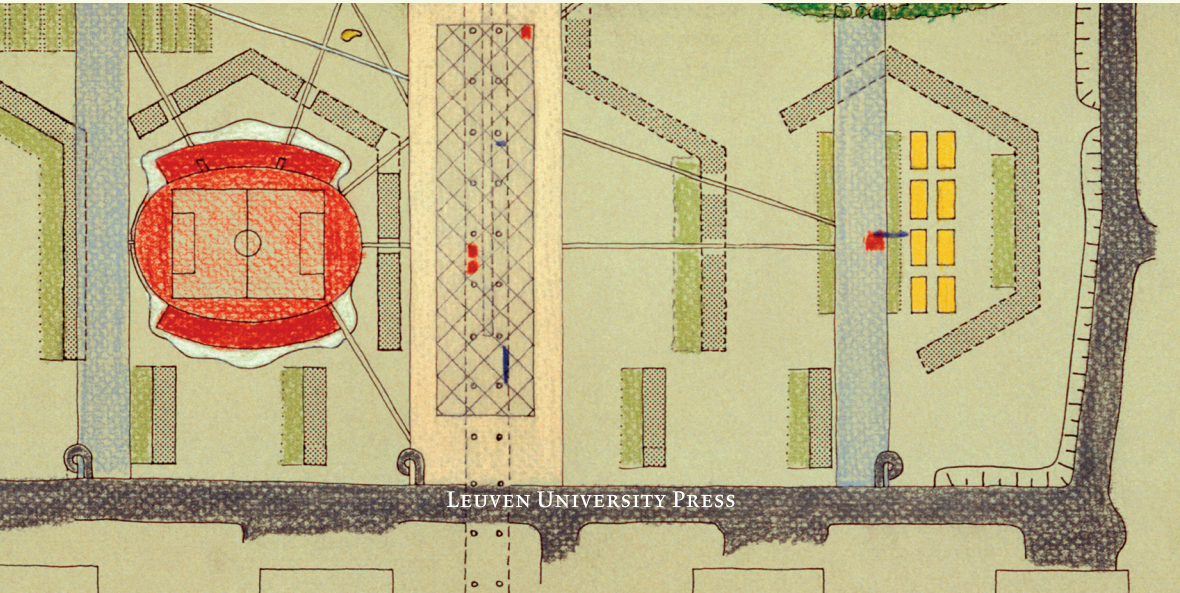


Andrea Migotto and Martino Tattara (eds)

CONTESTED LEGACIES

Critical Perspectives on Postwar Modern Housing



LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

Contested Legacies:
Critical Perspectives on Postwar Modern Housing

CONTESTED LEGACIES

Critical Perspectives on
Postwar Modern Housing

Edited by

Andrea Migotto and Martino Tattara

LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

The publication of this work was supported by the KU Leuven Fund for Fair Open Access.

Published in 2023 by Leuven University Press / Presses Universitaires de Louvain / Universitaire Pers Leuven. Minderbroedersstraat 4, B-3000 Leuven (Belgium).

Selection and editorial matter © Andrea Migotto and Martino Tattara, 2023

Individual chapters © The respective authors, 2023

This book is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Non-Derivative 4.0 Licence. Further details about Creative Commons licences are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/>



Attribution should include the following information: Andrea Migotto and Martino Tattara (eds), *Contested Legacies: Critical Perspectives on Postwar Modern Housing*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2023. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Unless otherwise indicated all images are reproduced with the permission of the rightsholders acknowledged in captions. They are expressly excluded from the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence covering the rest of this publication. Permission for reuse should be sought from the rights-holders.

ISBN 978 94 6270 372 8 (Paperback)

ISBN 978 94 6166 514 0 (ePDF)

ISBN 978 94 6166 515 7 (ePub)

<https://doi.org/10.11116/9789461665140>

D/2023/1869/32

NUR: 648

Layout: Crius Group

Cover design: Daniel Benneworth-Gray

Cover illustration: OMA, Revise Bijlmer, project plan (1986) © SABAM Belgium 2023



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION. THE PAST AND FUTURE OF POSTWAR HOUSING ESTATES: FACTS, HERITAGE, PROJECT	7
<i>Andrea Migotto and Martino Tattara</i>	

PART 1. THE MODERN HOUSING PROJECT IS A SOCIAL PROJECT: A CRITICAL READING

CHAPTER 1. SOCIAL HOUSING AND THE REGIMES OF TIME: A FEW MOMENTS WITHIN THE LONG LINES OF (SOCIAL) HOUSING IN VIENNA AND AUSTRIA	31
<i>Michael Klein</i>	

CHAPTER 2. TOO BIG? DEBUNKING SCALE MYTHS WITH THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL ARCHITECT'S DEPARTMENT	49
<i>Jesse Honsa</i>	

CHAPTER 3. A SOCIAL CRITIQUE OF THE LARGE-SCALE MODERN HOUSING PROJECT	75
<i>Martino Tattara</i>	

PART 2. INTERPRETATIONS OF THE 'UNBUILT' SPACE: FORMS, CATEGORIES, AND TERMS

CHAPTER 4. BELOW THE SHADOWS	93
<i>Federico Coricelli and Nicola Russi</i>	

CHAPTER 5. THE COMMON SPACE PROJECT: THE CASE OF LATIN AMERICAN NEIGHBOURHOOD UNITS	115
<i>Umberto Bonomo</i>	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

**PART 3. AGENTS MEAN HISTORIES: ACCOUNTING FOR
MULTIPLE EXPERIENCES AND AGENCIES IN POSTWAR
HOUSING ESTATES**

CHAPTER 6. LIVING TOGETHER: (THE MULTIPLE) 'STORIES' OF AN ORDINARY
HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN POST-WWII TURIN 133

Gaia Caramellino

CHAPTER 7. GOSSIP AND COMPLAINT: WAYS OF (RE-)PRODUCING THE SOCIAL
IN HOUSING 'EXPERTLY' 155

Heidi Svenningsen Kajita

PART 4. CULTURES OF TRANSFORMATION

CHAPTER 8. HOUSING COMPLEXES IN BRAZIL: A MODERNIST HERITAGE 181

Flávia Brito do Nascimento

CHAPTER 9. MODERNISM IS DEAD, LONG LIVE MODERNITY: THE BIJLMER AND
THE PROJECT OF 'INCOMPLETENESS' 201

Andrea Migotto

ABOUT THE AUTHORS 229

THE PAST AND FUTURE OF POSTWAR HOUSING ESTATES

Facts, Heritage, Project

Andrea Migotto and Martino Tattara

FRAMING POSTWAR HOUSING

The transformation of large-scale postwar housing estates has become a central theme in current architectural debate, involving a multitude of professional figures, from urban planners and energy experts to social scientists and, at times, public administrators. This sudden spark of interest remains mostly practice-oriented, generally motivated by the concrete urgencies related to the obsolescence of these buildings and has only partially triggered new intellectual speculations. The deterioration of construction materials and of technological installations has a visible impact on the living comfort of inhabitants; poor energy performances lead to skyrocketing bills that, especially in times of energy crisis, landlords and tenants can hardly sustain; and the more general and systemic rise of maintenance costs accentuates the continuous devaluation of the estates. These technical and economic reasons often go in parallel with the intention of planners to ‘rectify’ other issues, in particular matters at the crossroads between social conditions and spatial qualities, related for example to the vulnerable personal and economic conditions of residents and to the image, and level of inclusivity, of these urban neighbourhoods. As postwar residential buildings approaching their end-of-life cycle are ubiquitous, it should come as no surprise that the question of what to do with this physically but also numerically large housing stock is becoming urgent.

In recent years, a number of diverse projects for the transformation of this type of estates have been successfully completed in several European countries, from the Netherlands to France, from Belgium to Switzerland. Some have become exemplary, being broadly disseminated and widely acclaimed within the architectural debate. What is most valued by contemporary architectural culture is the capacity of these proposals to take advantage of the possibilities given by existing constructions to imagine a future of greater spatial quality

while reducing the use of additional resources and lowering the impact on the planet in terms of energy and materials. The groundbreaking work of French office Lacaton & Vassal, in collaboration with architect Frédéric Druot, is perhaps the best known example in this direction.¹ Aside from the undeniable effectiveness of their approach, the success enjoyed by the work of the French architects has sometimes resulted in replicas of their design principles almost as ‘a given’, arguably revealing the need for a thorough reflection on the criteria and agenda behind refurbishment projects after decades of generalised disinterest by the architectural profession. However, what is perhaps most relevant to mention, despite the success stories of new projects and the unquestionable advantages they present, is that for many housing agencies and municipalities, the question of whether to embark on a process of transformation (from retrofitting to rehabilitation) or to simply demolish and rebuild (as in the recent demolition of Alison and Peter Smithson’s Robin Hood Gardens in London) remains open and difficult to answer. This reticence suggests that the criteria, or preconditions, that responsible institutions evaluate to initiate a project are far more diverse and perhaps contradictory than those often assumed, even by trained architects, from the outside.

In this book, we line up with advocates of the first option (reuse and adaptation of the existing) over the second (demolition). However, we are primarily interested in addressing the future of postwar residential buildings going beyond the technical and pragmatic reasoning according to which decaying and poorly performing buildings need to be rehabilitated or retrofitted, especially in a time dominated by ideas of recycling, circularity, and energy performance. Are technical and economic issues the only aspects at stake in guiding the refurbishing of postwar estate projects? Instead, what we set ourselves to discuss in this book are the cultural conditions for such a project to happen and the diverse forms or meanings this ambitious agenda can take. We address the question of what the legacies and values of this housing stock are; why they are worth being reinterpreted, transformed, and preserved over ‘demolition and redevelopment’ practices; where and how we can identify such values—epistemologically, culturally, and physically—and perhaps offer some lenses through which to look at this housing stock as a multifaced resource for the future of the city rather than a recurrent problem.

One of our pivotal assumptions is the following. Although the book discusses a series of telling case studies from different geographical contexts, including some realisations by important modern architects in countries such as Chile and Brazil and well-known European residential estates, we openly use them to discuss a broader condition: that of the ‘generic’ postwar modern residential project at large. The term ‘generic’ is here used in its etymological meaning—“belonging to a larger group of objects”.² Hence, the proposed

categorisation of “generic postwar modern residential project” binds together the loose totality of those large-scale residential buildings constructed during the period we commonly call ‘the welfare state years’. With this term, we refer to the decades spanning the 1950s and 1970s, characterised by the efforts of postwar reconstruction, initially, and by the economic boom of the 1960s. Yet, the ‘welfare state’ label does not simply stand for a historical periodisation, but delineates a peculiar political regime and ideology about the role of the state, the promotion of policies targeting the well-being of citizens and the relation between public institutions and society.³ While we tend to associate this term with the welfare policies typical of European countries, in the book we include cases from such Latin American countries as Chile and Brazil, whose welfare policies differ from those we are mostly familiar with and which have been identified with terms such as welfare states “in transition”.⁴ Ultimately, regardless of differences of a political or administrative kind, what is more meaningful for our analysis is that these countries have also been characterised by large public investment in housing in the postwar years and that the architectural production of that period confronts us today.

We are aware of the risks of thinking of the universal by discussing the specific.⁵ However, the phenomenon we are addressing and the editorial angle we have chosen make sense precisely when we stop thinking of each case as unprecedented and unrepeatable and we train ourselves to notice what is common to these projects. Most have been neglected by canonical architectural historiographies yet have clearly been influenced by the architectural and planning models of the Modern Movement—of which they are both a manifestation, a testing ground and, more often than not, a latent heresy. We refer to buildings and estates that often have no recognised architectural value but whose social and material relevance cannot be downplayed; they are projects that have been most likely designed by technical offices of local housing companies or local architectural firms, that we tend to overlook when walking by, but whose presence has by now become an integral part of the city. While it is precisely this housing stock that has been traditionally used to disseminate the well-known decadent image of the failing planning efforts of the Modern Movement and of its multiple historical manifestations⁶ (not without reason, in several instances), we believe that the postwar residential project constitutes today, due to its overarching architectural qualities, the urban ambitions and the sheer quantity of dwellings we are considering, an unavoidable fact and a potential resource upon which to imagine a project for the city of tomorrow.

The book does not deal with uncharted territories. The interest in large-scale modernist housing has recently expanded, also from an academic perspective, as testified by the growing number of studies and interpretive trajectories that have established a solid body of knowledge on what we can consider

among the most remarkable architectures of the second half of the twentieth century. It is enough to browse through recent academic journals or attend one of the many seminars on the topic to get an idea of how the large housing complexes built between the 1950s and 1970s have become a prominent field for architectural scholars. While developing our positions, we also turned with growing interest to a series of books that, based on the analysis of a series of projects and case studies, recently presented design-oriented approaches to the transformation of the postwar modern housing stock,⁷ or to the processes of alteration, modification, and appropriation conducted on their living spaces by the residents themselves.⁸ This book sits within this expanding field of enquiry. However, while most of these works deal with precise historical reconstructions of the cultural and political roots of postwar architecture, with the monographic assessment of singular cases, or with the outcomes of transformation processes, in this book we explore a different trajectory. We bring together a series of contributions on selected international—European and South American—case studies that illuminate the terms, practices, and problems related to a specific aspect of this architectural heritage defined loosely in stylistic and temporal terms: its capacity to face future transformations. Each essay addresses a specific issue related to architectural design choices, professional practice, building development, management practices, and housing culture in an attempt to open up the debate on what it means to transform postwar housing and why we should do so.

RELEVANCE AND LIMITS OF POSTWAR HOUSING ARCHITECTURE

It might sound contradictory that, in an age characterized by ubiquitous financial capital and the digital economy, by smart and precarious forms of work, by the fragmentation of the socio-economic cornerstone of Fordist society such as the nuclear family, and by widespread concerns about the sustainability of our development models if not about our very way of living, we have turned our attention to architectural and planning schemes dating from more than half a century ago. Our cultural tenets, not to mention our beliefs and hopes for future progress, probably could not be more distant from those underpinning the vast projects of the welfare state. Isn't it precisely the cultural and social structures of modernity, of which these buildings are prominent embodiments, that we are now trying to deconstruct, intellectually and physically? Why, then, has architecture so eagerly tried to offer insights into the artefacts produced by "state-organized practices of 'military' rationalization"?⁹ Why are we attracted by the architectural embodiment of that epochal effort which, after the devastation of war, attempted to democratize social rights for

“as many people as possible” while reproducing the capitalist economy?¹⁰ And why are we urged to revisit buildings that not only no longer match current popular taste, but are often stigmatised and strongly represent beliefs and practices generally considered outdated? Notwithstanding the various reasons that have triggered a disciplinary reassessment of such architectural heritage and regardless of how such reconceptualization is operated, the underlying thread is that of an urge to move beyond the label of failure with which this housing stock has often been identified and to discuss the conditions for its possible redemption.

PAST PROMISES, ENTHUSIASM, AND THE RISK OF NOSTALGIA

In the introduction to their seminal *The Architecture of the Welfare State* (2015), Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel identify three main reasons for their book.¹¹ First, a tangible dissatisfaction, related to a growing disillusion, with the social and political ideas behind the economic crisis of 2008: neoliberal ideologies governing both politics and mainstream culture which had set the pace for economic developments and social policies since the 1980s, promising liberation from the insurmountable limits of welfare state policies, have eventually revealed programmed inequality behind the mask of individual freedom. Second, the urge to address questions of legacy and preservation stemming from the material and functional outdatedness of postwar public housing. And third, the desire to seriously readdress, from a contemporary perspective, established disciplinary beliefs, such as that of the near-Promethean visionary figure of the architect that got cemented in the period of postwar reconstruction¹² or the deep-rooted narratives such as the innate inhumanity and socially disaggregating character of large modernist housing estates.¹³ Their book represented one of the most convincing efforts to make the built works of the welfare state the subject of architectural research and reflection in their own right, beyond national borders and the fragmentariness of singular architects’ oeuvres. In a way, our book stems from similar interests and temporally situated challenges, taking advantage of the recognition that operated in their book yet focusing on a more specific field of inquiry: the sui generis and long-standing modernity of postwar mass residential architecture which haunts us to this day. In a crucial passage, the three authors carefully warn the reader not to idealise postwar politics and related architectural schemes as a panacea for the ills of our own times: “to revisit the welfare state era [...] is not to look back in nostalgia but to learn from the consistent negotiations between capital, labour and the state from which the western European welfare state emerged.”¹⁴ By fully endorsing this position, our book

attempts to go a step further. The potentially empowering models—economic, social, and architectural—of the welfare state might not be suitable for our own time, yet there is no risk of looking back with nostalgia. Instead, these concrete projects confront us now as they are, as facts with their own history (material and social, actual and fictional, mainstream and hidden). The questions we ask then are: What was and can still be valuable in these projects? How do we judge these values today? Where do we begin to critically assess these values as heritage?

If reproducing past models is not only nostalgic but useless, dissecting the residential architectural production of the postwar decades is, on the contrary, helpful for sharpening intellectual tools to understand the features of the contemporary crisis while becoming a reference to hypothesize future visions. Captive as we are of the socially and culturally disempowering nets orchestrated by the neoliberal culture of housing financialization,¹⁵ the housing projects of the welfare state still haunt us for what they embody: the unprecedented attempt to find a balance between the inherently unequal capitalist economic system and the demands for universal social equality and prosperity, in both private and collective terms. These housing complexes, which were originally built not just for the lower classes but for people with diverse income levels and professional occupations, underpinned redistributive political agendas engineered at the national level with the goal, in the present, to solve the urgent housing needs and, in the longer term, to support the endless growth of national and private wealth.¹⁶ Despite the crisis of such a sociopolitical model, the current inability to even only imagine similarly powerful redistributive programmes—where the bond between architectural design, productive forces, and social ambitions could be meaningfully addressed—testify to the poverty of our social imagination and act as one of the main levers driving us in the reassessment of this built heritage.

WHAT AFTER THE NARRATIVE OF FAILURE?

The act of reviewing the postwar mass housing projects is also a way to do justice to them with a set of simplistic yet widely accepted critical judgements formulated from the 1970s onward. The crisis of the welfare state, at once political, financial, and cultural, subjected both its institutional bodies and its formal embodiments to harsh criticism. Such aspects as the centralised policies that led to public housing construction, the size of buildings, or the widespread use of industrialised techniques like prefabricated concrete panels were all perceived to signal top-down paternalism, mass conformism, the suppression of cultural variety, and the imposition of inhuman living conditions. Criticism

did not spare the form of the city: the dismissal of the modernist “green city”¹⁷ with large residential blocks freely distributed in an undefined park-like environment paved the return of conservative models of urbanity based on a more traditional network of streets, squares, and closed residential blocks identified as more instrumental to the promotion of private ownership and interest.¹⁸ Also, functionalist planning and the aesthetic of concrete prefabricated construction became symbols of the failures of technocratic utopian thinking. Aware of the intricacies between facts and perceptions, yet dissatisfied with positions that have eroded the allure irradiated by the modern city, in this book we ask ourselves whether all this is true or not. While past critiques were largely fed by burgeoning cultural paradigms that looked with growing interest to privatization, the dismantling of state-provided services, individual freedom of action and variety of expressions, all of which became the cornerstone of neo-conservatism, today we can clearly see how these critiques were largely biased.

Looking at how high-rise housing was mass-produced on a global scale yet with alternate destinies, architectural historian Florian Urban recognises that speaking of success and failure in relation to postwar housing cannot be done only in relation to the original goals of solving “the housing crisis provoked by demographic growth and country-to-city migration” and providing “modern standards for the whole of society.” The “shifting significance of housing blocks within the respective societies and their perception by architects, politicians, and inhabitants” must also be considered. In Urban’s view, buildings acted “as vessels, conditioning rather than creating social relations”, with architectural design being “only a factor in a broader equation which leads to the quality, both material and social, of housing development”.¹⁹

PRESENT SENSIBILITIES AND QUESTIONS ON POSTWAR HOUSING ARCHITECTURE

A BROADER FIELD OF ENQUIRY

The reassessment of postwar public housing in the early twenty-first century poses questions that cannot be confined to the ‘typical’ architectural fields of form-giving and construction. It also calls into question the larger spectrum of institutional structures and policies that occur before the architect operates. Reviewing these projects implies, therefore, also finding a value in contemporary research for aspects like forms of housing tenure, types of governance, and decisional processes, as well as the practices of maintenance. Indeed, these aspects have long been overlooked in both architectural research and design practice.

We believe that, to achieve a sharper evaluation of postwar estates, it is crucial to look at the impact of political agendas, housing policies, institutional organisations, and professional discourses. What seems necessary is not only to examine the design and realisation phases, but also to consider the life of buildings before and especially after delivery and the ways in which they have been inhabited. The deconstruction of popular wisdom according to which modernist mass housing is a uniform and monolithic phenomenon based on industrialised production, dwelling standardization, and bureaucratic control suggests the need to put forward more advanced intellectual categories and analytical tools. We do not intend to deny that large-scale projects were often technocratic schemes conceived with little interest for the lives of residents or that experimental construction techniques might have had a negative impact on the quality of life, causing long-term budgetary setbacks. Yet we feel the urge to discern between the ways in which architecture was first conceived and produced and how it was later “reproduced”.²⁰ It is also necessary to understand that the architecture of housing is only part of a dense network of knowledge, decisions, and interests of which design cannot offer a full synthesis. Hence, it cannot be the only culprit.

LIFE AND AGENCY IN THE FOREGROUND

Considering architectural and urban designs not just as products but as the setting of a series of conditions for living, it is evident that in assessing our subject matter, forms of occupancy and inhabitation should be taken into consideration. And if we look at how residential units or neighbourhoods were lived in and transformed after being completed, we are compelled to include inhabitants within that broad network of active agents responsible for the care and reproduction of architectural quality. Use is one of those intellectual categories that can be helpful to bridge design decisions with subjects and built matter. Multiple studies have recently provided accounts of the individual and collective experience of domestic spaces and how what were initially conceived as perfect “machines for living”—fully organised schemes according to predetermined conceptions of use and movement preached by the CIAM congresses—underwent radical alteration over the years. Looking through the lens of the “agency of users or residents”, housing blocks appear less the result of professionalized design practices under the lead of the architect than the dynamic unfolding of complex and endlessly negotiated collective efforts—mostly ignored by professional discourses—in which several actors are involved.²¹ The cornerstone of functionalism was the hypothesis that architecture could organise behaviour within the domestic space on the model of the worker in the factory.²² After World War II, social housing agencies and public promoters

started looking at residents as active users and devised an apparatus of professional figures and of manuals, drawings, surveys, exhibitions with the scope of aligning housing supply to their needs and living habits.²³ Since the late 1960s, evoking the role of users became a slogan to undermine what was perceived to be purely bureaucratic and alienating housing policies and domestic designs.²⁴

We should be careful of such emphasis, however. Nowadays, the praise of resident agency often seems to be used to build up fictitious moral distinctions between ‘good design’ (which allows inhabitants to actively appropriate their living environment) and ‘bad design’ (bureaucratically developed by technocrats for whom only economic and management criteria matter). This stance stems from a rather diffuse perception, mirroring neoliberal ideologies, that residents know exactly what they want and what’s best and that they should be the ones directing the development of architectural and urban projects. Doubtful as we are of any cheap schematism, with this book we argue that the assessment of postwar housing needs to consider the agency of dwellers in housing, acknowledging that the design, use, and management of large housing estates are all part of a complex collective endeavour which deserves more attention in both academic studies and professional practice. This view means, for example, turning our gaze towards practices that have generally been overlooked in our field, like those concerned with the care of both buildings and people.

TRANSFORMATION AS A CHALLENGE BEYOND THE ‘PURELY ARCHITECTURAL’

Despite the chronic lack of social housing at the national level and the growing demand for affordable homes, housing agencies in many European countries—from Belgium to Italy and from Sweden to Switzerland—have set refurbishment as their primary target. If, in addition to the obsolescence of postwar housing stock, we consider that these buildings represent a non-negligible portion of the contemporary housing offer in urban areas and currently accommodate primarily disadvantaged or vulnerable households, the magnitude of the issue facing administrations and housing agencies is today clear.

Yet, despite the claims of many European housing agencies, it is also true that strategies based on demolition and/or privatisation are arguably the two most widespread and economically attractive approaches in relation to the transformation of postwar large-scale public housing.²⁵ These solutions flag not only the thinning capacity of public institutions to cope with expensive and complicated rehabilitation processes, but also the risks derived from a hasty dismissal of existing social dwellings. It is undeniable that many of these estates are in such a state of decay that any attempt at renovation would result in enormous costs that severely question strategies of retrofitting and

refurbishment. Yet, while privatization often perpetrates discriminating models built around the ideal of asset-based welfare,²⁶ it is also true that demolition and successive redevelopment too often result in realizing lesser units than those demolished, worsening an already compromised housing supply.²⁷

Here, we neither present explicit design strategies nor directly discuss some of the projects that have recently been successfully implemented. We rather seek to develop a bridge between historical investigation and theoretical speculation in the hope of developing intellectual tools to assess the cultural ground on which postwar housing transformation should be conducted. The questions we aim to address are thus the following: Are postwar modernist residential buildings and urban schemes still culturally and functionally meaningful for our societies? If so, in what terms? How shall we interpret the relevance of past cultural tenets while addressing current societal challenges? Is it possible to adapt the architectural expression resulting from postwar social policies to present-day demands? Besides architectural form and language, what are the other relevant fields on which postwar housing processes and design could be revalued? How can a newly defined network of actors—from professionals to inhabitants—be involved in responsible housing practices of the future? We are convinced that answering these questions is fundamental in understanding how the modernist housing blocks and urban schemes are not just problematic facts in need of quick fixes. On the contrary, they become active objects to mirror changed living habits and shape future forms of inhabiting.

The practice of retrofitting the products of postwar urbanisation, especially in the case of massive and often monofunctional residential estates, is no easy task, especially for both responsible companies and professionals and not only for architects or planners. If we leave aside for now some exceptional examples, most refurbishment projects concern the simplification of the interior layout and its rationalisation (by eliminating corridors and by offering larger living areas) as well as the addition of a layer of insulation and new cladding as a way to lower the environmental impact of the building and keep bills low. While bureaucratic renewal seems to add little to the quality of buildings, the remarkable work by Lacaton, Vassal, and Druot²⁸ and others has shown how transformation can be a way to rethink the disciplinary tenet of postwar functionalism and can create new forms of living. And yet it is precisely the most remarkable projects today that also bring to our attention the crucial shortcomings we encounter in the negotiation between established mainstream culture standards, critical expectations, and the art of designing space. It is particularly evident when thinking of the possibilities of ‘transforming’ the ways in which property, tenure, and maintenance in large-scale postwar estates are conceived or the rigid ways in which housing is still seen as something completely detached from the sphere of work. This point therefore raises another

crucial challenge: the potential and limitations of seeing these buildings and what they stand for as heritage.

THE QUESTION OF HERITAGE

In his seminal book *Words and Buildings*, Adrian Forty addresses the idea and use of history in architectural modernity and after its crisis. In his view, the so-called turn to history,²⁹ famously employed by Western architects since the 1970s, represents a rather unproblematic approach to history. One of the starting points of the 1920s modernist avant-garde—we are aware of the risk of simplification here—was, as Forty suggested, the refusal of historicism and the continuous stylistic referencing typical of nineteenth-century architecture. The 1970s marked a reaction against the modernist agenda, leading historians and architects to reconsider architectural value based on the past. Perpetrating a refusal of the immediate past, the return to history was mainly identified with a recovery of pre-modernist identities, languages, cultures, and imaginaries which, in the second half of the twentieth century, had mainly lost their significance.³⁰ Yet, Forty shed light also on the relation between history and the slippery twin category of heritage, stating:

This confusion [over the value of history for architecture after the 1970s] is nowhere better exemplified than in ‘heritage’: objects and buildings preserved from the past are offered as ‘history’ itself, while the partiality and interestedness of the procedure that has rendered them as history is obscured under the satisfying concrete wholeness which they present to our eyes.³¹

Architectural discourses from the 1970s onward, triggered by an elusive yet conservative ideological charge, had a crucial twofold consequence for the subject matter we treat in our book. First, the turn to history, willingly or not, placed modernism back in history, a place from which the latter had struggled to escape. Second, because of its historicity, modernism itself would become part of a set of identities, cultures, and heritage values for the present. Mainstream rejection was largely motivated by the intention of architects to investigate folk architectural languages and construct an apparent autonomy of the discipline from the broader scope of explicit social engagement.³² The limits embedded in these attitudes can now be overturned. We are probably more inclined to openly face the historicity of modernist architecture and more willing to appreciate not only its aesthetic achievements but also, most importantly, the close implication of architecture in social and political

issues.³³ It is from this peculiar historical consciousness that the heritage values embedded in postwar housing projects can be reconsidered. A crucial effort in this regard has been carried out by DOCOMOMO, one of the leading organizations concerned with the recognition, dissemination, and safeguard of culturally relevant products from the modernist period which has addressed the question of postwar mass housing in a series of recent issues of its journal.³⁴

Heritage stands out as one of the main underlying themes touched upon in the essays of this book, perhaps the central one guiding the intellectual exchange between contributors. This aspect does not mean that heritage is the sole concern of the essays, nor that related arguments will feature in it as the main point of discussion. Yet, from a multiplicity of perspectives, fundamental questions of postwar housing estates as heritage are posed, showing the many meanings of this apparently innocent concept. All contributors in fact identify in these residential realisations—whether in their form, techniques, practices, or ideologies—a heritage relevance of some kind. At the same time, the various approaches to and points of view regarding ‘heritage’ raise a number of problematic points that need to be acknowledged in this introduction.

The first ambiguity we encounter is that of ‘recognition’. This relates to the qualities of the built artefacts and of the urban environments tackled in the following pages. ‘Large-scale postwar housing estate’ is a loose category, applicable to a myriad of specific projects worldwide with marked differences. Not all these complexes were built using prefabricated construction techniques, nor were they all developed under the direct planning of the state. Neither did they all fully accept the linguistic tenets of modern functionalism, nor were they all designed by well-known architects. What is certain is that a large majority of them do not display that set of exceptional qualities we usually assume are worth preserving. The challenge we face is therefore to spell out novel approaches by which to rediscover, or argue for, these projects as a form of heritage. The motivation for this intellectual reassessment of the fundamental categories of our culture can be identified in what was sharply argued by the editors of a recent work on the adaptive reuse of postwar housing, who contended that “the achievement in terms of *Baukultur* is often due to the interplay among large numbers of generic buildings rather than design of individual outstanding buildings”.³⁵ The effort to recognise the values embedded in the generic and often authorless forms of our built environment stands out as an epoch-making task of our time, one which necessarily demands as yet uncharted or often repressed intellectual categories.

A second issue is the need to define new instruments or meanings by which to reconfigure the notion of heritage, expanding the one we have to embrace objects that are traditionally distant from what is commonly accepted as constituting heritage. In her wonderful book *Uses of Heritage*, Australian

archaeologist Laurajane Smith openly denounces the typically nineteenth-century view of heritage that still largely dominates Western culture.³⁶ The faults of this notion are manifold, from the fact that it has been constructed around the purely material, technical, and aesthetic evaluation of objects to that of triggering preservation attitudes mainly focused on the “static” safeguarding of universally valid identities. Moreover, this cultural stance has been perpetrated and naturalized through what Smith calls “authorized discourses”: apparently universal procedures reproduced through the professionalization of the practices for the identification and preservation of “cultural values”. We should ask whether the evaluation of heritage based solely on the artistry of a specific work is enough, first, to acknowledge the relevance of the housing stock of the welfare state and, second, to do it justice. Arguably, it is not so much or not only in the strictly aesthetic qualities of architecture that valuable and long-term cultural achievements can be located. The broader spectrum and interplay of processes, policies, actors, relationships, practices, memories, and design which have been layered upon these buildings over the years and which have been slowly brought to light by innovative research approaches are, more likely, where alternative definitions of heritage can emerge.

Thirdly, the reassessment of heritage shall also clarify what appears to be a main cause for reluctance in dealing with the transformation of postwar estates. The question of what to preserve or what is worth preserving goes together with that of how to preserve, which is a matter not merely of practical know-how but of scope. If heritage is not inherent to things but a socially created category, then purpose is not a secondary issue. The difficulty posed by mass housing buildings is that pre-given ideas of heritage preservation for other types of artefacts might not hold here. In public buildings or monuments, we directly perceive the representation of collective memory through formal and stylistic devices. In markedly authorial architecture, of which modernist housing by architects such as Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe make up the most emblematic case, the practices of how to preserve are immediately evident: buildings are museum pieces to be protected as such and to be restored, through the preservation process, to their original condition, the moment when they were constructed. Mass housing projects are neither recognised monuments nor properly authorial. They could be better interpreted as “palimpsests”, that is, the “product of a wide range of social and symbolic processes that can be reconstructed through the traces they leave and the representation they inform”,³⁷ or as artefacts whose identity derives from an evolving combination between the aesthetic, the cultural and the social. The recent success of ‘adaptive reuse’ is at its best when the outcome projects explicitly stage alternatives to a purely preservationist approach to heritage. In this regard, we should also not forget that most postwar housing is heritage ‘in use’. This translates, at

first, into a multiplicity of paradoxes. We often perceive an apparent contradiction between the aesthetic and spatial values to be preserved and, for example, the necessary technical updates such buildings desperately need or other transformations that can make residents live more comfortably. Both instances are legitimate but are perceived as exclusive due to the competing interests involved and the lack of tools to confront them as two sides of the same coin. The case of the renovation of the Cité de Lignon social housing (Geneva) is a telling example of a virtuous process through which scholars, experts, and designers have cherished the balance between cultural value and technical performance through the lens of heritage.³⁸

Even so, we must also emphasize that it is not only about technical performance. The buildings we might consider worth preserving not only pose very pragmatic questions about the quality of life of their inhabitants but also—and this is something which is seldomly considered—the forms of life they allow. This concern is not just a matter of respecting technical standards, but of rethinking the connection between living culture, social needs, and lived space to turn past buildings into valid actualities. Rethinking heritage, departing from its content rather than from a predetermined understanding, could make sense of transformation strategies that emphasise, on top of economic and energetic concerns, the social value of this built stock as heritage itself.

BOOK STRUCTURE

Our book gathers a series of contributions that discuss the value of, and the reasons and conditions for a future reassessment of large-scale postwar housing estates. Collectively, the texts comprise a broad and variegated but complementary matrix of enquiry. The validity of the overall effort lies not only in the set of international case studies discussed in each contribution and in the different thematic focuses, but also in the fact that the authors have used multiple methodological tools and approaches.

This book is the materialization of a collective four-year effort. Its beginnings date back to an international design workshop organised at the Faculty of Architecture of KU Leuven in September 2019, which saw also the participation of faculty and students from three other universities (TU Wien, Politecnico di Torino, and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile). The collaboration between students and faculty focused on the transformation of four high-rise housing estates built in Belgium between the 1950s and 1970s. Inspired by what at the time was recognised to be a compelling architectural theme and triggered by the interest of the institutions involved (some local social-housing companies and the regional government), we organised an

international seminar in February 2021, centred on the transformation of large-scale postwar housing estates and held at the Department of Architecture of KU Leuven. On that occasion, all contributors engaged in the presentation and discussion of the essays collected here. The resulting book is organised in four thematic sections, each composed by two or three essays with the intention to nurture and stimulate dialogue between the different contributions.

PART 1. THE MODERN HOUSING PROJECT IS A SOCIAL PROJECT: A CRITICAL READING

This first section includes three contributions that critically look at the premises, conditions, and legacy of postwar social housing. The essays frame the analysis of specific case studies within the larger frameworks of the challenges posed by modernity as a historical and cultural construct. This section aims to highlight how postwar housing projects were at once the embodiment and enactment of the key concepts that grounded postwar modernity. They also intend to show how, with the crisis of Fordist industrial society and of related modernism, these also underwent processes of transformation emphasizing inner ambiguities and conflicts.

The texts in this section discuss the relationship between postwar housing and modernity looking at three main conceptual trajectories. Michael Klein discusses the connection of housing culture with historical time, examining how the social construction of *time-regimes* shaped the shifting forms and semantics of housing. Jesse Honsa tackles the relationship between design, architects' labour organizations, and large-scale postwar housing, revealing how new large-size public organizations like the LCC architects' department in London were able to support technological, social, and spatial innovation. Finally, Martino Tattara attempts to demystify the notion of postwar *social housing* by looking at its architectural roots in the early CIAM meetings, when the definition of social order through traditional gender relations, urban strategies, and tenure forms contained the seeds of its future (current) crisis. In this section, authors discuss long-standing modernist narratives, like the promised emancipatory dimension of social housing, the cultural construction of socio-temporal perspectives, and the social contribution of the designer. Having played a primary role in shaping modern housing cultures, these narratives are here fundamentally questioned.

PART 2. INTERPRETATIONS OF THE 'UNBUILT' SPACE: FORMS, CATEGORIES, AND TERMS

The contributions in this part attempt to put forward a set of novel terms and interpretative categories to better understand what has recently been identified as the most important contribution of large-scale postwar housing estates, namely the interplay between building volumes and 'unbuilt' spaces. While attention has traditionally been placed on the aesthetic and social qualities of the 'built' architecture, open spaces have been turned into a secondary domain of research and practice. This object-oriented approach motivates the widespread acceptance of certain categories through which the unbuilt of modern housing blocks is traditionally described: neglected, undifferentiated, generic, inhuman, degraded, and so on.

