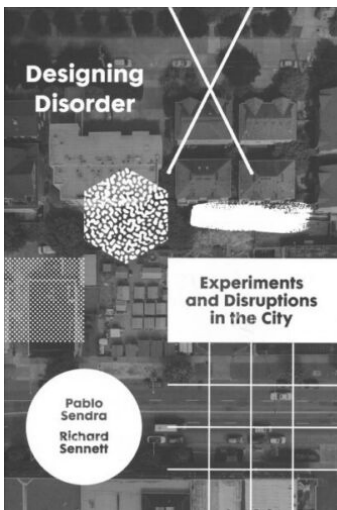
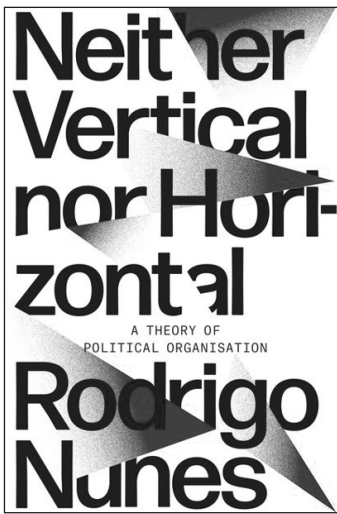


Rodrigo Nunes, *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal. A Theory of Political Organisation*, London, Verso Books, 320 pp. – 2021. Paperback: € 23,55 - ISBN 9781788733830

Pablo Sendra, Richard Sennett, *Designing Disorder. Experiments and Disruptions in the City*, London, Verso Books, 160 pp. – 2022. Paperback: € 11,83 – ISBN 9781788737838



The precise observation of the contemporary impasse is the starting point for both the authors and activists of *Neither vertical nor horizontal: A theory of political organisation* and *Designing Disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City*. The former is an intense and meticulous investigation by the Brazilian philosopher Rodrigo Nunes, the latter is a two-handed book where the architect Pablo Sendra reflects on the masterpiece *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* together with its writer. The volume was published by Richard Sennett in 1970 and soon became a significant essay on the dangers inherent in the rationality through which modern metropolises have been built and governed.

Rodrigo Nunes' approach is mainly theoretical, and, as the subtitle suggests, it is not a book on how to organise but on how to think about organisation. Thus, its purpose is not to find the correct answer, but rather to ask the right questions. According to the author, recent movements show an extraordinary strength of initial action but, at the same time, seem to be incapable of evolving into long-term forms. However, instead of blaming the different types of organisations, Nunes suggests reframing the ways of thinking about it. He does not try to identify the best form of organisation but investigates what an organisation is in its broadest sense. As the title emblematically announces, the book develops through the philosophical-political deconstruction of a long series of binarism as centralised/dispersed, leaders/participants,

collective/aggregate, local/global, party/movement, organisation/spontaneity, hegemony/autonomy, and mostly vertical/horizontal. As stated by the author, these have paralysed the practical potential of recent movements. Specifically, the book is a response to the social movements that characterised 2011, a year that remains a vivid memory of the insurrectional force. The author proposes a view whereby the 2011 protests are the 1989 counterpart to the 1960s protests. The destruction of the Berlin wall highlighted the impossibility of enduring the contemporary situation, just as 2011 was a long response to the 2007 economic and political crisis. That was the year of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa and the Occupy movement in the United States and some European countries. While it brought great hope, it also stressed the internal limits of demonstrations. The author contends that movements are abandoning horizontalism because of their lack of roots, inconstancy, and inability to sustain themselves. He, therefore, commits to reviewing the facts, forms, and forces that have limited horizontalism. He does so, by exploring the theme of organisation trauma, which is interconnected with what is called "two melancholias" in chapter 2. This term refers to two decisive historical moments in the leftist struggle: the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the student and workers' struggles of 1968. The two moments have been as powerful as their consequences over time have been disappointing.

According to the author, the indecipherability of causes and errors led the left to a loss of confidence and to a totalizing “self-torturing,” which contributed even more to the weakening of the concept of revolution.

In chapter 3, he tries to understand why people once seemed to believe more. Starting from its earliest deterministic and theological meaning, he deals with this change in perception of revolution and the consequential progressive evasion of the organisation dimension. Revolution was originally linked to the motion of the planets and a cyclical interpretation of history. However, the advent of the modern era and a rising conception of the future changed its meaning. In the nineteenth century, people believed they were living on the edge of great events and had total confidence in progress. Nevertheless, the publication of the second law of thermodynamics, which guaranteed the inevitable decay of all forms of energy, along with the events of World War II and fascism, severely influenced revolution theory.

Reading this historical description and how it led to the crisis of certainties offers several similarities in the field of the discipline of architecture in which, however, the process of mystification has been much slower and much more difficult to disguise.

A key observation of the consequences of modernity on contemporary cities is the basis for Richard Sennet’s and Pablo Sendra’s book. The book is divided into three parts. The first, by the American sociologist,

takes up the basic concepts of his thinking about the city. The second is edited by the architect Sendra and is an attempt to put into practice the instances presented above. The third is a three-way dialogue in which the two authors are questioned on some fundamental themes, such as the meaning of the hybrid figures of the sociologist-activist and the architect-activist.

