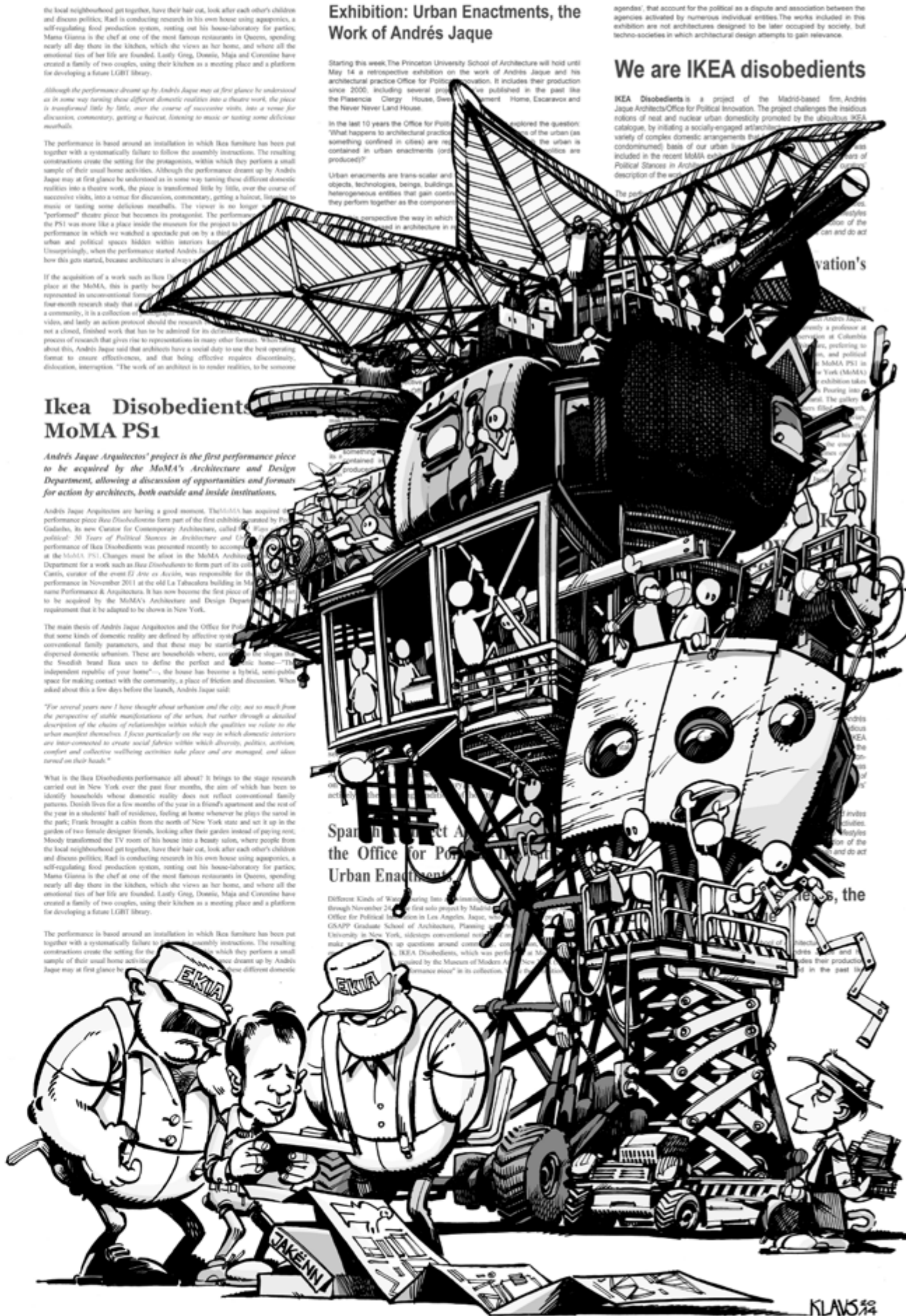


Architects in action

→ Andrés Jaque (Madrid, 1971) and the Office for Political Innovation explore the potential of post-foundational politics and symmetrical approaches to the sociology of technology to rethink architectural practices. The office is currently devoted to the study of connected domesticities as politically active transmedia urbanisms. Jaque is currently architect at ETSAM, Madrid, and professor of Advanced Design at GSAPP, Columbia University, New York, and has lectured extensively throughout the world.



**Exhibition: Urban Enactments, the Work of Andrés Jaque**

**We are IKEA disobedients**

In the last 10 years the Office for Political Innovation has explored the question: 'What happens to architectural practice when the urban (as something confined in cities) are re-created in urban enactments (or, what are produced)?' Urban enactments are trans-scalar and objects, technologies, beings, buildings, heterogeneous entities that gain continuity as they perform together as the components of a shared situation.