Going against this prejudiced understanding, the two contributions propose an opposite point of view. For them, the project of the ground, which is at once spatial, material, social, and legal, withholds the promises of revealing the variety of living conditions hidden behind the generic formula of modernist 'green space'. The authors thus contend, from different methodological and geographic viewpoints, that open areas are key to exploring the meanings of collective life in postwar estates and to reassembling their values towards the future. The concern for the 'unbuilt' at the scale of the neighbourhood is a common background from which individual agendas are pursued: the essay by Nicola Russi and Federico Coricelli proposes a new disciplinary terminology (obtained from a selection of relevant modernist housing projects and organised in the form of a glossary) and describes the material qualities of open spaces surrounding modern residential blocks in northern Italy; Umberto Bonomo reveals in his essay how the open space of Latin American neighbourhood units has been the place for the development of alternative ideas to the binary relationship between private and public through which the modern project has traditionally been defined.

PART 3: AGENTS MEAN HISTORIES: ACCOUNTING FOR MULTIPLE EXPERIENCES AND AGENCIES IN POSTWAR HOUSING ESTATES

The third section focuses on the mismatch between constructed cultural, social, and/or ideological expectations of living in postwar housing complexes and the everyday reality experienced by residents. Building upon micro-scale investigations, interviews, complaints, surveys, and other sources of knowledge, the two essays of this section share similar intentions: they unpack how the concreteness of collective living differed from that expected by designers;

they reveal how the often forced improvisation of everyday life became a catalyst to foster unexpected communal preoccupations and endeavours; they describe how dwellers reacted and adapted to the straitjacketed frameworks of modern life and how this, on the contrary, shaped their existence; they further reveal how a sense of attachment and collective identity fostered by these buildings can support processes of transformation and rehabilitation. In their quest to unveil the nuances of real living and how these turned into transformative agencies towards expert knowledge and stakeholder interests, the two essays make us understand the architectural artefact as an index of change.

In her paper, Gaia Caramellino uses micro-histories to render how agents' experiences operate on built artefacts, materially and immaterially, to generate a plurality of interweaving meanings. Architecture's discourse discovers in this way its dependency on the individual and collective experiences of historical subjects, opening parallel horizons to read cultural changes. Heidi Svenningsen Kajita's contribution challenges the notion of expertise in social housing production and reproduction, pointing to how dwellers' gossip and complaints have the potential to be considered expert forms of knowledge. Bringing to the fore the social limits embedded in exclusive formal structures of knowledge management typical of modernist housing production, the paper puts forth that reconsidering the boundary between amateurism and professionalism could pave the ground for the valorisation of essential reproductive practices in the domestic realm. These essays consider the memories of residents, the experiential accounts of agents, the work methods of architects: these are challenged with the goal of offering a multilayered understanding of postwar housing which allows one to reflect on the limits of traditional historical accounts. In a broader perspective, the two contributions reflect on how the study of everyday practices can generate forms of knowledge and methodological and projective approaches able to inform the assessment of large-scale housing estates today.

PART 4: CULTURES OF TRANSFORMATION

The fourth section tackles more directly the issue of the transformation of postwar modern housing starting with two case studies: the large-scale postwar housing complexes built in Brazil by professional organisations, and the proposals by OMA/Rem Koolhaas for retrofitting the Bijlmermeer modernist estate in Amsterdam in the 1980s. In discussing these two projects, the authors, rather than focusing on the technical aspects of design proposals, take the opportunity to define the cultural foundations of, and possible outcomes for, a transformative project today.

In her essay, Flávia Brito do Nascimento describes the bond established between residents and their complexes, as well as the implications this connection has on the rehabilitation of these buildings. In her conclusion, Brito do Nascimento discusses the importance of reconceptualising ‘heritage’ as an operative category that needs to consider not only the changing conditions that generated these housing projects, but also the process of transformation of their residents. In the final chapter of the book, Andrea Migotto samples two proposals for the Bijlmermeer developed between 1986 and 1987 by Rem Koolhaas and his office as a means to discuss the array of policies and designs advanced for this modernist estate in that decade, using the notion of ‘incompleteness’ as a guide to understand the often-silenced power of architectural refurbishment project proposals. Rather than innocent technical propositions to improve the lives of inhabitants and make the city a better place, these design proposals, the essay argues, were charged means used to continuously rewrite the material, cultural, and ideological heritage of modernism, multiplying future projects and interpretative perspectives, building up expectations and countering depressing views of the present, while endlessly running the risk of remaining caught within the reactionary webs of modernity.

NOTES

1. Their approach to the refurbishment of the French ‘Grands ensembles’ was developed early on as a broader national project described in the book *Plus* and later tested in a series of projects, including the renovation of the Grand Parc apartment building in Bordeaux. See: Anne Lacaton, Jean-Philippe Vassal, and Frédéric Druot, *Plus. La Vivienda Colectiva. Territorio de Excepción* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2007).
2. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*.
3. For a broader picture of the topic, see: Christopher Pierson and Francis G. Castles, eds., *The Welfare State Reader* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006). On the fundamentals and the crisis of the postwar welfare state system, see: Pierre Rosanvallon, *The New Social Question: Rethinking the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
4. On the discussion of welfare policies in Latin American countries, see: Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *Welfare States in Transition: National Adaptations in Global Economies* (London: SAGE, 1996) and Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, *Democracy and the Left: Social Policy and Inequality in Latin America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).
5. A seminal book dealing conceptually and methodologically with this troublesome relation, namely, the productive relation between material specificities and

universal categories, is Anne Kockelkorn and Nina Zschocke, eds., *Productive Universals—Specific Situations. Critical Engagements in Art, Architecture, and Urbanism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019), 8-29. In particular, in the introduction to the book, the editors list the assumptions behind a reconsideration of universals to explore their concrete and operative potential. They state: “First, universals do not come into the world in a realm of abstraction, but are brought into action through messy, wordy encounters in specific situations. Second, the authors [of the various papers in the book] view universals as productive [...]. Third, they accept that a contested relationship between the universal and the specific permeates processes of cultural creation at every stage and scale between production and representation” (p. 13). Thus, universality shall not collapse into schematism and homogeneity, but it is a tool to potentially explore the specific in a broader way. On the other hand, specific situations enable the engagement of universal notions with the concreteness of the world in becoming.

6. The connection between large-scale housing programmes initiated around the planet in the second half of the twentieth century and the architectural principles of the Modern Movement, notwithstanding the variety of instances identified with the latter term, has been thoroughly addressed in Miles Glendinning, *Mass Housing. Modern Architecture and State Power. A Global History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021). To further clarify a debated and debatable historiographical issue, we are aware that the category ‘Modern Movement’ was a culturally, professionally, and eventually politically constructed one which, from its early phases, was all but monolithic and univocal on the inside. On this aspect, it is telling to consider the divisions between members and their agendas at the early CIAM meetings already, as has been well discussed by several scholars. See: Paola Di Biagi, “La Carta d’Atene. Manifesto e Frammento dell’urbanistica Moderna”, in *La Carta d’Atene. Manifesto e Frammento dell’Urbanistica Moderna*, ed. Paola Di Biagi (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 1998), 34-35; or the positions of the various architects at the early CIAM debates, as shown by the texts in Carlo Aymonino, ed., *L’Abitazione Razionale. Atti dei Congressi CIAM 1929-1930*, Polis n.10 (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1971).
7. We can mention a series of recent publications that have, from different perspectives, addressed the issue of refurbishment of the existing (residential) stock, in particular: Maren Harnack, Natalie Heger, and Matthias Brunne (eds.), *Adaptive Re-Use. Strategies for Post-War Modernist Housing* (Berlin: Jovis, 2020); Spartaco Paris and Roberto Bianchi, *Riabitare il Moderno. Il Progetto per il Rinnovo dell’Housing* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2018); Elli Mosayebi and Michael Kraus, *The Renewal of Dwelling: European Housing Construction 1945-1975* (Zürich: Triest Verlag, 2023). On the relevance of addressing this topic today, see: Maren Harnack, Natalie Heger, and Matthias Brunne, “Introduction”, in *Adaptive Re-Use*, 7-15.

8. Olivier Boucheron and Maria Anita Palumbo, *L'entre-deux Barres: Une Ethnographie de la Transformation des Ensembles Collectifs par leurs Habitants* (Saint-Etienne: Presses universitaires de Saint-Etienne, 2023).
9. Stanislaus von Moos, "The Monumentality of the Matchbox: On 'Slabs' and Politics in the Cold War", in *East West Central. Volume 1 Re-Humanizing Architecture New Forms of Community, 1950-1970*, eds. Ákos Moravánszky and Judith Hopfengärtner (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2017), 255-82.
10. Thomas H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class", in *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 1-85.
11. Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, eds., *Architecture and the Welfare State* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).
12. The ideological construction of the exceptionality of the figure of the artist (and architect) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been discussed in Deborah J. Haynes, *The Vocation of the Artist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 115-37.
13. An example is Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Hilary Shipman Ltd., 1985). A more recent critique of high modernist ideology and culture is the famous book by James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New York: Yale University Press, 1999).
14. Swenarton, Avermaete and van den Heuvel, eds., *Architecture and the Welfare State*, 6-7.
15. The relation between architecture, late capitalism, and neoliberalism has been broadly discussed in Kenny Cupers, Catharina Gabriëlsson, and Elena Mattsson, eds., *Neoliberalism on the Ground: Architecture and Transformation from the 1960s to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020).
16. Tom Avermaete and Dirk van den Heuvel, "'Obama, Please Tax Me!' Architecture and the Politics of Redistribution", *Footprint* 5, no. 2 (2011): 1-4.
17. An idea largely inherited from the early proposals by Le Corbusier. See, for example, the set of principles and the urban design proposal in *La Ville Radieuse* (Paris: Editions Vincent Fréal et Cie, 1964).
18. On the praise for a return to a more traditional urban structure against the bar in the nature typical of modernist canons, see: Philippe Panerai, Jean Castex, and Jean-Charles Depaule, *Formes Urbaines, de l'Îlot à la Barre* (Marseille: Editions Parentheses, 1997).
19. Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab. Histories of Global Mass Housing* (London: Routledge, 2012), 1-2.
20. With this expression we refer to a broad spectrum of actors and activities that operatively play a role in running these projects and in caring for them. A crucial theme in this regard, considering post-occupancy activities, is that of building maintenance. Although this topic has been mostly underplayed, especially by

designers, in favour of decisions related to the realisation of an architectural object, some authors have attempted to identify care- and maintenance-related questions as a field of design and enquiry to rediscover. Hilary Sample's *Maintenance Architecture* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2016) is a telling case in this evolving field of enquiry.

21. Gaia Caramellino and Federico Zanfi, eds., *Post-War Middle-Class Housing: Models, Construction and Change* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015).
22. A crucial example of this design attitude was Alexander Klein's work. See: Matilde Baffa Rivolta and Augusto Rossari, eds., *Lo Studio delle Piante e la Progettazione degli Spazi negli Alloggi Minimi. Scritti e Progetti dal 1906 al 1957* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1975). For a critical reading, consider also Andrea Migotto and Marson Korbi, "Between Rationalization and Political Project. The 'Existenzminimum' from Klein and Teige to Today", *Urban Planning* 4, no. 3 (2019): 299-314.
23. As discussed in Kenny Cupers, *The Social Project. Housing Postwar France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), especially in the chapter 3 and 4 of the book; or, similarly for the Italian case, by Patrizia Gabellini, "I Manuali: Una Strategia Normativa", in *La Grande Ricostruzione: Il Piano Ina-Casa e l'Italia degli Anni Cinquanta*, ed. Paola Di Biagi (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2001), 99-111.
24. Examples of this criticism are two seminal works of the early 1970s: N. John Habraken, *Supports. An Alternative to Mass Housing* (London: The Architectural Press, 1972); Colin Ward, *Housing: An Anarchist Approach* (London: Freedom Press, 1976).
25. A recent case in the UK is addressed in Richard Waite, "'Irreplaceable' Post-War Blocks Face Demolition as AHMM Team Reveals Huge Lambeth Plans", *AJ*, 2021 [accessed 6 October 2021]. A telling case in Belgium is that of the Rabot towers in Ghent. See: Pascal De Decker et al., "The Death of Three Ugly Ducklings. On the Demolition of the Rabot Towers in Ghent, Belgium", *ENHR Conference Proceedings*, Lisbon, 2015.
26. That is, forms of welfare based on the possession of property rights and asset ownership (e.g., a house) rather than access to (public, state-granted) services. See: Richard Ronald and John Doling, "Home Ownership and Asset-Based Welfare", *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, no. 25 (2010): 165-73.
27. On this point, we can recall a discussion the authors had with Ellen Denis, project manager of the social housing company SHM Woonhaven Antwerp (3 October 2019) on future schemes for the replacement of high-rise apartment slabs in the Europark district, in the Antwerp Linkeroever district. One of the issues raised by Denis was that, due to current planning regulations on height and surface area, demolition and redevelopment would result in the construction of fewer social housing units. This policy means not only a reduced offer in the

- face of growing demand, but also greater financial concerns for social housing companies whose main income derives from rent.
28. Lacaton, Vassal, and Druot, *Plus. La Vivienda Colectiva. Territorio de Excepción*.
 29. For a detailed discussion of the architectural culture in this period, see: Ákos Moravánszky and Torsten Lange, eds., *East West Central. Volume 3 Re-Framing Identities. Architecture's Turn to History, 1970-1990* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2017).
 30. Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 267-90.
 31. Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 203-5.
 32. Mary McLeod, "Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism", *Assemblage* 8, no. 8 (1989): 22-59.
 33. The argument for design practices to engage with social transformations was discussed, among others, by Jan Boelen and Michael Kaethler, eds., *Social Matter, Social Design: For Good or Bad, All Design Is Social* (Amsterdam: Design Academy Eindhoven & Valiz, 2020).
 34. Ana Tostões and Zara Ferreira, eds., *Docomomo Journal 65: Housing for All*, 2021; Ana Tostões and Zara Ferreira, eds., *Docomomo Journal 54: Housing Reloaded*, 2016; Miles Glendinning, ed., *Docomomo Journal 39: Postwar Mass Housing*, 2008; Ana Tostões, ed., *Docomomo Journal 51. Modern Housing. Patrimonio Vivo*, 2015.
 35. Harnack, Heger, and Brunne, "Introduction", 7-16.
 36. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006). Consider, in particular, part I of the book ("The Idea of Heritage", 11-84), on the historical construction of currently dominant categories and discourses of heritage which nowadays often prevent a more agile and progressive use of this idea.
 37. A useful book to consult for acquiring a broader perspective on the state of the art of this practice is Bie Plevoets and Koenraad van Cleempoel, eds., *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage. Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2019).
 38. Franz Graf and Giulia Marino, "Modern and Green: Heritage, Energy, Economy", *Docomomo Journal*, no. 44 (2011): 32-39.

PART 1

**THE MODERN
HOUSING
PROJECT IS A
SOCIAL PROJECT**

A Critical Reading

SOCIAL HOUSING AND THE REGIMES OF TIME

A Few Moments within the Long Lines
of (Social) Housing in Vienna and Austria

Michael Klein

INTRODUCTION

“One day, when we will be no longer, these stones will speak for us.” These were the words of Mayor Karl Seitz in his speech at the opening ceremony of the Karl-Marx-Hof, a housing scheme that might be considered the epitome of the housing programme of Red Vienna, the social democratic government of the interwar period. The period laid the foundation for one of the most comprehensive housing policies in a European city under capitalist rule, a housing policy that with major modification lasts until today. Apart from the pathos, Seitz’s words disclose a relationship between architecture, housing, and time that often goes unnoticed, even if it has shaped residential living fundamentally, particularly the architecture of social housing.

The concern is timely, given the recent redistribution of day-to-day schedules accompanying the pandemic, attendant lockdowns, and the restructuring of labour, the lasting dissolution of work- and free-time. The concern is timely even beyond the scope of the pandemic in the face of the question whether the *heritage* of the modern project of social housing can be updated or what role the past, the present, and the future take in social housing.

REGIMES OF TIME

What we refer to as social housing—regulations and interventions into housing markets through various policies and building programmes by the extended local state¹—is characterized by a specific relationship to time. Despite the many different forms, types, or structures that social housing has historically taken, we might read it as materialized, objectified relations of time, which can

be distinguished from other ones, before or after social housing (or—in order to bypass *periodization*—following other mechanisms of residential distribution). I will call these specific relations *regimes of time*—regime in the sense of an enduring set of rules, protocols, and norms that govern the social through what is thinkable and doable in time.²

These regimes of time are historically embedded in society and change with time according to hegemonic contextual forces. Each time regime encompasses at least two dimensions: first, the relationship to what is called historicity and, more generally, temporality in our very embeddedness in history and in what (theoretical as much as material) constellation past, present, and future productively relate to another;³ and second, the patterns, codes, regulations, and protocols that provide the rhythms that structure everyday life.⁴ Within these two dimensions, the relationship between time and the architecture of housing and domesticity is described by a mutual reciprocity: as much as architecture can be read as a reified relation of time (in how it establishes relations to the future, present, or the past), the *distributions* within and through architecture (re-)produce the world that structures everyday life in rhythm and temporality.⁵

To unravel time's entanglement with this particular component of the built environment, I draw on material documenting how social housing has been evolved over time—and on its impending demise. While a major part of the historical moments, projects, and policies I refer to relate to Vienna (a city which has remained a constant point of reference in social housing), the conclusions I draw from them do not stop here: Vienna serves as just one—admittedly pronounced—model for developments that parallel those in other cities and affect the wider realm of housing.

FROM A CYCLICAL REGIME TOWARDS THE MODERN REGIME OF TIME

The practice of social housing as we know it—as it has been developed during the early decades of the twentieth century and as it unfolded in the second half of it during the welfare state—can be assigned to a linear, even teleological time regime, which was established on a broad, societal level during the late nineteenth century. This regime can be positively distinguished from one that preceded it. I will refer to this prior regime as *cyclical*.

It is the regime of grand cycles that refer to agrarian and pre-industrial societies characterized by the recurrence of night and day, of seasons, of the weather, of life cycles, which recur in the calendar of saints, holidays, and festivities—a life along cyclical rhythms that imply a specific temporality: rhythms last for a moment, pause, and start again. The word *cyclical* does not indicate

that there was no history (also the cyclical knows historical lines, ruptures, and the singular event—and even repetition produces difference, as Gilles Deleuze pointed out),⁶ but rather that the *lived time* is determined by cycles. Apart from the rhythms of *bios* and *cosmos* that structure the cyclical, as Henri Lefebvre notes in his short treatise on the elements of rhythmanalysis,⁷ its forms are equally established through *modes of production* and social order: think of inter-generational cycles in the traditions of trade and artisanal guilds, their modes of inheritance, where profession, social status, the relation of master and servant-worker—of residential and productive property—is handed down from one generation to the next, leaving little space for social mobility and change. Through the *house*, these arrangements of circularity are also inscribed into the built environment.

The historical succession of the circular regime by the linear should not suggest a clear break; instead, remnants of the cyclical *dispositif* continued to be at work while a linear *dispositif* has been established. With the shifts in production, a linear temporality defined above all by clock and synchrony that organized the population to maximize productivity was about to unfold, as E. P. Thompson worked out in his pioneering *Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism*.⁸ For major parts of urban life, however, the constitution of time remained cyclical far into the nineteenth century and beyond. In Vienna, living quarters were not separated from workspace until the second half of the nineteenth century. Accommodation was still tied to work (and the work-place) and therefore catered to the individual only; together with wages, often paid in kind, it did not allow for workers to reproduce in families.⁹ For the few workers—and other employees, artists, and so on—who passed themselves off as *free* subjects and who could choose their form of residence, the residential rental market was structured rhythmically: rent was to be paid in advance semi-annually, on the feast days of Saint George (April 24) and Saint Michael (September 29),¹⁰ that is, the beginning of spring-summer season and the early days of the fall-winter season, reflecting the rhythms of working contracts along seasonal and nature-related production. Twice a year, therefore, Vienna witnessed the tragic parades of residents with their sparse belongings, forced to move out when they could not pay the rent.¹¹ (fig. 1.1)

What followed was the separation of working and living on an urban scale. Structurally, the separation of labour and living was marked by a split between the labour contract from abstract rental contracts (the landlord being no longer the employer), between labour time and leisure time; spatially and architecturally, it is paralleled by the new type of the apartment house, separated from the assembly line and the factory. Altogether, these divisions contributed substantially to the establishment of a *linear temporality*, which is characteristic for what can be called the *modernist regime of time*. The linear tick-tock of the



Figure 1.1: Forced eviction of residents, Vienna, 1918. Source: Karl Bednarik (ed.), *Österreich 1918*, (Vienna: Verlag für Jugend und Volk, 1968)

clock, the punctuality of time clocks, of factory whistles and rental contracts, all form a temporal sensibility and act as a technology establishing order and control in and through time, indispensable for the changes in production. Socially, the clock has had a pervasive effect on multiple levels of life. More than other machines, it became “a means by which the regularization and regimentation of life necessary for an exploiting system of industry could best be assured,” as the writer George Woodcock noted on the mechanization of human existence.¹² Thus, this process of subjectification along a new linear time regime did not put an end to repetition, for both the worker and the resident still follow strict routines in the factory as much as in everyday life patterns. Rather, it replaces the circular logics of *the ever same* by the teleological scheme of *the new* that bears the promise of the future. Modernism thus bears not only a new orderly but above all a teleological conception of time. We encounter these different—even contradictory—conceptions in the dynamics of accumulation and growth of the capitalist mode of production and neoclassical economics, in the sublation of Hegelian Marxism, in the progress-through-technology in science and technology, as well as in the promise of social uplift in the social-democratic welfare model. What all of them have in common is the construction of an image of the future which places more emphasis on the future than on the present.

The hopes of peasant workers heading to industrializing cities like Vienna for work and a better future were met, however, with a dire reality. At the urban level, the effect of their aspirations was massive population growth and the

emergence of the “industrial reserve army of labour”,¹³ a local relative surplus in the population that drove down (unregulated) wages and entailed un(der)employment.¹⁴ Soon, its effects were mirrored in housing: with little to no income and a scarcity of available residential space, rents rose, while investors had no incentive to produce affordable space. While this development was typical for most major European cities at that time, the asymmetries of population growth and available residential space seen in Vienna were extreme. For the working population, it meant living in small, crowded apartments with temporary subletting (on an hourly basis to *bed-lodgers*), under threat of eviction and homelessness: in Vienna—and elsewhere—the working class experienced residential precarity.

Seen through a governmental lens, *social housing* might be read as a technology to counter such a grim prospect, a device (one of several) to assert the promise of the future on a universal level. Devised as an interventionist practice from above, its claim was to take over future aspirations from the privileged few and to redistribute it evenly. That applies to various backgrounds, which brought forth policies for social housing, be they social democratic, social conservative, or liberal lines of thought. Although the level of intervention differed between these political backgrounds, all of them implied a state-led balancing act that, based on the modern temporality with its immanent teleology, deployed the vision for a better tomorrow to meet the needs of today.

THE ANTICIPATORY SOCIALISM OF RED VIENNA

Red Vienna serves as an example of the redistributive prospect and the teleological promise borne by social housing. The housing policy of the social democratic government between 1919 and 1934 encompassed both comprehensive rent regulation and a building programme which, over the period of about one decade,¹⁵ provided more than 60,000 apartments to the working class.¹⁶ Taking over housing production almost entirely during the years of economic crisis, Red Vienna raised the response to urgent needs and the amelioration of everyday life to social democratic politics. What distinguishes this strategy from other programmes of social housing is not only its numbers, but also its comprehensive economic structure: unlike in many other cases, housing production was not financed by borrowing against future revenue, but through a progressive tax model on luxury goods,¹⁷ which marks it as a redistributive socialist policy. At the same time, however, the programme pursued strong reformist strategies to secure production and social reproduction *within* capitalism: in terms of architecture, the interior organization, and the floor plans, the programme was strongly oriented towards the rhythms of the

bourgeois core family.¹⁸ The core of the political strategy of *Austromarxism* (the theoretical school underlying Red Vienna) was to anticipate the future through welfare services as efforts towards a socialist society. Beyond the factual amelioration of everyday lives, therefore, the housing programme of Red Vienna pursued a pedagogical and culturalist approach of *enlightenment* on how to prepare the population for a historically necessary socialist society. Paradoxically, however, the rhetorical means taken up in architecture referred neither to the culture of contemporaries nor to the working class, but instead to bourgeois high culture: Red Vienna was progressive and modern in its social policy, yet reluctantly conservative in its architectural aesthetics. For a party which conceived of itself as belonging to the avant-garde, this aesthetic practice seems like an aberration.

THE PROMISE OF THE WELFARE STATE

After a devastating decade of fascist rule,¹⁹ a “new” social democracy took up and continued social housing, even if under different political agendas. Not the advent of socialism, but a new, *Western* society oriented towards depoliticized consensus, based on economic growth and the universal principles of welfare rights,²⁰ became in Vienna the framework in which postwar housing was developed. In the face of the immediate past of fascism and extinction (and the further past to economic recession and unemployment), the belief in progress became necessity. While yesterday’s world lay in ruins, the world of tomorrow was yet to be built. Unlike in times of peace, the necessary means to do so (land, though particularly building materials and capital) were not available. For postwar reconstruction, it gave reason for centralized planning and organization of the housing sector; in conjunction with the statism of social democracy—a driving force behind social housing all over Europe—it provided the framework for state-led modernization through housing.

Modernization through reconstruction was an ambivalent project from the outset: the *Per-Albin-Hansson Settlement* (1947), designed by Franz Schuster (together with Eugen Wörle, Friedrich Pangratz, and Stephan Simony) was literally built of ruins: the homes were built with the help of so-called Vibroblock machines, an industrial aid supplied by Sweden that made it possible to produce bricks out of debris and cement. (fig. 1.2) The ambiguity of time, however, runs deeper: the settlement was part of the extension plan that was drawn up for Vienna during National Socialist rule. Construction followed post-fascism’s ground zero: it was named after Per Albin Hansson, the “architect” of Sweden’s socialist *folkhemmet*.²¹ Schuster’s architecture spans a net of references beginning with the settlement movement, a left-leaning cooperative



Figure 1.2: Per Albin Hansson Siedlung. Source: Stadtbauamt der Stadt Wien (ed.), *Per Albin Hansson Siedlung, Der Aufbau 9*, (Vienna: Verlag für Jugend und Volk, 1951)

initiative in Vienna after WWI that he strongly supported, via New Frankfurt and the CIAM II to *Heimatschutz* and the National Socialist settlement ideology. The floor plans for the so-called duplex apartments were ahead of their time: neighbouring minimum apartments that could be joined once housing supply and the economic situation allowed for it and family situations required it. The duplex-apartment might be read as a reification of postwar optimism for a different future, or, more generally, for the growth model that was inscribed into modernism, materialized in stone (or, here: rubble).

Housing continued to bear on the foundation of linear progress in the decades of the *Fordist* welfare state, where it became part in what the Regulationists termed the *mode of regulation*—that is, a substantial contribution in the stabilization of (re-)production. Beyond the provision of residential space, housing programmes were to stimulate the economy; they ensured both employment and low rents and paved the way for an emerging consumer culture. Upward social mobility, the consolidation of a middle class, and further aspects of universal welfare were actively pursued by means of housing. Strongly oriented towards highest quantities and economic planning, its architecture was increasingly dominated by the bureaucratic functionalism of the building industry. In 1960, the Montagebau GmbH was founded. The company took up the Camus construction system to erect roughly 10,000 apartments in uniform prefab slabs at the edge of the city. (fig. 1.3) Key to the floor plans, designed by Oskar and Peter Payer, was the “functionally correct assignment of the activities to be carried out within the apartment.”²² Essentially, this meant the reproduction of idealized family norms. In this functionalism,



Figure 1.3: Oskar and Peter Payer, Housing Siebenbürgerstraße. Image by M. Spiluttini, Architekturzentrum Wien

standardization reached beyond the floor plan and equalled the normalization of ways of life such as heteronormative relationships in core families, regular income, and extensive stability in the conduct of life—in other words, the linear projection of the long-term planning horizon.

THE DEATH OF THE FUTURE

Starting with the late 1960s, the teleological conception of time and associated programmes—technological optimism, the promise of social rise, infrastructural welfarism—came to a halt. This turn cannot be attributed to a singular event; multiple lines of flight have contributed to it. However, within the modern project, which had been informed by a strong progressivism, an underground current of *exhaustion* surfaced and erupted what had hitherto been unknown to the movement. Theoretically, this exhaustion arose along topics like depletable resources in *The Limits to Growth*,²³ laws of energy in *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*,²⁴ and soon was complemented by a political-economic

paradigm shift reacting to deficit spending aiming for stability, underpinned by the criticism of normative and disabling welfare, and a growing rejection of naïve progressivism. The world-to-be turned out differently, the measures taken wrong. The euphoric spirit of 1968's "Summer of Love" was soon overshadowed by the grim picture of environmental disasters, resource depletion, the oil crisis, a sudden increase in political violence in Europe, and the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state. After the Hippies came Punk: within a few years, the future had vanished.²⁵

Architecture and planning were severely hit by this collapse of the *telos* of the prosperous future and progress; even if at first the critique was scant (directed at architecture's close relationship to state power), it was nothing short of a principal challenge that ultimately shook the discipline to its very foundations. What was framed more generally as a critique of modernism's conception of time became an existential question of the discipline, and it was posed first and foremost in the context of modern housing. The self-conception of modern architecture has essentially been built on projecting, predicting, and planning what is to come. What would planning mean if its premise—the future—turns out so differently from what was expected? What does *design* in the very meaning of *disegno*—as *drawing forth* an idea²⁶—mean, when it turns out that the predicted rhythms drawn into optimized floor plans did not meet the changing requirements of future residents but, rather, were tailored to a normalized average user who hardly existed?

THE ENDLESS NOW

The *loss of the future* was not without consequences for architectural production. The most obvious was a gradual withdrawal from mass housing, complemented by an ever-growing engagement with the ephemeral, which—in temporary installations, in architectures-as-events—has remained at the heart of a progressive branch of the discipline. Vienna, itself a capital of a joyful future scepticism (the inflatables and performances of Haus-Rucker-Co, Coop Himmelb(l)au, Missing-Link, and Salz der Erde come to mind),²⁷ saw it also taken up in housing: in the aspirations towards *flexibility*.

When other countries were hit by recession that allowed neoliberal policies to unfold, Austria went through a period of economic prosperity. Social housing, which was firmly embedded in the economies of the Austrian conservative welfare state,²⁸ was not abandoned but structurally adapted and architecturally revived. In 1968, along with the new Austrian Housing Subsidy Promotion Act (*Wohnbauförderungsgesetz*), the Austrian Ministry of Building (*Bautenministerium*) launched a new funding scheme for research that soon developed into a

platform where architectural experimentation and social sciences met with practice.²⁹ Research objectives focused on housing needs and demands and on the democratization of housing, amongst other things. More theoretical and scientific research was accompanied by a series of architectural competitions entitled *Wohnen Morgen* (dwelling tomorrow) as an “applied and practical form of research” that aimed explicitly at innovation; results were made available through the journal *Wohnbau*.³⁰ The interest in flexibility became instrumental with the request to design for the re-transformation of the domestic sphere along changing lifestyle patterns, with the demand for participant design and adaptability by the user. It emerged particularly with the rise of co-housing projects in alternative milieus (even if it cannot be limited to them).

In the local architectural discourses, flexibility in floor plan layouts can be traced back to the early days of social housing, although the issue has changed over time. Some earlier schemes, like the ones proposed by Anton Brenner for the Rauchfangkehrergasse estate (1924-25), use flexibility, for example, in the sense of a physical reconfiguration of space by a superimposition of changing, yet predefined functional and spatial settings over the course of the day so as to minimize surface. It marks an approach that is paralleled in the modernism of van Tijen, Van den Broek, or Stam and has had a lasting impact on the discourse on the minimum dwelling (CIAM II).³¹ The concepts for *Quartier Lichtenthal* by Peter Prader and Franz Fehringer (1955)³² and the more pragmatic *Saalwohnung* (1965)—a loft-type prototype for council housing by Alfred Kratochwil that kept predefined rooms to a constructive minimum—shifted the attention to the user-resident. Yet it was not until the 1970s and the criticism of a dogmatic functionalism that flexibility gained momentum. The new interest in flexibility mirrors a new engagement with change: from the focus on quantity and standardization during the post-WWII reconstruction towards quality and adaptability, the change in residential demands and needs related to social rise—to household structure due to the diversification of biographies and of lifestyles—replaced the certitudes that residents needed during the Fordist era.³³ The obsession with change, however, also holds a pinch of scepticism towards future predictability, in addition to indicating an approach that replaces fictional determination by the provision of open frameworks. As Alan Colquhoun noted, this attitude to flexibility was that the “requirements of modern life are so complex and changeable that any attempt on the part of the designer to anticipate them results in a building which is unsuited to its function and represents, as it were, a ‘false consciousness’ of the society in which one operates.”³⁴

The architect steps back from the role of the sole author, reinventing the practice as provisioning space rather than determining lives. Seen from this angle, flexibility sounds a political note, even more so when regarding another

research objective of the funding programme: the democratization of housing, which entailed concepts and designs for user participation and co-housing, a novelty in social housing. Involving user-residents required new processual designs for adaptation according to the requirements. It also called for new construction methods that offered variability at a later stage. While until then residents were considered hardly more than beneficiaries of welfare, participant design, collaborative housing projects, and residential self-management put the user at the centre of attention. For the architect Ottokar Uhl—a key figure for participatory design and flexible constructive systems—the motivation was essentially political: participating in the design process caused the user to abandon the role of the consumer.³⁵ In flexible spatial systems, therefore, a prerequisite for participation became a tool for decommodifying the production of housing. To engage with the resident, architecture had to reject the predetermination of future use and re-invent itself as an *open system*. This became tangible in Uhl's use of the *support-infill* scheme developed by N. John Habraken and SAR.³⁶ *Wohnen Morgen Hollabrunn*, the poster child among federally sponsored architectural competitions, adopted the SAR modular grid most directly, distinguishing between a primary load bearing infrastructure and a secondary finishing structure. Similar approaches, albeit in cross-wall construction, were realized in *Wohnen mit Kindern (1980)*, a self-managed co-housing project, and the project *Festgasse*, a 30-unit complex that introduced participatory design to public housing.

The link to flexibility can be found throughout the early project of participatory approaches in Austria. Eilfried Huth and Günther Domenig developed a series of proposals that gradually left behind the known limitations of mass housing: *Zellflex* (1964-65), a settlement for workers at a machine factory with a standardized prefab primary structure with fittings arranged to residents preferences which could be further extended in self-construction at a later stage. Following a comparable approach in a condensed scheme, *Artiflex I* used the architectural model as a simulator to tap the full potentials of the flexible structure, while *Neue Wohnform Stadt Ragnitz* transferred this position into a conceptual superstructure, in which flexibility, participation, and self-building coalesce in new ways of living together beyond the established forms of tenure and ownership. More outcome-oriented, above-mentioned Herbert Prader and Franz Fehringer realized a residential project with user participation in Purkersdorf, Vienna, that sought to limit predetermined floor plans: structurally a cross-wall construction, the interior finishing was left to resident decisions; apartments could be rearranged in size through swaps in surface area with neighbouring units or through buffer spaces.

Flexibility, as these projects indicate, can be achieved through various spatial, architectural, and organizational strategies. The research study and publication FLEX 1&2 by Christof Riccabona and Michael Wachberger, which provided the conceptual framing of the discourse on flexibility within housing in the 1970s, differentiated between several forms of flexibility: *inner flexibility* (spatial rearrangements within the unit) and *outer flexibility* (expansion of or changes in the unit's volume). In order to enable alternate dispositions and to provide room for prospective change in the requirements of users, the authors call for so-called plus-capacity, additional surface area of the unit.³⁷ The benefits of spatial surplus for flexibility was also the result of a user-study on potentials of the loft type by the Institute for Empirical Study (IFES).³⁸ The study, titled *Mobilizable Interests for Loft-type Apartments*, provides the blueprint for the flexible layout: an empty surface, placeable ducts and openings, plus walls and elements to furnish the setting. (fig. 1.4) This setting might read as the square one of determinacy: if the future is not a complete loss, it does hold true for architecture. What is, then, the flexible open floor plan if not permanent re-actualization? The dream-like scheme that can be constantly re-adapted to ever changing requirements, to needs and desires, is the dream for an architecture that can never be out of date. If there was an ultimate role model for the flexible floor plan, it might be found in Koolhaas's observation of the *typical plan*, a homogenous empty surface, a plan stripped of all qualities.³⁹ Its longing for genericness, its relentlessness in clearing out determinacy effects in the erasure of history: the typical plan and its domestic sibling, the flexible floor plan knows no past, no future; it only knows never-ending presence.

The architectural attempts to provide more flexibility in domesticity during the 1970s and 1980s remained largely niche innovations. Apart from a few prototypical examples, little made its way into mass production. The cumbersome apparatus of social housing bureaucracy formed the background for this hesitant innovation, as a neoliberal narrative wants to make us believe. Decisive, however, was the incessant industrial functionalism inscribed into housing production: industry, not bureaucracy, reduced flexibility. Only much later, what might be termed planning flexibility reached a market level. It made it without all the collective, societal dimensions of the co-living projects. Today, customization of the floor plan has also become a common feature in subsidized housing, not least because it offers an advantage in market competition among developers. The few exceptions that upheld structural flexibility in residential architecture can be found in the off-mainstream co-housing segment: flexible architecture, by and large, remains in the niches of residential production.

