination could be understood, making visible, for example, the port of origin of the Brazilian granite or the location where the construction debris was to be processed.

A third group included a series of strategies to provide space for those issues raised by publics not directly involved in the process. Their inputs would be collected, recorded, archived, and displayed together with those of official experts (such as architects or engineers). These strategies included forums to discuss the technology applied on site, with participation by both engineers and the general public; video recorders available for anyone to leave statements, theories, opinions, or proposals to be displayed in the city center; and screens where messages texted to an automatic system would be displayed on site.

For more than a year a number of these actions were applied. Very often the capacity of visitors to evaluate the evolution of the building site was significantly higher than that of the experts. Important controversies emerged when, for example, particular publics learned materials easy to source from local producers had been supplied from distant ports of origin.

The first group of actions succeeded in rendering the building site as a place people from all around Galicia could regularly visit and explore.

The second group of actions provided a certain level of symmetry in the calculability of the site to the general public and to the architects and engineers in charge of the project.

The third one proved too successful, to the extent that its success as a tool to convey and archive opinions on the development of the works was the reason why the twelve actions were canceled, at the very moment when the project cost had doubled from that of the first government-approved estimate.

12 Actions to Make Peter Eisenman Transparent. Andrés Jaque/Office for Political Innovation. 2002. Photograph by Miguel de Guzmán

THE YELLOWS IN THE PLACE OF THE BLUES

The previous image shows some workers from the "blue" construction company, working on the "yellow" construction company's area. This boundary crossing was something we only noticed after carefully examining the photograph. We showed it to the project management team (composed mainly of architects and engineers) and asked them "How could it be that the 'blues' were working on the 'yellow' site?" They answered: "They shouldn't. They don't. The security plan makes it impossible." We later posed the same question to a number of visitors who had regularly followed the evolution of the process, by taking advantage of the possibilities provided by the twelve actions. Some of them were able to give us an interpretation consistent with the photographic evidence: "The 'blue' and the 'yellow' companies help each other. They have an agreement, and when one of them reaches a peak of activity, they can count on the help of the other one. With this agreement they have reduced the resources they need on site by more than 20 percent."

Research, calculus, description, discussion, archiving, collection, narrating, collecting evidence, raising issues, defending hierarchies, enunciating, detecting alternative historiographies, evaluating, and conveying are, in part, the constituents of everyday life. These activities not only take place in the specialized rooms where official researchers work but are also carried out by all publics. Research should be seen as a collective activity, in which color design, events design, and platform design can play important roles. Architectural devices can foster and trigger this collective research at the same time that they cater to many other missions. Maybe, when considered in this way, design and research should be seen not so much as independent practices, so new ways of rethinking their relationship can be invented.

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1. "No creo que este edificio sea sobre el futuro de la arquitectura. Creo que es sobre el futuro de Galicia. Ese es su enorme valor. También cambiará la relación de Galicia con el mundo..." Translated to English by the author of the text. "Peter Eisenman. No se puede ser un arquitecto intransigente," El País, September 11, 2010, accessed March 26, 2014, http://elpais.com/diario/2010/09/11/babelia/1284163962_850215.html. ^
2. "El Guggenheim ha generado 3.173 millones de euros, 37 veces su coste," El mundo País Vasco, June 20, 2011, accessed March 21, 2014, http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2013/06/20/paisvasco/1371727853.html. ^
3. "Andrés Perea: El metro de Cidade da Cultura sale por un precio muy razonable," La Opinión Coruña, January 13, 2011, accessed March 21, 2014, http://www.laopinioncoruna.es/contraportada/2011/01/13/andres-perea-metro-cidade-da-cultura-sale-precio-razonable/456446.html. ^
4. Borrowed from cybernetics, the metaphor of the "black-box" was introduced by Bruno Latour in his book Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society published in 1987. It refers to those processes in which intermediate events are concealed and only inputs and final outputs are accountable. ^

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