

UIA WORLD CONGRESS OF ARCHITECTS 2026

PAU SARQUELLA E MARIA GIRAMÉ IN CONVERSATION WITH BENEDETTA TAGLIABUE

Benedetta Tagliabue, Executive Editor of Arketipo and founder and principal architect of EMBT Architects in Barcelona, speaks with Maria Giramé, co-founder of Bajet Giramé, and Pau Sarquella, co-founder of Persiana Barcelona and Sarquella Torres Studio, two of the curators of the upcoming UIA World Congress of Architects, which will take place in Barcelona from June 28 to July 2, 2026. In this conversation, they discuss the ambitions behind the congress, the significance of bringing the UIA back to the city thirty years after its previous Barcelona edition, and what participants can expect from the programme: from debates, research, workshops and exhibitions to the collective moments that will unfold across the city. Together, they reflect on Barcelona as a laboratory for architectural thought and practice, and on the questions the congress hopes to open around architecture, the planet, and the many transitions shaping our present.



Luc Miralles

PAU SARQUELLA

'WE WANT THESE MEETINGS AND REFLECTIONS TO GENERATE KNOWLEDGE. (...) THIS MAY LEAD TO AN UNEXPECTED RESPONSE, CAPABLE OF TRANSCENDING WHAT EACH INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT BRINGS WITH THEM'

Benedetta Tagliabue: Let us begin this conversation in Catalan. That will probably be best for the Italian translation as well, directly from Catalan. So, my first question has to do with the fact that Barcelona has already had this precedent. In 1996, as I remember, there was another opportunity to host a congress here in Barcelona. How are you approaching and planning a congress now? What is different from the previous one? And what does it mean for it to take place in Barcelona, with the presence of this city?

Maria Giramé: The fact that the congress returns to Barcelona thirty years later has given us a certain sense of hope, because it has already happened here before. It is the first time that the UIA Congress is repeated twice in the same city. That has never happened before. But, of course, from 1996 to 2026 everything has changed enormously. It is not only a question of comparing the format of a congress in 1996 with the format

of a congress in 2026; they have nothing to do with each other. The structures, the importance of certain institutional strategies, modes of operation, collaboration between entities, these things did not exist in the same way in 1996. It was much more freestyle. Now everything is much more structured. Congresses today are also much more structured, and we have to work with that.

BT: Because when it was held in Barcelona, the UIA was relatively new?

MG: No, in fact the congresses began after the Second World War.

PS: The first congress was in 1948. There was also one in Madrid in the 70s. We do not know those very well, to be honest; we do not have much information.

MG: In 1996, Barcelona was in its post-Olympic moment. It was also a stellar moment for architecture, both for Barcelona as a city and for architects of enormous importance.

PS: Many people think of 1995 as the end of that

cycle. It was the moment of the explosion of the figure of the star architect, and of cities wanting a piece by a star architect among their citizens. To pick up on what Maria was saying, the two of us did not experience 1996 directly, because we were not yet studying architecture, but two of our fellow curators were in their first and second year at university at the time and took part as volunteers. So there is also an emotional link within the team, which is quite interesting. Later, while I was studying, I remember coming across that mythical photograph in front of MACBA: Herzog, Foster, Peter Eisenman in a Barça shirt. At the time you saw it, but you did not really understand what had happened, because the UIA is not the Venice Biennale. It is an organisation and a congress that, in itself, does not necessarily have such strong recognition within the profession. Perhaps in the academic world it is different, but not so much in professional practice.

MG: It was not widely known. I think institutions

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and people in political power knew what it was, but we architects did not really have the UIA in our lives.

PS: Still, I have the feeling that in 1996 it was a major event, and that everyone who was here understood that it was the UIA. The congress that came afterwards, in Beijing in 1999, I have hardly received any input about. Now we are doing the 2026 congress in Barcelona, and in 2029 it will return to Beijing, which will also become the second city to repeat, thirty years later. Barcelona 1996 was a big thing. I suppose it also had to do with the fact that it almost died of success - not died, perhaps that is not the right word - but there was such a huge concentration of people that venues had to be changed and the event remained in memory as something slightly overwhelming. It is interesting to see how the later UIA congresses have not always had much visibility. We knew about Copenhagen because we were already more or less inside the process, but otherwise these events do not necessarily reach very far. I understand that this is also very much linked to communication and to how what happens at the congresses is managed and transmitted. I think the fact that this time there was a competition for the curators, allowing people who were not so embedded in the world of congresses to enter, could create a turning point.