How, then, has the housing sector responded to the changing requirements, to the unpredictability of the future that was rightly criticized in functionalist residential planning? It is worth returning to the fundamental research by

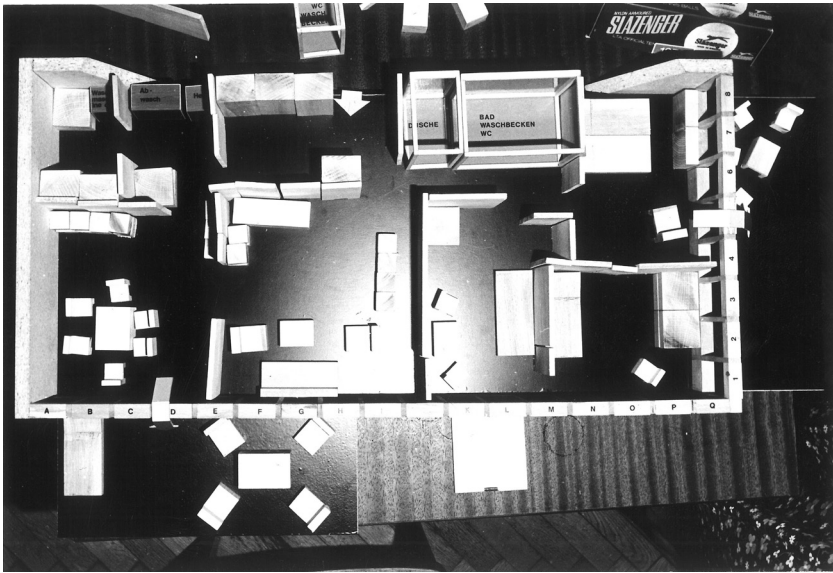


Figure 1.4: Study model for *Mobilizable Interests for Loft-type Apartments*, IFES 1974. Source: IFES Institut für Empirische Sozialforschung (ed.), *Mobilisierbares Interesse an Saalwohnungen*, (Vienna: IFES, 1974)

Riccabona and Wachberger published as FLEX 1&2. In addition to the above-mentioned three modes of flexibility that architecture has to offer to meet changes in domestic needs (*inner flexibility*, *outer flexibility*, and *plus capacity*), the two authors address a fourth one, namely, mobility. Essentially, it is the mobility of users—and not architectural flexibility—that the market ultimately succeeded in establishing as the response chosen to address changing residential requirements. Social diversification and the pluralization of lifestyles prompted housing markets to multiply the supply side: a multiplicity of domestic types has replaced the standardized floor plan. Commercialization and commodification therefore were—certainly not the solution—but a response to change and uncertainty. While the task to address the very question of time—the future requirement of the users—was not covered architecturally, it has been left entirely to the market and residents. Two consequences, at least, followed this development: from the resident’s perspective it brought about an intensification of costs and uncertainty (re-commodification meant rising prices, and changing apartments comes with additional costs). From the vantage point of residential architecture, however, themes such as future, anticipation, and projection—key to architectural thinking—have been taken off the agenda.

POSTSCRIPTS FROM THE FUTURE: A SPECULATIVE REGIME OF TIME

Enter current mode: various indications suggest the come into being of a new time regime, one that can be devised as a *speculative regime of time*. The understanding of housing as investment for capital revenue rather than residential living space has gained momentum since the financial and economic crisis of 2007/08, resulting in major investments in residential real estate. Housing, considered a rather conservative, low-risk asset with little revenues before, was to become the new concrete gold. Between 2008 and 2018, the price of residential real estate rose at 80% in Vienna, despite the regulated housing market.⁴⁰ (fig. 1.5) The share of rent-controlled apartments has come down to a quarter of the newly built residential space. While this quota seems high compared to other cities, it exceeded 90% during the years of the Fordist welfare state. Investment in housing has become a normalcy for bonds in real estate funds as well as in individual financial security. The same is true of the investment from pension funds and insurance firms.⁴¹ Over the course of two decades, Vienna has witnessed an epistemological shift in housing from a human right to interest-bearing capital as a commodity and even to what has been described as the financialization of housing: the capitalization of outstanding



Figure 1.5: Construction site fence with promotional image, Inner City of Vienna. Image by author, 2012

returns for production and liquidation circuits and the further securitization of this capital. These financial processes, however, are not extrinsic to the sphere of residential living, as Lisa Adkins has shown, but influence everyday life.⁴² Resale and the secondary purchase of future earnings from real estate credits effects the acceleration of capital circulation, in addition to a rise in return expectations. The result is a reversal in the conception of time: whereas the modern conception of time presupposed an ultimate order of chronology, or a linearity steered towards the future, a better tomorrow that even sacrificed the present for the future, financialization makes use of the present out of a (virtual) future.⁴³ This is the future retroacting into the contemporary. Here, past, present, and future do not stand in a present relation, but are in a continuous state of flux. This turbulence is not limited to an arcane world of finance, but, as financial speculation is increasingly affecting everyday life, it also extends to and makes over our concept of time: within the *speculative time regime*, specific forms of future—namely, speculative futures—increasingly steer and determine the present.

Faced with the negative effects of financialization, strategies and practices for providing affordable space become indispensable. For architecture and planning, this situation will require regaining the future back on the agenda, in strategies that cannot be easily excavated from the past: a simple return to the established mechanisms of social housing according to the mentality and the mechanisms of Fordism will remain ineffective. In the light of this new time regime, thinking pursuant to the concepts of social housing (as we know it)—following its structures, architectures, and its established forms of de-commodification—might become hard, even impossible.

NOTES

1. Concerning the local state, see: Cynthia Cockburn, *The Local State: Management of Cities and People* (London: Pluto Press, 1977); concerning the extended integral state, a concept developed in reference to Antonio Gramsci, see: Nicolas Poulantzas, *State–Power–Socialism* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), 167–179, and Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Gramsci and the State* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), 69–110.
2. Michel Foucault conceptualized this set as a *dispositif* or *apparatus*; see: “The Confession of the Flesh”, in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194–228. Concerning the use of the notion of *regime*, see: Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 20.

3. For a recent debate, see: Armen Avanesian and Suhail Malik, eds., *Der Zeitkomplex – Postcontemporary* (Berlin: Merve, 2016).
4. As Henri Lefebvre states, everyday life is shaped and structured through various linear and cyclical rhythms. Consequently, he proposes a so-called rhythm analysis to unravel the deeper structure of everyday life as a transdisciplinary approach that involves all senses. See: Henri Lefebvre: *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Continuum, 2004), 19-26.
5. The relation cannot be reduced to a simplified Marxist relation of base and superstructure, in which the former determines the latter.
6. See: Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London: Continuum/Athlone Press, 1994), 1-27.
7. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, 73.
8. Edward Palmer Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", *Past & Present* 38 (1967): 56–97.
9. Wolfgang Hösl and Gottfried Pirhofer, *Wohnen in Wien 1848-1938* (Vienna: Deuticke, 1988), 17ff.
10. Bernhard Friedmann, *Die Wohnungsnoth in Wien* (Vienna: Wallishäuser, 1857), n.p.
11. Friedmann, n.p.
12. George Woodcock, "The Tyranny of the Clock", *The Chesterton Review*, no. 22 (1996): 393-398.
13. The term is coined by Marx for describing a temporal relative surplus population that results in unemployment and forces down wage rates. See: Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Chapter 25: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm#S2>
14. Michael Denning, "Wageless Life", *New Left Review*, no. 66 (2010): 79-97.
15. The building programme was only launched in 1923 and lasted until 1934 when the Austrofascists violently took power.
16. On the architecture of Red Vienna, see: Mafredo Tafuri, *Vienna Rossa. La Politica Residenziale nella Vienna Socialista* (Milan: Electa, 1980) and Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919-34* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1999); for a more general perspective, see: Anson Rabinbach, *The Crisis of Austrian Socialism: From Red Vienna to Civil War 1927-34* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
17. Rainer Bauböck, *Wohnungspolitik im sozialdemokratischen Wien 1919-1934* (Vienna: Neugebauer, 1979).
18. See: Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna: Experiment in Working-Class Culture 1919-1934* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 146-179.
19. This format does not allow for an elaboration on the relation of time and space in fascism; suffice it to say that it is an ambiguous, paradoxical relation. Especially in its early days, national socialism finds its future in the past. The

reactionary anti-urban vision of a blood-and-soil peasantry oriented to the past, its orders and rhythms are soon paralleled by the industrial and time-based *dispositif* of Nazi-era planning, the concept of the semi-urban *Siedlung*, of armament of territory, and of machinic extinction.

20. Thomas Humphrey Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950).
21. Stadtbauamt der Stadt Wien, *Die Per-Albin-Hansson-Siedlung in Wien*, Der Aufbau 4 (Vienna: J & V, 1953).
22. Oskar and Peter Payer, *Überlegungen zur Gestaltung der ersten Montagebau-Wohnungen für die Gemeinde Wien* (Vienna: self-published, 1963).
23. Donatella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, William W. Behrens and Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).
24. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
25. For a comprehensive theoretical debate on the concept of the future in the twentieth century, see: Franco Bifo Berardi, *After the Future* (London: AK Press, 2011).
26. Jonathan Hill, "Drawing Research", *The Journal of Architecture* 11, no. 3 (2006): 329-333.
27. For an overview see: AZW, *The Austrian Phenomenon, Architektur Avantgarde 1956-73* (Wien: Birkhäuser, 2009).
28. Walter Matznetter, "Social Housing Policy in a Conservative Welfare State: Austria as an Example", *Urban Studies* 39, no. 2 (2002): 265-282.
29. The focus of the programme has to be seen in the context of a shift from quantitative to qualitative concerns, as well as in meeting the critique on functionalism described above.
30. Bundesministerium für Bauten und Technik (Wohnbauforschung), *Wohnbau – Fachzeitschrift für Wohnbauforschung* (Vienna: Sparkassenverlag, 1974-85).
31. Helga Fassbinder and Jos van Eldon, "Flexibilität im niederländischen Wohnungsbau", *Arch+* 100/101, no.10 (1989): 65-73.
32. The project, which was one of the few Viennese contributions to the late CIAM debates, was presented at the CIAM meeting in La Sarraz in 1955. See: Monika Platzer, *Cold War and Architecture* (Vienna: Park Books, 2020), 260.
33. On this debate, see: "Nur wer Gestalten kann, wohnt zufrieden", in: *Wohnbau* 1976(1), BMfB or Riccabona and Wachberger: Flex I, Wien.
34. Alan Colquhoun, "Plateau Beaubourg", *Architectural Design* 47, no. 2 (1977): 98.
35. Ottokar Uhl, "Democratization in Architecture", in *The Scope of Social Architecture*, ed. C. Richard Hatch (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984), 40-47.

36. The support-infill scheme was developed by N. John Habraken and SAR – Stichting Architecten Research (a foundation for architectural research in the Netherlands) already during the early 1960s, published under the title *De Dragere en de Mensen: Het Einde van de Massawoningbouw* (Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema, 1961), and published in English as N. John Habraken and SAR, *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing* (London: Architectural Press, 1972).
37. Christof Riccabona and Michael Wachberger, *Flex 1&2 – Untersuchungen über die Wirtschaftlichkeit flexibler Wohnsysteme* (Vienna: Study for the Ministry of Building and Technology, 1972).
38. “Grenzen der Flexibilität: Am Beispiel Saalwohnung”, *Wohnbau*, no. 7-8 (1976), 25-27; IFES Institut für Empirische Saalwohnungen, *Mobilisierbares Interesse für Saalwohnungen* (Vienna: self-published, 1974).
39. Rem Koolhaas, “Typical Plan”, in Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S.M.L.XL.* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), 336-350.
40. See: Press release, Chamber of Labour Vienna, January 10, 2019.
41. Anita Aigner, “Wohnraum als Investment: Eine Kritik der Vorsorgewohnung“, *dérive*, no. 75 (April 2019): 17-25.
42. Lisa Adkins, *The Time of Money* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 114-116.
43. Elena Esposito, “Die Konstruktion von Unberechenbarkeit”, in Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik, eds., *Der Zeitkomplex – Postcontemporary* (Berlin: Merve, 2016), 37-42.

TOO BIG?

Debunking Scale Myths with the London County Council Architect's Department

Jesse Honsa

INTRODUCTION

In his classic treatise on postmodernism, Charles Jencks presented a diagram of different economic systems that produce different architecture. While the old system of private commissions had generated small but responsive projects in a variety of styles, the newer welfare state and international private development demanded scales of production that were “nasty, brutal and too big”. Like the buildings themselves, the architecture offices that designed them faced this problem of scale.¹ Elsewhere, Jencks attacked the modernist focus on streamlined production, which he claimed was a barrier to “ad-hoc” flexibility.² The scale of centralised authorities, sprawling estates and high-rises was a recurring point of contention for a generation of postmodern critics. Appropriated as arguments in the dismantling of the welfare state, such assessments have left us with an image of mass housing as a monotonous process where dwellings are serially designed and produced like automobiles.

If we test that stereotype against an individual artefact—say, a single slab block in East London—the characterisation might hold true: its facade expresses a serial logic, and its obdurate walls prevent adaptations by inhabitants. If considered as one of many such blocks across London, however, we might understand that repetition created iterative versions rather than carbon copies, testing new technologies and living types through evolutionary change. And if we zoom out to consider the block in relation to its setting, we might understand it as one tactic within a long-term flexible strategy of urban reconstruction. The “project” in question is not the singular building, but a complex process of housing a city. The Stepney-Poplar Comprehensive Development Area was one such project, a city-sized area of East London that was transformed by the London County Council (LCC) Architect's Department and other actors over several decades.

This chapter considers the nuanced reality of large-scale housing practices through an investigation into the LCC's postwar work. The largest architecture practice in the world at the time with over 1,500 employees, the municipal office was tasked with rebuilding war-torn London, building over 114,000 permanent dwellings from 1945 to 1965.³ But far from mass-producing houses like cars, the bureau created highly varied, innovative, and informed work, supported by processes impossible within a smaller practice. The chapter uses the enormous Stepney-Poplar project as a case study, comparing planning documents from different years and remapping individual completed projects within the area. It draws upon written accounts and oral histories of architects working at the department, considering how the LCC developed flexible working methods to negotiate scale: creating feedback loops between regulatory planning and implementation, research and practice, and inhabitation and design.⁴

It is necessary to question the validity of stereotypes, which are often based on the quotations from canonical master figures rather than materialist readings of actual work by more anonymous forces. Both the critics and apologists for mass housing often look at the stated goals of architects rather than their actual output.⁵ Individual LCC architects may or may not have had honourable intentions or megalomaniacal fantasies of razed earth and sublime repetition, but reality forced a productive negotiation with context.

The actual output of the welfare state was far from monolithic: Miles Glendinning has recently revealed the extent to which the architecture and delivery systems of postwar mass housing varied in different countries—and indeed even within individual municipal offices such as the LCC.⁶ And Jencks claimed large-scale projects were authoritarian, yet elsewhere claimed that they suffered because “no one has control over the whole job from beginning to end”.⁷ The latter is perhaps more accurate, as all architecture is in fact collaborative, and larger projects demand more of it. It could be argued that large-scale collaboration can create more informed work by incorporating more expertise. In the case of the LCC, that expertise came from professionals but also increasingly from residents themselves.

Mass housing's undeserved stereotype is perhaps a result of media that favour finished products over incomplete processes. Until now, the media has often distorted perceptions of the welfare state by focusing on exceptions: exceptionally iconic or exceptionally controversial. Existing publications about the LCC tend to focus on a few extraordinary flagship projects: in particular, the Alton Estate.⁸ Built on picturesque virgin land in suburban Wandsworth, the large, low-density project was in many ways uncharacteristic of the firm's output. After all, the diminishing amount of green land inside London prompted a shift towards smaller brownfield sites—in particular, ones left vacant by the German Luftwaffe. By 1957 the average LCC housing site was a mere four

acres (1.6 ha), often in a depressed inner-urban area.⁹ As I will attempt to show, in this context the economies of scale that could come with mass housing had as much to do with networked intelligence as with bulk production.

A NEW STRUCTURE

The LCC Architect's Department had been designing working-class housing since 1890, but conditions in the postwar period greatly expanded its mandate. London and other British cities urgently needed rebuilding, and for the emerging welfare state this was an opportunity to remodel the city along more equitable lines. In principle, the administrative channels to mobilise reconstruction followed a decentralised model already established earlier in the century: local municipalities conceived, built and managed their own housing estates with financing from central ministries. However, the stipulations to obtain subsidies wavered greatly under consecutive governments.¹⁰ London had a “two-tiered” municipal structure, where both the LCC and the 28 local boroughs within the county could apply for funds in an indirect competition. Yet it was an asymmetrical relationship, as new planning laws gave the LCC much more power to obtain land compulsorily and oversee urban development.

The long 1950s was a period in which typical speculative processes were somewhat suspended. The state rationed scarce construction materials and labour to ensure that they were directed towards pressing needs such as public housing. Architects, with little prospects in private practice, shifted to public offices either out of political conviction or simply for job security.¹¹ Even the 1955 lifting of rations, though, was not a return to business-as-usual: new planning laws prevented suburban expansion, effectively inflating urban land prices. Speculation in London was thus limited to only the well-off, or it focused on more profitable uses such as offices and hotels. Expensive lands within poor areas such as Stepney and Poplar had close to zero private-led development.¹² Public offices like the LCC continued to engage in housing on a large scale throughout the 1950s and 1960s—though increasingly to serve a working-class niche rather than the general population.

The specific character of the department in this period was partially the result of an internal struggle within the municipality. Since the nineteenth century, the department had designed houses on sites acquired and managed by the parallel Valuer's Department—a bureau of accountants with a penchant for budgetary restraint. In 1945, facing the monumental task of rebuilding, the Council decided to centralise housing design with the Valuer in order to streamline production. This decision was a major blow to the architectural community who had spent the wartime dreaming of new opportunities for

reconstruction. In 1949 the *Architects' Journal* used its public platform to berate the Valuer's dull housing designs, and in October of the same year responsibility was restored to the Architect's Department.¹³

The *Journal's* media stunt may not have influenced this political turnaround,¹⁴ but the comments helped set a new agenda. The periodical had criticised the Valuer for its insensitive approach which had stifled creativity and innovation. Salaried architects working under the Valuer apparently had their hands forced by upper-echelon civil servants, within a large pyramidal structure kept all decisions at the very top.¹⁵ The Architect's Department, on the other hand, had begun to structure itself in clustered teams of around sixteen architects, managed by a team leader. This structure was first implemented by LCC architect J.H. Forshaw in the 1940s and was later expanded by his successor Robert Mathew. At its height, the department had around twenty such groups, twelve of which were in the housing division headed by H.J. Whitfield Lewis.¹⁶ It was still a pyramidal organisation with ranks from chief architect to division heads to trainees, but the group model allowed for the decentralisation of responsibilities.

Public Administration theorist Luther Gulick argues that divisions of labour do not by definition follow official organograms, but they follow a mesh of "process-" and "purpose"-based specialisations. "Process-based" divisions are disciplinary in nature, but they need to collaborate with other disciplines to solve problems, and this usually entails a great amount of top-down control. "Purpose-based" divisions, on the other hand, revolve around addressing specific issues, but they need to integrate different experts. For Gulick, every organisation is some hybrid of process and purpose systems, forming a "tangled fabric" within a matrix.¹⁷ Applying this theory to the LCC, housing teams were "purpose based", composed of generalist architects tasked with solving a particular housing problem. Yet they were assisted by various specialists, including in-house engineers, surveyors, model-makers and sociologists. Furthermore, divisions were spatial, as housing and planning teams focused on particular areas of London. (fig. 2.1)

The group structure had advantages and disadvantages. LCC historian Ruth Lang argues that it allowed the department to multiply its ranks, whereas a more hierarchical structure would have faced organisational problems when it increased in number.¹⁸ And as has often been noted, this arrangement allowed for a certain amount of design independence within each team.¹⁹ It was nevertheless an encumbrance for directors, frustrated with the amount of "ad-hoc" decision-making in the lower tiers.²⁰ LCC Architects Edward Hollamby and David Gregory-Jones reflected that a "production"-oriented organisation, with separate teams for preparing drawings, design and construction supervision, would have avoided some of the "anarchic working methods" found in

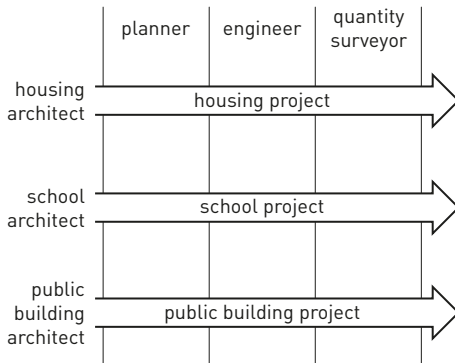


Figure 2.1: Purpose- and process-based divisions in the LCC. Projects passed through many specialists but were managed by general teams of architects. Drawing by author

the chosen autonomous group system.²¹ Additionally, architects who had been promoted to managerial positions found that they no longer had an ability to influence design directly—there was little room for professional growth.²² Nevertheless, it is undisputable that the group structure led to a highly creative and innovative practice as independent teams were free to test new ideas.

The LCC could capture some of the best architectural talent in the country because it had such a large and ambitious programme of commissions, and it could keep its workforce busy by shifting staff between various activities such as housing, schools, and civic buildings.²³ The municipality also had centralised resources, including an “organisation and methods” division that disseminated management practices, a telephone dictation system, and, after 1960, a computer for costing and engineering—luxuries undreamt of in private practice.²⁴

Though the department embraced collaboration within its boundaries, it was at times hostile to external collaborators. LCC Planners bemoaned how traffic engineers outside the department’s regime that had differing goals. Committees were too slow. The Valuer’s Department allegedly “sabotaged” the architects’ efforts to avoid displacing populations. Tensions also emerged between the LCC, local boroughs and private developers, all with their own interests.²⁵ Even if the firm had a willingness to incorporate expertise, there was nevertheless a rigidity in the belief that their architects knew best.

In 1965 the LCC was enlarged to become the Greater London Council (GLC). This expansion not only entailed the incorporation of the suburban fringe that altered the political makeup of the body, but it led to a restructuring of responsibilities. The Architect’s Department was reduced as more housing work shifted to local boroughs. The quantity of GLC housing work diminished in the 1970s, and the entire urban body was eventually dissolved in 1986.²⁶

PLANNING AND HOUSING

The primary responsibility of the Architect's Department was statutory rather than creative: to ensure that built work complied with regulation. 'Planning' in this sense was a passive duty, one of applying well-understood rules to well-understood problems. Even so, the department was simultaneously engaged implementation, which required a different type inquiry into specific problems whose natures were not fully known.²⁷ Within any neighbourhood, the planning division had to coordinate various projects by design teams working on housing, schools, and other buildings; as well as local boroughs who were developing their own housing and were also in charge of aspects such as street furniture.²⁸ Rather than simply restricting, "creative planning" was a cyclical process of consultation between those overseeing entire neighbourhoods on paper and those involved with the messy reality on the ground.²⁹

Postwar plans were drawn up while bombs were still being dropped on the capital. In 1943 the LCC commissioned the preeminent town planner Patrick Abercrombie to develop the *County of London Plan*. This was not a fixed masterplan, but a guiding image: as the conditions for rebuilding were still unknown, it established a flexible framework based on a few key principles. Densities were now to be managed by anticipating rates of people per acre—while the pre-war planning of settlements followed more rigid patterns based on distances between blocks, this plan allowed sites to be arranged in a number of ways. The plan also attempted to correct the problems of chaotic laissez-faire development by rationalising housing, workplaces, shopping, and public facilities around "neighbourhood units" ranging from 6,000 to 10,000 people. It was a diagrammatic idea rather than a concrete plan, one that would be implemented through more detailed studies on a case-by-case basis.³⁰

The plan was disseminated in many publicly accessible formats to gather popular support, including public exhibitions, a documentary film and an illustrated Penguin edition book.³¹ Communications tactics would remain a vital part of the LCC's activities, as planners often drew up two sets of plans for every neighbourhood: technical plans for experts and communicative drawings to share with local inhabitants at informal presentations to groups and schools.³²

After the war's end, legislation defined eight parts of London as "Comprehensive Development Areas", giving the LCC special powers for the compulsory purchase of land. The Planning Division established a "Reconstruction Areas Group" headed by Percy Johnson-Marshall. The Stepney-Poplar Comprehensive Development Area (SPCDA) was the largest of these areas, a 1,945-acre (787-hectare) zone straddling the boroughs of Stepney and Poplar in East London.³³ It had lost around a quarter of its housing stock in the war, but it was still a densely inhabited district with a

population of 100,000, surviving in dilapidated Victorian terraces or temporary huts on empty land.³⁴

As suggested by the Abercrombie plan, Stepney-Poplar was divided into 11 neighbourhoods, separated by existing infrastructure and new parks. While the major roads that bound each neighbourhood would be maintained and even enlarged, the dense grid of Victorian residential streets would be erased to create deeper urban superblocks.³⁵ The “neighbourhood unit” concept gave some flexibility for each area to develop rather independently—as Ruth Lang observes, there is an analogous relationship between the networks and divisions in plan and the networks and divisions within the LCC’s organisation.³⁶ Though planners referred to “social units”—conjuring notions of determinism that would later be criticised by Christopher Alexander and Jane Jacobs—in practice this was less about establishing spatial hierarchies and more of a way to simply divide work within a large team.

Financial limits and a scarcity of materials dampened efforts to redevelop the entire district at once.³⁷ Work progressed incrementally, meaning that every project responded to an ongoing condition. Innovations facilitated a proliferation of higher buildings, the rising level of car ownership demanded new standards for parking, and continued housing pressure forced planners to reconsider density requirements. There were countless amendments made to the plan.³⁸ Planners constantly struggled to force their neighbourhood unit diagram onto real settlements. For example, LCC sociologist Margaret Willis found that “Neighbourhood 11”, a narrow band of houses squeezed between East India Road and the docks in the southeast corner of Poplar, was not a true neighbourhood by any definition. The road, “instead of dividing Neighbourhood 11 from other areas, actually draws people to it.”³⁹ At other times the architects used the neighbourhood concept malleably, proposing to make up for lost density in one neighbourhood with higher densities in another—seemingly defying the logic of balanced density in each unit.⁴⁰ Whatever planners’ intents, dividing the metropolis into neighbourhood units was a means to divide the work of those who designed each piece. (fig. 2.2)

There are marked differences between the early illustrative masterplans for Stepney-Poplar versus the built reality. For example, the area of the Mountmorres Estate in Neighbourhood 4 was partially damaged in the war, and it was conceived in the 1943 plan as a linear distribution of terrace houses and four-storey slabs. Only part of the area was acquired by the LCC, however, because some landowners petitioned to have their lands exempt from compulsory purchase. Moreover, there was an existing LCC nursery on the site that needed to be preserved. It would be impossible to establish the repetitive *Zeilenbau* (linear block) pattern on this complicated site. The central features of the Mountmorres Estate as it was built was instead an enclosed space as a

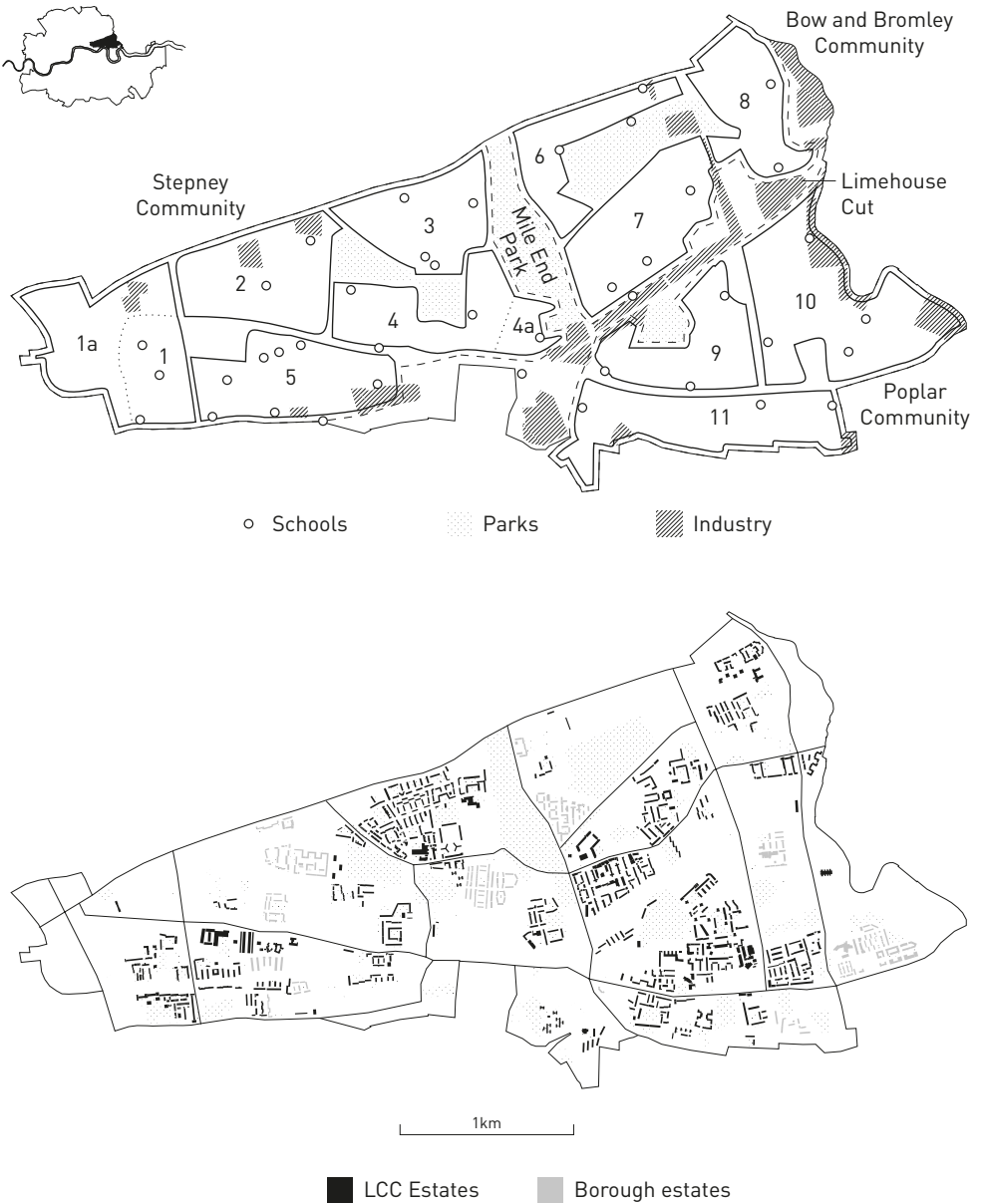


Figure 2.2: The Stepney Poplar Comprehensive Development Area, as conceived as eleven neighbourhood units (top), and actual built projects by the LCC and boroughs (bottom). Drawings by author

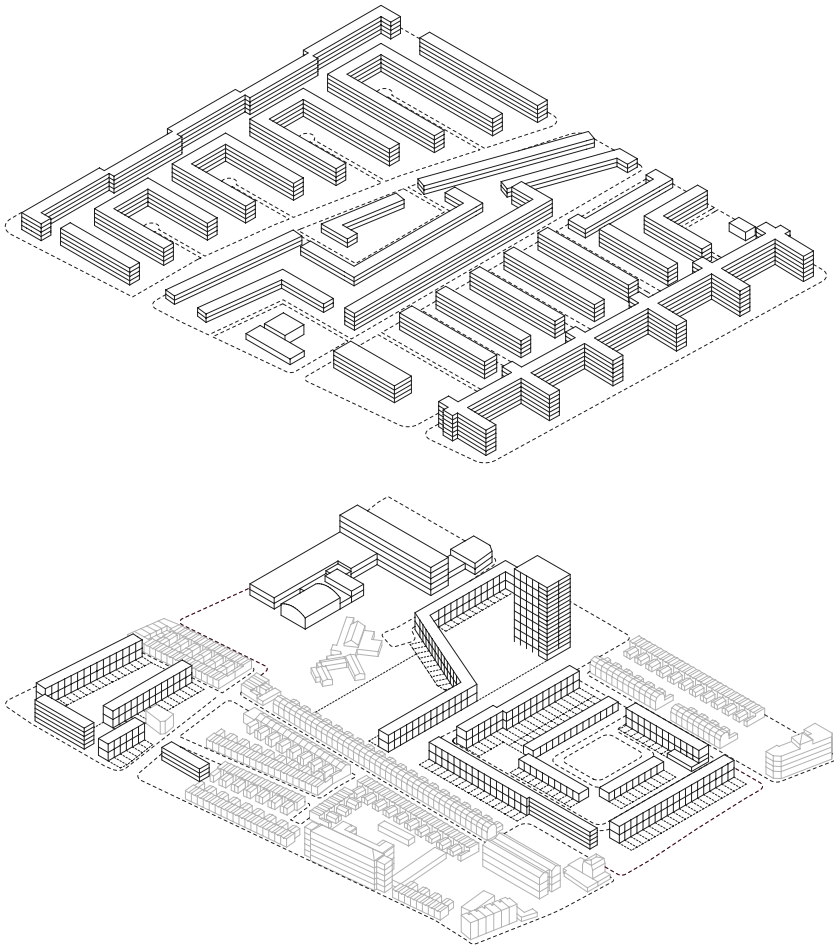


Figure 2.3: Mountmorres Estate in Neighbourhood 4, Stepney Poplar. While the original 1943 Plan suggested a linear organisation (top), the architects had to contend with existing buildings exempt from compulsory purchase and had to shuffle populations in situ. The built project (bottom) therefore relied on enclosed squares and a high-rise block. Drawings by author

“modern interpretation of the traditional English square”.⁴¹ The grassy square came to be recognised an appropriately sized unit of incremental urban development that could give an air of control within a rapidly transforming area. This design was also supported by sociological research conducted at the LCC in 1951, which found that existing enclosed squares were important “focal points” for locals, including older people and schoolchildren. It was also found

that the maintenance and supervision of a framed square was much easier than in the fragmented “odd bits” of space surrounding freestanding blocks.⁴²

Another feature of Mountmorres, not anticipated by the 1943 plan, is a 17-storey Latham House. This building appeared not just because technological and typological innovations allowed it (as explored later), but because it was a means to shuffle populations in situ by phasing construction. In this site and many others in the SPCDA, high-rises were first erected on empty areas in order to rehouse local populations, before demolishing their existing houses nearby.⁴³ Every new estate was therefore cast by the knowledge of existing buildings and populations, rather than a *tabula rasa* design. Commentators including the LCC planners themselves later criticised the ad-hoc or episodic quality of Stepney-Poplar,⁴⁴ but it is evidence that the bureau was responding to complex conditions. (fig. 2.3)

The area has had to absorb several societal changes over the subsequent fifty years. The GLC carried on after the LCC in developing estates in the pipeline, but by the late 1970s government funding for council housing was severely curtailed.⁴⁵ With a tight budget, Tower Hamlets (the post-GLC borough that replaced Stepney and Poplar and inherited the LCC’s estates) had particular difficulty in accommodating new demographic demands: a 1970s influx of predominantly Bangladeshi immigrants with the need for larger family dwellings; a 1977 act that demanded councils accommodate homeless people; and after the 1980s, creeping gentrification from the two financial hubs of the City of London and the new Canary Wharf. Meanwhile, employment shifted from manufacturing to service-based work.

In retrospect, the LCC may appear naive in attempting to fix density, living, and working patterns amid constant change. On the other hand, the diversity of urban patterns created by the LCC plan has allowed for the accommodation of new uses. In recent years, “estate regeneration” has been a popular trend in London that seeks to densify existing estates through demolition and/or infill, amid the demonisation of council housing and the pressure for more housing supply. It is a controversial practice that produces more homes but fewer with social rent, and it raises eyebrows when suitable building stock is demolished. Still, the regeneration of Stepney/Poplar has been of a more adaptive nature than elsewhere in London where the wholesale demolition of estates and displacement of residents has been more severe. Just as the LCC inserted blocks into complex urban conditions, their ‘regeneration’ has been of a selective and surgical nature.

TYPOLOGICAL INNOVATION

One of the stereotypes of mass housing is that it relies on a ‘one-size-fits all’ typification of dwellings and of users. It is perhaps an unfair way of looking at the past, as the notions of consumer choice that we are today familiar with were only just emerging in the 1950s. Public housing actors were only beginning to consider tenants as individual ‘users’ rather than universal ‘recipients’, and they were only beginning to recognise inhabitants as a source of knowledge.⁴⁶ Moreover, there was a great variety in what the LCC produced.

Since the 1920s, the Department had used standardised plans, determined by demographic groups in order to expedite the design process.⁴⁷ Any new housing type had to be approved by the Housing Board—a committee of elected representatives who, in the words of Chief Architect Hubert Bennett, could not even tell if drawings were hung upside down on a wall. It was therefore common practice to bypass such committees by recycling existing templates.⁴⁸ Still, there was a constant struggle as staff architects argued for the need for adaptations from standards. In 1952 the Housing Division debated different methods of standardisation: entire buildings, construction components, or the living unit? Architects were unanimously against standardising entire buildings. There was great interest in ‘open systems’ where building components could be assembled into different combinations, but this would be a massive task to coordinate dimensions with so many manufacturers, and the potential list of components would be too extensive to manage.⁴⁹ In the end the preferred solution was to maintain the standardised living unit, roughly defined at half-inch scale, which went through rapid evolutions.⁵⁰ Perhaps counterintuitively, the standard dwelling proved more flexible than the ‘kit of parts’ approach. The latter would require a totalising set of ingredients, coordinated and produced by manufacturers, and considering all possible combinations. By contrast, the standard unit type was only on paper, and it changed almost every time it was redrawn.

The strategy of ‘mixed estates’ allowed designers to gradually implement change. This settlement method combined various types of flats and houses within an estate to avoid making ghettos of a specific class or type of person. Mixed estates were also argued on aesthetic grounds for breaking monotony, with the economic rationale that they were actually cheaper to build.⁵¹ They created a diverse portfolio of building stock that gave tenants a range of options, allowing for the careful introduction of new types while mitigating the risk of failure. This flexibility was born not out of moveable walls, but from a palette of possibilities.

