# Luis Rojo

Graduated from the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arqui-tectura de Madrid in 1987, where has been teaching since 1992. He is Ph D Professor at the Department of Architecture, teaching design studios as well as Labs and Workshops at the Master for Advanced Architecture program. He obtained a Masters degree at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University in 1989, and was Visiting Professor of Architecture at the GSD on regular basis between 1994 and 1998, and again in 2001, 2006 and 2011. He was appointed Visiting Professor of Architecture at the City College of New York for the Fall semester of 2017. In 1994 he founded Rojo/Fernandez-Shaw, were he develops his professional work.

de Castro

UNDOING
DE-CONSTRUCTION

**OPERATIONAL ARCHITECTS
IN THE WARFARE IMAGINARY
AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF INVERSE GEOMETRIES**

Presentation slide, OTRI, 2004.
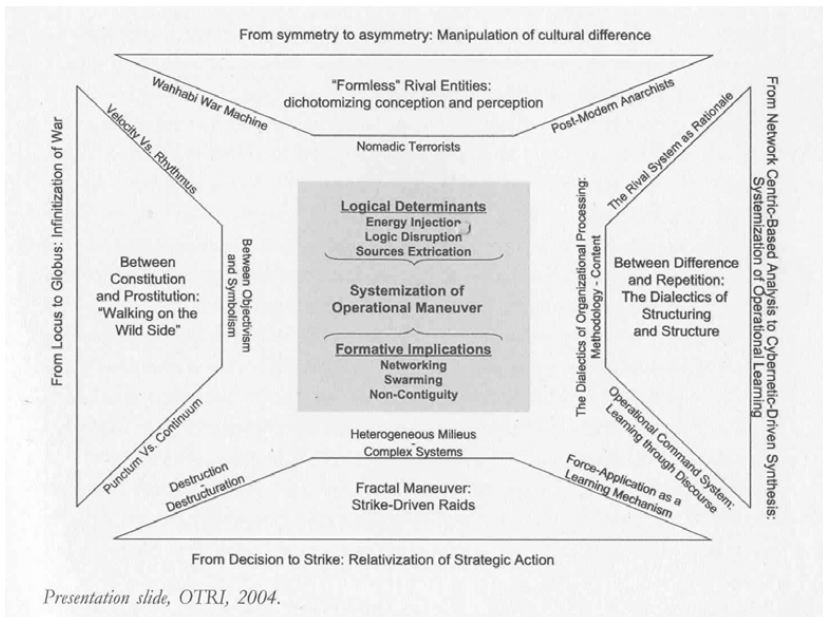
Unknow,
Presentation slide, OTRI, 2004

144

After two decades of reflecting on how to reinstall critical architecture theory within the common practice, we are confronted by a meaningful dilemma: the sophisticated architecture theory of the 1980 and 90 that brought about a more complex and intricate description of form, matter and the built environment, -deconstruction, fractal structures or rhizomatic scales-, has in- avertedly became the reference for the actual state of the arts of contemporary urban warfare.

According to Eyal Weizman text –based on field data and interviews with the directors of the Operational Theory Research Institute in Tel Aviv and other army men that participated on the operations-, the striated and the smooth had provided the paradigms for inventing safer tactics to move through the built fabric avoiding visibility and exposure, thus becoming invisible, undetected, unpredictable and consequently even more lethal.

In an interview on September 24, 2004 with Aviv Kochavi, the Commander of the 2002 attacks on Nablus, he introduces openly the theoretical issues into the tactical description:

> *"The enemy interprets space in a traditional, classical manner... We opted for the method of walking through walls...like a worm that eats its way forward, emerging at points and then disappearing. We were thus moving from the interior of [Palestinian] homes to their exterior in unexpected ways and in places we were not anticipated... We took this micro-tactical practice of moving through walls and turned it into a method, and thus we were able to interpret the whole space differently."*

The public use of such critical terminology by the Israeli generals at the OTRI (Operational Theory Research Institute)

exposes the consequences of the unpredicted implementation of architectural theory to the reading of materiality, enclosure and boundaries.