MG: Yes. The UIA Congress takes place every three years. Usually, the organisers decide who will be the general rapporteur - what we have called the curator - and that person defines the theme. This is the first time there has been a competition. Here in Barcelona it is the first time.

BT: So it is the first time the chain has been broken.

MG: Exactly. The chain by which people who already knew what the UIA was, who had already been to other congresses, were the ones who took it on. The UIA establishment itself selected the person who would decide the structure of the congress, what would be discussed, who the speakers would be. This time the decision was made by COAC, the Architects' Association of Catalonia, together with CSCAE, who launched the competition. The idea was: Catalonia is committed to competitions; if we organise a congress, the curatorship should also come out of a competition. That is what they did



in 2023.

BT: So, you are the first ones?

MG: The first selected through a competition, yes. The competition itself will not necessarily be repeated. In Beijing, as far as we know, they will continue with their usual system and decide who the curator will be.

BT: But perhaps it could be you.

MG: No. In Beijing it will be the UIA. We are the last curators in this sequence, but we do not decide anything.

PS: It took us quite a few months to really understand how the whole system worked. In the end, you realize that the International Union of Architects is essentially the international body that represents architects and has the greatest recognition before the United Nations, UNESCO, and similar institutions. It is an organization structured in such a way that all of us registered with architects' associations in over a hundred countries are part of the UIA. So, in a way, it operates like an international architects' association. And ultimately, when the UIA decides that the Congress will be held in a given place, it is because there is a national body, such as the CSCAE, in that country.

MG: They are the organisers.

PS: And they are also the ones who normally decide whom to appoint as curator. Usually it is someone very involved in the world of professional bodies. Perhaps that also explains why the UIA has not been so visible recently. In Barcelona, Ignasi de Solà-Morales was a different kind of figure.

BT: I remember it was Solà-Morales, was it just him?

MG: He was the general rapporteur, the main curator, and then he had a whole team of architects around him who formalised everything.

BT: This leads to my next question, about the fact that you are not one person, but a group. What has it been like to work as a group and to reach this point, which I find very interesting: being the first curatorial team to emerge from a competition and to propose things?

MG: We belong to a generation that is very used to doing public competitions, and also to associating with others in order to do them. This happened almost by chance. We became curators by chance, not because we had worked together before or knew exactly where this would go. It was more: well, let us try. We knew each other because we coincided at the university. Some of us taught together and there were many synergies that made us feel we could do it. I cooked them a rice dish on the terrace of my house in Poblenou, and they all accepted. I was heavily pregnant, about to have my daughter, my only daughter, and I convinced them with that very good rice. We all got into this mess because it was a good project.

BT: Fantastic. And how has the collaboration been from the beginning until now?

MG: Very intense. The congress, in the end, is not a small thing. It is not only a congress; it is an exhibition, a workshop with 180 students, a book with Park Books, 105 congress sessions, routes, parties. It is all very complex. We have had to learn to work together, to get to know each other, to organise ourselves. In reality, we are like cousins. There is a lot of intensity.

PS: Yes, it has already been three years. The competition took place in August 2023, when Maria was about to have her daughter. During the congress it will have been three years.

MG: Almost three years, yes.

PS: She is a daughter of the UIA. Over these three years there have been many meetings, moments of great excitement and moments of disappointment, and in the end all those things bring people together. Even though, of course, we all have strong personalities, strong visions and a great desire to do things well, and there have been disagreements, the overall sum has always been extremely positive and interesting. I am very happy, whatever happens.

MG: I am happy too. After everything, the balance is good. When the congress is over, we will feel very liberated, because it has been very

intense, but we will also miss each other a lot.

BT: You will have to cook more rice dishes.

MG: I will have to cook more rice, for sure! It is not paella, it is a rice dish, a little different from paella.

PS: But it has also been a good thing that the group was not entirely homogeneous - the fact that we were not all from the same background, I mean, that we did not all study together. So, in a way, there are three slightly different generations: some are a bit younger than us. And that has also been interesting, because there is the international perspective, and then, suddenly, you realise that those years do mean something, don't they? And the knowledge has been enriched by that.

MG: It would not have been the same if it had only been people from our generation. Having two people from a very different generation has been very important. There is a different understanding. It has been very beautiful, very intense and very hard, but also very beautiful. We always work here in Barcelona, in my office in Poblenou, and then once a month or every two months we spend a day in Banyoles.

BT: That sounds wonderful.

PS: Otherwise, every week we meet on Tuesday afternoons. We begin at 3:30 p.m. and finish at midnight or 1:00am in the morning.

