

DEBATE

Architecture and a New Human Condition. Practices and Skills for an Approaching Turn- over

Alberto Ferlenga

There was no need of an epidemic to realize that most of our beliefs about contemporary living were quickly crumbling under the pressure of global events. Today, much in this field must be reconsidered if we do not want to follow up hypotheses which are as stunning as improbable, like those related to a return to rural life. In this regard, the architecture of the twentieth century still proves to be a field of unused materials, while the living experience of Italian cities, that inexhaustible deposit of solutions and differences, gives us further reason for reflection. Combining experiences in progress with overlooked but precious events and recent technological acquisitions is an imperative for the culture of architects, a culture which cannot postpone its redefinition. In the coming years, those who are involved in training at universities will have to replace a teaching calibrated on professions now profoundly changed with a new way of teaching, consistent with a new definition of the architect.

Vivir juntos. Self-sufficiency and Idiorhythm *Iñaki Ábalos*

The aspiration to formulas and organizations of life outside the family has survived multiple failures; in fact, such aspiration has produced few examples that survived beyond a couple of generations. However, it has also nurtured experiences with great success, which have lasted for centuries, and an everlasting desire to find formulas for social balance. In their current versions, such balance is complemented by self-sufficiency, not only in economic terms but also energetic and ecological ones. These arguments can be applied to urban contexts and new forms of urbanity, as well as to rural spaces and empty population areas, which assume a new value from this perspective, especially if associated with digital and/or agricultural economic activities. The practical example of diverse contemporary formulations developed by the Ábalos + Sentkiewicz architectural office is useful to assess the current validity and pertinence of the search for alternatives to conventional ways of living together.

Age, Community and Utopias in Shared Living

Sergio Martín Blas

A future communal living has been repeatedly devised in 20th century housing architecture, driven by the aim to supersede both the old patterns of family or tribal associations, and the rising individualism in urban societies.

The tension between imagination (project) and reality arises as one of the constants in that historical experience, together with the tacit search for balances between a sense of participation in shared assignments (*communitas*), and the rights of personal retreat, exclusion, distance and isolation (*immunitas*). The article explores such tension as a precious source for collective housing design, starting from the extreme case of the soviet shared apartments (*kommunalki*) and the subsequent experimental projects since the 1920s. Almost one hundred years later, in 2020, the utopian overtones of modern collective housing, revealed by the pervasive presence of children and young people in its iconography and discourses, must be revised: communal living utopias and their once ideally young dwellers converge again in their old age, pointing the need to find new residential forms and shared living ideals.

Factories of Shared Living. Designing the Renewal of Housing

Maria Argenti, Emilia Rosmini

The epochal change the world is undergoing raises questions about urban housing models. This situation also offers a chance to reimagine the question of lofts. The essence of this model was less about temporary final configurations and more about the desire to investigate dynamic processes for the renewal of decommissioned industrial properties and new forms of participation. Similarly, the challenge today is to invert the individualist-consumerist approach to housing, founded more on separation than on inclusion. Analysing the theme of “living in a factory,” the text looks at such examples as the Coopérative d’habitation Station n° 1 in Montreal, the project for Le Chais in Bordeaux, the Torpedo Hall Apartments in Copenhagen, the citadel of social housing in the former Le Blan spinning mills in Lille, the transformation of the Titano ceramics factory in San Marino, the Savonnerie Heymans social housing complex in Brussels, the Passage du Sucre lofts in Barcelona and Lots Road in London. The exploration continues with the Bamboo Micro Housing Proposal presented at the Hong Kong Architecture Biennale in 2014, the ZAC urban project for the Brun cookie factory in Saint-Martin-d’Hères, the Mill Junction Project in Johannesburg, the Can Planell and Kanaal Wijnegem and the recently completed refurbishment of the Fabra i Coats textile factory in Barcelona. These case studies help us look beyond experimentation to imagine the reconstruction not only of buildings, but also of our very idea of collective dwelling.

Nostalgia for the Organic. Community as a Coexistence Utopia

Manuel Delgado

Experiments on community living implying an exile or protection from the ruling models defined by individualism and fragmentation, by homogenization and crowding, have multiplied in the last decades in the advanced capitalist societies. All those experiences share the aspiration to achieve a way of living together based on unselfish cooperation, environmental sustainability, a more or less self-sufficient economy and self-management.