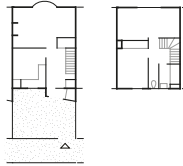
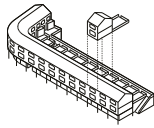
One can witness a rapid evolution in dwelling design: for example, the maisonette type, a two-storey dwelling within a multi-storey block. The type was tested in the 1951 Lansbury Estate “Live Exhibition” in Poplar, and was found to be preferred by inhabitants over the common walk-up flat because it had more privacy and mimicked the traditional terrace house by stratifying living and sleeping spaces.⁵² These prototypes led to the standardised type MA.A4 in 1952. One crucial advantage was that they allowed half of all dwellings in a four-storey block to have direct access to a garden.⁵³ Later in 1957, the LCC recognised the need to find a more versatile standard floor plan which could be accessed from different directions and accommodate a mix of large families on the ground floor with gardens, and smaller families above. Research head Oliver Cox disseminated a draft version of a new type MA.G3/4 to all twenty housing sections and received spirited advice on how to make this type ideal. Yet despite the intense amount of scrutiny placed on finding one versatile type to solve all problems, MA.G3/4 was almost never used—diversity prevailed over one standard.⁵⁴ (fig. 2.4)

The maisonette type was also exposed to other mutations. In 1952, it was reformatted for use in 11-storey high rise slabs on the Loughborough Estate, intended for households without children. This idea then evolved into a hyper-efficient, 12’3” (3.7m) frontage dwelling that first appeared in an 11-storey slab on Bentham Road in Hackney. To quell doubts from the housing committee about its extreme dimensions, the compact unit was even tested in a full-scale mock-up.⁵⁵ A further innovation occurred as the LCC sought a type capable of avoiding high-altitude drafts: 17-storey towers on the Tidey Street site in Stepney featured maisonettes accessed by an internal, double-loaded corridor.⁵⁶ Innovation was also born out of specific site conditions, as in the case of a “cross-over” maisonette on the Lincoln Estate in Poplar that directed views away from an unsightly gasworks to the west.⁵⁷ New types arose from specific needs, but once approved they entered into a repository for future use, pushing and pulling between standardisation and improvisation. (fig. 2.5)

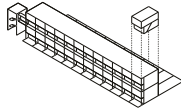
The Architect’s Department employed an in-house sociologist Margaret Willis, who surveyed resident’s opinions and recorded the use of their own dwellings using the wide array of housing types to gather feedback on user preference. Architects also received feedback from the Housing Department, who managed estates and maintenance with 48 local offices across London. However, there were limits to such feedback loops, as knowledge entered into practice too slowly. For example, in the early 1950s it was common practice to design remote garden allotments for residents of the upper floors of maisonette blocks, but Willis found that it was an unpopular solution in surveys conducted in 1952 and 1954.⁵⁸ Yet section architects continued to reproduce the same solution for several more years, because they were evidently unaware of this

TOO BIG?

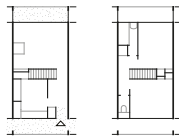
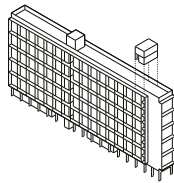
maisonettes
above shops
1951



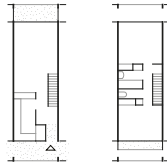
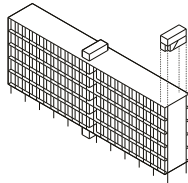
walk-ups
MA.A4
1952



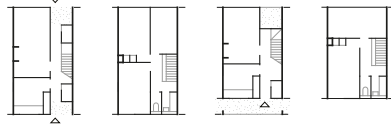
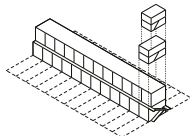
high slab
MA.3L
1952



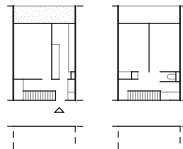
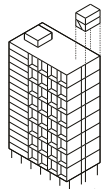
narrow
frontage
MA.3B
1953



small upper
dwellings
MA.G3/4
1957



double-loaded
PF.CA
1957



cross-over
MA.X3
1957

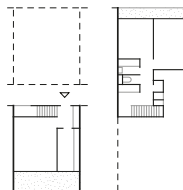
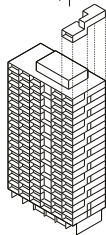


Figure 2.4: Some variations of the LCC's maisonette in the 1950s. Drawings by author



Figure 2.5: A special "cross-over" maisonette developed to allow each unit to have a southern orientation and avoid views to a nearby gasworks on the Lincoln Estate, Neighbourhood 7, 1956. Source: "L.C.C. Redevelopment at Tidey Street, Poplar", *Official Architecture and Planning* 19, no. 5 (May 1956): 247-249

research. Staff architect John Partridge confirmed this “weakness”, as “it was to take considerable time before research findings were validated and had any major contribution to the housing types and layout designs that were on the drawing boards.”⁵⁹

In other ways, architects were well aware of user preferences but had little agency. One of the most controversial practices was the use of high blocks: everyone knew that citizens overwhelmingly favoured houses with gardens, but the LCC was dependent upon a national subsidy programme that favoured high-rises, and it faced pressure to deliver at great density.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the bureau was at least informed by empirical research. This analysis was something largely non-existent in speculative guesswork and private practice where the architect’s role ended when occupation began.

TECHNICAL INNOVATION AND TECTONICS

The Architect’s Department was an important hub for technical innovation during the white heat of technological change in the postwar years. It could afford to invest in productive research, as the continuity of its housing mandate assured that the costs of R&D could be amortised across a wide range of future applications.⁶¹ Architects working on design assignments often moved to the Housing Division’s Research Group to develop particular ideas, ensuring that research was relevant for real-world applications.⁶² The LCC developed several important innovations: box-frame construction, internally-ventilated bathrooms, lightweight facade panels, electric floor heating, and single-stack plumbing.⁶³

One potent area of research was in the realm of prefabricated concrete panels, for which LCC architects collaborated with building firms. A first step was taken in the 11-storey point blocks of the 1953 Fitzhugh Estate, which were originally conceived in concrete, but the architects and contractor Wates decided to experiment with prefabricating beams, lintels, stairs and balcony slabs.⁶⁴ Two years later, the LCC took prefabrication further with its Picton Street scheme, designed together with the building firm John Laing & Son, under a special ‘negotiated contract’ rather than a standard competitive bid. The scheme featured a greater proportion of prefabricated elements, assembled with a travelling crane: floor panels, beams, stairs, infill walls, façade panels, and technical ducts.⁶⁵ Even at the time, it was recognised that “the constructional components used for the Picton Street buildings may not slavishly be copied” because of their unusual and complex combination of elements—it was another experimental step towards panelised construction.⁶⁶ (fig. 2.6)

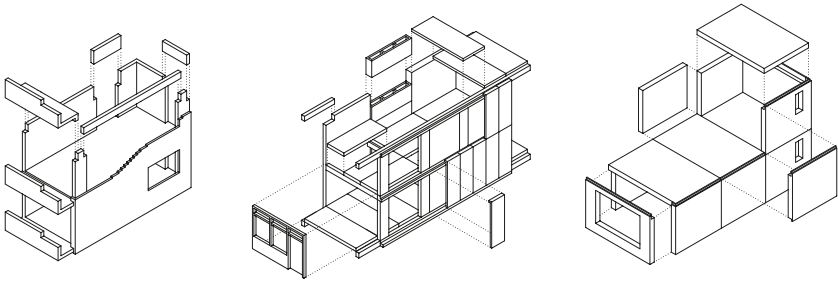


Figure 2.6: Innovations in prefabricated concrete by the LCC. The 1953 Trinity Road Estate (left) used lintels, beams, stairs, and balcony slabs prefabricated onsite. The 1955 Picton Street scheme (middle) used prefabricated floors, facades, beams, and technical ducts, while load-bearing cross-walls were cast in situ. The 1962 Morris Walk project (right) used a fully prefabricated system, with panels produced in a factory. Drawings by author

A greater leap occurred in 1962, when the LCC devised a partnership to license a proprietary system from the Danish firm Larsen Nielsen, to be used by the British contractor Taylor Woodrow and the precast specialists Anglian to produce large-format concrete panels in a factory. The LCC contracted one thousand units for its Morris Walk Estate (1962-65), with the prospect of many other orders should the system prove satisfying.⁶⁷ It could leverage this innovation in the British industry precisely because it could guarantee a large amount of upfront work. Even if the basic premise was imported from Denmark, it still required a massive amount of coordinated design work, with over 100 LCC staff working out aspects of the design far in advance.⁶⁸

Yet despite all of the rapid innovations being pursued by different teams, there was an underlying tectonic expression which remained fairly consistent and reinforced the collective goals of the Department. Projects had a strong tendency to represent the individual dwelling on the façade: load-bearing “cross walls” and floor slabs were often exposed, while others were concealed, to articulate buildings and estates as aggregations of individual family dwellings. Many of these details, such as hanging concrete frames or exposed brick pilasters, were in fact ornamental rather than purely functional. (fig. 2.7) And when the construction system prevented such expressions, as was the case with Morris Walk, the chief designer Martin Richardson bemoaned that it “didn’t express the house, but the production unit, which had no social meaning and therefore no visual meaning.”⁶⁹ It has often been claimed that the vast department split into separate aesthetic camps,⁷⁰ but this assertion overlooks some of the most crucial similarities when it came to representing the domestic scale.

The living unit, rather than the concrete panel, was the bureaucratic building block within these social constructions. It was the unit of measurement throughout committee approvals and subsidy applications. And, given



Figure 2.7: Exposed brick parti walls in LCC blocks, which identified the divisions between each maisonette, were often decorative: they were separated from the actual parti wall by a waterproof membrane. Concrete slabs between each maisonette were exposed, while intermediate floors were concealed, further articulating the building as an aggregation of dwelling units. St. Annes (Locksley Street) Estate in Neighbourhood 4a, LCC Photograph Collection. © London Metropolitan Archives (City of London)

the Department's reliance on type plans, the unit was the fixed element that architects had to use—their expression revealed the bureaucratic process of conception.

This established a generic architectural language—something desirable within a welfare state programme to eradicate the inequalities of “East Ends and West Ends”. The LCC's 1943 Plan criticised London's “lack of coherent architectural development”, which it hoped to correct with a generic language that could work across the metropolis. The term ‘generic’ is often used disparagingly, but it does not necessarily mean something without qualities: it refers to a higher-level genus or family, a commonality out of distinct parts.⁷¹ Generic architectural patterns were part of an active attempt to develop a collective image for the entire London County—after all, the LCC was designing in every corner of the territory. The LCC even had a policy of using particular materials such as yellow London stock brick, which could make a link with historic buildings in most neighbourhoods and allow for “the co-ordination of



Figure 2.8: LCC housing was later subject to privatisation under Thatcher’s “Right to Buy” policies. Already explicating property boundaries through exposed parti walls, staggered plans, and garden walls, it is still quite easy for buyers to adapt each house without much consequence to the collective form. Lansbury Alton Street Extension, Neighbourhood 9. Photograph by author, 2023

the type and colour of building materials rather than the making of haphazard decisions.”⁷²

However, the flaw in this egalitarian agenda was that the LCC could not build for all classes under the subsidy regime, meaning that the language it developed simply perpetuated a nineteenth-century practice of using architecture to articulate social class, contributing to a stigmatisation of social housing. Moreover, the language reinforced a conservative notion of the family as the building block of society. The highly atomised facades of LCC projects even anticipated the privatisation of social housing that would later occur under Thatcher’s “Right to Buy” policy in the 1980s. (fig. 2.8)

COMPARISON TO BOROUGHES

The 28 local boroughs within London County could also apply for funding from the government to design and build their own council housing. These smaller organisations had a markedly different approach, though, one that reveals the importance of scale. The two boroughs of Stepney and Poplar did not have the resources to employ architectural staffs like the LCC and rather left housing design to borough engineers. They sometimes hired architectural assistants, but given their inconsistent workloads, they relied on outsourcing design for many projects. Other boroughs outsourced work to private architects. Yet one-offs projects could not invest in knowledge production through a continued programme. As put by the critic R. Furneaux Jordan, the private architect was “unable to use one client’s job as a pioneering job, or pilot scheme, for the benefit of another client”.⁷³

The LCC, on the other hand, had a monopoly in knowledge assembly. However, the outsourcing trend would later infect the LCC when faced with staff shortages and a restructuring of the county in the 1960s.⁷⁴ Two of the most iconic and controversial housing projects from the entire postwar era were commissioned by the LCC and built in the south-east corner of the Stepney-Poplar area: the 26-storey Balfron Tower by Ernő Goldfinger and goliathan Robin Hood Gardens by Alice and Peter Smithson.⁷⁵ While it was often argued that private architects brought fresh ideas to the council,⁷⁶ they had fundamentally different motivations, as private practice must use projects to attract more commissions. Though reminiscent of the LCC in their use of prefabricated concrete and maisonettes, such projects were much more bombastic, becoming symbols that have polarised opinions of mass housing.

The LCC also had an advantage in its ability to wrestle with large-scale industry and even develop collaborate on the development of new systems, while small councils were often out of their league. Stepney Metropolitan Borough’s first attempt to build a point block was a notable failure, as it naively contracted a local ship-repairing firm that went bankrupt.⁷⁷ By contrast, the LCC avoided contracting risky construction firms, installing a sophisticated tendering process that compared their own surveyors’ estimates to that of invited contractors.⁷⁸

As prefabrication became more prevalent in the later 1960s, major building companies offered all-in-one design-engineering-prefabrication-construction services, based on templated designs that could be erected with great speed. Tower Hamlets, the successive borough to Stepney and Poplar, went on a fierce system-building campaign, commissioning companies such as Bison and Laing to quickly produce towers. The LCC, on the other hand, was always sceptical of ‘closed’ proprietary systems that eliminated the opportunity

for designerly adaptation.⁷⁹ Small, local borough councils were therefore much more deserving of the mass-production moniker than the centralised LCC: the same towers were commissioned by local authorities in such far-fetched places as Tower Hamlets, Birmingham, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Flaws with these ‘package deals’ later became evident as many buildings were erected without proper supervision or coordination.⁸⁰ In 1968, the devastating collapse of the Ronan Point tower in East London raised serious concerns about the quality of prefab systems. The tower was commissioned by the Borough of Newham and was built by Taylor Woodrow-Anglian with the Larsen-Nielsen system—a system related to the one that the LCC had helped develop. Reflecting on this crisis, LCC head architect Hubert Bennett made a distinction between these “borough jobs” and his own office, which had sufficiently supervised the very same builders on many projects.⁸¹ The LCC was not immune from failures, but it had managed to avoid some of the worst problems. Boroughs had been eager to speedily deliver houses for their restless constituents, and were often frustrated with the pie-in-the-sky LCC architects who indulged in seemingly capricious design.⁸² Even so, their sense of urgency—driven by the need for quantity alone—blinded them to other grave issues of which the larger LCC was more aware.

However, if centralised offices created scalar economies in the design of new estates, they apparently created diseconomies in the maintenance of existing ones. The architecture of mass housing has often been vilified for deterministically creating ‘antisocial’ behaviour, when in reality it was management that was often the missing link.⁸³ In the postwar period, the old practices of door-to-door rent collection and resident caretakers had been gradually replaced by a system in which detached staff efficiently managed larger catchment areas. By the early 1960s the LCC, operating over 100,000 dwellings across London, had only one estate officer for every 310 homes.⁸⁴ Management was often accused of being unreceptive to making necessary repairs.⁸⁵ The resulting problems—broken elevators, leaks, unmanicured gardens, graffiti, and other forms of ‘hooliganism’—were not unique to the LCC/GLC, as local boroughs followed the same managerial logic. Still, by the 1980s it was clear that scale and maintenance costs were correlative: in a 1982-3 survey, the overall operational cost of the average GLC dwelling was £12.31 per week, around 40% higher than that of sampled local boroughs.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION: DEBUNKING

The stereotypes of mass housing are part of a greater neoliberal myth: that free market competition produces dynamic innovation and is best suited to accommodate demand, while the State is slow and inefficient.⁸⁷ Assuming that government's role should only be to regulate the occasional market failure or environmental hazard, the myth ignores how states have historically shaped markets and fuelled development.⁸⁸ Economist Mariana Mazzucato had recently attempted to “debunk” this myth, revealing how many important technological innovations such as the internet emerged from public rather than private investment. States, motivated by long-term social goals, take risks that no one else is willing to make.⁸⁹

Public housing has been demonised for its ‘failures’, but it was responsible for introducing a wide range of innovations that have become prevalent in the private sector: introducing notions of private property to the working class,⁹⁰ introducing new construction methods to the industry, and introducing high-rise living formats to speculative developers. Nonetheless, the ‘myth’ of the slow and cumbersome state becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. One of the LCC's greatest assets was its highly talented workforce, but it later became difficult to recruit architects flocking towards more ‘exciting’ private firms.

Mazzucato also challenges the reverence given to small-scale firms as supposedly creative. Innovation always necessitates some failures, but start-ups and other small businesses do not have the capacity to absorb failure. They break rather than bend.⁹¹ The LCC certainly produced failures, but they learnt from and incorporated such experiences into their body of knowledge—big was bendable. It is therefore unfortunate that the continuity of knowledge production was cut short with the dissolution of housing responsibilities. Mazzucato's ideas are being picked up, though, by a new generation of British public servants who seek to create more innovation through inter-council research and development.⁹²

Bigger in every dimension may not always be better: after all, the LCC Architect's Department was in many ways an exception, and it was not necessarily ideal in every respect. Yet it challenges received notions of ‘common sense’, which place favour towards what is immediate, small, local, and apparent, and retracts from the realm of larger, difficult-to-comprehend institutions.⁹³ The binary oppositions between public/private or large/small ignore the truth that all are based on mutual interdependency. Considering how such an ecosystem should operate requires an ability to *engage* with the large and complex.

NOTES

1. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 12-15.
2. Charles Jencks, *Adhocism: The Case for Improvisation*, expanded and updated edition (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2013).
3. John Craig, "The 1943 London Plan: A Perspective", *Official Architecture and Planning* 33, no. 12 (December 1970): 1075-1078.
4. I am indebted to several digital resources and databases that have made in-depth research possible during the 2020 pandemic, including the University of Edinburgh's "Tower Block" database (towerblock.eca.ed.ac.uk); the London Metropolitan Archive's online picture archive (londonpicturearchive.org.uk); historic OS maps available from the Library of Scotland (maps.nls.uk); and historic photographs, maps, and aerial photography from the Institute of Historical Research's "Layers of London" database (layersoflondon.org), and the British Library's *Oral Histories* (www.bl.uk/subjects/oral-history).
5. Adrian Forty, "Being or Nothingness: Private Experience and Public Architecture in Post-war Britain", *Architectural History* 38 (1995): 25-35.
6. Miles Glendinning, "Multifaceted Monolith: The Hidden Diversity of Mass Housing", *Social Analysis* 54, no. 2 (2010): 47-59; Miles Glendinning, *Mass Housing: Modern Architecture and State Power – A Global History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).
7. Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, 14.
8. See: Nikolaus Pevsner, *Outline of European Architecture*, 5th edition (London: Penguin Books, 1957), 704.
9. William Geoffrey Fiske, "Housing by the London County Council", *Social Work (1939-1970)* 14, no. 3 (July 1957): 342-346.
10. Following an immediate postwar Labour government, the Conservative Party was in charge from 1951 to 1963, with consequences on housing policy. However, the LCC was led by Labour throughout the era.
11. Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-war World: Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2002).
12. LCC, *Administrative County of London Development Plan* (1960), 174.
13. Nicholas Merthyr Day, "The Role of the Architect in Post-war State Housing: A Case Study of the Housing Work of the London County Council, 1939-1956" (PhD diss., University of Warwick, Department of Art History, 1988), 148.
14. Nicholas Bullock, "Ideals, Priorities and Harsh Realities: Reconstruction and the LCC, 1945-51", *Planning Perspectives* 9, no. 1 (1994): 87-101.
15. Day, "The Role of the Architect in Post-war State Housing", 126.
16. Day, 148.
17. Day, 464.

18. Ruth Lang, "Towards an Architecture of Ingenuity: The Schools Division of the London County Council Architect's Department, 1943-65" (PhD diss., Newcastle University, 2020), 110-111. Special thanks go to Lang for sharing her dissertation.
19. Day, "The Role of the Architect in Postwar State Housing"; Elain Harwood, "London County Council Architects", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2009); Ruth Lang, "Architects Take Command: The LCC Architects' Department", Volume 41 (October 24, 2014), <http://volumeproject.org/architects-take-command-the-lcc-architects-department/>
20. LCC Housing Division Co-ordinating Meeting Minutes, (7 August 1952; 4 March 1953; 11 April 1954). London Metropolitan Archives (henceforth LMA) LCC/AR/CB/01/134.
21. Edward Hollamby and David Gregory Jones, "The Structure and Personality of the L.C.C. Architects Department", *Architecture and Building* (May 1957), 170-180.
22. Lang, "Towards an Architecture of Ingenuity", 124.
23. Lang, 150.
24. Eric L. Jackson, *Achievement: A Short History of the LCC* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1965), 62-69.
25. Walter Bor, interview with Louise Brodie, *National Life Story Collection: Architects' Lives*, British Library, 1997, audio, <https://sounds.bl.uk/sounds/walter-bor-interviewed-by-louise-brodie-1001572490390x00002f>
26. Owen Hatherley, *Red Metropolis* (London: Repeater Books, 2020).
27. David H. Petraeus, "The Relationship between Design and Planning", *The U.S. Army Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, U.S. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication no. 3-33.5 (2006); quoted in Kees Kaan and Manuela Triggianese, "Complex Projects: Design or Planning?", *New Urban Configurations*, TU Delft (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2014), 72.
28. Percy Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 196.
29. Arthur Ling, "Reconstruction of Cities", *Official Architecture and Planning* 19, no. 12 (December 1956): 609-612.
30. Patrick Abercrombie and J.H. Forshaw, *County of London Plan* (London: Macmillan, 1944).
31. Marco Amati and Robert Freestone, "All of London's a Stage: The 1943 County of London Plan Exhibition", *Urban History* 43, no. 4 (2016): 539-556.
32. Percy Johnson-Marshall, interview with Mark Crinson, *National Life Story Collection: Architects' Lives*, British Library, 1990, audio, <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Architects-Lives/021M-C0467X0002XX-0003V0>.
33. Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities*, 203.
34. Simon Pepper, "High-rise Housing in London", in *Mobilising Housing Histories*, eds. Peter Guillery and David Kroll (London: RIBA Publishing, 2017), 129.
35. LCC, *Administrative County of London Development Plan* (1951), 254.

36. Ruth Lang, "Orchestration of an Organisation: Redevelopment in Planning and Practice", *The County of London Plan: 75 Years On* (London Metropolitan Archives, 2018).
37. Walter Bor, *The Making of Cities* (London: Leonard Hill, 1972), 101-103.
38. LCC, *Administrative County of London Development Plan* (1960), 78-81.
39. Margaret Willis, "A Social Survey of Neighbourhood 11", LCC Sociological Reports (1957), Percy Johnson-Marshall Collection (henceforth abbreviated PJM) at the University of Edinburgh. PJM/LCC/D/6.
40. LCC Housing Management Department, Housing Layout Committee (14 December 1956) LMA LCC/AR/CB/01/131.
41. "LCC: Further Developments in the Stepney Community", *Architects' Journal* (March 28, 1957), 458.
42. Margaret Willis, "Survey and Analysis of Amenity Open Space in Residential Areas", LCC Sociological Report (1951), PJM/LCC/D/6.
43. "Redevelopment of St. Anne's Neighbourhood, Stepney", *Official Architecture and Planning* 19, no. 1 (January 1956): 30-34.
44. Arthur Ling, "Reconstruction of Cities", *Official Architecture and Planning* 19, no. 12 (December 1956): 609-612; Johnson Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities*; Bor, *The Making of Cities*, 103.
45. "Public Housing in Poplar: The 1940s to the Early 1990s", in *Survey of London: Volumes 43 and 44, Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs*, ed. Hermione Hobhouse (London: London County Council, 1994), 37-54. British History Online, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols43-4/pp37-54>.
46. Matthew Hollow, "The Age of Affluence Revisited: Council Estates and Consumer Society in Britain, 1950-1979", *Journal of Consumer Culture* 16, no.1 (2016): 279-296.
47. Christopher Metz, "The Logic of the Norm: LCC Urban Housing during the Interwar Period", *Housing and the City Conference* (Architectural Humanities Research Association, 2020).
48. Hubert Bennett, interview with Louise Brodie, National Life Story Collection: Architects' Lives, British Library, 1999, <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Architects-Lives/021M-C0467X0035XX-0001V0>. The reliance on type plans also expedited the approval process for subsidies from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. London County Council Architect's Department Housing Division, *Information Book*, 1957, 331.1.
49. LCC Housing Division Co-ordinating meetings (7 August 1952), LMA LCC/AR/CB/01/134.
50. LCC Housing Division Memo, "Four-storey Maisonettes: Type Plans" (March 1955), LMA LCC/AR/CB/01/137.
51. Flats Sub-committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee, MoHLG, *Living in Flats* (HMSO, 1952); MoHLG, *Flats and Houses 1958: Design and Economy* (HMSO, 1958).

52. Margaret Willis, "Living in Maisonettes", LCC Sociological Reports (1952), PJM/LCC/D/6.
53. LCC, *Housing Type Plans*, (1956).
54. LCC Housing Division, "Housing Types" (1957), LMA LCC/AR/CB/01/137.
55. Colin St. John Wilson, interview with Jill Lever, *National Life Story Collection: Architects' Lives*, British Library, 1996, audio, <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Architects-Lives/021M-C0467X0013XX-0001V0>
56. Stefan Muthesius and Miles Glendinning, *Towers for the Welfare State: An Architectural History of British Multi-storey Housing 1945-1970* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, 2019), 72.
57. "L.C.C. Redevelopment at Tidey Street, Poplar", *Official Architecture and Planning* 19, no. 5 (May 1956): 247-249.
58. Margaret Willis, "Living in Maisonettes", LCC Sociological Reports (1952-54), PJM/LCC/D/6.
59. John Partridge, "Roehampton Housing", *Twentieth Century Architecture* 9 (2008): 114-120.
60. The subsidy bias towards high-rise dwellings is explored in Patrick Dunleavy, *The Politics of Mass Housing in Britain 1945-75* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
61. John Partridge, interview with Jill Lever, *National Life Story Collection: Architects' Lives*, British Library, 2002, audio, <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Architects-Lives/021M-C0467X0075XX-0001V0>
62. Oliver Cox and Cleeve Barr often worked in the Research group when developing new ideas. Day, "The Role of the Architect in Postwar State Housing", 146.
63. Miles Glendinning and Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 13.
64. Cleeve Barr, *Public Authority Housing* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1958), 109.
65. John Laing, "London County Council Picton Street Scheme", *Team Spirit* (December 1955): 110.
66. LCC, "Notes on the Housing Development at Picton Street, Camberwell", Housing Estate Reports (May, 1957), PJM/LCC/D/4.3.
67. LCC, 75.
68. Peter Guillery, *Survey of London: Volume 48 Woolwich* (2012), 320-324.
69. Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 188.
70. Nikolaus Pevsner, "Roehampton: London County Council housing and the picturesque tradition", *Architectural Review* (July 1959): 21-35.
71. Martino Tattara, "A Cross-section of Genericity and Commonality: Towards a Vocabulary for the European City", *Dieuwertje Komen – Commonness* (Amsterdam: FW Books, 2009).
72. LCC, "Lansbury Estate: Use of Stock Bricks" (15 January 1954), LMA LCC/CL/HSG/02/064.

73. R. Furneaux Jordan, "L.C.C.: New Standards in Official Architecture", *Architectural Review* (November 1956): 311.
74. "The Housing Problem in London", *Official Architecture and Planning* 27, no. 11 (November 1964): 1391-1393.
75. The two projects were designed and completed for the GLC, but work was originally commissioned by the LCC prior to 1965.
76. Bennett, interview; Elizabeth Layton, "New Strategies for Local Authority Housing", *Official Architecture and Planning* 24, no.11 (December 1961): 495-498.
77. Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 271.
78. Bennett, interview.
79. Glendinning and Muthesius, *Tower Block*, 187.
80. Adam Curtis, "The Great British Housing Disaster", *Inquiry*, BBC, 1984, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ch5VorymiL4>
81. Bennett, interview.
82. Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Postwar World*.
83. Becky Tunstall, *The Fall and Rise of Social Housing: 100 Years on 100 Estates* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2020), 29-30.
84. Anne Power, *Property before People: The Management of Twentieth-Century Council Housing* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 78.
85. Power, 142.
86. Power, 197.
87. See: Patrik Schumacher, "Only Capitalism Can Solve the Housing Crisis", *Adam Smith Institute* (April 25, 2018), www.adamsmith.org/capitalismcansolvethousingcrisis.
88. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon, 2001).
89. Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015).
90. See: Pier Vittorio Aureli, Leonard Ma, Mariapaola Michelotto, Martino Tattara, and Tuomas Toivonen, "Promised Land: Housing from Commodification to Cooperation". *E-Flux: Collectivity*, 2019, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/collectivity/304772/promised-land-housing-from-commodification-to-cooperation/>
91. Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State*, 52-54.
92. Finn Williams, "Designing Upstream: Rebuilding Agency Through New Forms", *Architectural Design* 88, no. 5 (2019): 104-109.
93. See: Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work* (London: Verso Books, 2015), 9-13.

A SOCIAL CRITIQUE OF THE LARGE-SCALE MODERN HOUSING PROJECT

Martino Tattara

THE ARCHITECTURAL ORIGINS OF LARGE-SCALE POSTWAR MODERN HOUSING

Large-scale postwar housing estates are one of the most tangible outcomes of the principles of modern architecture, namely, the sets of ideas and tenets discussed and experimented from the first half of the twentieth century and that became instrumental in giving form, during postwar reconstruction efforts, to the housing needs of the time. Although each postwar housing project is the embodiment of local specificities, particular conditions and regional differences, a concrete slab or tower in a green setting is quickly identified with the loosely defined category of ‘modern housing’. In his recent historical account of mass housing, Miles Glendinning underlines how it would be impossible to reduce postwar housing production to a singular and unified group. He also recognises, however, that there are a series of “recurring formulae of modernist architecture that are pervasively repeated in postwar mass housing”. Examples include the idea of the neighbourhood unit, the free-standing block positioned amid green open spaces, the deployment of prefabrication or industrialised construction, and, since the 1950s, the use of “variants of conglomerate planning”, ranging from decked megastructures to “low-rise high-density clusters”.¹

To confirm the relation between early modern housing experiments and postwar mass housing, we can also consider the role played by technological advances in early modern and postwar projects. The ‘mass’ dimension of postwar housing had its beginnings in the emergence in the late nineteenth century of new building materials and technologies and in the reform of the construction industry. In the early twentieth century, Walter Gropius was interested in experimenting with new construction methods for mass housing, Mies van der Rohe fully embraced the new available materials, and Le Corbusier dreamed

of building houses like cars. According to Florian Urban, the technological experimentations of the first decades of the twentieth century were the preamble to the peak in mass housing construction of the postwar decades when “the material qualities of reinforced concrete improved considerably in terms of insulation, stability, and endurance, and industrially produced buildings grew to an unprecedented size”.²

Yet, if innovative materials and technological advances laid the basis for the ‘massification’ of postwar housing, other concerns and ideas illuminated the work of the early modern architect, such as the ambition to redefine domestic labour through the application of Taylorism, the importance of guaranteeing acceptable health and sanitary conditions to all inhabitants, the rational and functional spatial organization of living activities, and a set of aesthetic concerns. Although modern architects believed that standardization was the ‘alphabet of socialist architecture’ and the guarantee of social progress and emancipation, a thorough assessment of the social agenda of avant-garde modern housing is still lacking, especially if such an assessment were to be conducted with the goal of understanding the capacity of such projects to meet today’s main housing challenges.

In this chapter, we therefore aim to carry out a critical analysis of modern housing, focusing on a few instances of the debate internal to the *Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne* (CIAM), which, from 1928 to the mid 1960s, remained the most important forum for the exchange of ideas on modern architecture, where many of the tenets were drafted upon which postwar modern housing estates are built. While the modern housing project has been criticised for the size of its buildings, the use of industrialised techniques (like prefabricated concrete panels), the uniformity of its units, and the monotony of its open spaces—all aspects that were perceived as the spatial embodiment of top-down planning imposed on inhabitants by the central authorities—we here want to shift the focus towards an understanding of the ‘social dimension’ embedded in the idea of what a modern home should have been. Contrary to the widespread criticism that has traditionally put the vast dimensions and scale of such housing under scrutiny—which we rather consider the result of the glorious attempts to give physical definition to widespread redistributive policies by the state—the hypothesis is that, despite the significant technical and aesthetic breakthroughs of the early twentieth century, the modern housing project did not fully address some of the rising social questions that appeared in the transformations of the domestic realm that occurred in the late nineteenth century following industrialization. Rather, we would argue that avant-gardist aesthetics, functional redefinition, and technological innovation in housing architecture were combined with a certain conservatism that manifested itself in particular in the space of the house. Though CIAM itself was the setting for a

continuous and at times fierce debate between contrasting and evolving ideas, the modern housing project as defined through the main narratives of CIAM did not develop and advance a social agenda capable of meeting some of the questions of the time. Some of these shortcomings have ultimately resurfaced, too, when discussing the legacy and potential transformation of this large-scale postwar housing stock in relation to pressing housing challenges today.

THE POSTWAR SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECT

Large-scale postwar housing generally carries the connotation of ‘mass housing’. This underlines the quantitative effort (and technical underpinning) of post-World War II housing provision and the emergence of ‘mass’ as a concept used to characterise modern society. Many would apply differently the ‘social housing’ label to any postwar high-rise concrete tower or slab placed in large open and green spaces. Social housing is one of those terms that are difficult to grasp. While discussion on social housing often takes place in fields such as planning, public policymaking, the social sciences, and architectural history, within the field of architecture the term is felt to be slippery to the point that in conjunction with the term housing, architects tend to use similar yet less disputable adjectives, such as ‘public’ or ‘affordable’. Housing Europe, the European Federation of Public, Cooperative, and Social Housing, reinforces this terminological ambiguity by presenting on its website an overview of the official definitions of social housing in each of its twenty-two European member states, revealing how each country defines the term differently. While in the Netherlands, for example, social housing identifies the provision of housing at below-market price to a target group of disadvantaged people, in Germany, besides being rarely used, the term refers generally to any form of publicly subsidised housing. In Belgium, despite local differences between the regions, social housing is the attempt by the authorities to offer adequate and affordable housing in terms of hygiene standards and sound living conditions with a certain security of tenure for low-income households.

It is no surprise therefore that social housing has been identified as a “floating signifier”, “a term with no agreed-upon meaning”.³ To define a social housing intervention today, however, researchers Anna Granath Hansson and Björn Lundgren have identified five criteria: the specific target groups, the type of housing tenure, the type of housing provider, the involvement of subsidies, and the role of public intervention.⁴ While these criteria do not play a crucial role in each country, having as a target group households with limited financial resources and providing housing below-market rents or prices seem to be the two essential conditions for the existence of a social housing project. If defined

in this way, it is clear that the project of social housing and its discussion tend to commonly rest outside the traditional disciplinary perimeter of architecture.

To fully understand the meaning of the term beyond preconceived categorizations and definitions, it makes sense to dissect the social as a specific historical category instead of thinking of it as a connotation of housing. Emerging with the advent of industrialization, the social is a modern category indicating those institutions concerned with the management, government, and reproduction of society, and therefore positioned between the public and the individual. As recalled by Deleuze, a “social” domain is one where desires, freedom, and forms of empowerment can be achieved, but also a sphere where continuous control and enforcement are exerted by authorities.⁵ It is therefore clear why the sphere of the social was implemented especially during the advent of industrialization, of changing political regimes, and of the rise of capitalism, when the issue of governing a population and its reproductive power became closely interwoven with that of production and capital accumulation. In this historical context, housing became one of the fundamental institutions by which to govern the social. Dwelling was not only the space necessary to guarantee those acceptable living conditions needed for societal reproduction, but also a perfect *dispositif* capable of taming its inhabitants by stimulating aspirations towards ‘more respectable’ middle-class values. Since then, every social housing project has been deeply embedded in a persistent tension between aspirations to emancipation and paternalist control. This condition can be observed from the onset of the first social housing experiments with their attempt to limit, by spatial means, ‘immoral’ behaviour. For instance, the small cottages designed for workers by John Wood the Younger in the late eighteenth century and Henry Roberts’ proposals for lodging houses designed for the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes (SICLC) in the mid nineteenth century. Many of the most recent social housing realisations also illustrate this condition. (figs. 3.1 and 3.2)

Keeping in mind the ambiguous nature of social housing and the above definitions, it seems necessary to mobilise a set of specific and innovative critical categories when attempting to conduct an architectural assessment of a social housing project. Rather than focusing on more traditional architectural features, such categories would make it possible to shift attention to the subject of a housing project; the tenure status or, in other words, the specific form and institutional framework governing possession and use of a unit; and the ownership model, including the question of land accessibility and its control. While these are all aspects that are traditionally *not* part of an architectural discussion on housing but rather understood by architects as preconditions or subsequent conditions to design, we suggest considering these critical for a ‘social’ assessment of the modern home, also considering today’s challenges.