The movement through the fabric against its materiality and structure –breaking thought the buildings, entering on the solid sides, opening holes on the party walls- is described conceptually by the military as 'non linear, non-predictable anti Newton mechanics'. (see chart above) And the invasion of the camp by multiple self-directed squads is described as a 'principle of swarming', a sort of operational theory based on the unexpected understanding and occupation of the urban fabric based on complex fractal-like geometries. Thus, by re- conceptualizing the war and the urban structure all at once and under the label of 'inverse geometry', the military manoeuvring is apparently endowed with a new understanding of the city by reorganizing the urban syntax and reversing its logics.

The critical undermining of the discipline of architecture is reedited and reformulated as a conceptual instruments for a more efficient warfare openly labelled –without shame or irony- as 'post-modern', and fought in the inside of private homes and layered concrete structures. Coldly re-conceptualized as abstract models, the material logic of architecture and the structure of the city is undermined –this time literally- by working against its basic form, use and construction in the carving out the routes into the camps and the moving through walls, floors and rooms even with vehicles.

Deprived of any human condition and turned into a theoretical model, the city, designated as the actual medium of warfare, is used against its plan.

Warfare strategies and urban planning are thus re-edited as equivalent techniques for the occupations or production

of the urban environment. To make and to destroy are, in this seemingly neutral and conceptual operational approach, two alternative implementations of the same techniques.

What does it mean that advance architecture design and advanced warfare strategies share the same terminology? That they both deploy a common bibliography and use the same terms to describe their subject matter? Or that they theorize their disciplines –to build and to destroy- by the same concepts, with common philosophical paradigms? Are these coincidences fortuitous or rather significant?

The focus shifted from identifying the intricacy and complexity in the unplanned urban fabrics and its conceptual description as a sort of 'formless liquidity' to its literal occupation through hard violence and language metaphors, and from de-construction as the exposure of power structures to the sheer destruction of built boundaries and domestic realms. Such is the arrogance of power, their intellectual whims.

The conceptualization of urban warfare through such theoretical models provided the military with an apparently neutral technique, as also with the support of an unrelated bibliography to provide those invasive tactics with conceptual authority. The overtly sophistication of conceptual paradigms –liquidity, the swarm, inversed geometries, operational architect, etc.- and its use to describe the built environment of Palestinian camps and neighbourhoods as complex systems of hidden relationships and unstable balances serve the purpose of upgrading the warfare task to an intellectual endeavour.

But when these concepts, borrowed from post-structuralist philosophy and its implementation in architecture theory, are re-edited in the form of a discourse, is just an act of com-

munication for turning invisible the factual military reality.

Colonial power always used language to erase the traces of its violence and occupation. The narratives of Orientalism first, and economic development later, served the purpose of theorizing the asymmetrical relationship between the two sides. And within those theories the permeability of the boundaries always benefited of the colonial power. Such is the case of the intellectualize army that enters the domestic by hollowing its protective boundarie.

The use of a conceptual language and theory to describe the occupation of the West Bank in spatial and structural terms turns the problem abstract, devoted of a human side.

Not that different from the construction of a 7,4 hectares mock-up town in the Negev dessert where to practice the military manoeuvres and assaults, named after Chicago. However enlarged according to the resemblance of the different targets (a Lebanese village 1980, an Iraqi town in 1992 and a Palestinian city of Gaza in 2006), it should not be taken for post modern contextualism. The fact is that the practices in the mock-up environment did not turn theory into practice but into more theory, the words into more words, as the 1/1 scale model never cease to be the simulation of a city without citizens.

At the end of the day, the urban issue at stake was nothing more than transparency, openness and visibility. The West Bank cities are a tight and intricate maze of enclosed spaces –streets, alleyways, homes, rooms and basements- and not the open battle field of the 'classical' warfare tactics. But it was the misplacement of the war into the domestic realm of civil areas and urban neighbourhoods that made necessary the critical re-conceptualization of the city form and of the domestic in order to reify it as abstract, a malleable problem

in the need of rational solution.

However, we have to acknowledge that the use of such complex geometrical and conceptual models was not that sophisticated in its practical implementation in design. As the Israeli army also does, architects often confused the conceptual terminology for its metaphorical formal qualities. In both cases, the translations are often literal.

But to turn discursive practices into warfare techniques and applied onto defenceless populations in domestic spaces poses fundamental questions on the purpose of critical theory and its specificity, as it seems to fit anywhere and apply to any argument. Such uncritical adaptability might signal to its questioning for lack of precision or purpose.