**Ikea Disobedient MoMA PS1**

Andrés Jaque Architects' project is the first performance piece to be acquired by the MoMA's Architecture and Design Department, allowing a discussion of opportunities and formats for action by architects, both outside and inside institutions.

Andrés Jaque Architects are having a good moment. Their MoMA has acquired the performance piece *Ikea Disobedients* from part of the first exhibition created by the Danish, its new Center for Contemporary Architecture, called *Urban Enactments: 30 Years of Political Stances in Architecture and Urbanism*. The performance of *Ikea Disobedients* was presented recently to accompany at the MoMA PS1. Changes must be effect in the MoMA Architecture Department for a work such as *Ikea Disobedients* to form part of its collection.

The main thesis of Andrés Jaque Architects and the Office for Political Innovation is that some kinds of domestic reality are defined by affective systems that are not conventional family parameters, and that these may be starting to define dispersed domestic urbanism. These are households where, for example, the slogan of the Swedish brand Ikea was to define the perfect and ideal home: "It's independent, simple, and easy to assemble." The office has been working on this space for making contact with the community, a place of fiction and discussion. When asked about this a few days before the launch, Andrés Jaque said:

"The several years now I have thought about urbanism and the city, not so much from the perspective of stable manipulation of the urban, but rather through a detailed description of the chain of relationships within which the qualities we relate to the urban manifest themselves. I focus particularly on the way in which domestic interiors are inter-connected to create social fabrics within which diversity, politics, activism, culture and collective self-organizing activities take place and are managed, and ideas shared on their behalf."

What is the *Ikea Disobedients* performance all about? It brings to the stage research carried out in New York over the past four months, the aim of which has been to identify households whose domestic reality does not reflect conventional family parameters. Danish lives for a few months of the year in a friend's apartment and the rest of the year in a student hall of residence, feeling at home whenever he plays the guitar in the park; Frank brought a cabin from the north of New York state and set it up in the garden of two family-decorated friends; his other two gardens instead of paying rent; Maddy transformed the TV room of his house into a beauty salon, where people from the local neighborhood get together, have their hair cut, look after each other's children and discuss politics; Rad is conducting research in his own home using apparatus, a self-regulating food production system, nesting on his home-laboratory for parties; Masha Girona is the chef at one of the most famous restaurants in Queens, spending nearly all day there in the kitchen, which she views as her home, and where all the emotional ties of her life are founded; Luffy Greg, Dennis, Maja and Corvina have created a family of two couples, using their kitchen as a meeting place and a platform for developing a future LGBT library.

The performance is based around an installation in which Ikea furniture has been put together with a systematically failure to follow the assembly instructions. The resulting constructions create the setting for the protagonists, within which they perform a small sample of their usual home activities. Although the performance is based on the Ikea furniture, the performance is understood as in some way, turning these different domestic realities into a theatre work, the piece is transformed little by little, over the course of successive visits, into a venue for discussion, commentary, getting a haircut, listening to music or testing some delicious meals. The viewer is no longer a passive audience; the performance becomes its protagonist. The performance is the PS1 was more like a place inside the museum for the project to be developed, a performance in which we watched a spectacle put on by a fiction of the urban and political spaces hidden within interior spaces.

**Spanning the Street At the Office for Political Innovation**

Different kinds of working arrangements have been explored through November 24, 2010 also project by Madrid's Office for Political Innovation in Los Angeles, Japan, and GSAPP Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Urbanism in New York, alongside environmental research and urbanism.

Andrés Jaque is not a typical architect. His radical stance, breaking the traditional boundaries of architecture, makes him one of the most relevant figures in European architecture today. Both his firm, Andrés Jaque Architects, founded in 2000, and its spin-off, Office for Political Innovation, are a continuous source of inspiration for the new generation of architects throughout Europe who claim a change in the discipline. From his very first projects, Andrés showed an interest in working with conventional domestic realities that have been omitted by architects and the political and corporate realms.

# Architecture's daily politics

SPAIN — TEXT: GONZALO HERRERO DELICADO, ILLUSTRATION: KLAUSTOON

Your work has always been charged with a very critical political load. What is the relevance of politics in architecture?

Architecture makes it possible to coexist different agents in the city that won't be able to live together without its presence. From this point of view, the architecture is always a political action itself, and its challenges are simultaneously discussed in the urban and domestic arenas. The conventional descriptions of a city are out of phase and are now more and more complex. Nowadays also, the politics are not as easily defined and are described by spatial structures simultaneously connecting different countries. The political sphere is not just defined by a single government or society, but by many imperceptible spatial structures and networks.