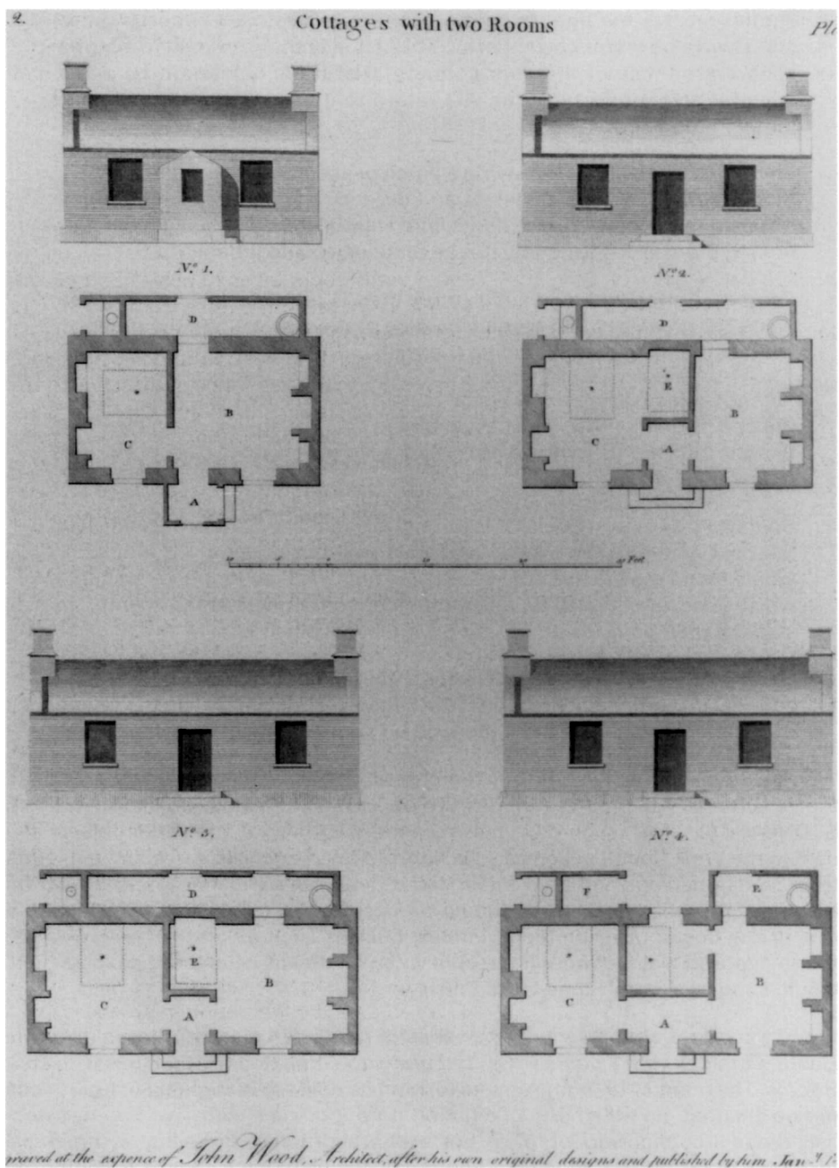
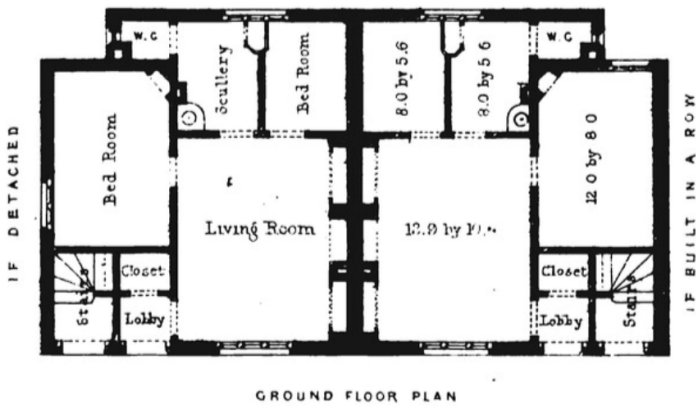
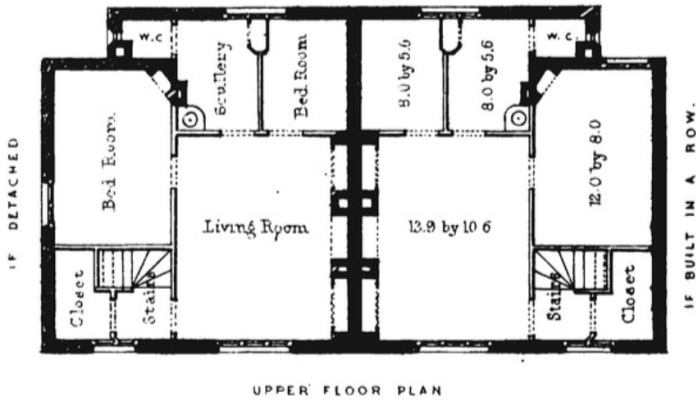
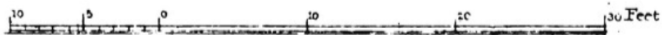


Figure 3.1: John Wood the Younger, cottage for one or two workers, 1806. Theoretical project, plan. The schemes for cottages developed at the end of the 18th century by architect John Wood the Younger and aimed at improving the conditions of labourers' housing reveal how the notion of privacy and domesticity cultivated by the wealthy was projected onto the lower classes' way of life



Note.— If one or two Feet be added to the depth of these Houses, another Bed Closet 5 feet wide may be taken from the large Bed Room.



By G. S. M. to the Queen.

Figure 3.2: Henry Roberts, proposal for a model house for four families designed for the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes (SICLC), 1851. Theoretical project, plan. During the 19th century, the Society for Improving the Conditions of the Labouring Classes (SICLC) developed new typologies for affordable, collective urban dwellings in collaboration with architect Henry Roberts. The internal layouts of the units were devised to allow the separation of space for the sake of privacy, and to reinforce the authority of the parents

THE SUBJECT OF MODERN HOUSING

In a sketch of the Immeuble Wanner in Geneva (1928-29)—an application of the Immeubles-Villas concept of 1923-25—Le Corbusier portrays a man shown “dressed in trunks and tank top pounding a punching bag placed in a *jardin-suspendu*” and a woman, watching from a balcony, her hands resting on a railing on which a blanket hangs—“as much a symbol for her as the punching bag for him”.⁶ Several decades later, a photograph of the House of the Future by Alison and Peter Smithson (1956), a model home designed for the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition, portrays a man sitting on a futuristic armchair, absorbed in reading what seem to be important documents, and next to him, a woman standing behind a kitchen trolley, busy carrying out domestic chores. These two projects, despite being widely considered two of the most advanced ideas of dwelling of their time and designed by some of the most prominent members of CIAM, reveal how gender roles were traditionally understood and how the social agenda of the domestic space as a place of political and gender conflict was avoided.

Who is therefore the subject of the modern house? Can we recognise an underlying contradiction between the social emancipatory aspiration of modern housing and the forms of social relations that this domestic architecture engendered? It is not easy to answer these questions given the rich and varied set of ideas, personalities, and experiences that contribute to the definition of modern housing. However, if we look back at some of the main contributions to the definition of modern housing, it is evident how the modern architect refrained from the process of individuation of those subjectivities that emerged with the formation of the capitalist city and the advent of industrialization. Let us remember how, with the rise of metropolitan living in the nineteenth century, a new set of living typologies emerged, especially in North American cities, where boarding houses, residential hotels, and rooming hotels came to represent an increasingly diffuse way of living and where social mobility and the uprootedness of workers became common features of society. These typologies, rather than the traditional family, addressed a new subject—the transient single man or woman that moved to the city in search of their professional fortune.⁷ One of the earliest forms of these lodgings was the boarding house, where a family could rent rooms to lodgers for a price that included both housekeeping and meals. Often run by women, boarding houses were commercial enterprises that generated a major social revolution in the history of domestic space—namely, the professionalisation of domestic labour.⁸ Unlike in the family household, where domestic labour was unpaid, the services of a boarding house were provided in exchange for payment. While reformers considered domestic labour a wife’s ‘natural’ duty, thanks to types such as the

boarding house they were revealed for what they were: burdensome and time-consuming forms of labour. This is why boarding houses were considered a form of wifely insubordination, a threat to the very ideology of marriage, which implied that work at home was something that women exchanged for the security and protection provided by their husbands.⁹

In the late nineteenth century, boarding houses were gradually replaced by new typologies of temporary living, like the ‘residential hotel’, for instance, large structures with centralised housekeeping and a multitude of communal facilities. This type of living accommodation was suitable for both transient professionals and wealthier, more permanent residents who chose to live permanently in a hotel to free themselves from the responsibility of managing a large household.¹⁰ As soon as this way of life gained momentum among the upper class, it was translated into a more common and affordable form of lodging such as the mid-priced rooming hotel for workers. Although these were commercial enterprises marked by class division and racial discrimination, they offered not only cheap and accessible accommodation but also the chance for many people to break free from unwanted family ties and to reject normative domestic arrangements.

It is therefore not by chance that Karel Teige, the Czech representative to the 1929 CIAM on low-cost dwelling, recognised how the modern hotel can be considered “one of the first precursors of the proletarian dwelling when applied to the conditions of a socialist society”.¹¹ For Teige, the problem of the minimum dwelling, and thus the problem of dwelling for people dependent on the subsistence minimum, cannot be solved by adapting the freestanding villa or large middle-class city apartment to the economic possibilities of the lower classes, but needs to be based on overcoming “the family and its associated household as the core ingredient of all reforms in housing”. For Teige, a new dwelling culture would need to be based on “proletarian dwellings without a family-based household and alien to bourgeois dwelling habits”.¹² For him, projects like Le Corbusier’s Immeuble Wanner in Geneva were superficially conceived as a “so-called collective house” for those “who have enough money to pay for such a lifestyle”.¹³ The search for new forms of collective dwellings capable of bypassing the family clearly collided with the 1929 CIAM agenda and programme, where the various projects that were presented, analysed, and discussed were categorised quite conventionally according to categories such as the single-, two-, and multi-family dwellings, as if the nuclear family, in the general architects’ imaginary, constituted the only possible form of household. With few exceptions, the limited typological offer typical of initial modern housing design was no different from what would later become the dominant typological offer in postwar modern housing, generally characterised by two- or three-bedroom apartments which not only catered to the nuclear

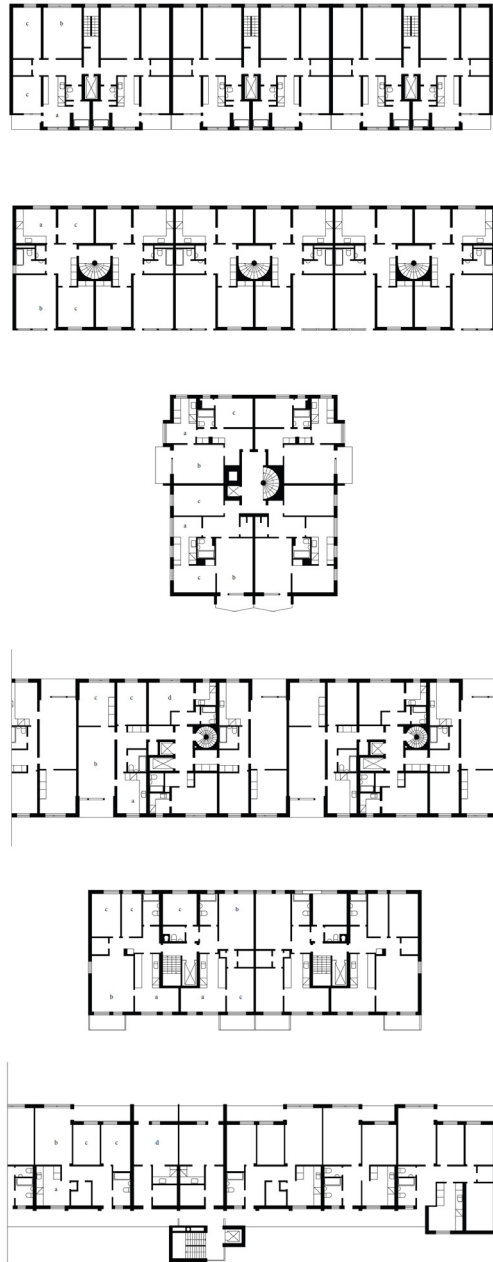


Figure 3.3: Million Homes Program, Sweden, 1965-74. Multiple 3-room types, plan. The majority of the housing units built during the Million Homes Program in Sweden targeted, through the typical 3-rooms apartment, the nuclear family. Drawings by Julius Seniunas

family as its main social subject, but which also promoted a rigidly defined understanding of domestic roles, familiar hierarchies, and power relations, as spatially transcribed in the unit's plan organisation. A clear example of this type is one of the largest postwar housing programmes initiated in Europe, the Million Homes Programme developed in Sweden between 1965 and 1974. Here, despite typological variations at the scale of the building, most housing units were regular three-bedroom apartments, designed for a typical family with two children. While in the imaginary of the time there was no space any longer for a man pounding a punching bag but rather for the busy bureaucrat, little seemed to have changed in terms of home decorum and the social roles of family members. (fig. 3.3)

Today, this typological limitation represents a legacy that is hard to change. At a time when the material conditions of the postwar housing stock require an urgent upgrade, recent demographic changes brought about by migration processes, the ageing of the population, and the emergence of new households all call for a typological reinvention that needs to be carried out within both the rigidly defined framework of postwar housing blocks and a set of often rigid regulations and guidelines.¹⁴

THE LAND FOR THE MODERN HOUSE

On the first page of *The Radiant City*, Le Corbusier anticipates, in large bold characters, what seems to be the precondition—"the decision", in his terms—for the development of the modern city: "the mobilization of the land for the common good".¹⁵ For the French architect, the institution of private property represented the major impediment to comprehensive planning and the realization of the modern city, and the primary cause of the dreadful living conditions of the present. It is the "ferociousness of a few private interests", writes Le Corbusier, that has "given rise to the suffering of countless individuals".¹⁶

According to CIAM, if the cities of the industrial revolution were not planned according to the needs of production processes, it is because of the interests of private property. Consequently, not only were urban centres unable to accommodate the influx of workers, but they could not give space to their own natural growth. While living conditions quickly degraded, the city spread to the countryside "as a disease".¹⁷ Against this condition, CIAM architects recognised the possibility of land expropriation as the solution to the problems. While, according to the Athens Charter, "the ground should be open to mobilization whenever it is a matter of the general interest" and land-owners should be compensated for the "fair market value to be assessed before projects are worked out",¹⁸ in the pages of *The Radiant City*, Le Corbusier, in

perhaps an even more dramatic tone, calls for “the destruction of the legal system” in order for society to have “the entire land surface of the country at its disposal”.¹⁹ Yet this does not presuppose the elimination of private property at large but something necessary to “improve the assets represented by our land for the benefit of mankind”. How to proceed? “Let the lawyers find a way”, was Le Corbusier’s optimistic answer.²⁰ What seems to be suggested here is a regime where private individuals would continue to have the right to sell and buy land, but where authorities would have the right over land alienation in the event of disputes between a ‘common good’ and private interests.

CIAM architects and planners believed in the possibility of regaining control over planning and the process of transformation of the city by controlling land speculation and through the redistribution of resources according to rational criteria that prioritise the common good. As the issue of land ownership is closely interwoven with the housing question, achieving a classless city—namely, a place where every inhabitant would be allowed to live in neighbourhoods without class distinctions—requires a process of land redistribution. Yet, as James Holston observes, a similar legislative power to the one dreamed of by CIAM—the possibility of expropriating land without recourse to the courts—allowed Baron Haussmann to realise his profound transformation of Paris from 1852 onwards.²¹ The influence of Haussmann on Le Corbusier and on CIAM planners is well known, but if we look at the experience of Paris, it is doubtful whether the instrument of land collectivization would be enough to guarantee an egalitarian distribution of resources. As highlighted by Holston in his thorough critique of the modern city and of the tenets of modern architecture, the Haussmannization of many European cities solved the housing question not by producing a classless city. On the contrary, the ‘surgical incisions’ operated on the city fabric led to the removal of the ‘dangerous’ classes from the heart of the city and their relocation in more peripheral locations.²²

While the housing issue has always been one of accessibility to land as correctly understood by CIAM, the practical discussion over the tools to initiate a process of redistribution seems to remain on an abstract level and linked to a rather general hope. The possibility of expropriation and compensation as set up in Paris and, after that experience, in many European cities unfolded into a condition where land for public housing could in fact only be provided, in most cases, at the edge of the city. These housing estates were often not only located peripherally, but the land for these projects was made public and accessible in the form of garden estates.

Privatization of the land and the consequent high land prices are the first barrier, and often an insurmountable one, to the development of public housing, especially in locations that are not seen as disadvantageous by inhabitants. Yet, locations that were once peripheral and distant from urban centres have

today become part of the rapidly growing city, often well connected through public transportation networks. While within the current market conditions there are limited possibilities of making land available for social housing initiatives, the large sites of postwar housing estates should be understood as an asset for possible processes of (housing) densification. While postwar buildings need refurbishment and retrofitting, we should also look at the potential embedded in the large open spaces where they are located and which are often in the hands of public housing administrators. An exemplary case is the Linkeroever in Antwerp, a large modern neighbourhood characterised by high-rise slabs in a green setting. Here, the large spaces between the buildings, which are the property of the same public housing agencies that own the current housing blocks, hold an enormous potential for a densification process that could be conducted in tandem with the upgrading of existing buildings. While Antwerp's City Architect and the housing agencies involved are developing ideas and projects that recognise such potential, the larger impasse to be overcome is represented by current planning regulations, which strictly limit the number of social housing units in the area.²³ This example illustrates a widespread condition of large-scale postwar housing: an available stock of public land whose social potential demands careful consideration.

THE TENURE OF THE MODERN DWELLING

In 1926 Hannes Meyer designed for an exhibition the experimental Co-op Interieur prototype to illustrate his essay "Die Neue Welt" (The new world), a manifesto about contemporary life.²⁴ The interior contained several foldable objects: a bed, a table (topped by a gramophone in the image), two chairs (one of which is hung on the wall), and a small shelving unit stocked with jars. The room's single bed indicates that the space was intended for one inhabitant, while the two chairs imply that the inhabitant would also have the means to receive guests. In proposing the Co-op Interieur as a model of living, Meyer seems to have believed that the modern housing project should be based on a cooperative spirit and on the sharing of resources among single occupants.²⁵ In his proposal, Meyer was inspired by the proliferation of residential hotels and boarding houses in the large industrial metropolises of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and especially by the emergence in the US of the first housing cooperatives such as the "Home Clubs" designed by Philip G. Hubert in 1883.²⁶ These clubs represented both a new typology of collective living and a new economic model in which residents were shareholders who participated in all aspects of the building's organisation and development. Hubert's "Home Clubs" can be considered the earliest form of co-operative apartment buildings.

With the start of the twentieth century, European cities saw the emergence of experimental models of dwelling tenure. In Germany, Lily Braun proposed the development of apartment buildings with centralised food preparation, housekeeping, childcare, in-house kindergarten, and recreational facilities. Inspired by American experiments in collective housing, Braun proposed the formation of cooperative societies that could provide kitchenless housing units. Although her proposal was initially met with scepticism, cooperative apartments known as *Einküchenhäuser* (one-kitchen buildings) later become popular in Europe. A notable example of this typology is the “Service House”, which was conceived and built by Otto Fick in Copenhagen in 1903. It offered living spaces supported by services such as housework and food preparation carried out by service staff;²⁷ this model was further developed by construction foreman Oskar Schwank, who founded the Wohn- und Speisehausgenossenschaft (Dwelling and boarding cooperative society) in 1915.²⁸ Through the cooperative, Schwank was able to build the Amerikanerhaus in Wiedikon, Zurich, a housing block which, as its name suggests, was inspired by the American residential hotel. The block comprised forty-five kitchenless dwelling units and communal services, including shops, a professional kitchen, and a public restaurant.

Although several modern architects imagined alternative housing tenure as appropriate to modern housing, the legacy of these early-twentieth-century experiments was largely ignored by CIAM, which found in the public authorities and housing institutions better support for the large-scale housing ideas it aimed to build. And although social housing is traditionally associated to a rental form of tenure, in the heyday of the welfare state, the tacit political goal of many liberal-democratic states in Europe was to build a ‘property-owning democracy’. Even social housing projects, with their rigidly defined housing units modelled on the nuclear family, trained dwellers in the virtues of a privately owned domestic space. When not privatised, the postwar social housing stock was administered through traditional rental contracts, rigidly governing relations between tenant and landlord, generally favouring the latter, protecting their financial interests and impeding the right of use of inhabitants.²⁹

Within this tenure system, inhabitants remained the passive users of their living space with limited participation in its administration and management. In light of the rising management and maintenance costs of public housing units, especially in the case of the rapidly aging postwar housing stock, it would be beneficial to define forms to bypass the rigid institutional setting of traditional rental contracts and support forms of decentralised governance, developing socially empowering forms of collective living and providing better social and environmental services to the population. In the Netherlands, for example, the approval of the new Dutch Housing Act (*Woningwet*, 2015) makes

possible decentralised governance within public housing schemes.³⁰ While this requires capacity and time that might not always be available, it could represent a radical change to the way life has traditionally been organised and managed within postwar housing.

CONCLUSION

Discussion of the transformation of large-scale postwar social housing estates prompts several questions regarding the physical conditions of this vast housing stock. Yet it also raises questions regarding the adaptability to new social and demographic transformations and to changing welfare conditions. Housing Europe, the European Federation of Public, Cooperative, and Social Housing, has identified in its recent report today's challenges with three terms—affordability, availability, and sustainability—which relate to rising construction and energy costs, changing demographics, and recent migrations, in addition to the energy performance of new and old housing stock.³¹ Many of today's pressing issues were disregarded by the modern architects, who did nothing to interpret and develop some of the ideas on housing developed in the nineteenth and at the start of the twentieth century. These concepts would not only have made 'modern housing' more fit to face the challenges of today, but would also have advanced a more socially informed architectural project.

NOTES

1. Miles Glendinning, *Mass Housing: Modern Architecture and State Power – a Global History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 89.
2. Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing* (London: Routledge, 2012), 49.
3. Anna Granath Hansson and Björn Lundgren, "Defining Social Housing: A Discussion on the Suitable Criteria", *Housing, Theory and Society* 36, no. 2 (2019): 149.
4. Anna Granath Hansson and Björn Lundgren, 149–66.
5. Gilles Deleuze and David Lapoujade, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 113–21.
6. Lars Lerup, *After the City* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 182
7. On this, see: Paul Groth, *Living Downtown, The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

8. For a comprehensive history of boarding, see: Wendy Gamber, *The Boarding House in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007) and Dogma and Black Square, “Towards a History of the Boarding House”, in *Like a Rolling Stone: Revisiting the Architecture of the Boarding House* (Milan: Black Square, 2016), 22-41.
9. See: Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1982).
10. Groth, *Living Downtown*, 38.
11. Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 325.
12. Teige, 325.
13. Teige, 334.
14. On the challenges for social housing programmes in Europe today, see: Housing Europe, “The State of Housing in Europe 2023”, < <https://www.stateofhousing.eu/#p=1>>
15. Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City* (New York: The Orion Press, 1967), 1.
16. Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter* (New York: Grossman, 1973), 93–94.
17. Le Corbusier, 95.
18. Le Corbusier, 96.
19. Le Corbusier, 189.
20. Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, 189.
21. James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
22. Holston, 48–49.
23. Christoph Grafe and Bart Decroos (eds.), *Linkeroever: Sprong over de Schelde* (Antwerp: Vlaams Architectuurinstituut, 2017).
24. Hannes Meyer, “Die Neue Welt”, *Das Werk* 13, no. 7 (1926): 205–24.
25. Pier Vittorio Aureli, “A Room without Ownership”, in Aristeidēs Antonas, Pier Vittorio Aureli, and Raquel Franklin, *Hannes Meyer Co-op Interieur* (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2015), 7–16.
26. Charles Matlack Price, “A Pioneer in Apartment House Architecture: Memoir on Philip G. Hubert’s Work”, *Architectural Record* 36 (July 1974): 74–76.
27. Dirk Urban Vestbro, “History of Cohousing: Internationally and in Sweden”, in Dick Urban Vestbro (ed.) *Living Together: Cohousing Ideas and Realities around the World* (Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology. Division of Urban and Regional Studies, 2010), 45.
28. Norbert Schoenauer, “Early European Collective Habitation: From Utopia to Reality” in Karen A. Frank and Sherry Ahrentzen, eds., *New Households, New Housing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1989), 55-56.
29. On this topic, see: Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

30. Andrea Migotto, “Towards a new Social Home Rethinking Social Housing Models, Practices and Architecture in Flanders” (PhD diss., KU Leuven, 2023), 135-190.
31. Housing Europe, “The State of Housing in Europe 2023”.

PART 2

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE 'UNBUILT' SPACE

Forms, Categories,
and Terms

BELOW THE SHADOWS

Federico Coricelli and Nicola Russi

Y a-t-il rien de plus élégant que la ligne pure d'un viaduc dans un site mouvementé et de plus varié que ses substructures s'enfonçant dans les vallonnements à la rencontre du sol?¹

—Le Corbusier

CONTEXT

Postwar Europe served as the canvas for the aspirations of the Modern Movement to be realised on an unprecedented scale. To fight the housing shortage, each nation organised reconstruction plans amounting to tens of thousands of residential units per year, encouraging the production of modernist neighbourhoods. In Italy, the Ina-Casa Plan led to the construction of approximately one million dwellings in fourteen years (1949-1963).² Aside from the plan's broad social and political effects, the architecture of the new Ina neighbourhoods best embodied the crossover happening at that time between international spatial ideals and construction models, on the one hand, and the limitations or expectations imposed by localised inputs, on the other—a recurrent negotiation that will characterise the 1950s. The Ina-Casa planning guidelines encouraged the use of locally available materials and labour-intensive construction techniques to echo a certain continuity of vernacular aesthetics for the realised buildings. At the same time, the Ina-Casa Plan triggered a marked rationalisation in the organisation of domestic space all over the country, as well as the standardisation of both spatial arrangements and technical solutions. The layout of the dwellings, for instance, aligned with the principles disseminated by contemporary international examples, yielding the success of functionalist organisational principles.

However, while the design of domestic spaces and building types grew more and more specialised, another field of architectural expertise did not enjoy the same success in those years. In opposition to perfectly working interiors, the design of the open spaces and the patches of landscape around the buildings remained a more ambiguous domain, with design categories, reference models, and ideal objectives being less clear. This lack does not mean that

Italian postwar architects ignored the problem. Rather, the urgency of a fast provision of new homes and the reconstruction of destroyed cities made of the unbuilt space a secondary matter of concern compared to the mission of providing a shelter for thousands of people.

In a retrospective analysis of the Ina-Casa Plan, Bernardo Secchi stressed the significant disconnection between the features of the new urban areas created by the plan and its architecture. He noted: “In reality, the dark crowd of Ina-Casa realisations was not at all Mumfordian: five or six storeys, neighbourhoods as pieces or fragments, extroverted and incomplete, lack of accurate design of open spaces and their referral.”³ Secchi felt that the Ina-Casa Plan’s episodic nature failed to propose a cohesive idea for a new postwar city. He expanded on this point by explaining that some Mediterranean European countries—like Spain, Italy, or France—approached reconstruction plans without the urbanistic coherence present in Scandinavian, Dutch, or German contexts. Zooming in on the Italian case, Secchi noticed that these unconvincing results largely depended on the unpreparedness of the administrative infrastructure of the plan: on the one hand, the postwar urgency to increase the employment rate prevented more structural urbanistic reforms, given the lack of actual time to discuss and produce them; on the other, it was also due to the planning culture of the early years of the Republic.

To better understand the limits of the Italian planning culture in the immediate years after the war, two leading figures can be considered, both closely related to the institutions that governed the Ina-Casa Plan: Bruno Zevi, the founder of the Association for Organic Architecture (APAO), and the industrialist and patron Adriano Olivetti, who served as president of the National Institute of Urbanism from 1960 to 1969. The former famously contributed to the development of the *Manuale dell’Architetto* published in 1946, a building compendium for the reconstruction intended for all architects and full of technical solutions and technical details derived from the local Italian vernacular tradition. The latter developed a philosophy of living and working based on the principle of (local) communities as the main decision-making and political subject of the new democratic state. Olivetti enthusiastically stated in 1951 that in major cities like Rome, Milan, and Turin some “organic self-sufficient neighbourhoods”⁴ (*quartieri organici autosufficienti*) were starting to be built, highlighting at the same time the satellite condition of the Ina-Casa neighbourhoods and their organic urban form. Both Zevi and Olivetti understood that the real reasoning behind the Ina-Casa Plan, and the only way for it to succeed, was to fulfil its political and social goals from the ‘bottom’, based on the involvement of the local communities in the reconstruction effort. This view was a pragmatic way to embrace the profound territorial and social differences of the country, while accepting the fragmented nature of the

Ina-Casa Plan at the urbanistic level in place of a more unitarian modernist approach. Inevitably, this organicist and bottom-up culture was not able to build a consistent vocabulary for open space in the postwar neighbourhoods, leaving each project to deal with its landscape and ground conditions as an isolated problem.

It is possible to argue that the Italian postwar attitude towards open space fell within the broader modern understanding of natural resources and, in particular, of land as appropriable for development: thus ‘unbuilt space’ was primarily a synonym for *available* space, as resources were considered limitless and reproducible through emerging mass mechanization techniques.⁵ In a context of potentially infinite growth, the open space could be perceived primarily as a ‘quantity’ to be placed in between buildings, focusing more on the issues of economy and density of the outcome rather than on the specific spatial qualities.

Returning to the difference between buildings and urban qualities, the postwar neighbourhood can be framed within a debate on the typological forms of the built fabric that spanned from the mega-structural approach to the tendency in favour of the vernacular in more small-scale typologies, building a rich vocabulary for built solutions. This same richness cannot be found in the case of the open spaces, though, or in how to organise the unbuilt ground. Causes are various and open for interpretation. In 1953, for instance, the French magazine *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* dedicated two issues to Italian architecture. In one, curated by the magazine's Italian correspondent Vittoriano Viganò and focusing on dwelling culture, the picture that emerges is an enthusiastic account of all the architectural features proposed by Italian architects and the peculiar integration between architecture and applied arts.⁶ Interestingly, the only mark of criticism was posed by the landscape architect Pietro Porcinai in his report on green space and landscape design. Porcinai claimed that:

in vain, the urbanists, especially in Italy, proclaim that cities and houses must be built in greenery. Only architects are convinced of this truth. The public authorities provide neither the support nor the guidelines that could make the project more effective. [...] In Italy, there are no achievements like those in the Nordic countries. Here they have encountered too many obstacles. However, there are so many attempts by passionate amateurs!⁷

What emerges from Porcinai's bitter note, not unlike Secchi's criticism, is a concise expression of the negative shadow that Italian bureaucracy cast on the progressiveness and qualitative results for urban design in the country. This specific trait of the Italian postwar culture represents an anomaly, as urbanism

has, since the early years of modernity, produced both innovative typologies of public space hand in hand with the development of new building typologies. If the boulevard, to take a telling archetype, is the key invention of nineteenth-century urbanism, what are its equivalents in the regional variations of modernism? In the postwar Italian interpretations of the modernist neighbourhood, a combination of cultural and social factors prevented the development of an organic vocabulary of its spatial figures. Simply put, more effort was placed on the development of building typologies. In contrast, it would be reductionist to interpret the Italian postwar open space design as a mere vacuum in the formation of the new neighbourhood units.

Comparing the Italian experience with the richness of international experimentations, the following sections examine the possibility of retroactively revealing categories and ideas of open space that were latent but still operational in the postwar period.

PLAYLIST OF VOIDS

Even if the experience of Ina-Casa cannot be detached from its contextual peculiarities, it is useful to read it in comparison with the broader spectrum of international projects developed in the same decades. Could the Italian lack of tradition in the modernist open space be linked—conceptually or materially—to the contextualist or ad-hoc strategies tested in other European countries? Such a question can be quickly answered by looking closer at recurrent figures of open space in different modernist neighbourhoods. Even if not explicitly framed, it is possible to argue that different projects in space and time adopted analogous strategies, building a rich panorama of forms, figures, and spaces that go beyond any reductive functional categorisation or the typical narrative of the undefined modernist green landscape in between towers and slabs.

To identify recurrent logics in the design of open spaces, this section discusses a lexicon—a “playlist of voids”— as a means to retroactively read the various open space design strategies and their relationship to the modernist neighbourhood. The families of voids that are here identified constitute a fabricated, posthumous vocabulary that hopefully helps to read some open space forms in postwar residential neighbourhoods as a coherent variation on similar themes. This vocabulary defines an initial conceptual classification of the open space and subsumes, yet accepts, the nuances being tested in specific Italian neighbourhoods. This is an initial explorative effort and is open to being expanded and reworked, either through the study of additional projects or through the juxtaposition and combination of the same terms we discuss below.



Figure 4.1: Playlist of voids. Collage by authors

We suggest using the concept of playlist,⁸ as a classification method that escapes any ordering principle, emphasising the filters applied in the selection. The terms of the playlist refer to a specific condition investigated in one or more projects that suggest a distinct and recognisable design methodology. The selection of these cases aims to refine tools to then read, in the following section, some Italian postwar Ina-Casa neighbourhoods. (fig. 4.1)

INTO THE WILD

Cases:

- Le Corbusier, *Firminy Vert*, Firminy, 1957-1967
- Otto-Iivari Meurman (general plan), *Tapiola*, Helsinki. 1952-56

In most cases, postwar neighbourhoods played a pioneering role in the expansion of urban areas. Le Corbusier's vision for *Firminy* was based on pure prismatic volumes erupting from the fronds of trees like Photoshop cut-out figures. The integrity of the surrounding landscape preserves the distinction between the hyper-controlled building and the wild, unspoiled character of nature. During reconstruction, Scandinavian countries proposed a hybrid urban model combining the garden city concept with tower-and-slab neighbourhoods. It is uncommon to find a photograph of the new town of *Tapiola* without a tree trunk in the foreground. The Finnish neighbourhood extends the relationship between buildings and nature to the extent that we are immersed in a forest city instead of a garden city.

REGROUNDING

Cases:

- Alison and Peter Smithson, *Robin Hood Gardens*, Tower Hamlets, London, 1968-1972
- George Candilis, Alexis Josic, and Shadrach Woods, *Le Mirail*, Toulouse, 1964-1979
- Roberto Gabetti and Aimaro Isola, *Residenziale Ovest (Talponia)*, Ivrea, 1975

In *Robin Hood Gardens*, the central space is created with an artificial hill placed between two buildings. This artificial horizon, made with natural elements, establishes a dynamic perspective game between the interior and the exterior of the built mass, where the circulation is organised by the Smithson's recurrent element of the streets in the sky. In Toulouse, the new town of *Le Mirail* counterbalances the never-ending zig-zag layout of the slabs with an articulated landscape of sloping lawns and playgrounds. Candilis, Josic, and Woods here use the topography to bridge the human scale and the *bigness* of the modernist building. Another fundamental aspect of the void in postwar collective housing is the boundary between the built and the natural environment. A hapax in Gabetti and Isola's production, the *Residenziale Ovest* in Ivrea, has no path permeating the exterior lawn and the façade of this two-storey crescent.

The crescent-shaped plan defines the courtyard's shape and compresses it into a hill that reaches the height of the roof.

URBAN POCKETS

Cases:

- London City Council, *Roehampton*, London, 1952-1955
- George Candilis, Alexis Josic, and Shadrach Woods, *Le Mirail*, Toulouse, 1964-1979

The functionalist relationship between residential and service buildings is one of the typical criticisms of modernism. Interventions as large-scale as the Alton Estate in London can condense the Athens Charter's programmatic guidelines into the spaces between residential slabs. Paved ground portions enclose small libraries, kindergartens, and community houses that are separated from other public spaces. Team X also takes advantage of the contrast between the high-density housing slabs and life on the ground: in *Le Mirail* in Toulouse, the void facing the linear building structure is punctuated by enclosed public services areas with their dedicated open spaces.

BLACK-SCAPES

Cases:

- Émile Aillaud, *Les Courtilières*, Pantin, 1955-1958
- André Lurçat, *Saint Denis Avenue Fabien*, Paris, 1946-1950

The *trentes glorieuses* were defined by the doctrine of infinite mass consumption. Urban planners prioritised the car lane as the city's primary infrastructure to modernise the metropolitan area. Even in an early postmodern variation of a *grand ensemble*, such as the one designed by E. Aillaud, the main street divides the curved mega-courtyard into two sections. This type of urban device introduced another scale by overlapping two distinct urban conditions—that of the pedestrian and of the motorist—in large-scale neighbourhoods. The grid of orthogonal slabs is superimposed on the street plan in Saint-Denis's rigorous application of the modernist ethos. The car lanes are so prevalent that buildings are connected by bridges to facilitate their passage.

GREEN HEART

Cases:

- Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, *Harar*, Milano, 1949
- Per-Axel Ekholm and Sidney White, *Baronbackarna*, Örebro, 1955
- Émile Aillaud, *Les Courtillères*, Pantin, 1955-1958

In one of Milan's first postwar neighbourhoods, Figini and Pollini combine the single-family house scheme—a type preferred in legislation—with high-density slabs. Slabs mark the border between the *outside* and the *inside*, where collective services like schools and sport facilities are located. The central rectangular void structures the entire neighbourhood, introducing a protected space reminiscent of the prewar socialist urban typology of the *hof*. The same strategy is applied with an organic flower-shaped void in Örebro in the *Baronbackarna* neighbourhood. In this case, a set of open courtyards (the petals of a flower) is connected to a central green area, placing a degree of intimacy between the two kinds of open spaces. Aillaud's projects define organic voids shaped in the form of clouds. In *Les Courtillères*, a park is carved from curved slabs, generating semi-curved pockets on the perimeter of the central area.