In the first part, Sennet adds evidence to his long-standing thesis picking up on concepts he wrote when he was 25 years old. As a Harvard student, he was taught to have complete faith in the rationality of modern architecture. However, at the same time, he witnessed the long season of student protests at universities. He looks at urban dynamics dictated by the real estate industry, the anti-democratic use of space, privatisations, and formal strategies to control and exclude. He defines them as obvious symptoms of a rigid and predetermined design that stifles the modern city and represses people’s freedom of action. For Sennet, the city is both a *ville* and a *cit  *. The former term indicates the physical form and the latter the way of inhabiting and experiencing urban space. The two elements are closely related and influence each other. By presenting various examples, from Le Corbusier’s plan Voisin to the contemporary Hudson Yard, a New York example, he demonstrates the adverse consequences of modern planning on people’s lives. Additionally, he shows their counterparts, such as the bustling Garment District, near

Hudson Yard, as positive models of how cities should be. He analyses these examples to show how “disruptions” can counteract hyper-determination, both formal and social, and turning to architects and urban planners, he proposes to “design disorder”. The first chapter of the first part is a historical reading of the relationship between order and society in recent centuries. It begins with the first modern work of social engineering, namely Napoleon’s Civil Code of 1804, and proceeds by introducing the twentieth-century concept of the “open city.” This concept, theorised by the urban planner Jane Jacobs, incites the production of extravagant urban expansions and adaptations, such as putting a hospital for HIV patients in the centre of a shopping street. Although Sennet admires Jacobs’ strategy, he sees in it a somewhat overly romantic revival of neighbourhood life of the past and he denounces its impossibility in the contemporary city. The sociologist asserts that, as John Locke stated, democracy can be anywhere, not just in the size of the neighbourhood or village. However, the perception of democracy in recent times is much closer to Thomas Jefferson’s position, which argues that democracy is possible only in reduced fields. According to the author, if we still think of the Greek theatre as a space of democracy, we will not be able to accept and understand today’s complex and fast-paced spatiality. Somewhat like Nunes critiques the renunciation of the growth of horizontal movements, Sennet recriminates the disillusionment with which

urban planners and architects view the contemporary city as a space of democracy and hypothesises some physical concepts that might convey democracy. In the second part, Pablo Sendra starts referring to the same 2011 protests from which Nunes' book stems and adds some others, such as the M15 movement in Spain or the long tradition of English squatters. He argues that it is necessary to take note of both the forms of imposed order as well as of how they are contested by people. Protests spontaneously modify the physical space and create variations able to host democracy. Therefore, talking about protest movements becomes an opportunity to reflect on how to design disorder. He illustrates first some spontaneous design episodes, such as the case of the claiming of spaces under the West Way in North Kensington in London, then annotates a series of design examples, such as Santiago Cirugeda's Recetas Urbanas project, Stortorget Square in Norway by Ecosistema Urbano, or Office for Political Innovation research. The cases show different attempts to use architecture as a tool to design disorder instead of order. Based on their reading, the author presents his own proposal. For Sendra, infrastructure should be a long-lasting tool for interacting with public space. Infrastructure provides a basic structure that contains and systematises and, at the same time, allows episodes of spontaneity. Even more detailed examples can be found in the sections "Below," "Above," and "Disorder in Section." He describes, with words and drawings, technical floors, terminals, modu-

lar surfaces, and vertical connecting elements, all different types of infrastructure. These technical examples help him to define the system necessary to design disorder as a sum of components to which one does not attribute a specific function but functional capabilities, which are different possibilities of co-functioning dependent on interaction with other components. Pablo Sendra refers to these links as assemblages, whereas Rodrigo Nunes could call them ecosystems. Just as *Designing disorder* is divided into a more reflective part and a more propositional part, the second part of *Neither vertical, nor horizontal* identifies what is called "organised ecology" as an effective framework for organisation theory. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the different elements of ecology, such as distributed leadership, organising cores, vanguard-function, diffuse control, platforms, diversity of strategies, and parties. Thinking about organising as an ecology means thinking about the relationships between different levels and forms of action. It means referring not to individual movements but to the ecology in which they cooperate. Throughout ecology, there is no competition, but clashes create richness and are essential for life. Within an ecology, the richness of one cluster is available to the whole ecology, and each component can indirectly shape the field of possibility of the others. To understand ecology, one must think of organisation as a vector of force. Kant's principle that two terms can be opposite but not necessarily contradictory helps us to understand ecology in an innovative way. In the *Critique*

of *Pure Reason*, in the late 18th century, Kant explains that an object, on which two different but counterbalancing vector forces act, remains static but without denying the existence of motion. So, ecology is a set of vectors that come in various sizes, directions, shapes, and degrees, with different capacities to gather support and produce change and that, when combined, produce mediated motion. Even though the two books address different areas, they both aim to find a reliable solution to complex situations and time constraints. The solution is not meant as an oriented result but rather as a dynamic application of a concept, thus as an ever-changing interpretation of the tools. While we have on the one hand, a more philosophical thesis and on the other, a dissertation that seeks to give a practical spin to anthropological theories, both capture the same spirit toward a future that can be reshaped through an interpretation of political association and to a political interpretation of space. It could be said that urban planners and architects would find in reading *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal* suggestions for thinking about physical forms and how they are linked to political forms. There is a point of contact between political theory and design that *Designing Disorder* starts to investigate but that should still be explored today and probably the most inspiring feature of the two works is their attitude towards reasoning about overall power. This is in the conviction that the future must be faced together.

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