What is the role of the domestic scale in this game?

The small or domestic scale must be understood from an urban scale, as the most complex social interactions in the city usually start in the domestic space. For instance, some processes we have recently experienced – like Occupy Wall Street, the Spanish Revolution, or the Arab Spring – have happened in the public arena, in the squares. But they wouldn't have been possible without the collaboration of numerous small spaces that are connected online and have generated these political transformations. My current interests are in research to trace these interaction networks and to find the way that architecture could have a higher relevancy connecting these domestic spaces, like gyms or beauty salons, with public spaces like squares, highways or even supermarkets. At the moment, these places are the stage where politics are being discussed, creating what I call 'Urban Enactments'.

Could explain these 'Urban Enactments' in further detail?

It is more relevant to talk right now about 'Urban Enactments' than about categories like 'space' or 'city'. Until recently, these kinds of categories held great importance and, in my opinion, are right now outdated. Urban enactments are trans-scalar and trans-media constructions. They mobilize objects, technologies, beings, buildings, environments; making constellations of heterogeneous entities that gain continuity (as a contingent urbanism) only as they perform together as the components of a shared situation.

Another main focus at the core of your work is the connection between architecture and society, as well as the acclaimed performance, *IKEA Disobedients*. At the same time, this project was also widely criticized because it didn't provide an architectural solution. What do you say about it?

After we made the first performance of *IKEA Disobedients* in Madrid, Candela, one of the characters featured in the project, was threatened to be evicted and, because she was part of this project, there were many spontaneous protests in the streets of Madrid to support her. Also, thanks to the massive media impact created around the project after being acquired by MoMA, she was finally not evicted from her house. There you have the solution. In fact, this is probably the most architectural project we have ever done in the office.

Do you think architecture is going back to its roots by connecting with the real matters of the citizens and putting aside corporate or government interests based on economic purposes?

In recent decades, only a small portion of the architectural production has been visible. This sort of architecture was far away of the public realm and the worries of the city and its citizens. But this is probably a lack of attention from the media; in Spain, for example, while some massive public facilities were being built and became mainstream as the City of Culture by Peter Eisenman or the City of Arts by Calatrava, some other networks started to be built as, for example, the network of self-managed community centres in Madrid. The kind of projects, like El Campo de la Cebada in Madrid, that were unperceived because of the shining of other ones and are now getting the great value that they deserve.

But what is the general situation throughout Europe, in your view?

Of course the situation in Europe is not the same all around and the crisis has brought some examples of new architects that are working with very nostalgic models. There are some people that still think there is space for just a formal, self-referential and old-fashioned architecture, which, although it is full of colours, is very conservative in the way it interacts with society. An architecture without excesses or risks, as one might expect. In the same way that there is currently a dispute in the streets of Europe to define what the shared coexistence frame is, there is

also a dispute to decide if architecture will be related in this definition of the social scheme.

Your life is divided between Madrid and New York because of your teaching practice at Columbia University and Princeton. What differences do you find between new architects in Europe and United States?

At present it is very difficult to define differences between what is happening in a city like New York and many European capitals, because many of their daily realities are closely connected. But there is something very important in the United States, as there is a divorce between many cultural and political debates and the world of architecture offices. My work tries to set up the connection between architectural design and political processes that are in fact very close, but this divorce in the United States is worsening the quality of the cities and the architecture itself. Architecture needs to find its place in these debates.

As one of the chosen ones selected by Rem Koolhaas to take part in this year's widely anticipated Venice Biennale, what will be your contribution to its theme, 'Fundamentals'?

We are taking part in the Biennale with the project 'Sales Oddity'. We are no longer living in post-war Europe and we all have gone a step forward. It is very important to understand what the European post-war meant and how, in that moment, urbanism, national media and industry were combined and coordinated to create the sort of societies that don't exist anymore. Europe has radically changed, and some nostalgic elements – for example, national television channels or the trade unions – don't have any sense right now. Europe shouldn't be nostalgic, because it is now in a different moment marked by different technologies, media and other models of interaction where there are new possibilities. Our project tries to answer the question about which opportunities there are for Europe in 'Home-to-Home TV' and the age of online interaction.

Which other projects are you currently working on? Our ongoing work includes projects of very different scales: a 70 m<sup>2</sup> flat refurbishment in Madrid for a female couple who are going to have a child, and a huge project in Abu Dhabi with the renewable energy and sustainable technology company, Masdar. We have also recently won a competition for the transformation of Weizman Square in Holon, Israel.