COVERED LANDSCAPE

Cases:

- Le Corbusier, *Unité d'habitation*, Marseille, 1946-1952
- Renaat Braem, *Kiel*, Antwerp, 1950

The first *Unité* by Le Corbusier emphasises the views through the *pilotis* by rotating the building toward the main access street. A framed horizon therefore extends the depth of the covered landscape. Using the first of Le Corbusier's five principles, Renaat Braem constructed several modernist neighbourhoods in postwar Belgium. An organic landscape intersects the geometric lines of the open ground floors of the residential slabs in the *Kiel* neighbourhood unit in Antwerp. The maximum contrast is reached when artificial structures replace trees as the landscape's source of shade.

STREETS IN THE SKY

Cases:

- Greater London Council, *Thamesmead*, London, 1967-71
- Giancarlo De Carlo, *Villaggio Matteotti*, Terni, 1970-1976

By designing bridges and elevated platforms around the year 1970, several architects radically altered the distinction between pedestrian circulation and street traffic. This strategy blurred the dichotomy between architecture and open space, by attempting to include public space *in* the buildings as an architectural element. The concept was developed by the Smithsons for the Golden Lane competition, where they experimented with building access using a balcony distribution that also served as a transition between the exterior public space and the interior private realm. For the Smithsons, the streets in the sky concept would allow for a looser concentration among individuals, beyond the mere separation of circulation patterns. In *Thamesmead*, a neighbourhood made famous by Stanley Kubrik's *A Clockwork Orange*, the circulation void is articulated by a series of vertical and horizontal concrete elements. In his *Villaggio Matteotti*, Giancarlo De Carlo implemented elevated exterior platforms as a hybrid space, which can be used as both places to stay and for circulation.

DECONSTRUCTED COURTYARDS

Cases:

- Jacques Henri-Labourdette and Roger Bolleau, *Grande Ensemble*, Sarcelles, 1954-1976
- Sigfried Nassuth, *Bijlmermeer*, Amsterdam, 1966-1982

The critique of the urban block of the nineteenth century and its redistribution into isolated slabs could serve as an effective reductionist definition for the entire modernist project. The open courtyard is probably the leading urban figure for most modernist neighbourhoods. In the case of the *Grande Ensemble* of Sarcelles, slabs shaped after an organic plan surround a central single space. The scale of such an open space is no longer the one of the urban courtyard but of the park. The scientific approach of pre-war Cartesian proposals is replaced in the postwar period by a hypertrophic dimension of the courtyard. In Amsterdam's *Bijlmermeer*, the courtyard becomes a structuring hexagonal grid wrapped by continuous slabs.

NEOPLASTIC MOSAIC

Cases:

- Jaap Bakema, Jo van den Broek, Frans van Gool, and Jan Stokla, *Klein Driene*, Rotterdam, 1956-58
- Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Lafayette Park*, Detroit, 1955-1963

During the 1949 CIAM held in Bergamo, the Dutch group presented a neighbourhood unit proposal composed of a mix of orthogonal housing typologies allowing for different kinds of open spaces. These mosaic tiles could be grouped to provide various degrees of intimacy, from public spaces on the street to private front gardens. A few years later, the project was realised in the *Klein Driene* neighbourhood. Each mosaic tile is organised as an ‘urban tatami’ rotating around a core of public space. If the modules of the Dutch CIAM were based on equivalence, then Mies and Hilberseimer experiment with a different hierarchy in the *Lafayette Park* ‘mosaic’ of voids. The neighbourhood combines elements of the American garden city and the European modernist tower and slab layout. A central park organises the intervention according to a clear hierarchy, from the larger scale for public use to the private garden of an individual. This orthogonal organization of voids allows the development of a taxonomy for each element. The following is a list of the elements of *Lafayette Park*, arranged from urban to residential scale: car spaces; forest (not designed nature); park (designed nature); green verge (placeholder greenery); linear paths; semi-courtyard (open spaces framed by buildings); enclosed collective space; private garden. (figs. 4.2 and 4.3)

READING THE MOSAIC OF VOIDS IN THREE ITALIAN NEIGHBOURHOODS

Using the playlist of voids, is it possible to offer a more nuanced, precise, and perhaps indulgent analysis of the Italian postwar neighbourhoods? To do this, three exemplary neighbourhoods are considered: the *Bernabò Brea* in Genoa, *Mirafiori Sud* in Turin, and the *Gratosoglio* in Milan. All of them were developed within the framework of the Ina-Casa Plan.⁹ The case studies are situated in Italy’s most industrially developed region, which served as the epicentre for the country’s postwar reconstruction and as its major economic engine. Milan, Turin, and Genoa were governed by comparable political and economic forces since their functioning was complementary.¹⁰ In many instances, the logics of expansion were intertwined with integral components of a larger productive

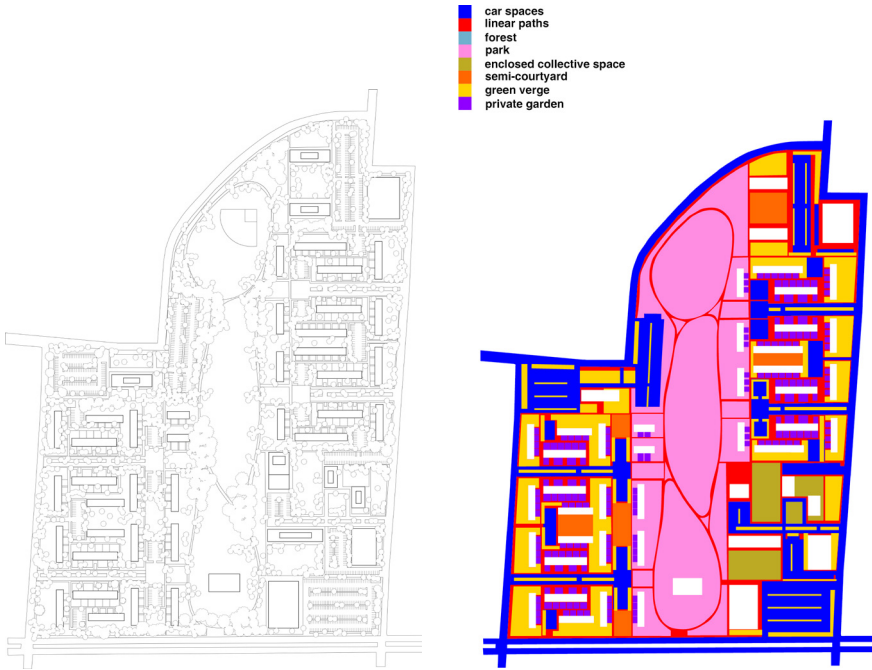


Figure 4.2: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Pavilion Apartments and Town Houses, Lafayette Park, Detroit, MI, Site plan. 1955. Drawing by authors in collaboration with Federica Pessotto, Enrica Prataviera, and Lucia Rebolino

Figure 4.3: Void analysis of Lafayette Park in Detroit. Drawing by the authors in collaboration with Federica Pessotto, Enrica Prataviera, and Lucia Rebolino

process led by heavy industry. Not by chance, the three neighbourhoods share the same typological and urban layout. Yet, unlike the similarity of their master plans and massing strategies, the public and open spaces are organised very differently.

The neighbourhoods of *Bernabò Brea* by Luigi Daneri in Genoa,¹¹ of *Miraftori Sud* in Turin (designed by the technical bureau of the municipality of Turin)¹², and of *Gratosoglio* by BBPR in Milan¹³ share an analogous regulatory framework,¹⁴ adapted to the economic conditions of the population, which was starting to have more and more access to cars, resulting in a more understandable adherence to the modernist realizations of the Ina-Casa built housing stock. In particular, the cases of Turin and Milan, situated in the Pianura Padana (the Po Valley), also share the same climatic conditions, while the case of Genoa represents an exception that is useful for understanding a possible variation of the same model with different climatic and topographical conditions.

The Genoese neighbourhood was built between 1950 and 1956 on a residual green area, which was subsequently zoned as public space. The city was already formed around the new neighbourhood at the time of its construction, albeit with a lower density than today, making the *Bernabò Brea* a rare case in the Italian context of modernist urban infill. Milan's postwar expansion, because of its geographical conditions, took place as a result of new satellite neighbourhoods during reconstruction. The *Gratosoglio* was built between 1963 and 1971 on pre-existing agricultural land in the southern farmland of the Milanese metropolitan area. It was a common practice of the Ina-Casa Plan to reclaim agricultural land for residential purposes to optimise the project budget by saving on land acquisition costs. In the third case, in the southern part of Torino, close to the major FIAT car production plant site, the *Mirafiori* neighbourhood was developed in multiple stages, beginning with a major initiative in 1963. The neighbourhood was built as the de facto residential part of a company town in the hinterland's flatlands.

At first glance, the scale difference between Genova's project and the others is striking. Nevertheless, because of the city's peculiar geography, this neighbourhood was the only one at the time which defined a proper urban realm rather than a mega-structural approach, as in the second Daneri's project for Genova—the *Biscione* of Forte Quezzi.

The three neighbourhoods share some of the orthodox principles of modernist urbanism defined by the CIAMs, such as the orthogonal configuration with vast open spaces between slabs. Functional zoning categories describing public space are insufficient to grasp the complexity of the open spaces. Vast stretches of asphalt with placeholder greenery result from norms and from the urgency to build fast and cheap, with the living unit as the main priority to be satisfied. Nevertheless, Italy's modernization process had to deal with a palimpsest of existing traces of historical remains, adding additional issues for architects and limiting the success of a pure modernist approach.

Contemporary urban sprawl disguises the original conditions that the three neighbourhoods were facing at the time they were built. Lush vegetation occupied *Bernabò Brea*'s hill in Genoa, while vast agricultural land stretched for miles around Turin and Milan. When the architects were called to confront the scale and the site conditions during the design phase, these were completely different from the suburban realm they are nowadays immersed in. The voids conceived originally were sized for isolated extra-urban neighbourhoods rather than suburban mid-dense areas. (figs. 4.4-4.6)

Comparing the historical site maps of the three projects with the original drawings developed by the architects, it is possible to distinguish the set of constraints inherited in the three neighbourhoods from the elements introduced by the new projects. Three different approaches to the unbuilt space



Figure 4.4: The Gratosoglio neighbourhood in Milan. Source: *Casabella*, no. 363 (1972)



Figure 4.5: The INA-Casa Bernabò Brea neighbourhood in Genoa. Source: Alessandra Carini (ed.), *Housing in Europa 1900-1960*, vol. 1, (Bologna: Centro Studi Oikos, 1979), 257



Figure 4.6: The Mirafiori neighbourhood in Turin. Source: *Domus*, no. 512 (1972)

emerge. In Genova, most of the existing street layout was preserved, and the new intervention was carefully nestled into the steep topography of the city. In Turin, the original street network marked a clear border to the site and the directions of the internal roads. In Milan, the BBPR's project worked following the heliothermic orientation of the buildings and developed along new main infrastructural axes, while the border of the site is left untouched.

The Ina-Casa design manuals played a key role here, acting as a sort of meta-project for each new neighbourhood unit, architecturally but also beyond that. The Ina manuals served as one of the few norms regulating the design aspects for the first fifteen years after WWII, until the 1968 law on the zoning standards of public space per inhabitant.¹⁵ In the second volume of the manuals, both quantitative and qualitative principles are outlined. A neighbourhood's density was capped to five hundred inhabitants per hectare—half the quantity of Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse*. The minimum suggested quantity for public services buildings was set at six square meters per inhabitant, while the ratio between the streets and the site areas could oscillate between one third and one tenth. Finally, various points of the manual insisted on 'harmonizing' these new mid-density settlements with their context. In the presence of natural, relevant elements, the buildings' composition was to be adapted accordingly, driven by the existing site conditions. Next to quantitative parameters, the Ina-Casa manuals were completed by settlement diagrams that did not investigate a use and morphological classification of the open space.

Today, there is still an absence of literature dedicated to the forms of the material and morphological features of the Italian modernist open space. A first proposal to compare the three different design approaches is to use the "neoplastic mosaic" from the playlist of voids as a common term to understand recurrences and exceptions. As the other entries of the playlist focus more on the general settlement principles, the mosaic's finer detail for investigation matches the task for investigating these three otherwise highly different open space settings. (fig. 4.7)

At first glance, the general circulation and asphalt surfaces in each neighbourhood play different roles. In *Bernabò Brea*, the infrastructures follow the topography, whereas in Turin, a cul-de-sac organization aims to maintain spatial continuity through a discontinuous orthogonal grid of spaces. Circulation in Milan is structured by a looped strip that forms the layout and then expands in minor, tilted quadrangular rooms. In all cases, car parks are dominant. In Genoa, the parking lots are aligned below the buildings through the colonnades on the ground floor, thereby avoiding large open parking areas. In

Bernabò Brea
Genoa



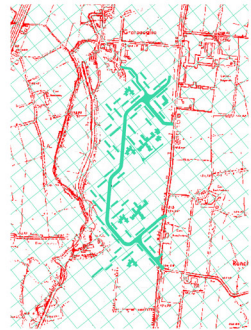
2020
1935

Mirafiori
Turin

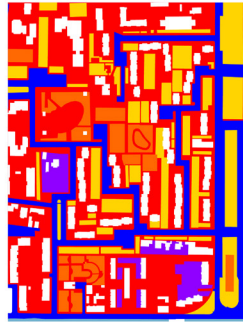
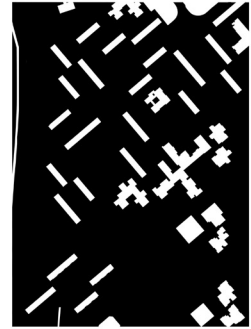


2020
1930

Gratosoglio
Milan



2020
1956



- car spaces
- linear paths
- forest
- park
- enclosed collective space
- semi-courtyard
- green verge
- private garden

Figure 4.7: First row: anchors and constraints of the substrate with the overlay of the project. Second row: built and void plan of the three neighbourhoods. Third row: void analysis of the three neighbourhoods. Drawing by authors in collaboration with Federica Pessotto, Enrica Prativiera, and Lucia Rebolino

Milan and Turin, designated parking areas are present. In Turin, parking lots facilitate access to the entire system, while in *Gratosoglio*, they are distributed within inner pockets. The first figure results in a maze of asphalt, while the second depicts a main infrastructural layout with subordinate systems.

Pedestrian path organization goes hand in hand with car infrastructure space. In Turin, it is ubiquitous. Once car-oriented space spreads in all directions within the area, the remaining open space is dominated by asphalt paths. In Milan, an equally car-based design, pedestrian circulation systems run along systems' edges and rear.

From the modernist pattern layout, which was influenced by a car-centred culture, very different approaches emerge, especially when classifying the hierarchical relationships between infrastructure space and domestic space. In addition, it is possible to discern even more differences in the three projects' landscape design and vegetal elements, as their material conditions are less generic and less correlated with accessibility issues. In Milan, the road verge infills the expansive open-air rooms cut by the infrastructural strips. Due to its position, size, and surface treatment, this type of vegetation is more decorative than a space with multiple potential uses. The same device is widely employed in *Mirafiori*, where the streets and sidewalks spread in all directions, patched by squared and often enclosed greenery. Because of its peculiar topography, *Bernabò Brea's* mosaic flattens and regularises the contours in pockets of enclosed collective.

The pedestrian path system functions as a connective network of thin paved passageways within the planted landscape. Although the presence of natural elements was a key design element of the *Ina-Casa* manuals, explicit landscaping guidelines are never mentioned. If the traces of previous environmental conditions predominate in Genoa, where buildings fluctuate on a green background, in Milan and Turin, the architecture itself defines the empty space. In *Mirafiori*, the space between buildings is occupied with fragments of verges and enclosed vegetation, playgrounds, and open-air activities. In *Gratosoglio*, the distance between the slabs' facades reduces the resulting void to a super-green verge. On the other hand, the rear open spaces are mostly connected in a unique park.

Once the voids in the mosaic are unpacked, it becomes clear how the three neighbourhoods have developed distinct identities. *Bernabò Brea* is a punctual landscape design over a generic wild condition based on the delicate modelling of the predominately natural context. *Gratosoglio's* identity is shaped by its promenades and extensive void enfilades. Finally, *Mirafiori's* spatial identity is based on the sequential repetition of geometrically defined open spaces that conceal the actual size of the neighbourhood.

TO EACH ITS OWN GROUND?

The three analogous layouts of the considered neighbourhoods differ profoundly on their open space conditions. The fact that modernism spread as an international architectural movement with much more local variations than what has long been commonly believed is no longer a taboo. Rem Koolhaas, in the explanation of his research for the 2014 Venice Biennale, observed the absorption of modernity over the last one hundred years in all the national participations to the exhibition, declaring modernism to be a plural and fragmented experience: “we meant the verb Absorbing Modernity to suggest the body blows that a boxer absorbs when he fights a bloody match [...] From ‘modernity for all’ we went to ‘each their own modernity’.”¹⁶

Following Koolhaas’s metaphor, if the postwar Italian neighbourhood is one of the most recognizable “blows” to the territory provoked by the spreading of modern planning principles, it is also true that a process of absorption took place. This absorption mainly filtered the import of building types and elements from the international context but has less relevance on the open spaces between the buildings. What were the causes for this an amnesia? Why are we able to detect many vocabularies for the built and fewer for the open space?

Borrowing another Koolhaasian term, one possible answer could relate to the rhetoric of the modernist *tabula rasa*, where the open space was perceived first as a blank canvas to lay masses on. Still, upon closer inspection it might be much more than that. The absence of a systematic set of manuals on open space design left a knowledge gap in the classification of open spaces; they existed and were thought by architects and urbanists, but remaining ‘nameless’ they failed to be transformed into models and remained fragmented site-specific interventions. In the Ina-Casa manuals, terms referring to the open space were not absent. Yet they were often used to recall the historical form of the Italian city, as confirmed by one passage in the instructions to architects: “the main focus will be on the main characters of the streets [*strade*] and of the squares [*piazze*], and only secondarily on the architectural aspects of the new buildings”.¹⁷ The mention of streets and squares alludes to a sort of post-modern *ante litteram* urbanism based on the historical city’s urban voids, conflicting with the projects’ locations selected on the national territory which were usually detached from the city and on reclaimed agricultural land. The modernist slab required different operative terms for the open space than the traditional understanding of the street and the square carved into the compact urban fabric.

The modernist neighbourhood layouts brought about rich experimentation in open spaces, but the spatial elements were rarely named or classified by their architects. In this view, these projects failed to circulate as models in the Italian process of absorbing modernity, giving birth to more ad hoc experiments.

Together with the cultural values of the open space, what influenced decisively the design of the open space in postwar Italy was also the notion of standard. Formalised by law in 1968, the quantitative nature of open space as a public service would come to dominate the discourse around the neighbourhoods since the Ina-Casa Plan years. In an equal quantitative assessment of open space classified in motorways, parking lots, and green areas, infinite variations and designs could be iterated. The strength of the Italian urbanistic laws granted the success of the plan on the administrative side, but—as criticised by Secchi—it failed to elevate the Ina-Casa Plan as a means to build a vocabulary of open spaces beyond the ones already conceived in the traditional city. The Italian contribution of the Ina-Casa Plan is not one that lacks a tradition *tout court*. It mostly demonstrates that when the architects had to deal with open space, the available tradition was only the urban one of the historical city, most of the time leaving the open space as a mere distance below the shadows of the buildings, to be filled with services required by the standards.

In 1936, when Le Corbusier was asked to comment on the new masterplan for *Ivrea*—twenty years before the beginning of the Ina-Casa Plan—his point of view reveals a mark of criticism that could be extended to the postwar Italian architectural culture. He expressed his reservations on the way Italian urbanism was interpreting modernity by staying attached to the figures of the traditional city’s open space. He assessed the plan as a “ritual of ancient ideas (very particularly Italian), of the times when the street was dominating and the houses leaned on the street, and of the times when the contemporary lifestyle and modern techniques didn’t exist. I find that the modern architects that deal with urbanism are thus architects softened by the architectural form: they are not creators of organisms. This is my take on your plan for Ivrea”.¹⁸ Le Corbusier’s remark clarifies the difficulty of recognizing an open space tradition in postwar Italian neighbourhoods. In fact, the overstudy of the typologies of the buildings cast a shadow over the formation of an open space vocabulary, which would have required opening up to new materials, spatiality, and forms alien to the historical city.

NOTES

1. Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un État Présent de l’Architecture et de l’Urbanisme* (Paris: Éditions Vicent, Fréa & Cie, 1960), 234.
2. Paola di Biagi, *La Grande Ricostruzione: Il Piano Ina-Casa e l’Italia degli Anni Cinquanta* (Roma: Donzelli, 2001).
3. Bernardo Secchi, “I quartieri dell’Ina-Casa e la costruzione della città contemporanea”, in Paola Di Biagi, ed., *La Grande Ricostruzione. Il Piano Ina-Casa*

- e l'Italia degli Anni Cinquanta*, 150. By employing the term “Mumfordian”, Secchi refers to Lewis Mumford’s interpretation of the city as an unitarian expression that encompasses architecture, urban space, and its society.
4. Adriano Olivetti, “Discorso del presidente all’apertura del Convegno, proceedings of the third Conference of the INU ‘L’Urbanistica e l’Industria””, *Urbanistica*, no.8 (1951): 8.
 5. Aaron Betsky, *Making It Modern: The History of Modernism in Architecture and Design* (New York: Actar Publishers, 2016).
 6. This hybrid approach to scale had been represented in many exhibitions at the Triennale di Milano since the 1930s. The focus was on the architectural objects as containers of interior landscapes instead of public areas and landscapes.
 7. Pietro Porcinai, “Jardins et espaces verts en Italie”, *l’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*, no. 48 (1953).
 8. Our playlist of void space is based on the analysis of the projects published in the book *Housing in Europa 1900-1960* and in its follow-up edition focusing on the period 1960-1979. This book is one of the most comprehensive publications on postwar large-scale residential neighbourhoods in the context of contemporary Italian architectural culture. It summarises the entire spectrum of references that an architect of the early 1980s should be familiar with or consult when attempting to design a residential structure. Consequently, this work can be regarded as a genuine instrument for comprehending the means and objectives of comparing the differences between the international and Italian postwar contexts. Even though the focus of the book is on typologies, unit layout, and circulation and less on the open spaces, it includes rich documentation for each of the cases presented. Alessandra Carini, ed., *Housing in Europa 1900-1960*, Vol. 1, (Bologna: Centro Studi Oikos, 1979).
 9. The *Gratosoglio* in Milan was already part of the PEEP plans (Piani di Edilizia Economica e Popolare), which represented the normative evolution of Ina-Casa after the introduction of law 167 in 1962. *Mirafiori Sud* in Turin was initiated within the framework of the Ina-Casa Plan and co-funded by the car manufacturer FIAT.
 10. The three cities are historically described as the *triangolo industriale* (industrial triangle), as a unique connected system of industrial and logistical infrastructure.
 11. Along with Luigi Daneri, the project was designed by Luciano Grossi Bianchi and Giulio Zappa. See “Quartiere Ina-Casa Bernabò Brea”, *Domus*, no. 178 (1990); Carlo Melograni, *Architetture nell’Italia della Ricostruzione* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2015), 98-100; Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell’Architettura Italiana* (Torino, Einaudi, 2002), 38; Giovanna Franco and Stefano F. Musso, *Architetture in Liguria dopo il 1945* (Genova: De Ferrari, 2016), 170-71.

12. The neighbourhood was designed by the technical office of the municipality of Turin. See “Codice. Incontri e Scontri sulla Casa”, *Domus*, no. 512 (1972); Francesca De Filippi, Ianira Vassallo, “Mirafiori Sud: la Città Fordista oltre la Fabbrica. Scenari e Progetti per la Costruzione di una Nuova Identità”, *Ri-Vista*, no. 2 (2016); Caterina Quaglio, “Il Fardello Pubblico. La Rigenerazione ‘Area-Based’ dei Quartieri Pubblici: Storie di Luoghi, Pratiche, Scambi. Parigi, Edimburgo, Torino”, (PhD diss., Politecnico di Torino, 2020).
13. See: “BBPR Gratosoglio”, *Casabella*, no. 363 (1972): 17-26; *Edilizia Popolare*, no. 77 (1969): 5-20; Piva, *BBPR a Milano*.
14. According to Italian law, each dwelling unit must have at least one bathroom with a window for natural ventilation. The impact of apparently simple standards on the architectural design constrained the array of typological variations of the domestic layouts.
15. “Piano Incremento Occupazione Operaia. Case per Lavoratori Legge Fanfani del 28.2.49, n. 43. Suggestioni Esempi e Norme per la Progettazione Urbanistica. Progetti Tipo”, (Roma, 1950).
16. Rem Koolhaas, ed., *Fundamentals: 14th International Architecture Exhibition* (Venice: Marsilio, 2014), 21.
17. “Piano Incremento Occupazione Operaia. Case per Lavoratori Legge Fanfani Del 28.2.49, n. 43. Suggestioni Esempi e Norme per la Progettazione Urbanistica. Progetti Tipo”, (Roma, 1950).
18. Letter of Le Corbusier to Aldo Manganeli, November 24, 1936, in *Casabella*, no. 101 (1936).

THE COMMON SPACE PROJECT

The Case of Latin American Neighbourhood Units

Umberto Bonomo

INTRODUCTION

When analysing the concept of ‘common’ in the field of architecture, as well as in the social sciences and the humanities, it becomes evident how various meanings proliferate rapidly, often contradicting and failing to reconcile with each other. Generally speaking, the idea of what is common is associated with the notion of the public or the collective. However, the definition I intend to present here suggests a more profound reflection on the aspects of use, ownership, and identification of common space in Latin America’s modern neighbourhood units. The goal is to demonstrate how these spaces undeniably serve collective purposes, occasionally even public ones, yet remain primarily common areas. The choice of focusing on South American neighbourhood units is rooted in the rationale that precisely these projects provide an opportunity to discuss the concept of ‘common’ on the basis of use, ownership, and identification. In fact, in most of these cases, the buildings and their spaces are shared by a distinct and recognisable group of people, an authentic community with a specific and well-defined identity. This situation is different from the individual identities of the residents or families; and, above all, it diverges from the broader urban space into which the neighbourhood units are inserted.

Traditionally, urban structure is understood as an interplay between opposing spatial, material, and institutional realities, such as the private space of housing and the public space of the city. This dichotomous contrast shapes the framework of Western societies and urban environments. However, in recent years, numerous studies have highlighted the emergence of an additional spatial condition: that of the ‘common space’.¹ This essay, centred on the concept of common space—understood as a legitimate alternative to the schematic distinction between public and private—allows us to contemplate the intricacies of space, morphology, usage, and ownership that constitute modern Latin American metropolises. The study and research of common space is therefore construed as integral to the ongoing discussion within the fields of

architecture, urbanism, sociology, and anthropology. The notion of what is common—in some cultures more than others—reflects the deep structures of our society and the way we live together.

The Latin American context is notably distinctive, as several countries within the region are currently undergoing a thorough reevaluation of the extreme neoliberal socioeconomic model in place. Since the 1970s, neoliberalism in Latin America has exacerbated the division between public and private realms. This separation is not limited to physical spaces, but extends to encompass social, symbolic, and functional dimensions.² The radical divide between public and private spheres has brought into play (and brought to the surface) a discussion about the autonomy of common space, which emerges as a potential alternative to the prevailing social, urban, and architectural models shaping the cityscape. In the following pages, I will delve into the main aspects that define the discourse surrounding common space in Latin America. These insights also serve to fill certain knowledge gaps, since common space has received relatively limited scholarly attention and is often incorrectly conflated with public or collective spaces in architectural discourse.

Common spaces can still be found in the layout and urban structures of large-scale neighbourhood units built in Latin America under various economic and State policies. This essay aims to demonstrate that one of the major contributions of modern architectural urban and housing development in Latin America is precisely the emergence of common spaces. In fact, countries like Chile, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, and Peru have witnessed the creation of remarkably large-scale neighbourhood units between the 1940s to 1970s. Within these environments, common spaces have played—and continue to play—a pivotal role in shaping the residents' ways of life. These neighbourhoods are specific urban settings, distinguished by abundant green spaces and pedestrian-oriented zones, offering a high quality of life to their residents. The spatial and formal attributes of these outstanding expressions of modern architecture offer a chance to delve further into theoretical aspects and ongoing discussions linked to communal space, as well as to anchor these concepts in concrete and tangible spatial parameters. These cases are relevant due to their capacity to provide a finer understanding of the spatial intricacies related to the city and architecture, while offering the discipline a new avenue for research and design: the realm of common space.

COMMON SPACE IN HOUSING PROJECTS: CONSIDERATIONS ON A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEM

Within large-scale modern housing complexes, and particularly in extensive neighbourhood units, common space emerges as a hybrid and articulated space, situated between the domain of the public, inherent to the city, and the domain of the private, specific to each resident. Common space is at the centre of these two contrasting domains, and is systematically strained by these two opposites. The idea of what is common is linked to an intricate web of meanings, spanning various fields including the economic and political spheres, urbanism and notions private or collective ownership. In some countries, the term ‘common’ indicates the national public good, which further complicates its comprehension, recognition, and management.³

The common denominator that brings together all these spatial experiences is the role of common space as, both historically and in present times, the epicentre of community life for residents. In many cases, common spaces in modern projects now encompass expansive and environmentally relevant green areas, which have acquired substantial heritage value and managed to encapsulate the profound identity of residential neighbourhoods. These modern housing enclaves, having retained their original ‘green’ character precisely through their common spaces, often mitigate the impact of rapid and abrasive urban transformations taking place outside. In some instances, the common space opens up to the city to such an extent that it seemingly merges with the public domain, but in fact it is a large shared space, literally ‘co-owned’ by all inhabitants of a certain housing complex. The notions of sharing, community, and co-ownership are precisely the underpinning elements and shared factors that connect international urban endeavours of large-scale neighbourhood units and vast Latin American housing complexes. When the concept of ‘common’ is used within the fields of architecture and urbanism, it inevitably evokes the great social and urban utopias of the late nineteenth century—figures like Fourier, Owen, and Godin—as well as the theoretical proposals of Marx and Engels, which interlinked economic production and communitarian life. While these propositions and concepts left a profound imprint on modern cities and societies, they also managed to translate and interpret the social challenges of the era into powerful urban and architectural manifestos. According to Lluís Frago and Sergi Martínez-Rigol,

this new society was not to be created within the existing industrial cities of France or England, as advocated by Marx (1818-1883) and Engels (1820-1895), but for it to crystallise, a new type of urban settlement would have to be created, where all the functions that would make men and women freer would cohabit.⁴

The Italian postwar architect and planner Carlo Aymonino, in his book *Origini e Sviluppo della Città Moderna*, explains that

it is by identifying the contradictions within society that we must start from, and by using leverage to prefigure a society of a different type [...] we can trace back today to that date, the awareness of a different path, by no means parallel, between urban planning and politics.⁵

Social conflicts at the beginning of the twentieth century were at the same time a question of state policy, driving institutional modernisation and catalysing new urban planning theories and architectural solutions. The excerpt from Aymonino underscores a yearning for a different kind of society, one that was varied and responsive to emerging norms and property dynamics, capable of dismantling the dichotomous relationship between private and public spheres. This new conception of society would be imprinted onto the structure and the idea behind large-scale modern neighbourhood units, where the main protagonists are common space, community, and communality. To understand the leading role of common space in shaping the modern metropolis, it is essential to represent it as the fusion between urban and architectural concepts along with the social and economic policies that made it possible.

The social tensions that would directly influence the design of housing and urban landscapes began to converge in Latin America from the 1930s onwards as a result of the intense process of institutional modernisation within its nations. Driven by substantial rural-to-urban migration, this modernisation intensified the demand for housing.⁶ It was during this period that the principles of modern architecture and urbanism were established as an alternative capable of addressing the aforementioned issues. It is within this transformative context that innovative legal and regulatory frameworks emerged, including horizontal property laws, laying the foundations for co-ownership arrangements and the materialisation of common spaces as tangible entities, governed by well-defined legal structures.

It is precisely in the regrettable disregard of these legislative, political, and cultural aspects that conventional historiography has reached an impasse in interpretation. Architectural histories of large modern housing developments have focused almost exclusively on their morphological and urban characteristics, thereby overlooking the distinctive ownership dynamics of common spaces, which have frequently been mistaken for public spaces.⁷

Aspects of ownership, legal and regulatory systems, institutional structures, and financing mechanisms, which have enabled construction endeavours, have frequently been overlooked in urban analyses of large-scale urban experiences. For instance, the extensive analytical work published in 2010 by

the FORM research group at the Polytechnic of Catalonia, delving into projects in Latin America, stands as an example of this historiographical approach.⁸ On this publication, projects are depicted in terms of their morphological and urban conditions, with no allusion to legislative frameworks, potential utilisation scenarios, or the responsibilities tied to common spaces. In the introductory segment of the text, Teresa Rovira states that “it is interesting to explore the way in which public space is transformed in each type of proposal”,⁹ referring only to morphological aspects and making no distinction between the various forms of tenure and ownership inherent in each analysed case study. Such omissions dangerously oversimplify the discussion and disregard the existence and specificity of common space as an alternative and radically different space from both private and public spaces. The British Pavilion at the 2008 Venice Biennale was dedicated to a comprehensive reconstruction of housing policies and achievements in the UK between 1870 and 2008, linking these experiences to urban theories and other exemplary cases built across Europe. This initiative steers the discourse in the correct direction, yet it does not solve entirely the historiographical problem associated with common space, as it refrains from explicitly naming and analysing it with resolve.

Far from criticising these investigations, I intend to highlight the scarcity of discussion concerning the role of common space within collective dwellings and neighbourhood units of the twentieth-century. This led to common space—as a legitimate and recognised spatial category distinct from the dominant and schematic dichotomy of private versus public—going unnoticed until now, thus remaining absent from discourses relating to these emblematic large-scale housing developments.¹⁰ Large modern housing projects have not only transformed the urban landscape in terms of scale, density, residential typologies, minimal ground occupation, and the provision of expansive green spaces accessible to residents. They also embody an even larger revolution of ‘common space’ as an intermediary and intermediate space marked by diffused ownership intricate administrative structures. Nowadays, this space is often in crisis, precisely because of the challenges created by the specific forms necessary for its management and administration. Common spaces within large-scale housing estates in Latin America perhaps stand as one of the most significant inventions of architectural modernity. Moreover, it is likely one of the most sensitive and delicate aspects within residential projects conceived for modern metropolises.

OWNERSHIP MODELS OF COMMON SPACE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD UNITS

The ways in which tenure and ownership of both homes and common spaces have been organised vary from country to country, depending on financing instruments and the role undertaken by the state, nonetheless, two predominant models seem to emerge. The first is the rental model, generally adopted in projects promoted by the state. In Venezuela or Brazil, for example, the state took charge of constructing settlements and managing common areas and community furnishings during the initial decades of the projects' life. The Pedregulho complex in Rio de Janeiro,¹¹ designed by architect Affonso Eduardo Reidy, stands as a case in point, where flats were first leased to families selected among the "low-income officials of the city of Rio de Janeiro." According to Plaza,

the model of social organization to which the tenants of Pedregulho were subjected was fundamentally paternalistic; they were controlled by the authorities under elaborate rental contracts that included in their provisions periodic inspections of the property carried out by officials of the Departamento de Habitação Popular.¹²

Another feature shared by Pedregulho, alongside numerous other housing projects championed by Carmen Portinho (the first director of the Department of Popular Housing in Rio de Janeiro between 1947 and 1951), was the imperative inclusion of communal facilities and pedestrian spaces with the explicit aim of "creating small communities, schools of democracy, where life is more human."¹³ Once again, common space is given the responsibility of inextricably intertwining the architectural and urban dimension of the housing complex with novel societal ideals of democracy and collective habitation. (fig. 5.1)

The case of Venezuela holds significant emblematic value. Here, the Banco Obrero¹⁴ played a systematic role in promoting the construction of large-scale neighbourhood units and housing complexes targeted at the working class of Caracas. The bank's reliance on the Ministry of Public Works and on its direct association with the presidency, provided it with the power, money, and capability to dramatically overhaul the face of the city. Both the Banco Obrero and the state held land ownership, and once the housing complexes were built, they assigned flats to new inhabitants for rent. This highly centralised institutional approach, characterised by direct engagement in housing construction and administration, granted architects substantial autonomy and conceptual freedom. The National Housing Plan developed from 1951 to 1955 was made possible by the creation of the Banco Obrero Architecture Laboratory (TABO), led by architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva and a group of



Figure 5.1: Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Pedregulho housing block under construction (Rio de Janeiro). As is clear from this picture, the community program was concluded before the residential block, revealing the prominence of the “common space” in the definition of the new community. Source: Brazilian National Archives

young architects and locally trained students.¹⁵ The bank and its Architecture Laboratory helped develop a new model for residential blocks that would later engender a profound urban transformation. The redevelopment of El Silencio in Caracas marked the first instance of multi-family rentals. (fig. 5.2) As recalled by María Teresa Novoa, “architecture was seen as a tool to redeem the uncontrolled occupation of the territory.”¹⁶ This aspect is overtly developed in an article by Juan José Pérez for *Entreraya* magazine:

Villanueva proposed seven blocks, with middle-class flats and gardens and community facilities along the perimeter of the blocks. Popular and ‘middle-class’ sectors of the time would be the privileged recipients allowed to rent those new ‘high-rise houses’ that dazzled the people of Caracas.¹⁷

The second model, which has gained extensive traction across Latin America, refers to a composition of mixed public and private capital and a mortgage system for new occupants, enabling them to become flat owners over a period of about 20 years. The idea of fostering ownership instead of tenancy aligned with a specific economic and social model, wherein private property constituted the bedrock of society. To lay down such model, established legislations



Figure 5.2: “El Silencio” neighbourhood, Caracas (Venezuela). Source: Carlos Raúl Villanueva, via Wikimedia Commons

regarding ‘horizontal ownership’, ‘co-ownership’, or ‘sale by floor’ were enacted. These legal frameworks allowed large-scale buildings to have articulate ownership structures: the private space of the family coexisted with common spaces, collectively owned by all residents in established proportions. A remarkable aspect to highlight is the simultaneous emergence of horizontal property laws and crucial public institutions tasked with addressing the housing shortage in Latin America.