This article provides an interpretation for the recurrent claim to restore the “spirit of community” in three steps. First, it will be proved that the present aspiration to a true community, embodied in a specific residential space, is far from new, and stems from a long history of voluntary self-segregated dwelling. Second, a genealogy of the concept of community as it is used today will be traced, from its ideological roots in the romantic anti-capitalism of the XIXth century.

Lastly, the text explains how the central role of the idea of community is present nowadays not only in supposedly emancipatory social projects, but also in the political programs of social democracy which propose new ways of living, “third” ways encouraging citizens to protect themselves from the severities of the capitalist market without invoking the protection of public institutions and the estate.

RESEARCHES

The Resurrection of Dom Narkomfina

Luca Lanini

The Narkomfin, the building for the staff of the USSR People’s Commissariat of Finance built between 1929 and 1930 by Moisej Ginzburg and Ignatij Milinis, is a complex consisting of a block of centralized services (the common kitchen, the gym, the library) and a linear one, originally on pilotis, containing the lodgings distributed by galleries.

The Narkomfin has been many things in the course of its troubled existence: a laboratory of avantgarde Soviet building technology, the “House of Sleep” for the vaguely hospital aspect of its architecture and for the silence of its inhabitants, an “archaeology of Socialism,” the “Utopia Station,” the “wreck of a social condenser,” even an “example not to be repeated.”

After decades of decadence, this famous building, after an integral restoration by Aleksej Ginzburg (Moisej’s nephew), he is returning to a splendor that it perhaps had never had in any of his many lives. But how can a restoration, as far as possible philological, preserve the aura contained in this casket of the material culture of sixty years of Soviet history?

Living in the Aging City. Notes and Practices from Tokyo

Taishin Shiozaki, Ryosuke Motohashi

Housing in Japan is usually associated with the images of singular houses built in tiny plots, apparently unrelated to the developments of collective housing that prevail in many other countries. Such uniqueness is, however, the result of a specific and complex history of dwelling forms, in which the notion of sharing and collectivity arises in subtle and ambiguous ways. It is particularly interesting in this sense to look at the origins and evolutions of collective housing in Japan, starting from the pre- and post-war periods, in which many of the conventions and codes that condition housing design today were created.

From the notes about the single (detached) and collective housing forms after WWII in Japan it can be concluded that the nLDK code, the system of functional differentiation that defined most residential types in the country, has been a rhetoric tool to promote modern lifestyle while diminishing the old ways of sharing space. Declining birth rates and aging population have made Tokyo become an aging city in transition to a probable shrinkage in demographic terms. In this context, different attempts to transcend the nLDK system, like the house shared by different generations and the shared urban void in collective housing, prove the possibility of sharing space to overcome the repetition of modern functionalist logics in Japan and the logics of separation and solitude stemming from it.

Untagged Domesticities

Atxu Amann, Andrés Cánovas

We live a science fiction life in yesterday’s houses. While our ways of being in the world have undergone possibly the most significant changes since we abandoned nomadism, the housing types formulated by the Modern Movement still have a tremendous weight. Such types prevent us from advancing to new horizons, to abandon standardization, the family as a reference, permanence as a value and the idea of home as the refuge from a hostile city. The modern house is the permanent nostalgia of a time that never existed or should not have existed.

The gender revolution denounced the house as a prison; the information revolution destroyed the way of living established by dualism and broke the walls of the house. During the last decades, many architects have struggled for a new domesticity, expanded in the city and augmented in the network; a domesticity by which the intermediate and hybrid scales can accommodate forms of collective living that generate the dialogue of our natural, solitary and changing self with our social self, who cares for others and for the planet.

New Gourná, the Hassan Fathy’s Dream of Building a Industrious Community

Adelina Picone

The essay proposes a critical analysis of the whole story of Hassan Fathy’s New Gourná, starting from the principal aim: the construction of an industrious commu-

nity, whose munus (task) is the work, to affect marginalization and inequalities, addressing the theme of the house for the poor.

Hassan Fathy does not just prefigure an urban and architectural project, but a true development project based on the recovery of traditional knowledge and on the opportunities for work and economical wealth that building on raw earth, rooted in the cultures of the places, would generate, applying a programme of participatory architecture. An idea of great avant-garde and topicality, if we consider what is being discussed about the need for reactivation strategies for marginalized areas, to be based on processes centered on the cultural specificities of the territories, in order to generate job opportunities. New Gourna, however, in its disastrous epilogue, is both a lesson and a warning for the architects in relation to various issues involving contemporary living, not least the pandemic.