MG: Because we are doing all of this alongside our own studios and our own work. And we are not only continuing with the work of our respective offices; we are also all involved in the university in one way or another. Architects have this tendency: we like to do several things at the same time.

BT: That connects perfectly with my third question. You have all these themes, which are not easy, but there is clearly a concept behind them. It feels as if architecture is no longer understood as an object, but as a way, a process, something much more extended. It would be interesting to hear how you arrived at the first association, at the concept, and then how you divided it into the sections you created.

MG: There is something beautiful in relation to that. Our theme is Becoming. Architectures for a Planet in Transition. In 1996 the congress did not speak about the planet. It did not speak about the links between cities or between countries. It spoke about the city, and its centre.

PS: The 1996 theme was the present and future of the city. It spoke about the city as such.

MG: For us it was important to say that, in 2026, we can no longer speak only about the city. We have to speak about everything, because everything is connected, everything is encompassed. It is the butterfly effect: in the end, anything is linked to anything else. That is the subtitle of our motto.



Luc Miralles

PAU SARQUELLA:
'THIS IS NOT THE VISION OF A SINGLE ARCHITECT, BUT A FORM OF SHARED KNOWLEDGE, IN WHICH EVERYONE CONTRIBUTES THEIR OWN SMALL PART TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONFERENCE'

PS: The subtitle was very important, and it was essential for us that the word architectures appeared. Even if some topics and names go beyond architecture, we wanted the word architectures to be there, because we wanted this to be a congress where architecture could be shown and discussed. We believe we can speak about climate change through architecture, without necessarily shifting into more theoretical or speculative fields. It was important for architecture to be present.

MG: Built architecture was also something we were very interested in bringing forward.

BT: I think that is quite characteristic of here.

MG: It is. Here architecture is much more something that passes through many environments.

BT: I have always noticed in Catalonia this reality of the construction of architecture

as something loved, something that is made.

MG: Yes. Then there is the main word: Becoming. It is an English word and it means an entire period. It is not an instant action but a long verb, in a way. What we liked was to think that time has a great deal of meaning: architects make architecture, cities are made, things are built through time, and, above all, not from a tabula rasa. Many things have happened before us, many things are happening now, and many things will happen. We wanted to include time as a factor in the construction of the world, of spaces, of everything.

BT: That is beautiful, because it is a process. This idea of process is something we now understand more clearly. It is also beautiful to remember that the word planet was not present in 1996.

MG: As architects, we did not speak about the planet. We spoke about the city. I am even surprised that the title did not include something about the peripheries, although perhaps the peripheries came later.

PS: In 1996, I think the periphery began to be discussed through terrain vague.

BT: Terrain vague, came through Ignasi de Solà-Morales. But you mean it was not in the title.

PS: There were five or six themes in 1996, and one of them was terrain vague. That was quite beautiful. Enrique Walker, who has a significant role in this congress, spoke to us about it. He also participated then.

BT: I saw that there will be a conversation between Smiljan Radic and Enrique Walker. It will be a beautiful conversation.

PS: Enrique has been very supportive and very generous with us. In one conversation, he explained how the 1996 terrain vague later



Arnau Rovira



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became one of the threads that led him to develop his work on the ordinary. That 1996 experience influenced him a great deal. He is also pleased to come back and see many of the figures he has interviewed and known present here again.

BT: It is beautiful to ask what kind of experience you want to transmit to the participants. Barcelona as an urban laboratory.

MG: We like to explain this very much. One thing we wanted with this congress was not only to create a platform to explain and disseminate architecture, but also to create a platform for research. In fact, an important part of the congress budget has been devoted to that. That is why Barcelona is a laboratory. For more than a year now, twelve international studios have been conducting research, which we call Research by Design. For us it has always been important to understand that, in architectural practice, one can research by designing: one can investigate things, test solutions, analyse, and so on. We have twelve teams carrying out this research, and we have also created shorter, more compact investigations through the workshops with young architects and students: twelve mini-workshops of fifteen people each. All this forms a field of investigation. Barcelona is used as a laboratory, as a space for debate, but also as a place where things are being investigated. Many of these researchers bring their own spatial questions to Barcelona. If they have to choose a site, Barcelona and the Mediterranean become that site. We understand Barcelona in a global sense, not only as the city of Barcelona. This idea has been present from the beginning, when we entered the competition and when we won it, and we have fought to keep it. The congress will not only be a place where people speak about what they do, but also a place where conclusions from ongoing research are discussed.