In Argentina, for example, a substantial reform of the National Mortgage Bank in 1947 coincided with the approval of the ‘horizontal property’¹⁸ law of 1948. This legislative development led to the creation of iconic housing complexes such as the Los Perales neighbourhood in Buenos Aires, built between 1946 and 1955. Rosa Aboy accurately explains how “the neighbourhood has been described as the portion of public space in which a private environment is gradually appropriated through its daily use.”¹⁹

In Peru, the law on ‘horizontal property’²⁰ was approved in 1946, and, in the following year, the National Housing Corporation was created. This corporation oversaw a comprehensive plan for the construction of complexes and neighbourhood units, of which Unit No. 3, built on the outskirts of Lima, was a notable example. This project was described in the *El arquitecto Peruano* magazine in 1947 as

the city, a common house, with its functional layout, with its separate networks for pedestrians and vehicles, will guarantee the well-being and health of children.

There will be dozens of children's spaces for them. Mothers will find in the collaboratively organised shopping centre a suitable place to source equipment and clothes. Thanks to all this, to this neighbourhood unit and each of those that will follow, perhaps Lima and its provinces might one day rightfully earn the name of "Happy City."²¹

In Chile, the *Caja de la Habitación Popular* was established in 1935, followed by the approval of the 'horizontal property' law in 1937.²² This legislation quickly promoted the creation of residential blocks for sale, encouraging the introduction of this modality into the economic and social housing market. A Chilean example is the Portales Neighbourhood Unit, built in Santiago de Chile in 1954 by the Bresciani, Valdés, Castillo y Huidobro (BVCH) office.²³ This neighbourhood unit was built on the grounds of the former Quinta Normal de Agricultura, transforming a plot that had served for decades as farmland and agricultural experimentation space into a large and soon-to-be emblematic residential development. In 1932, before the creation of the Caja de Habitación Popular and prior to the approval of the Law on Horizontal Property, the Austrian town planner Karl Brunner drafted a proposal for the same land that would eventually host the Portales Neighbourhood Unit. Brunner's concept entailed a conventional urbanisation plan based on detached single-family and terraced houses within individually owned plots. Although the project did not come to fruition, what remains notable is the stark contrast between the two urban approaches: while Brunner divided the land at his disposal into privately owned parcels, the Portales Neighbourhood Unit was built on a large undivided property. The latter was conceived through the implementation of a residential block typology, laid out across undivided terrain interspersed with co-owned green areas, making optimal use of common spaces. It is this undivided common space that constitute the pivotal solution in the project. The 31 available hectares are cut only by a few roads and traversed by a dense network of footpaths weaving through nineteen residential blocks and over three hundred single-family homes, with the aim of creating a community of about 11,000 inhabitants. (fig. 5.3) Clearly, the concept of common space was maximally utilised from an architectural point of view as well: the design includes elevated pathways that interconnect the residential blocks. Even the terraced roofs of the single-family houses, also connected to this network, are considered common spaces available to the resident community. (fig. 5.4)

Common space—which exists as co-owned areas situated between the city's public spaces and private residential domains—emerges as a result of multiple factors and interconnections: institutional transformation; new normative and legal frameworks; architectural, urban, and social ideas forged in the initial decades of the twentieth century; and, most notably, the profound



Figure 5.3: The common space in the Portales neighbourhood unit, Santiago (Chile). Source: Fondo René Combeau, Archivo de Originales FADEU PUC

process of urbanisation that would radically reshape the South American metropolises.

In this regard, Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri have noted how “the metropolis is a factory for the production of the common.”²⁴ According to them, modern metropolitan societies have endeavoured to address the housing shortage by configuring common space as a multifaceted model encompassing social, cultural, and real-estate aspects, standing as an alternative to the traditional tenure and ownership system polarised between public and private. The laws on co-ownership enacted in the 1930s paved the way for the establishment of ‘residential condominiums’²⁵ that could be subdivided. This move was intended to incentivize housing production, with both governmental bodies and the participating private sector. The latter benefited from the possibility of subdividing and selling constructed housing units. Simultaneously, this process of dividing property into individually sellable residential units gave rise to the



Figure 5.4: Pedestrian paths across the housing roofs in the Portales neighbourhood unit, Santiago (Chile). Source: Fondo René Combeau, Archivo de Originales FADEU PUC

intermediate scale of common space, intended as a clearly discernible functional and spatial entity whose function was to create units of common domain—hence the concept of ‘con-dominium’—with specific co-ownership regulations. Co-ownership laws were a key legal and regulatory resource, instrumental in defining basic governance frameworks for the administration of large-scale neighbourhood units and modern housing estates. Throughout the 1950s, these legal frameworks played a significant role in regulating, administering, and overseeing as much as 80 percent of the land available for urbanisation and designated for the construction of new complexes, and thus articulating the synergies of communities of up to 20,000 people.

Although it may seem less significant when compared to the architectural and urban innovations brought forth by these housing projects, this observation holds paramount importance. It presupposes that the new models of administration should have been able to articulate the private ownership of housing with the common spaces shared by all owners, such as corridors, stairwells, lifts, entrances, gardens, and community and leisure facilities. These assumptions have not always been upheld. In some cases, they have not even been effectively implemented, underscoring the challenge of translating theoretical notions and concepts into practical reality. Natalia Alvarado has studied the origin and transformation of the administration system of Villa Frei, an important neighbourhood unit completed in 1968 in Santiago.²⁶ (figs. 5.5 and 5.6)

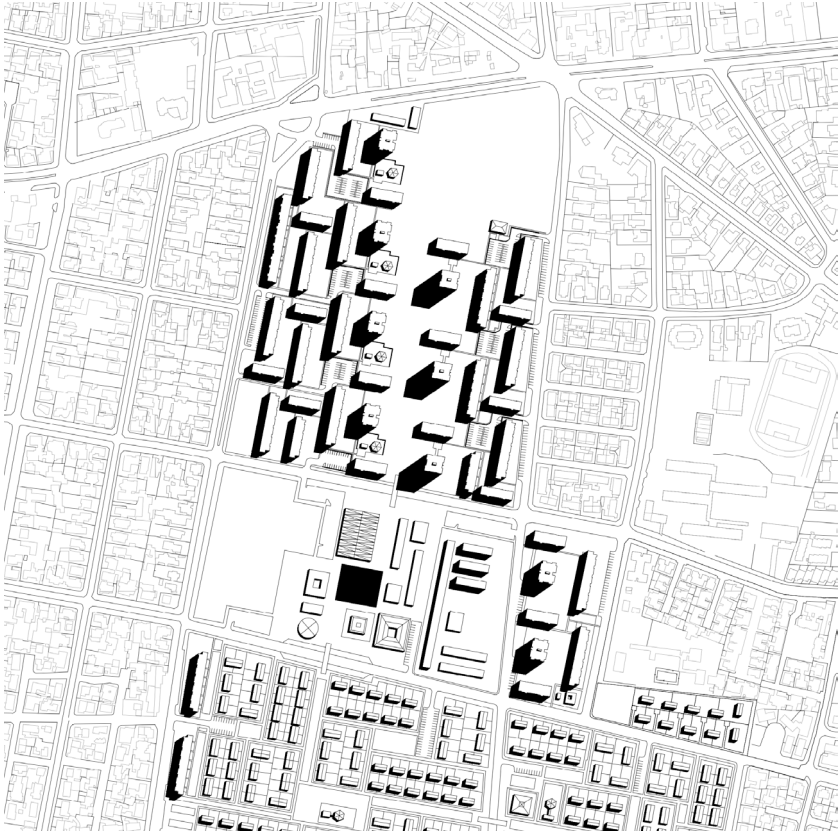


Figure 5.5: Layout of sector 1 of Villa Frei, Santiago (Chile). Drawing by author

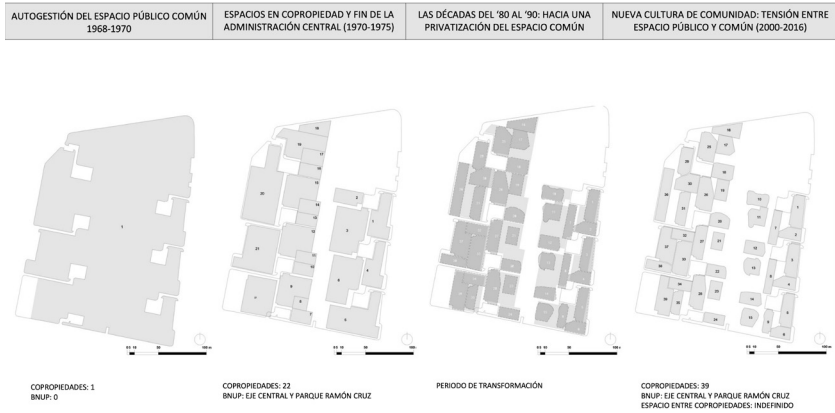


Figure 5.6: Development of the structure of the common space in Villa Frei, Santiago (Chile). Source: Natalia Alvarado

Her analysis unveils the shift from the initial model, where the entire project space was a large undivided co-owned property, to the residents' early attempts to initiate a self-management process. This transition led to land division, culminating in the current scenario defined by 39 micro co-ownerships, each corresponding with a specific residential building while the undeveloped space remains undefined.

CONCLUSIONS

Common space is an important innovation in design as well as in architectural, legal, and conceptual terms, which challenges the traditional systems of use and administration of the city set out on the building codes and urban guidelines of the nineteenth century. Common space was and still is a space of considerable creative potential: the place where, in large-scale modern housing complexes, new communities of neighbours have taken shape and found definition. Common space, although not always well defined by regulatory and legal frameworks, rested based upon, and helped to develop, innovative administrative models that were complex and unprecedented for the time.

The construction of large-scale neighbourhood units in Latin America, guided by the principles of common space as an articulating link between the individual home and the city, represents radical initiative, merging architecture and urbanism and showcasing the power of ideas and their capacity to shape new social imaginaries. The most controversial aspect of these proposals lies in their ability to foster communities. In most modern neighbourhood units, architectural and urban specificities coupled with robust underlying communal notions have created neighbourhoods with strong identities, which have persevered over time while still undergoing changes and being redefined. This shared sense of identity is a form of social capital occasionally giving rise to community initiatives, such as, in the case of the Portales Neighbourhood Unit, the publication in 1968 of the local newspaper *Quiubo Vecino*. In the case of Barrio Los Perales, in Buenos Aires, the neighbourhood's proximity to the stadium led to the creation of the Nueva Chicago football team, which proved to be a factor of strong social cohesion among residents. In the extreme case of the Conjunto 23 de Enero in Caracas, in 2017, because of the deep social crisis gripping Venezuela in recent years, inhabitants printed and introduced a local neighbourhood currency (the 'Panal') as a means to fight the rampant inflation affecting the official national currency.

These instances stand as tangible manifestations of the multifaceted and multilayered legacy embodied by large-scale modern neighbourhood units across the region. This heritage reflects profound social development, a field of

open, lively, and dynamic conflicts that intersect architecture, urbanism, culture, and society. Large post-World War II neighbourhood units are the result of a significant process of urban, social, technological, constructive, legal, and institutional modernisation. These dynamics and facets form the foundation for comprehending, studying, and interpreting neighbourhood units, and, if necessary, inform efforts aimed at their recovery, protection, or intervention, seeking to safeguard the role of common space as an original concept fundamentally responsible for engendering new social conditions characterised by a strong identity.

NOTES

1. For further information on the subject, among others, see: Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space. The City as Commons* (London: Zed Book, 2016); Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Guido Ruivenkamp and Andy Hilton (eds.), *Perspectives on Commoning. Autonomist Principles and Practices* (London: Zed Books, 2017); Penny Travlou and Stavros Stavrides, *Housing as Commons: Housing Alternatives as Response to the Current Urban Crisis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).
2. Alberto Sato proposes an interesting discussion on this topic: Alberto Sato, “De los bienes comunes y lo público”, *Revista ARQ*, no. 91 (December 2015): 50-55; and in the same field: Elke Schlack, *POPS. El Uso Público del Espacio Urbano: El Carácter Público a Través de la Normativa* (Santiago de Chile, Ediciones ARQ, 2015).
3. For an interesting discussion about the concept of common space and its characteristics see: Amir Djalali, “Common Space. Politics and the Production of Architectural Knowledge” (PhD diss., TU Delft, 2014).
4. Lluís Frago Clols, and Sergi Martínez-Rigol, “Las utopías urbanas del siglo XIX, herencias y carencias: la carencia social frente a la herencia técnica” (Barcelona, *XIV Coloquio Internacional de Geocrítica*, 2016), 2-13. Translated by the author. Original: “esta nueva sociedad no se debía crear en el seno de las ciudades industriales de Francia o Inglaterra ya existentes, tal y como propugnaban Marx (1818-1883) y Engels (1820-1895), sino que para que pudiera cristalizar, se debería crear un nuevo tipo de asentamiento urbano, donde cohabitarían todas las funciones que harían a hombres y mujeres más libres”.
5. Carlo Aymonino, *Origini e Sviluppo della Città Moderna* (Venezia, Marsilio, 2003), 49.
6. Between 1920 and 1930, main Latin American cities such as Buenos Aires, San Paulo, Santiago de Chile, and Bogotá doubled their inhabitants.

7. Generally, large-scale Latin American neighbourhood units are described as affordable projects, inserted in large green areas for leisure activities developed to serve the inhabitants of these new neighbourhood in line with the tenets of the Athens Chart. See, for example, Teresa Rovira, *Vivienda Social Moderna. México 1947-1967* (Barcelona: Universidad Politècnica de Catalunya, 2009), or Hilary French, *Key Urban Housing of the Twentieth Century. Plans, Sections, Elevations* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).
8. Grupo de investigación FORM, *Documentos de Arquitectura Moderna en América Latina 1950-1965*, Vol. 4 (Barcelona: Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, 2010).
9. Grupo de investigación FORM, 13.
10. A publication that tackles the issue of common property in dwellings is represented by research on the social heritage and the architecture of the SEAO Società Edificatrice di Abitazioni Operaie in Milan in the years 1879-2009. In the experience of the SEAO, common space allows for articulating the public urban scale of the city of Milan with the private scale of the house or apartment. Common space is not only an urban project but also a social one. See: Chiara Quinzii and Diego Terna, *Ritorno all'Abitare: una Cooperativa in Città. Un Progetto per la Società Edificatrice Abitazioni Operaie* (Siracusa: Lettera Ventidue, 2012).
11. The most complete and up-to-date work on this building was published by Flávia Brito Do Nascimento, *Blocos de Memórias. Habitação Social, Arquitetura Moderna e Patrimônio Cultural* (Sao Paulo: edusp, 2016).
12. Penelope Plaza, “De Bentham a Le Corbusier: Vigilancia y disciplina en la vivienda social moderna latinoamericana. El complejo habitacional Pedregulho, Río de Janeiro, Brasil (1947-1958)”, *Atenea*, no. 504 (2011): 126.
13. Carmen Portinho is cited by Flávia Brito Do Nascimento, *Blocos de Memórias*, 378.
14. The Banco Obrero (Workers’ Bank) was a public Venezuelan institution created in 1928, which played a leading role in the transformation of issues related to housing for the middle and lower classes of the population. Its role was to promote large residential initiatives of metropolitan scale throughout the country. See: Beatriz Meza, “Superbloques y masificación: vivienda Banco Obrero en Venezuela (1955-1957)”, *TECNOLOGÍA Y CONSTRUCCIÓN* 24, no. 1 (2008): 19-33.
15. On this topic, and specifically the role of TABO in the materialisation of the National Housing Plan, read: Beatriz Meza, “Proyectos del Taller de Arquitectura del Banco Obrero (TABO) para el Plan Nacional de la Vivienda en Venezuela (1951-1955)”, in *TECNOLOGÍA Y CONSTRUCCIÓN*, Vol. 2 (I-II, 2005): 09-22.
16. Maria Teresa Novoa “La Urbanización 23 de Enero: sueños rotos” in *Diario El Nacional*, 23 de Enero, 2020, <https://www.elnacional.com/papel-literario/la-urbanizacion-23-de-enero-suenos-rotos/>

17. Juan José Pérez, “70 años de la inauguración de la Reurbanización El Silencio”, in Entrerayas, *La revista de arquitectura*, accessed August, 2015, <https://entrerayas.com/2015/08/70-anos-de-la-inauguracion-de-la-reurbanizacion-el-silencio/>
18. The entire text of the law can be found in the web page of the Justice Ministry of Argentina, <http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/45000-49999/46362/norma.htm>
19. Rosa Aboy, *Houses for the People. Urban Space and Society in the Los Perales Neighborhood Unit* (Buenos Aires: Universidad San Andrés, 2005), 137.
20. Related to the Peruvian law, <https://docs.peru.justia.com/federales/leyes/10726-dec-1-1946.pdf>
21. Translated by the author. The original text is included in: Terry Belaunde, “Una obra en marcha”, *El Arquitecto Peruano*, no. 116 (March 1947): 23.
22. For more information on the original law, you can review the official Chilean site, <https://www.bcn.cl/leychile/navegar?idNorma=256753>
23. On this, see: Umberto Bonomo, “Las dimensiones de la vivienda moderna: la Unidad Vecinal Portales y la producción de viviendas económicas en Chile, 1948-1970” (PhD diss., Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2009).
24. Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 250.
25. The concept of condominium refers to the condition of property that is not fragmented but on the contrary shared among all the inhabitants belonging to the residential complex: common ownership. This idea, from a legal and use point of view, is quite radical; it corresponds to the configuration of the ‘group’ as a larger legal entity to which the common space legally belongs.
26. Natalia Alvarado, “La villa Frei como Palimpsesto Urbano: Parcelación, Urbanización y Edificación como estrategias de redefinición del espacio público-común” (Master diss., Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, 2018).

PART 3

AGENTS MEAN HISTORIES

Accounting for
Multiple Experiences
and Agencies in
Postwar Housing
Estates

LIVING TOGETHER

(The Multiple) 'Stories' of an Ordinary Housing Development in Post-WWII Turin

Gaia Caramellino

MEDIATING OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE IN THE RESEARCH ON POST-WWII COLLECTIVE HOUSING

This essay examines the history of a housing estate built between 1968 and 1974 in Moncalieri, near the Italian city of Turin and designed by the local architect Enzo Dolci for the emerging local middle-class. Discussing this project, I would like to reflect on the role of micro-histories and residents' memories in the shaping of a broader understanding of the practices related to the production and use of Italian postwar large-scale collective housing.¹

Only occasionally has the history of postwar Italian housing been approached looking at the residential culture, the lifestyles and domestic models of the emerging urban middle class: a social group whose aspirations, in terms of living comfort and modern lifestyles, have had a lasting impact on the physical and economic transformation of cities in the country.² Architectural studies offer a clear example of this forgetfulness: established narratives on collective housing projects have, so far, either paid tribute to a limited number of experimental cases touted by prominent modernist architects, or concentrated their efforts on the projects promoted through the state initiative.³ This attitude consolidated the understanding that the evolution of postwar Italian cities could be largely, if not fully, comprehended through the histories of renowned public estates.⁴ This perception is confirmed if we look at how images and catalogues of *exempla* featured by architectural guides of the 1980s attempted to establish a canon of Italian modernism. These documents rarely feature the multifaceted and stratified reality of the most "ordinary" housing complexes and neighbourhoods built between the 1950s and the 1970s. The scope of this article is to partially question this view, showing that the tangible traces of this ordinary production had a crucial agency to define the contemporary built environment.



Figure 6.1: Aerial view of the housing estate in Moncalieri under construction in the early 1970s. Courtesy of the Archivio Storico INA Assitalia

The limits showcased by historical studies in assessing the relation between modernization, housing culture and design can be equally seen in the type of methods employed for research.⁵ Hence, architectural histories tend to concentrate on the early stages of the design, to emphasise the architects' ideas, to recount the evolution of architectural proposals; or, they simply describe the forms and the spatial qualities of the completed buildings. What often remains out of the investigative spectrum is instead everyday life and the sources through which this gets visible. The aim of oral histories, micro-histories and subjective cultural interpretations in the field of housing research is therefore to bring these traditionally hidden narratives to the fore, allowing for new ways of understanding the progressive transformation of residential complexes by “injecting a sense of life in the architectural history of housing.”⁶

In this regard, the history of the Moncalieri estate offers a fertile ground. (fig. 6.1) Reviewing the various phases of this project can contribute to the critique of established architect-centred and object-oriented simplified narratives. Using the lenses of micro-histories, the modern residential towers designed by

Dolci reveal the dialectic nature of the negotiation processes between the plethora of stakeholders involved in design and construction.⁷ In addition to that, the interaction between the materiality of the estate, the circumstances of its construction, and the different perceptions of personal and social representations in the inhabitants' minds, all contribute to a more precise account of the project.

RE-WRITING THE HISTORY OF POST-WWII TURIN THROUGH ITS HOUSING ESTATES

The history of modernization of Turin between the 1950s and the 1970s has so far been portrayed mainly through the social figure of the local industrial working class and, architecturally, by looking at the residential neighbourhoods realized by state- and municipality-led programmes. While the local Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari (IACP) had already been operative in Turin since 1907,⁸ multiple public initiatives were launched during the postwar decades, starting with the approval in 1949 of the Tupini Law. This law allowed public subsidies for the construction of apartments not exceeding a determined size and standards.⁹ In the same year, the first of the two seven-year Ina-Casa programs (1949-1956 and 1956-1963) was launched, followed by the institution in 1963 of the GESCAL (GESione CAse per i Lavoratori) and the approval of the Law n. 167, which allowed the collaboration between public and private actors on the construction of new large-scale housing estates.¹⁰

The construction of new residential developments mirrored the remarkable urban expansion and the unprecedented growth of Turin after the 1950s. Urban and economic changes were mainly guided by private investments and stemmed from a new social mobility generated by easier access to homeownership and the affirmation of new consumerist behaviours. The core of these transformations were the metropolitan areas, where the diffusion of novel ways of life gained momentum, and where desires and expectations were stirred up by job opportunities and private wealth creation. The peculiar social habits of the emerging middle classes triggered distinctive “bourgeois” lifestyles and aspirations to live in large buildings in or next to urban centres. The construction of new residential neighbourhoods in urban areas was the answer to these wishes. To be sure, new neighbourhoods were also built on the urban outskirts mainly to fulfil the mass demand for housing in the city, or along the main traffic arteries of the newly expanded metropolitan area. These residential complexes proved crucial for the urbanization of postwar Italian cities and contributed significantly to the creation of private welfare schemes that materialize relevant parts of the so-called public city in the form of collective facilities, greenery, social equipment and new infrastructures.¹¹ Despite

all, scholars have often disregarded these patterns of urban growth for lacking proper urban qualities—mainly identified with the spatiality of historical centres—while denouncing private modern estates and neighbourhoods for being the products of mere speculative forces.¹²

The crisis of public housing programmes and policies in the 1980s have redirected scholarly attention from the quantitative approaches to the study of housing promoted by social scientists, political and economic historians. As a reaction, renewed academic interest for the micro-observation of housing practices and for the stratified physical and cultural environment of postwar middle-class housing developments emerged over the past decades.¹³ Although stigmatized and severely criticized for their supposed low spatial and material qualities, or for the anonymous formal traits that prevented the formation of a real sense of belonging in the dwellers, these middle-class housing estates are a material and immaterial heritage that expresses the ambitions and the systems of values of those involved in its production.

RE-NEGOTIATING PLANNING CULTURES AND URBAN VISIONS

The project, situated along the motorway that connects Turin to the municipality of Moncalieri, was designed by Enzo Dolci starting from 1954 in an area previously destined to agrarian activities. At the time of its construction, the surroundings were characterized by the presence of a working-class neighbourhood of four-storey buildings developed by the IACP in 1953, with units that rarely reached 35 sqm.

In 1960, in optimistic terms, Dolci described his project as a vision for a self-sufficient residential district and branded the 60,000 sqm housing estate as a “very-modern satellite town for 5,000 inhabitants.”¹⁴ The development was part of a broader strategic plan to connect the municipality of Turin with Moncalieri through the massive construction of housing estates and the densification of the southern periphery: a location identified as one of the main outlets for future urban expansions by the local administration. Due to the proximity to the venue of the *Italia '61* international exhibition, which was expected to take place in 1961, the urban growth in that area was estimated to boom in the coming years¹⁵. Hopes grew stronger when a futuristic monorail system was planned to facilitate commuting to and from Moncalieri.¹⁶ Yet, grand expectations never became reality. The expected boom of investments never arrived, while the urban visions and the ambitious imageries of residential expansion disseminated during the preparation of the 1961 Fair were only partially implemented. New, isolated buildings for tertiary activities, instead, began to appear in the area during the 1970s while the new housing estate by

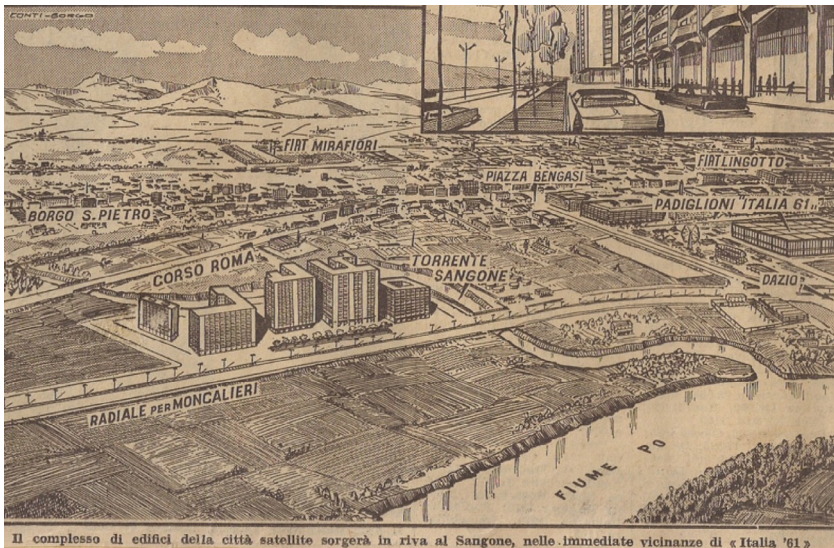


Figure 6.2: The modernist satellite-town for 5,000 inhabitants equipped with leisure and entertainment collective facilities, proposed by Enzo Dolci in 1960, as described in the article *Città satellite per cinquemila persone tra Torino e Moncalieri*, published in the Turin newspaper *La Stampa*, 10 June 1960

Dolci materialized as the southern access to the city. Contrarily to the original plan, now the project looked more like an isolated settlement stranded along the motorway marking the edge between the two municipalities.

In June 1960s, the local daily *La Stampa* announced that the Moncalieri residential development would become a new modern settlement filled with “shops, offices, cinema, laboratories and all the requirements for an independent life in a rationally organized community.”¹⁷ (fig. 6.2) The pompous rhetoric about the *quartiere* and the growing public attention for new neighbourhoods and satellite towns permeated the contemporary planning discourse and the prescriptions of the 1964 *piano intercomunale* (Intermunicipal Plan) of Turin to intend the *quartieri autonomi* (self-governing neighbourhoods) as new planning units. In this framework, the project by Dolci followed the plan’s idea of a “self-sufficient system of residential units equipped within their social infrastructures of primary facilities—the kindergarten, the elementary school, the park, and the church—and organized in housing estates on the model of the *unités de voisinage* or neighbourhood units, and equipped with services and infrastructure necessary for community life.”¹⁸

Despite the initial expectations, the realization of the project spread over a period of almost twenty years, from 1954 to 1972. The design phase was



Figure 6.3: Divergent urban strategies for the development of the area, introduced by Enzo Dolci during the 1950s. Left: comprehensive plan for the development of the entire area along the Sangone River, proposed by Enzo Dolci to the municipality of Moncalieri, 1957-59. Courtesy of the Archivio Municipale del Comune di Moncalieri. Right: aerial picture showing the land in the late 1950s. Courtesy of Riccardo Carver (private archive)

troublesome, to say the least. It consisted in a relentless succession of design solutions that Dolci developed to respond to changing planning intentions and the fluctuations of local private market strategies. Eventually, more than twenty architectural variations and a plethora of urban layouts were submitted between 1954 and 1966. (fig. 6.3) In 1954, the initial *piano di lottizzazione* (parceling plan) proposed a series of new segments of *villini* that replicated a system of detached units and private homes. The planning document evolved in 1958 into a more rigid scheme for conventional perimeter apartments blocks of six to ten-storey slabs organized on either side of the plot and connected by walkways.¹⁹ The new layout of the 1958 *piano particolareggiato* (detailed plan), proposed by the architect alongside a consortium of the landowners, responded to the new prescriptions offered by the Moncalieri General City Plan and approved in 1957. This essentially encouraged the construction of as many high-density buildings (defined as *semintensivi*) as possible in the whole area.²⁰ The final utopic vision proposed the “modern vertical satellite town” anticipated by Enzo Dolci²¹ and the concepts of the high-density autonomous integrated neighbourhood and modern self-sufficient satellite town. A factor that slowed down the whole planning process was the long and wearying negotiations taking place between the several actors involved. The final agreement led to the implementation of a small portion of the overall project, a 60,000 sqm housing development of ten residential towers and 600 apartments, organized around a core area destined to educational and recreational facilities (a nursery, an elementary school, private gardens, and public playgrounds), which were shared with the residents of the popular houses previously built by the IACP in 1953 on the same plot. (fig. 6.4)

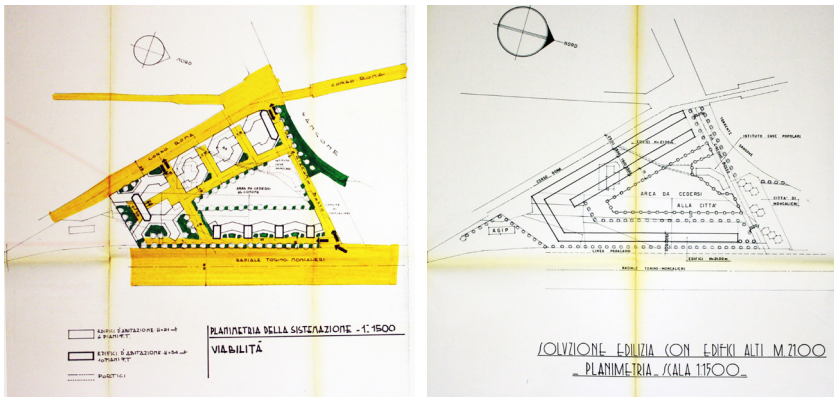


Figure 6.4: Two of the numerous projects submitted by Enzo Dolci to the municipality of Moncalieri over six years, before the approval of the final *Piano planivolumetrico consensuale di sfruttamento edilizio della zona* and the planning agreement between the community of land owners—the “Consorzio zona 2”—the architect, and the municipality of Moncalieri, in 1964. Left: plan submitted in 1958; right: plan submitted in 1962. Courtesy of the Archivio Municipale Comune di Moncalieri

The planning agreements (*convenzioni urbanistiche*) signed by the municipality, the architect, and the consortium of landowners, regulated the transfer of land to encourage the creation of public facilities and infrastructures by the landowners. The revision of the buildable volume enabled an increase in housing density. The result was a master plan with two fifteen-storey towers positioned at the corners of the plot, a condition not normally allowed by the local building code.²² A second design and construction phase (1963–1968) promoted by Dolci in collaboration with the national company Società Generale Immobiliare-SGI resulted in a new scheme for 12 additional affordable high-density buildings—five towers and seven slab blocks—that could allocate around 560 families.²³ This agreement was also extended to the construction of the main infrastructures, like streets, sewages and other technical services, that would contribute to the making of a “well-equipped city,” albeit the Sangone riverbanks were utterly slated to make space for new public greenery and leisure facilities.²⁴

The negotiations between all stakeholders essentially happened in a legal vacuum, marked by the absence of regulatory environment and the inadequacy of centrally planned policies for housing. These decisions challenged established municipal planning tools and the canonical distinctions between private residential development and public spaces. Looking at the role of public institutions and private real estate developers in matters of public space design, for example, we can possibly define new interpretative frameworks to understand

the history of the making of the “public city.” Between the 1950s and the 1970s, a significant part of the urban infrastructures of Turin—like public areas, facilities, and collective services of different kind and scales—was built thanks to the negotiation between public institutions and private initiatives.²⁵ The widespread use of negotiated procedures allowed to bypass the formal clear-cut division between the field of action of the public sector and that of market operators. Private developers became thus responsible for equipping the cities through the construction of private residential buildings, while public-private negotiations were ultimately regulated by the *convenzioni urbanistiche* (planning agreements) signed by the municipal authorities, developers, architects, and other stakeholders.²⁶

Often presented as eminent public achievements, urban expansions were instead generally realized by private initiatives, supported by public financial mechanisms or through forms of public-private collaboration. Moreover, these projects became the operative instruments for local policies to promote access to homeownership for most of the population. A more detailed account of Turin’s postwar urban expansion gets visible reading through the planning procedures mobilized by the private construction of new housing estates. Thus, the growth of the city was not a homogenous process, and even less the expression of a unique project, grounded on the prescriptions of the General City Plan-PRG. It rather emerged as the consequences of fragmented and incremental procedures.²⁷ In Turin, this phenomenon was largely triggered by the mobility and the aspirations of an emerging dominant subject, the urban middle class.

DESIGNING FRAMEWORKS OF MODERN LIFE

In the master plan submitted in 1964, Enzo Dolci opted for unconventional and “extravagant” design solutions which allowed the future inhabitants to enjoy the best views of the Po River and the surrounding hills from their homes. He intended the estate as a symbolic and modern “city gate” marking the southern access to the city. The project inevitably altered the existing working-class neighbourhoods around it: it was intended to forge a new idea of city, through innovative layouts at the urban scale, and by means of new domestic types, functions and technical constructive methods (like in the case of the façade). The design direction chosen by Dolci was to combine local design tradition with experimental solutions. The project evoked the ideals of the modernist “towers in a park,” yet it harmonized the cold language of international modernism with the aesthetic reality of the site by considering the heritage of Turin’s postwar building industry and local living culture. The result



Figure 6.5: Maquette of the 15-storey tower and the 8-storey building connected by a 2-storey continuous slab block with commercial portico and roof gardens, built along the new highway. Model by Enzo Dolci, 1964. Courtesy of Riccardo Carver

was an unconventional urban silhouette of eight ten-storey towers and two fifteen-storey corner skyscrapers with private gardens, connected through a continuous two-storey commercial platform laced with modern porticos and roof gardens that served as collective spaces.²⁸ (fig. 6.5)

On the building permit documents, buildings are labelled as both “*semintensivi*” (mid-density housing estates) and residences of “*medio tono*”, an adjective used to indicate a middle ground between richly equipped residential complexes and the “*intensivi*”, the term used to address high-density economic housing estates.²⁹ In the Moncalieri estate, the “*medio tono*” was embodied by a row of commercial facilities placed under the modern archways running along the edge of the complex. This element, operating at the threshold of architecture and urban design, mirrored Dolci’s intention to evoke the facades of the baroque palaces typical of the centre of Turin.

The uniform programme and the cohesive design solutions proposed by the architect established a framework of modern life expressed in the project at the multiple scales, such as for example, in the articulation of the building volumes, the façade layout, the floor plan organization as well as in the design of communal facilities and even of furniture of collective spaces designed by the architect. These architectural features gained a symbolic value for the



Figure 6.6: Enzo Dolci, “Edilizia residenziale”, article published in the popular magazine *Vita* (19 September 1963): 62-63

inhabitants and built up their personal and collective imaginaries as indicators of social affirmation. In other words, material or spatial features allowed dwellers to differentiate themselves from the surrounding working-class neighbourhoods, but also from the more conventional middle-class residential typology of the time, the *condominio*.