You & Your Neighborhood: Charles Correa and the Project of the Collective Residence

Edoardo Narne, Maria Francesca Lui

In 1955 Charles Correa exhibited at MIT in Boston his Master's Thesis, *You & Your Neighborhood*, an animated short film aimed to investigate important issues related to contemporary living: why are modern neighbourhoods inhospitable? How do the city and its parts grow? Can we reverse the cycle? Can we improve their environmental qualities? In that same year, at the age of 25, the young Correa finds himself facing a double crossroads: to dedicate himself to the art of cinema, a passion that will remain constant over the years and will lead him to other small productions, or to approach architecture? Continue his career in the United States or return to India, his home country? To these crucial questions, despite being very young, he will answer with a strong sense of responsibility, embracing architecture and responding to the urgent call of a nation at that time absolutely lacking in professionals.

In 1956, at the age of 26, Correa returned to India: here his talent was able to express himself in the design of small exhibition pavilions and museum buildings created after winning some competitions. His great passion, however, will remain linked for the rest of his life to that first short film in which the young architect feels the urge to provide the Indian nation with a responsible answer to housing needs. For sixty years Correa will offer to the Indian nation, his extraordinary ability to ask questions and to give profound and personal answers to the great universal questions, knowing how to combine the vernacular dimensions and the modernity and offering a new collective vision for the shared living.

Social housing architecture built in Uruguay in the second half of the 20th century under the cooperative system offers examples of high quality regarding design and construction. The works are the result of successful management processes, solidarity experiments within the framework of social movements crystallized in the mid-sixties. The model was legally established in 1968 and since then about 1.800 housing complexes have been built, most of them located in the peripheral areas of Montevideo and other cities in the country. The system

relies on the self-management of cooperative members, the advice of technical assistance institutes including architects and social workers, public financing and, in some cases, collective property. From three cases built simultaneously in a neighbourhood located East of Montevideo, this essay reviews the incidence of different currents of thought in the conformation of the resulting physical structures. The proposals of that period converged with post-war urban association models, ideas for community development and union organization, while stemming from ideologically conflicting positions.

Occupying the Inhabited Space: Collective Experiences and Architecture in São Paulo

Leandro Medrano, Luiz Recaman

Important innovations in relation to inhabiting the contemporary city have emerged, in the case of São Paulo, through the organized social movements. In the last decades, the movements of occupation of empty buildings in the central area of the city have established new levels for the criteria that define social housing. This text seeks to discuss these innovations confronted with the design strategies consolidated in the metropolis of São Paulo. In other words, design decisions, procedures and techniques present in the local architectural culture will be questioned in the light of a well-known case: the Nove de Julho occupation, a community housing experience that updates various aspects regarding the issue of social housing, such as property, sharing, self-management and cultural production. This experience signals a new way of thinking about the production of urban space in the full sense, in which the act of living extends and re-signifies the existing city.

Communities. Towards a Genealogy of Housing Cooperatives in Uruguay

Marya Méndez

Social housing architecture built in Uruguay in the second half of the 20th century under the cooperative system offers examples of high quality regarding design and construction. The works are the result of successful management processes, solidarity experiments within the framework of social movements crystallized in the mid-sixties. The model was legally established in 1968 and since then about 1.800 housing complexes have been built, most of them located in the peripheral areas of Montevideo and other cities in the country. The system relies on the self-management of cooperative members, the advice of technical assistance institutes including architects and social workers, public financing and, in some cases, collective property. From three cases built simultaneously in a neighbourhood located East of Montevideo, this essay reviews the incidence of different currents of thought in the conformation of the resulting physical structures. The proposals of that period converged with post-war urban association models, ideas for community development and union organization, while stemming from ideologically conflicting positions.

Territories / Borders: Collective Housing Experiences in Gothenburg and Lund

Gunilla Svensson

The article discusses the importance of understanding the city and its architecture not as objects, but as syntheses of meaningful borders that can define territories, which enable groups and communities to identify with specific places. To illustrate the use of borders and connections the text refers to the historic European urban structures, which in most cases stem from an interesting and lasting interpretation of territories, functions and aesthetics. Furthermore, two design examples where the aspect of territoriality has been important are presented in the article.

The first is a big scale social housing area in Gothenburg that has developed in a positive way through the definition of differentiated zones for public and private uses. The other project defines a new dwelling area that plugs into an existing student housing complex from the 70s, an iconic brutalist building. The new development, called Scheele Walk, adapts to the old structure to make the whole work together in a meaningful way. In both cases a specific attention is put in the way borders can configure territories.