PS: If you look at what a congress is, it is perhaps easier to understand by looking at a scientific congress. In science, there is a whole capacity for research in which, year after year, innovations, investigations, results or hypotheses are presented, allowing society to advance scientifically. In architecture, it may be more complex to arrive at that situation, but for us it

was fundamental that we did not simply create a platform where each architect would come and explain their own book or their own work. Today you can already find that online.

MG: You can find almost everything on the internet.

PS: For us, this meeting is important as a place to converse, to confront if necessary, and to establish a dialogue that takes people somewhere different from where they started. We want knowledge to be created through these encounters and reflections. We are often asked what the results of the congress will be. Right now, we do not know. It is more interesting to understand that we have set up a board on which selected people can come and explain what they have done, but also confront each other and see where they share points and where they differ. That can create an unexpected response, something that may transcend what each person brings individually.

BT: This is also visible in the planning, and in those words I have written down, which are fantastic. They show a desire to differentiate themes, but also perhaps to let those themes begin to integrate and fertilise one another.

MG: Yes. One of them is very evident: Becoming Circular. We even debated whether we should make it more complicated, because circular was perhaps too obvious, but we had already presented it that way. The six titles are intended to be alive. We are in a very living space now, with furniture, elements, things that can be a table, a divider, or many things at once. We wanted that to happen with the congress as well: mixtures and synergies between each of the six branches. The branches are actually quite simple. Becoming More-Than-Human speaks about ecology, other species that interact and cohabit with humans, landscape and so on. Becoming Circular speaks most clearly about material circularity, but also about the circularity of spaces, transformation and reuse. Becoming Embodied speaks about matter, technology, the transformation of matter and how materials are obtained. Becoming Interdependent speaks about interdependence, politics, gender, community, public space and collective housing. Becoming Hyperconscious refers to an expanded awareness of things: how a small decision, or a global decision, can

affect everyday life; how regulations and rules affect how we organise ourselves; how the size of a window, artificial intelligence, education, publications and magazines are all part of that field. We made it quite broad.

BT: It is always about creating more consciousness.

MG: Exactly. And the last one is Becoming Attuned. Attuned comes from the English verb to tune, as in tuning an instrument. It is a very beautiful word when you understand it. How do we tune our senses in order to understand architecture? When architecture is atmosphere, when architecture has meaning - the poetics of architecture. As six curators, but above all as six architects who practise built architecture and teach at the university, we wanted the six themes to be global, not simply isolated topics. Architecture is a balance between all these small factors. I do not think these six themes leave much of architecture aside.

PS: Certain words would have restricted us too much. If, instead of saying More-Than-Human, we had said sustainable, the word sustainability is so overused and so charged.

MG: Or ecological, directly.

PS: It would have given an image that was not really what we wanted. With the words we chose, many other topics can be included. It was also important that we were not presenting ourselves as experts in any one of these lines. We wanted to leave open ground so that the people we invited could take the words in their own way. Some understood them in one way, others in another, and that is very interesting. It is not the lone architect, but a figure of global knowledge, of everyone contributing a grain of sand to what the congress becomes.

BT: Is your structure quite different from previous congresses? For example, were workshops done before?

MG: The workshop is really something we invented. The competition brief asked us for a fixed programme: three days of congress, an opening event, student prizes and a closing event. That was what we had to do. We had the freedom to add elements, and we have added many things. One is the book, which is now almost being printed and will come out before



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MARIA GIRAMÉ
 'BARCELONA IS USED AS A LABORATORY, AS A FORUM FOR DEBATE, BUT ALSO AS A PLACE FOR RESEARCH'

the congress. We added this workshop - in fact, not one workshop but twelve workshops, each with fifteen students: 180 students from all over the world at the Tres Xemeneies during that week. We are also doing an exhibition. There has never been an exhibition of the UIA Congress itself. There have been exhibitions around the congress, or exhibitions by UIA working bodies, where each country can have a space of representation, but we are not curating those; they belong more to the technical organisation of the congress.

PS: The opportunity that came through the congress, or through the competition, was that it allowed us to decide where the congress would happen. We immediately understood that the theme of Becoming - transformation, process and the moment of global transformation - connected very strongly with the relationship to the sea. Barcelona's seafront is a line to which infrastructures have been added over time. The city has grown almost like a section: if you cut through the coast, you can read the growth of the city. The coastline is like an X-ray. At the same time, it is the horizon that connects us with the global south, with other countries. The Barcelona waterfront is therefore very important. There was also this piece, the Tres Xemeneies, which is itself the Becoming of Barcelona: the last space that has not yet been organised, that still has an essence of opportunity, that could become many things, and that has a past which speaks

directly to the congress. We thought it could be an ideal place for the congress to unfold.

MG: We even designed the entire congress for the Tres Xemeneies, with all the spaces. In the end it was not possible.

PS: There was a moment when everything had to be negotiated. The contract with CSCAE required a plenary hall for 4,000 people, seven stages for more than 200 people in the same venue, twelve stages for workshops and working bodies - a whole series of requirements. During the competition, this was planned for the CCIB, but we had already placed a significant part of the congress at the Tres Xemeneies. When we began developing the project, we realised that the CCIB was already occupied by another congress.

MG: There was another congress, so the CCIB could not be reserved. We could have gone to the Fira, but we did not want to. We wanted to remain closer to the Besòs.

PS: And we were not allowed to change the dates, so we had to find a solution. Since we already had part of the congress at the Tres Xemeneies, we worked intensely on how to accommodate the 4,000-person space, the stages and so on.

MG: We created temporary outdoor structures, very beautiful spaces, so that the congress could become a kind of architecture festival there.

PS: They were conceived as reusable structures. But the congress is in July, so comfort was a central issue. We began working with engineer friends on a beautiful idea: the Tres Xemeneies has a large underground level, and we could extract cool air from the basement and bring it into these temporary structures. With reflective layers and air movement, we calculated that with limited means it would be possible to be outside in July and lower the temperature to around 27

degrees, which we considered a level of comfort. **MG:** But the UIA did not think it was sufficiently appropriate.

PS: At first they did, but in the end... We spoke about changing point. There was a coherence for us in holding a congress about these issues in a place that did not simply close itself off from the outside with air conditioning, as if what was outside did not exist. To speak about all this from a sealed congress palace seemed contradictory. We liked the conceptual alignment of doing it there. At first they also seemed willing to move forward, but ultimately we had to go back.

MG: Now we are in the CCIB congress centre, with all eight stages during the congress hours. Every evening we go to the Tres Xemeneies.

BT: So the movement happens in the evening.

MG: Yes, the evening movement. It is the less formal, less official action, where you can have a glass of wine in your hand. There is no strict order of intervention. We call it the Open Forum. It will take place on the three evenings. The Open Forum is dedicated to speaking about time. We have the six Becoming lines, but the Open Forum recovers the word Becoming and relates it to time. It will work as a forum, in a centripetal way: all the speakers from that day will be in the central part of the stage. We will open a theme and pass the microphone around for short interventions. It will be almost like a ping-pong match, with brief reflections. Of course, we will have some people prepared, because improvisation does not always work, but the intention is to generate debate. For



us, the gathering, the common and community moment that architecture also needs, will be at the Tres Xemeneies. To have achieved that is a great success.

PS: We hope that the famous photograph from 1996, with all those men sitting in front of MACBA before the students, will this time become an image of the facade of the Tres Xemeneies, with a large group of people sitting in a forum, debating and dialoguing about the future of architecture.

BT: So it will not be a tent. It will be outdoors.

MG: Yes. It will be at the right hour, in front of the sea, with the building itself casting shade. It is the ideal moment.

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PS: There will be a large screen transmitting the dialogue, and a grandstand for 1,800 people looking towards the sea and towards the common debate. That grandstand is one of the few pieces we managed to keep from the original congress design, in which everything was going to happen there. It was one of the stages. The scale of the Tres Xemeneies is so enormous that any intervention had to play at that scale. The beautiful thing about the grandstand is that, beyond facing the sea in the summer sea breeze and the debate, it will also be the entrance to the turbine hall - a great staircase leading you inside.

MG: And inside there will be the central exhibition of the congress. It will be in the turbine hall and will remain open not only during the congress days but until 18 July, with free access.

BT: During all opening hours?

MG: Yes, during the opening hours, perhaps from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. It will be impressive, because the Tres Xemeneies is spectacular. Someone who has not been to Barcelona recently and did not see Manifesta may not have it in mind.

PS: It will be at what may be its most beautiful moment. In a few years, when the project begins and becomes something more fixed, it may lose some of this capacity. At the moment we are using only one third of the building, the part that was made accessible for Manifesta, because the congress could not invest more money in adapting more space. But 4,000 square metres is already a lot. It is magical.

MG: It has that quality of buildings that are almost ruins or cathedrals of industry. It is a structure, and perhaps it will never be better than this. We hope they do it very well.

BT: The issue is not the building itself, but the programme and the commission.

MG: Exactly. The problem is the commission.

BT: Because if they divide it too much and put too many people into it, that becomes the problem. It is like a cathedral. The cathedral is already there.

BT: Let us continue with another theme that is very important here now: housing. What is your approach? Is there something special in the way you look at housing, and how have you organised it?

PS: Of the 105 sessions in the congress, many touch on housing. The line that perhaps comes

closest is Becoming Interdependent, because it speaks about collectivity, public space and spaces of civic relationship. There are very interesting talks there. For example, we are bringing Josep Maria Borrell from IMPSOL, who will speak with his counterparts from Vienna and other cities that are benchmarks in public housing. They will speak not only from the point of view of architecture but also from the point of view of institutions. We also have talks with architects widely recognised for their work on housing, from Swiss practices to Peris Toral and others here. And there are talks that address housing not from a European perspective but from the global south. There is not one linear housing theme, but housing is immersed throughout the congress, because it is evidently one of the issues we all need to discuss. It is important to speak about it not only from the point of view of institutions or housing organisation, but also through other lines, including the poetic dimension of housing.

MG: The quality of housing, its tectonic performance, and the research that offices such as IBAVI have done around the tectonics of public housing - all of that also needs to be valued.

PS: One of the twelve research lines, HouseEurope!, is directly related to this.

MG: Yes. HouseEurope! is one of the Research by Design groups that has been working for a year. It is part of Becoming Hyperconscious. HouseEurope! began as an initiative at the European Commission, which closed a few months ago, and through the congress they have launched a new initiative called The Right to Housing. We have supported it together with ETH Zurich, helping to develop this new initiative around the right to housing for everyone: what the right to housing is, what its minimum conditions are, always taking into account no demolition, circularity and so on. We are also organising a roundtable, where the people behind HouseEurope! will be joined by relevant figures such as Secretary General Iñaki Carnicero and others, to debate not only housing but housing in relation to the existing built.

PS: We will also have figures such as the economist Anne Pettifor, who works extensively on housing, and Mariana Mazzucato, who has worked on circularity in relation to the economy.

BT: There are many names. It must be difficult for you to remember everything.

PS: The sad thing is that after three years working on all this, you would like to attend all the talks, but of course we cannot, because everything will happen in parallel.

MG: We have eight stages. We will not be able to be in all of them, and at the same time I want to see a bit of everything. I do not know how it will work.

PS: I think one of the legacies of the congress will be that all the talks will be recorded. There will be a huge body of knowledge archived, and we will have to do something with it.

MG: I keep saying that we must make sure there is a web page dedicated to that.

BT: Documentation is important.

MG: Very important. There will be cameras. It is a huge effort, and everything will happen very quickly, but there will be many conversations, many sessions.

BT: And you never know which ones will become important, so all of them need to be documented. Perhaps later, after the congress, you can listen to everything.

PS: Then conclusions can be drawn.

MG: That was also one of the reasons for the Open Forum. So many things will happen at the same time that we wanted everyone to be able to gather at the end of the day and ask: what happened today? It has been a small battle for months, but fortunately this moment of meeting together remains.

BT: In 1996, those famous photographs in front of MACBA happened because an auditorium was reserved where nobody could get in. People were almost crushed trying to enter, and then they moved to the MACBA square, and later to the Palau Sant Jordi, where nothing could be heard.

MG: We hope this will be a success. What sometimes worries us is that people may feel too lazy to go to the Tres Xemeneies at the end of the day, but we believe that the dynamics of the event should lead them there.

PS: It will be a festive moment, with bars, film, the exhibition, the sea.

MG: That is what we would like to think.

PS: There will be the grandstand, but there will

also be plenty of open space, so capacity should not be a problem. It is not only that the speakers are invited to be there; people sitting nearby who want to speak should also be able to converse. It will be a more informal and closer meeting.

MG: And if you do not want to be active, you can sit a bit further back in the stands, listening to the conversation while eating a sandwich or whatever there is - perhaps gazpacho - and having a glass of wine. That is the moment we are looking forward to.

BT: What happiness.

PS: We often say that it is like giving a gift to Barcelona. To be able to bring all these people here. We have been able to bring around 250 people: 150 selected by us and 90 from the Open Call. They are extremely interesting people, and the people of Barcelona can be there with them all together. That is extraordinary.

MG: In selecting speakers, the international perspective was always very important. We are two of the six curators here, but there is also a scientific committee that met with us every two or three months, and one of its constant concerns was where people were coming from - the UIA regions, the numbers, the representation. It has been a major effort to open the doors to worlds we do not know so well. We are very happy to have done it, although we wish it could have been even broader. It is not that we know all of Europe, but it is much harder to know Southeast Asia or Africa, but we have made an effort.

PS: If we speak about global transition, the climate crisis or social crisis, we cannot do so from a European chair without bringing in the places where many of these issues are being experienced much more strongly than here. It has been difficult, because in some places architectural education is not as internationally visible, and we did not want it to be merely a matter of quotas. We wanted to find people who could truly represent what we wanted to discuss.

BT: In relation to Becoming and the future, how is artificial intelligence present? Have you thought about introducing it, representing it?

MG: It is represented. We have incorporated artificial intelligence because we believe it is part of the debate in our field, but we also wanted to keep our feet on the ground. In three years' time, Beijing will probably make a huge leap with that issue. We have sessions dedicated to artificial intelligence, but we also look at it from a more philosophical and anthropological point of view, going to the roots of these discourses. For example, Mario Carpo will give a keynote. He is not an architect; he is a researcher and philosopher, and he will speak about the debate around artificial intelligence in the world in general. We will address the topic, but we are not

making an all-encompassing immersion into it. There is also a whole part connected to robotics, construction systems and material processes, where AI or new construction technologies are becoming possible because of how much things have evolved.

PS: In other cases, we have included it simply as a tool. What interested us was not so much the process but the result. One interesting case is Jean-Jacques Balzac, a pseudonym used by a French artist who generates images through artificial intelligence, which he calls wrong illustrations. He looks for errors produced by digital glitches. You see an image that seems correct, but suddenly it is not, and that uncertainty becomes, from his point of view, a form of beauty that generates emotions within the image. He uses artificial intelligence, but he is not necessarily speaking about AI; he uses it as an instrument.

BT: As a tool, while also making it visible.

MG: Exactly.

BT: That will also be a statement before going to China, where it will surely become the theme. Here it appears as part of a mixture of themes, as an instrument, but not as the entire foundation of the future.

MG: Yes. We will see.

BT: In three years we will see it at the congress, and probably in all our architectural offices as well.

MG: We are all already incorporating it in one way or another, if only to make our lives easier.

PS: We must also be cautious, because it may become a bubble. Right now there are not enough resources for all these artificial intelligences to survive if their use keeps multiplying. The energy and water consumption are frightening.

BT: We created a pavilion for the Venice Biennale, which is now on display here in Barcelona at the Roca Gallery, about the virtual water we consume. With AI, every question uses a certain amount of water. And yet I still keep asking questions.

MG: We all do.

BT: Even though we know it, we say: I need it, so I use it.

MG: But at some point there will be a change. I do not know what or when, but there will be.

PS: Probably through legislation. Otherwise, or through payment models, because at the moment everything feels astonishingly free, and that will not last forever. There are also companies using it intensively. Some are already thinking about dismissing people in order to pay for AI, or using AI to justify dismissals. And now there is the next step, agents: small programmes installed on your computer. You train an agent, and it can do many things. If you retouch four or five photographs in Photoshop, correcting verticals,

light and so on, you explain it once and it will do the rest. It will also learn which images you like and which you do not. It will summarise articles. It is spectacular, almost like having minions working inside your computer. But, of course, it will not be free.

BT: Let us move to the new generations. What themes do you see among younger generations, and how have you addressed them here? You are very young yourselves, but speak about yourselves too.

MG: We have very good genetics, Pau and I. But we are already approaching forty.

BT: In Italy, a few years ago, people used to say that fifty-year-old architects were the young Italian architects, because construction is so slow that until fifty you still have to consider yourself young.

PS: We have tried to include new generations in several ways. Each Becoming theme has a plenary session, which does not run in parallel with other sessions and takes place in the 4,000-person hall. We want those sessions to act as a kind of summary of each line. In each plenary, the two long-term Research by Design groups present what they have done; then the two workshops, which are shorter-term



investigations led by emerging architects, also present. There are also two critical figures who offer a transversal reading of what is happening in that session.

MG: They do not come to present their own work, but to speak about the others.

PS: They are more academic or critical figures, philosophers or people from the world of theory.

MG: We have Marina Tabassum, who is there as a critic at Antagonist, but also as a practising architect.

PS: It was important that these plenary sessions did not include only people with long careers. We wanted the workshops, and therefore emerging studios, to be present at the main point of the congress. We believe in the generational encounter: understanding that what young people are looking at today is something we all need to look at, because it will be the future. At

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the same time, young people also need to be able to dialogue with what has been essential before them. There is also the international student competition, whose results have already been decided and which will be exhibited inside the Tres Xemeneies. The workshops have invited not only architecture students but also young architects in their first four years after graduation. These 180 participants come from all over the world, offering a view of what young architecture is in Africa, South America, Europe, China and elsewhere.

MG: The twelve emerging architects who are workshop leaders are, in many cases, pioneers. They have ways of looking at architecture that are not immediately recognisable as architecture. For example, Common Accounts, who are half Canadian and half Spanish, will come to speak about parades and procession, about making community. Architecture is also about making community. They want to investigate that. Their workshop will try to make a procession the day after Sant Joan, using materials and collaborating with the cleaning workers in Sant Adrià and part of Barcelona, recovering what happened the night before and transforming it into a parade. These are not conventional architecture workshops; they are other points of view. Many people wanted to sign up for them. In fact, I think the workshops that attracted the most interest were those that were more surprising, rather than the more conventional workshops on built architecture, which are the ones we ourselves might have chosen initially.

PS: That is very beautiful, because it shows that younger generations are looking at architecture in a very different way from us. For them it is no longer simply a matter of finishing the degree and constructing a building. Architecture is many things. It is a discourse that we could describe as the voice of the young, but it is also architecture today. The circles are turning. This generation has had to extract architecture from places where it is no longer easily allowed to operate. We are not doing large buildings or large interventions in the same way. The opportunity lies in working with what already exists and finding openings where none seem to exist.

BT: A silly question I had not prepared: what

will the parties be like?

MG: The opening party, on Sunday evening, looks as though it will be very good. This is already official: CaboSanRoque will create a performance that has a lot to do with everything we are doing, although we cannot reveal it yet. There is a secret element. We hope everything goes well, and we believe it will be quite spectacular. It is the day of the inauguration. The politicians will speak briefly, but the interesting part will be this action to welcome the congress. Then the final day is also important: the student party, on Wednesday evening. It will be the moment when all the pressure is released. All the speakers will have spoken and had their moment, and we think it will be beautiful. That night there is also a gala dinner at Montjuïc Castle, but we will not go, because we will stay at the Tres Xemeneies.

PS: Taking advantage of the large screen and the stage, there will be DJs and we will be able to stay at the Tres Xemeneies until midnight. The place is idyllic. In 1996, I think the party ended up on the beach.

MG: That is what our fellow curators who were there told us: the important party was on the beach.

BT: And now there is a very new beach at the Tres Xemeneies, a whole new situation. The last question is a good one, so we do not end only with parties. What questions would you like the congress to leave open?

PS: One question has to do with how, from the small scale and from architecture, we can be aware of what is happening at a planetary scale and work on it from the small scale. Awareness can operate at a large scale, while architecture works at a small scale. That is already relevant. Another question concerns architecture understood as something always in transition. Removing monumentality from architecture allows us to understand that nothing ever has a final state. We were looking at the Palace in Charleroi in Belgium, for example: a neoclassical palace, an architecture that was surely conceived as final, and yet it has other lives. Jan de Vylder says that it will have still more lives. That helps us understand that authorship also becomes more diffuse. But if there is a will to transform something because it has to have another life,

other hands will intervene. That has always happened.

BT: Shall we leave it here? Is there anything else you would like to say?

MG: I do not know. I have felt very comfortable. We had never had this kind of conversation, speaking so openly and so well. We spend all day making presentations, with screens, but it is beautiful to be able to explain things like this.

PS: In the end, it is the same with parties: the most beautiful ones are the ones that happen almost improvised.

BT: I also imagine that many things will happen around the congress.

MG: I hope they invite us and do not think we are too busy. There are six of us; we can divide ourselves. In fact, five days before the congress, during the congress and for a few days after, many itineraries and routes have been curated using the theme of Becoming, mainly in Barcelona and the metropolitan area, with some outings to Banyoles and other occasional trips. For people coming from abroad, I think this will be very attractive, because there will also be openings of spaces that are usually closed or inaccessible. A lot of work has gone into reaching all these places.

BT: It is a great idea.

MG: Then there are the main congress events, and around them a kind of cloud of collateral and parallel events has appeared almost automatically. The 1996 congress also had many actions and events around it. We are trying to include some of these within the congress space itself, not somewhere else, so that they form part of it. Different roundtables are being organised, and we still need to speak with you, because we are preparing a stage dedicated to the transformations of Barcelona. The congress has always had a very international view, but the local view also seems very important to us. There are many things, and they are still being formalised. We hope these parallel sessions can go ahead, and we would very much like you to be part of the conversations on the transformations of Barcelona.

BT: Of course, it is a miracle that so many things have been possible, and that so many more will be possible.