A yet unexplored network of individual professionals and organizations was therefore involved in the production of the market-driven residential environment of postwar Turin. These actors helped translating influential housing models in concrete forms for more diffused application and popular appreciation. A member of this lesser-known community of practitioners deeply committed to the requests of an emerging middle class, Enzo Dolci was able to increase the “quality” of a project that at times seemed purely driven by quantitative profit-oriented criteria. His influence helped to forge new ideas of modern living for the local rising middle class, building up its new postwar identity through renewed standards of living comfort, building types, and settlement models. (fig. 6.6)

A CONSTELLATION OF CO-PRODUCERS: CONFLICTING STRATEGIES, REPRESENTATIONS, AND RATIONALES

Surely this is a project which is out of the traditional ‘canon’, reflecting positively on the builders [...]. The project possibly seemed more ambitious than it actually was: it was pushed a bit and then the operators adapted it to a booming market that was not elitist. The project, the location, the unusual typology, the height, the uncommon flat roofs, are all elements that gave a ‘special imprint’ for the time. (P. G. Deambrosis, architect, builder, and real estate developer, 2012).³⁰

Asked about the history of their neighbourhood, the inhabitants of the Corso Roma estate immediately recall the construction phase and the consortium of stakeholders involved in its realization. They also mention the distinctive features and diverse commercial and advertising strategies introduced by the various developers and their descriptions of aspects such as finishing details or building techniques: aspects which were evoked as distinctive traits of the project. The urban design provided a framework for modern living that targeted an extremely precise and homogeneous social group. This contrasted with the marked heterogeneity witnessed in the construction process, which saw the participation of a multitude of different actors.³¹ These included building cooperatives, family-run building companies, technical bureaucracies, real-estate developers, insurance companies, and surveyors among others. As revealed by one of the building developers involved in the construction of two of the towers along the main axis of Corso Roma:

In the direction of Turin, along the axis of Corso Trieste, the first housing cooperatives were involved in the construction of subsidized housing, a more conventional production in the commercial strategies and discourses [...] It was a courageous operation for the time: in spite of our initial defiance for the unconventional typology, quite unusual for the panorama of Turin residential market.³²

Due to the building contractors’ diverse agenda, working methods and financial structure, the initial project laid out by Dolci was translated into various housing schemes. The diverse forms of adaptation of the original plans reflect the different ambitions and commercial strategies of the single developers who took over the architect’s concept. The multiple developers and construction companies operated substantial typological and size variations accommodating a variety of residential apartments layouts, degrees of decorations and uses for the communal areas. Through their often-opposing strategies they assigned diverse symbolic meanings to the buildings and thus established new paradigms to “measure the status” of the edifices, leading to a significant

re-conceptualization of the architect's original aim to symbolize, through the design, the desires of a quite homogeneous social group.

By diversifying the design and dimension of apartments typologies and collective spaces, the stakeholders were able to give form to the social expectations of the future dwellers, while meeting the demands for comfortable living and the requirements of different middle classes lifestyles. The developers' divergent construction methods, typological solutions, and commercial strategies led to the diversification of the buildings' commercial value and originated the heterogeneous and fragmented social fabric of the Moncalieri estate. Faced to the homogenous architectural language proposed by the architect's project, the individual and collective memories of some of the players involved in the construction process reveal a fundamental discrepancy between developers' strategies and dwellers' life expectations. These contrasts resulted in a continuous reworking, and a certain variety of the floor plan design: from the minimum standards of the *tinello+salotto* (dinette+living room) apartments of 55 sqm to the 110 sqm flats of "*medio tono*";³³ the architect's original ideas were revised into multiple schemes and a multifaceted residential landscape that triggered the social imagery of the inhabitants.

Typological variations also point to emblematic differences between the developers in terms of their scopes and economic rationale. For example, local private contractors in the form of family-owned and small building companies realized floor plans that were "cantered, traditional, richly sized and for an elitist market."³⁴ They tried to optimize the available building volume by promoting more conventional apartments layouts in the framework of the design for the modern high-density towers, a typology frequently associated to popular housing. (fig. 6.7) As argued by the building contractor involved in the construction of one of the two the 10-storeys towers:

The attempts to guarantee a traditional layout with prestigious finishing representative of an average residential production cross the decision to reduce the common and shared spaces. In the construction, the main entrance halls and the doorman lodges were removed to increase the number of apartments, while the green common spaces and private communal gardens were replaced by a parking area.³⁵

By reducing the size of the common spaces within the building, replacing the main entrance halls with the doorman's flat and private shared gardens with car parks, the building company was able to adapt the original project to meet the ideals of domesticity typical of middle-class apartments. Conversely, building cooperatives and national real estate companies opted for reducing the size of the flats and maintained the "*medio tono*" of the buildings by emphasizing the prestige in size and decoration of the collective and representative spaces.



Figure 6.7: The construction site of the first four towers built along Corso Roma by the insurance company INA Assicurazioni and the small building company Deambrosi & Franchino in the late 1960s. Courtesy of the Archivio storico INA Assitalia

In the fifteen-storey residential tower inaugurated in 1969, the main entrance was re-sized and conceived as a two hundred meters squared hall, fully finished in marble, and hosted a doorman's flat and chestnut guardhouse. This entrance is strikingly in contrast with the minimum standards of the eighty-nine rental flats of small- and medium-size.³⁶ (fig. 6.8)

NEGOTIATING SOCIAL IDENTITIES THROUGH THE DOMESTIC SPACE

The multiple storeys of the Moncalieri housing complex acquire a richer significance when observed through the lives of its residents, their memories and experiences. The history of its architecture is shaped by the representations and the living practices of dwellers. Its history helps understand the construction process through the lens of “ordinary” situations.³⁷

One of the main fields where the representations of everyday life in the Moncalieri housing estate can be found is that of administrative procedures. The developers tended to concentrate on the long processes of negotiations



Figure 6.8: Entrance halls of the 15-storey tower in Corso Roma 24 and the 10-storey tower built by an housing cooperative along Corso Trieste. Photos by Michela Pace

with the local municipality and with the involved group of companies and mediators. For the inhabitants, instead, the occupancy experience of the building was profoundly influenced by the long processes that led them, between 1993 and 1996, to gain ownership of the apartments originally rented by the public insurance company INA Assicurazioni.³⁸ This is, for instance, the case of D. M., who rented an apartment in the 15-storey tower in 1970 and became homeowner during the 1990s when the insurance company sold all the units to the dwellers. For numerous inhabitants, it allowed for a re-negotiation of social identities through the ability to purchase an apartment.

His account testifies to the desires of the early movers, especially young couples in the early 1970s, for higher standards of domestic comfort, and of their aspirations to a modern life that eventually led them to become homeowners.³⁹ On top of the social and cultural meanings of owning a home, the unconventional modernist aesthetic of the buildings became an element of value and distinction in the collective imagery of the residents, making the scheme highly desirable. The “modern skyscraper under construction, with its luxury entrance hall with the doorman wearing a *livrea* (livery)”⁴⁰ was a persuasive image for the purchasers. As soon as they were inaugurated, the towers accommodated the superposition of different personal narratives and

representations, but also of living practices, confirming the role had by the estate in the residential and life trajectories of families for several generations. The modifications of the flats' layout and the mobility within the estate over different generations reflect the changing modes of inhabitation over time.

The testimonies of residents interestingly vary when they focus on singular architectural matters. The diversity of narratives and experiences built around the same building produced incoherent images and a more nuanced understanding of its history.⁴¹ For example, interpretative categories and differences that are usually relevant for architectural design—such as apartment versus housing scheme, private versus public space, building versus neighbourhood—tend to lose importance in residents' living narratives which are more concerned with a descriptive understanding of the specific features of the buildings, such as the living rooms, staircases, entrance halls, porticos, and playgrounds.⁴²

TRAJECTORIES OF CHANGE

Nowadays, the Corso Roma estate in Moncalieri remains the only realized fragment of the original plan. Residents' accounts and memories recall the transformation occurred in the overall territory as well as within their domestic interiors. Family testimonies put a particular emphasis on the modification of the layouts of the apartments through different generations and the residents' adaptation of the rigid frameworks and the schemes originally formulated by the architect to respond to the needs of a homogenous society and (nuclear) family models during the 1950s and 1960s. These modifications reflect the changing patterns of collective housing and the decline of previous social habits, ways of living, and expectations of the residents, but contribute also to documenting the shifting values of Italian home-centered society and its fluctuating relation to housing after the 1970s.⁴³ With the crisis of twentieth-century welfare state policies, the estate experienced social and material demise. It was subject to an emblematic process of demographic and economic changes, influenced by new trends in favour of home ownership and by the diminishing work opportunities for middle-class families. In addition, the technological and material obsolescence of the housing stock, and the changing paradigm of housing as a symbol of social mobility and security, largely affected the project's deterioration. Residents' memories help to clarify this passage. (fig. 6.9)

A telling example is that of the shifting recognition of collective spaces and peculiar architectural features of the project, that were originally built to meet the requirements of a booming market capable of interpreting the desires and

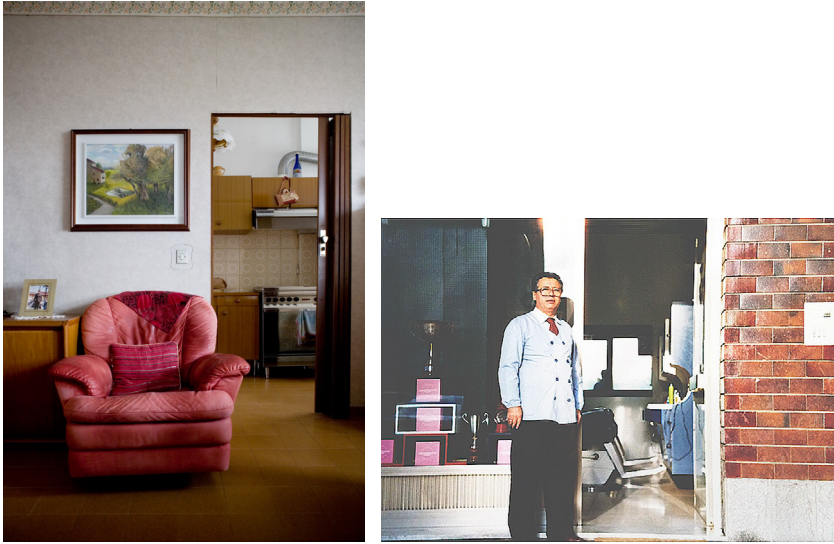


Figure 6.9: Left: The *tinello* (dinetto) of the 78 sqm apartment at the last floor of the 15-storey tower in Corso Roma n. 24. Photo by Michela Pace. Right: One of the first residents who moved in the estate in 1971. Courtesy of Marco S.

aspirations of the emerging middle classes. Dolci originally conceived the development as an inseparable ensemble of “representative parts.” The private communal gardens, entrance hall, porticos, and the central core of communal facilities were originally envisaged as the expression of the emerging consumption culture of the 1950s. The inhabitant’s demands for comfort and good life manifested their social expectations. Today, these spaces have lost their original significance and are incapable of responding to the emerging needs, habits and requirements of the new generations of dwellers.

Another remarkable shift happened in the overall spatial and physical perception of the building. For the original residents, the project’s features—such as the modern silhouette of the towers, the unconventional layout of the masterplan, the facades, the modern portico in ceramic tiles, and the entrance halls—stood for high standards of comfort and modernity. The richly decorated and large entrance hall—the *atrio*—with white arabesque marble finishing and furniture pieces personally designed by the architect conveyed the residents’ desire for social distinction. These spaces also acted as a sort of experimental design opportunities for the architect, who was profoundly committed to the design of semi-public, threshold spaces where he could freely test design solutions outside of the constraints imposed by apartment organisation or public space norms. The entrance halls were intended to be the representative

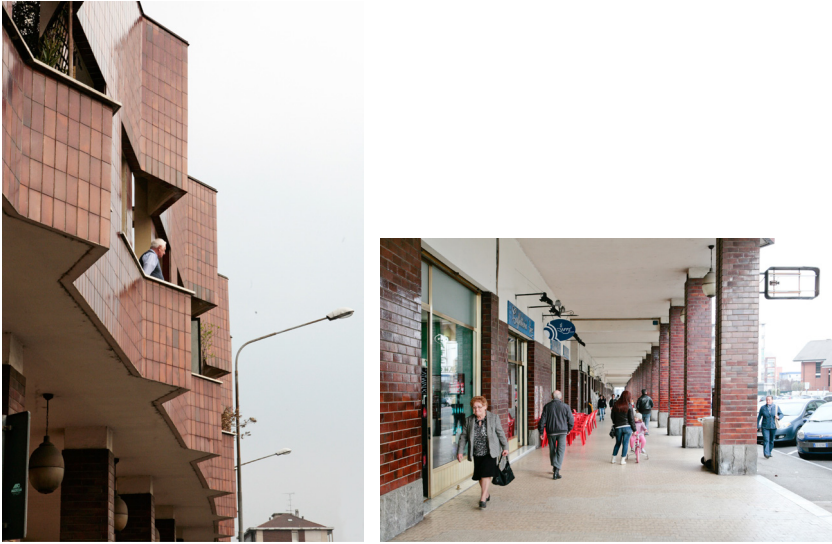


Figure 6.10: The element of the portico which conveyed the modernist discourse and community ideologies introduced by Dolci in ‘commercial housing’ and still represents an element of prestige in the perception of inhabitants, while serving as a facilitator of collective life. Photos by Michela Pace

spaces, where the designer and the work of artists, residents’ imaginations, and the regulatory framework of building codes and land regulations intersect.⁴⁴ Nowadays, this symbolic meaning is long gone and the ground floor spaces are often replaced by retail spaces or converted into passageways with excessive maintenance costs.

An outstanding example in a similar direction is given by the modern portico covered in ceramic tiles. It played an essential role in the eventual residents’ decision to move into the estate and provided a remarkable element of distinction from the unattractive working-class neighbourhoods nearby. Its architecture evoked desirable daily routines and hosted everyday functions that have today completely disappeared. Despite all, the idea of a “city within the city”—as envisioned by Dolci in the early 1950s and his project for a self-sufficient well-equipped community organized around the central core of facilities—is still largely rooted in the imagery of the inhabitants.

Finally, it can also be argued that the neighbourhood unit idea—variously interpreted as *unità di vicinato* or *quartiere* in the Italian post-WWII urban expansion plans—as well as the idea of publicness and the community values projected by the architect in his original plan, aimed to engender and improve social relations through design. However, they never found an effective

translation into the actual modes of inhabitation and use of spaces by the residents, barely interested in any ideals of collective life. Nowadays, the testimonies offered by the inhabitants confirm the unique character of the modern *portico* running along the perimeter of the buildings. (fig. 6.10) The builders and developers addressed with defiance this unconventional architectural feature, yet the *portico* still acts as an element of distinction from the surrounding working-class neighbourhoods. The forms of collective life and sociability that still permeate everyday practices connect the domestic sphere and private realm with the public life and the traffic on the street.⁴⁵

CONCLUSIONS

The urban negotiation process behind the construction of the Moncalieri housing development deepens our understanding of city-making practices in postwar Italy while it dismantles the accepted opposition between state projects and market interventions, those responsible of residential construction versus who realized leisure places and other facilities, individual versus collective living areas. Among these faulty dichotomies, it is arguably the ideological separation between private and public sectors, fields of action and interests that is paramount to move toward a new conceptualization of Italian housing architecture, and urban growth, in the postwar decades. This hard-to-disentangle interplay between private and public actors, likewise between urban policies and architectural designs, was arguably the defining traits of the Moncalieri estate's early history.

The documents and rules governing the design procedures offer a precious insight into the everyday working methods of space-making practices, including the bureaucratic processes that touched most aspects of the architectural profession in postwar Italy. Yet, this body of information is mainly transmitted within the closed communities of practitioners via oral recounts: an aspect that makes access to the sources more difficult and asks for careful interpretative processes.

The micro-histories of the housing complex in Moncalieri reveal the character of the ordinary residential estate as a place of mediation between regulated and informal housing practices, between the stories of inhabitants' lives and of the design process, the technical and non-technical culture. It depicts postwar housing provision in Turin as a process of negotiation which encompasses all the different aspects of the design process, producing broader forms of knowledge often dominated by bureaucratic procedures. The collection of stories or memories from the diverse actors actively involved in the estate produces contradictory narratives on the history of the housing complex,

fragmented between the subjectivities of lived experiences and the objective materiality of the context. These entanglements between different perspectives testify to the diversity of conflicting tales and dissonant voices of the variety of “co-producers” involved in the design and construction of housing. Also, such micro-investigations contributes to debunk certain canonical representations of postwar mass housing and to introducing a more nuanced understanding of the intricate set of planning procedures, professional practices, dwelling habits that produced the post-WWII residential environment in Turin.

The study of unheard voices reflects a shifting approach in architectural research and broaden the spectrum of methods of production of architectural knowledge reconsidering the cultural hegemony of the architect and the role assigned to architecture. It provides a more nuanced narrative of the history of twentieth century housing and, more precisely, of the housing practices during the Italian economic boom. It depicts large-scale housing provision as a process of cultural mediation. Linking the micro-history of the complex with the study of its spatial practices and looking at the diverse forms of interaction between architectural thinking, residential cultures, and professional practices, a more detailed understanding of how the ordinary environments in our cities were built is possible.

To conclude, the history of the Moncalieri estate provides a valuable lens for examining the city of today, its objectives and historical formation and can influence decisions on the demolition and retention of this housing stock. This repository of drawings, records, visions, values, memories, and practices can generate new experiments in redevelopment strategies and transformation approaches. They offer theoretical devices and spatial values for contemporary projects, in our current time when the values, aspirations, and political framework that produced mass housing programmes are partially extinguished.

NOTES

1. The article stems from a ten-years research on the ‘ordinary’ residential landscape of post-WWII Italian cities and most recent reflections on methodologies in the historical research on housing developed in collaboration with Filippo De Pieri.
2. Middle classes are addressed in this article in relation to their residential cultures, habits, and models. See the collective research “Architecture for the Middle Class in Italy, 1950s-1970s: For a Social History of Dwelling in Turin, Milan and Rome”, funded in 2010 by the Italian MiUR and coordinated by the author. See: Filippo De Pieri et al., eds., *Storie di Case. Abitare l’Italia del Boom* (Roma: Donzelli, 2013); Gaia Caramellino, Filippo De Pieri and Renzoni, *Explorations in*

- the Middle-Class City. Torino 1945-1980* (Siracusa: Lettera Ventidue, 2015); and Gaia Caramellino and Federico Zanfi, eds., *Postwar Middle-Class Housing: Models, Construction and Change* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015).
3. Paola Di Biagi, *La Grande Ricostruzione. Il piano INA-Casa e l'Italia degli Anni Cinquanta* (Roma: Donzelli, 2001).
 4. Paola Di Biagi, *La Città Pubblica. Edilizia Sociale e Riqualificazione Urbana a Torino* (Torino: Umberto Allemandi, 2008).
 5. Gaia Caramellino and Filippo De Pieri, "Domestic Italy after WWII: Collecting Stories from Middle-Class Houses", *Candide* 6, no. 9 (2015): 46-72.
 6. Gaia Caramellino, Filippo De Pieri, "Private Generalizations: The Emergence of the Micro Scale in Historical Research on Modern Housing", in Anne Kockelkorn and Nina Zschocke, eds., *Productive Universals: Specific Situations* (London: Sternberg Press, 2019), 310. In the text, the authors question the potentialities of oral history and micro-histories in housing research. On the use of oral accounts and micro-histories in architectural research see: Janina Gosseye and Naomi Stead, eds., *Speaking of Buildings* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2019) and Nancy Stieber, "Microhistory of the Modern City", *JSAH* 58, no. 3 (1999): 382-91.
 7. Gaia Caramellino, "*Basta un Milione per vivere in un Grattacielo fronte Collina*", in eds. De Pieri et al., *Storie di Case*, 295-96.
 8. After the approval of the State Law on popular housing (*Legge Luzzatti*) in 1903, the IACP was funded in Turin in 1907 to promote the construction of new public housing estates and contrast the ongoing housing crisis. The institute was established by the city administration with the financial support of local banks and other public and private organisms active in Turin.
 9. The Tupini Law, approved in 1949 revised the *Testo Unico per l'Edilizia Popolare ed Economica*, approved on 28 April 1938, introducing subsidies for the construction of new units that were not classified as "luxury apartments".
 10. On Ina-Casa, see: Di Biagi, *La Grande Ricostruzione*, 2001. Originally conceived for the development of new public housing estates, the Law n.167 allowed private developers to build middle-class housing using funding and land originally assigned for public housing. See Filippo De Pieri, "La legge 167 e i ceti medi", *Territorio XVII*, 64 (2013): 75-81.
 11. This interpretation has been introduced by Paola Di Biagi. See: Paola Di Biagi, *La Città Pubblica*, 2008.
 12. See: Antonio Cederna, *I Vandali in Casa* (Bari: Laterza, 1956).
 13. John Foot, "Micro-history of a House. Memory and Place in a Milanese Neighbourhood, 1890-2000", *Urban History* 34, no. 3 (2007): 431-453.
 14. "Città satellite per cinquemila persone fra Torino e Moncalieri", *La Stampa* (Friday, 10 June 1960), 9.

15. For the *Italia '61* international exhibition and the cultural and urban context behind the construction of the exhibition area in Turin, see: Sergio Pace, Cristiana Chiorino, Michela Rosso, *Italia 61. The Nation on Show. The Personalities and Heralding the Centenary of the Unification of Italy* (Turin: Allemandi, 2006).
16. Preliminary concept for the masterplan proposed by the architect Enzo Dolci in 1954. Private Archive of the architect Riccardo Carver.
17. *La Stampa*, 1960, 9.
18. See: Città di Torino, “*Piano Regolatore Intercomunale. Relazione Generale*” (Turin: July 1964): 223, 264-5/ X.11, n. 18 a-b/1965. Archive of the Municipality of Moncalieri (Acm).
19. First Parcelling Plan proposed by Enzo Dolci for the whole area in 1958. Letter by Dolci to the municipality of Moncalieri, 1958 (Acm).
20. Luigi Mazza, *Trasformazioni del Piano*, in Mazza-Olmo, eds., *Architettura e Urbanistica a Torino 1945-1990* (Torino: Allemandi, 1991), 61-85.
21. The three masterplans submitted by Enzo Dolci to the municipality of Moncalieri were approved in 1958, 1962 and in 1964. See: “Piano planivolumetrico consensuale di sfruttamento edilizio della zona di piano particolareggiato n. 2” (Acm), cat. X, cl. 11, fasc. n. 4/1964, 1958-64.
22. The consortium of landowners and developers coordinated by the architect was established in 1964. “Consorzio volontario costituito con atto n. 11.011/3857”, 20 March 1964 (Acm).
23. Active in Italy and abroad since the nineteenth century, SGI erected more than 700 residential buildings in Italy between 1945 and 1975. The real estate developer was active in the new areas of urban expansion, defining various typologies conceived for different sectors of the real estate market.
24. On the activity of SGI in Turin, see: Caramellino, De Pieri and Renzoni, *Explorations in the Middle-Class City. Torino 1945-1980*, 107-115.
25. On the negotiation practices and procedures in the planning of post-WWII Turin, see: Gaia Caramellino, Cristina Renzoni, “Negotiating the Middle-Class City”, *Cidades* 33 (2016): 68–88.
26. On the use of planning agreements in post-WWII Milan, see: Nicole De Togni, *Milano Negoziata* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2022).
27. AA.VV., “Il piano regolatore generale di Torino 1959”, *Atti e Rassegna Tecnica della Società degli Ingegneri e degli Architetti in Torino* 3-4 (1960): 94-168.
28. The final version of the project “Soluzione planimetrica definitiva-Piano planivolumetrico consensuale di sfruttamento edilizio della zona di piano particolareggiato n.2”, proposed by Enzo Dolci, was approved by the municipality of Moncalieri in 1964 (Acm).
29. See the already mentioned Tupini Law, approved in 1949.

30. Interview with P. G. Deambrosis, architect, builder, and real estate developer, by Gaia Caramellino, April 2012.
31. On the role of little-known builders and developers in the design and construction of housing for the middle-class, see: Barbara Miller Lane, *Houses for a New World: Builders and Buyers in American Suburbs, 1945-1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) or Ioanna Theocharopoulou, *Builders Housewives and the Construction of Modern Athens* (Hoboken: Polis, 2022).
32. “Verso Torino, su Corso Trieste, sono attive prima le cooperative, un’edilizia più convenzionata insomma, nei discorsi di commercializzazione [...]. Fu un’operazione coraggiosa per l’epoca, nonostante le perplessità iniziali per la tipologia fuori dal normale, anomala nel panorama dell’edilizia residenziale torinese”. P.G. Deambrosis, builder (Deambrosis & Franchino S.p.A.), interview by Gaia Caramellino, April 2012.
33. According to the Italian law regulating economic housing, the layout of 110 square metres marked the difference between “medium” and “luxury” apartments. See: the *Testo Unico per l’Edilizia Popolare* of 1938, cit., art. 48.
34. P.G. Deambrosis, interview, 2012.
35. The oral accounts of the builder are confirmed by the minutes of the Building Licence “Licenza edilizia n. 600-109” of March 17, 1964, and by the Building Permit “Permesso di costruzione” n. 74/69, April 21, 1969 (Acm).
36. Building Licence n. 131 1968-000232, 24 May 1968 (Ascm).
37. See: Steven Harris, “Everyday Architecture”, in *Architecture of the Everyday*, eds. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997); Ricardo Agarez and Nelson Mota, “Architecture in Everyday Life”, *Footprint* 17, 2015: 1-8.
38. Interview to Domenico M. by Gaia Caramellino, February 2012.
39. Interview with Paolo F., inhabitant, who moved in one of the ten-storey residential towers in 1971, by Gaia Caramellino, March 2012.
40. Domenico M., interview, February 2012.
41. Interviews with the inhabitants of the 15-storey residential tower owned by INA Assicurazioni collected between February and April 2012.
42. Memories of inhabitants tend to simultaneously invest places that are different in their nature and status, shedding light on how the practice of inhabiting modern estates inherently connects a plurality of different scales. See: Caramellino and De Pieri, “Private Generalizations”, 299.
43. Federico Zanfi, “Afterword. Getting our Hands into the Flesh of the Contemporary City”, in Caramellino and Zanfi, *Postwar Middle-Class Housing*, 369-383.
44. Carlo Perogalli, *Atrii di Case*, (Milan: Görlich 1960).
45. Interview with Paolo F., March 2012.

GOSSIP AND COMPLAINT

Ways of (Re-)Producing the Social in Housing 'Expertly'

Heidi Svenningsen Kajita

PROMISES OF THE USELESS

The fellow next door said to me – “It’s no good, arguing with them buggers, the Council. You might as well talk to the wall. They won’t listen to you or nothing.” But if you take that attitude, that the Council get their own way in the end, they’ll walk all over you.¹

This resident, when interviewed for a 1978 evaluative study of Byker Redevelopment in Newcastle upon Tyne (UK), reported the neighbourly gossip that sometimes defined the communication between residents and planning and architecture authorities as fraught. Despite the sense of uselessness that residents can be left with in such communicative processes, this resident persisted with the promise of collective action. At Byker, residents were not alone in acknowledging the importance of voicing their concerns in design and planning. Community involvement was the starting point for the rolling programme of this large-scale housing redevelopment that took place between 1968 and 1983. The architects, along with local authorities, experimented with various methods for exchanging information with residents, and together they came to demonstrate a turn towards public engagement aligned to the political reorganization and policies of the different eras, such as the timely 1969 Skeffington Report (UK).² Their joint efforts, though only partly successful in terms of effectively promoting residents’ participation in actual decision-making, had a lasting impact on design and planning methodology.

In the decades after World War II, Northern European welfare states subsidized a vast number of public large-scale housing estates for consolidated capital and social aims.³ At the time, architecture was understood as the production of objects and was closely aligned to industrialization and mass production. The social aspect of architecture was dealt with in behavioral and normative studies that guided standards for everyday spaces. Planned as a part of both social and/or municipal housing in various national models,⁴ the

collective organization of everyday functions was an integrated element of design thought to ease domestic tasks and, in turn, free up residents' time for paid work and leisurely activities. This social ordering of space was considered useful to capital production.

Yet when the capitalist promises faded—as they did even before the buildings, landscapes, and infrastructures were completed—the principles of systematic economic redistribution that had underpinned the estates' social purposes faded as well. This housing has since been stigmatized. In recent decades, it has increasingly become an object for speculative investment, negating former ideals of solidarity and displacing residents who have lived (sometimes vulnerable) lives in these estates. If not sold off or demolished, this housing has undergone renovation or transformation to become desirable for so-called resourceful residents. Despite these efforts, the public narrative describing the estates as social ills persists. As a result of this historical reality, opportunities to rethink the social in these large-scale housing estates as more than simple failure have been lost.

According to feminist scholar Sarah Ahmed, giving up on something that we expected to be useful “can point not only to *what*, that which is now deemed pointless, but also to *who*, those who had assumed something had a point” (original emphasis).⁵ With these words, Ahmed gestures to the promise of reorientating something towards more inclusive purposes for those whose needs were not originally met. Here I bring Ahmed's analytical gaze on academic institutions, spaces, and knowledge systems to the context of architecture, and more specifically to the imaginaries, processes, and expertise that characterize post-World War II large-scale housing. In doing so, I question how design expertise can be reoriented to engage social aspirations that might have been considered useless in former systems. How might distinct communicative techniques be blurred so that design and planning experts can support not only systematized design and planning but also residents' own social reproductive processes?

We can begin to answer this question, I argue, by building on understandings of architectural production as social relations.⁶ I therefore focus not on housing as built structures, but instead on how mediations from historical design processes for this housing engaged social concerns at various levels: from norm to fantasy via technical aspects to partial truths and personal processes. I focus on the archives of Ralph Erskine Arkitekter AB (hereon REA) because they offer informative examples of the nuanced and ambivalent interplay between mainstream design processes and social relationships.⁷ Rather than seeking to grasp only the intention behind or the reception of design, I also examine the archival documents to understand how communities' everyday actions can be nurtured and come to inform design.

Specifically, through iterative-inductive research into documents selected from the archives, I reveal how notions of gossip and complaint—those positively idle, useless utterances belonging to the realm of social reproductive processes—were embedded in the architects’ exchanges of information. This broad grasp of the social in architecture unsettles boundaries of expertise—it allows us to follow design processes across dissimilar knowledge fields, professional frameworks, and practices. First, in two sections, I describe specific design imaginaries—techniques, genres, and processes—of what I term *Erskine-like gossip and complaint*. In the chapter’s third section, I show how this gossip and complaint more generally works to redefine expertise, embedding communities’ often hidden and marginalized relationships in architectural design processes.

ERSKINE-LIKE GOSSIP AND COMPLAINT: BRITTGÅRDEN

In Sweden, Ralph Erskine gained popularity as the “the Englishman who designed *Folkhemmet* [the People’s Home]”⁸—the Social Democrat concept of the welfare state. REA designed multifamily housing and unfolded a critical approach to modernist planning. Between 1958 and 1969, they had designed a large-scale estate, Brittgården, in the small town of Tibro in Sweden. There, REA developed useful and compassionate principles for “places for living,” but they also revitalized old village motifs as part of a fantasy and “an artistic manipulation which gives intimacy and personal situation” onto the project.⁹ REA promoted ideas about what they termed “gossip groups” and “gossips’ living rooms” that would later find their way into Byker and other projects. In Byker, these concepts followed principles of public engagement, and they came to guide unique communicative processes with residents in which both desires and complaints were welcome. In the following, I look to the office archive to examine such Erskine-like gossip and complaints.

Archival documents, such as the drawing *Family and Gossip Group*,¹⁰ show REA’s intimate, personal design for Brittgården’s pedestrianized precincts. (fig. 7.1) While working on plans for the town centre, REA had been appointed to design this housing estate at the outskirts of the town. The mixed-typology and mixed-tenure estate of around 367 units (in the original scheme) was planned for workers in the town’s expanding furniture industry. Recreational grounds, a local shop, hobby rooms, communal laundries, play spaces, and so on were carefully arranged on paper according to norms and standards for government-sanctioned multifamily housing. At the time, multifamily housing schemes had to comply with national norms and space standards promoted through planning and design guidelines such as *God Bostad* [Good Homes], published in Sweden by the *Kungliga Bostadsstyrelsen* [Royal Board of Housing]

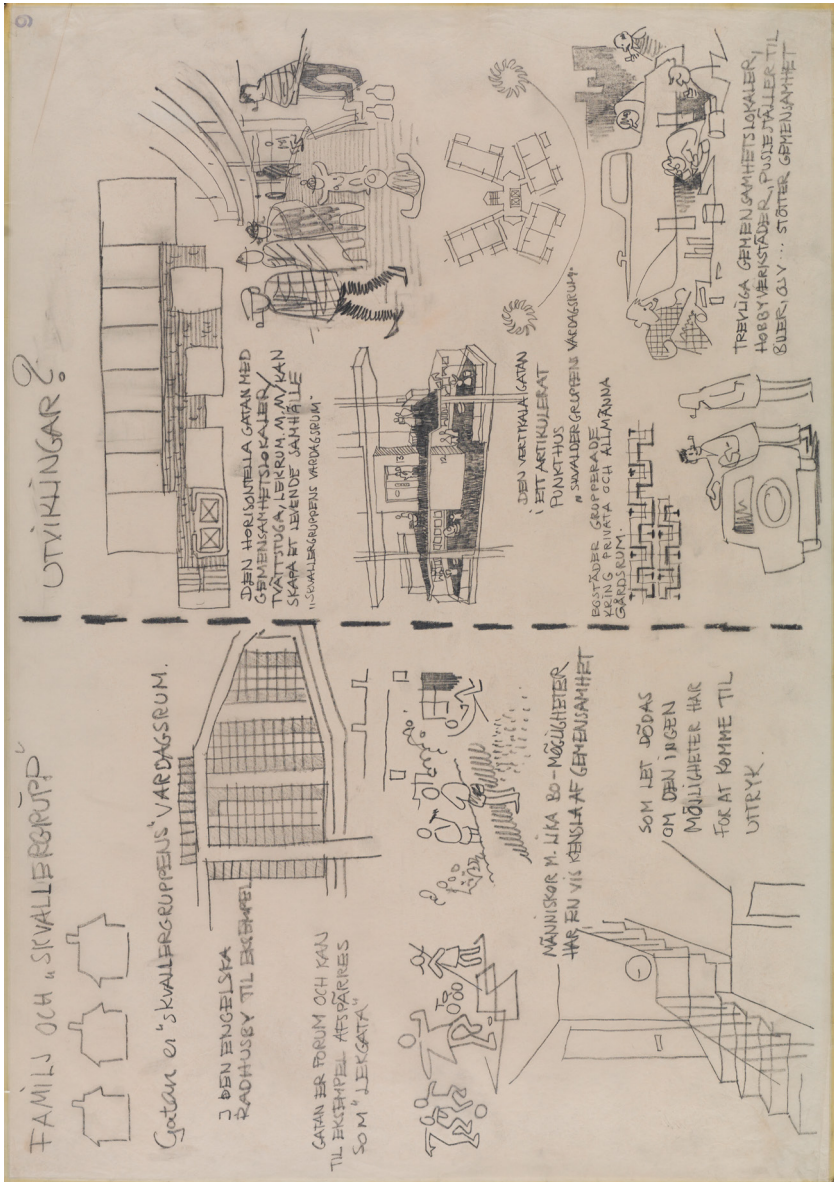


Figure 7.1: *Familj och "Skvallergroup"* [Family and "Gossip Group"]. Sketches and text on the top right outline ideas for horizontal streets with communal facilities—such as laundries, play space, and so on—which can create a thriving community: "the gossip group's living room". Drawing by Ralph Erskine, date unknown, Brittgården, ArkDes Collection: ARKM.1986-17-1008-09



Figure 7.2: Brittgården exterior. Women sitting on bench on gallery access deck. Photographer unknown, date unknown, Ralph Erskine, Brittgården, ArkDes Collection: ARKM.1986-122-1292

between 1954 and 1975,¹¹ and the parallel *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, drawn up by the Parker Morris Committee for the United Kingdom's Ministry of Housing and Local Government in 1961.¹² These normative guides were based on extensive research and specified functional living environments and construction, often in minute details. According to *God Bostad*, for instance, “[y]oung children depend on constant supervision and good contact with indoors (mother) and completely traffic-free play environment in residential neighbourhoods.”¹³ This generic idea is mirrored in a photograph in REA's office archive that shows women in Brittgården joyfully lounging on a gallery access deck while overseeing children playing in the courtyard below. (fig. 7.2) Sketches premeditate a neighbourhood unit experienced in neighbourly chats



Figure 7.3: Children and plants on access balcony deck. Photograph by Birgitta Gustafsson, date unknown, Brittgården, Tibro Museum

over wooden fences and hedges that would take place in smaller clusters of units, the “gossip groups.” Romanticized ideas for gossips’ living rooms were expressed in architectural elements such as benches, sliding fences, and balconies. While REA’s records embrace the era’s democratic programme and aims of solidarity, they also indicate a critical stance of the one-size-fits-all model of postwar housing as praised in the many vivid social and architectural histories already written and told.¹⁴ Although REA sought to build on traditional life-patterns such as on-street play and chatter, in translating *God Bostad* to design instructions for the built environment, REA also followed normative postwar precedent. Their expertise upheld the system. And a resident’s own photograph, taken a few years later, documents how the gallery access deck was used in reality, as it had been drawn.¹⁵ (fig. 7.3)

While my study focuses on archival documents, the geographical sites are (still) important for realising how these documents played into people’s lives because, as media historian Kate Eichhorn emphasizes, “coming to understand how people live may still be contingent on establishing a relationship with the people we seek to study, and on participating in their everyday life on some level.”¹⁶ I draw on Eichhorn’s ethnographic methodology, following the documents from the office archive into their broader contexts.¹⁷ Rather than

allocating the documents to either object-bound or social classification, this type of ethnographic approach to the documents, which include texts, drawings, photographs, and more, allows documents to be researched as media that can act differently in different contexts.

Following the documents along alternate routes, I came to learn more about how such records were used to prescribe use. For instance, on a site visit in Brittgården, I met and interviewed two women, daughter and mother, who had moved to the estate in 1968, about how institutionally enforced ideas for good citizenship played out in the everyday. As in many other postwar multi-family housing estates in Sweden, the collective structures in Brittgården were integral to ideas about citizen reciprocity in the welfare state's construction of justice and equality. New amenities such as automated washing machines relieved residents from some of the toil of housework. Such amenities and functions were sometimes installed in shared spaces (as in laundry rooms), which were intended to draw individual residents out into the collective sphere. I asked the women about communal laundry facilities on Brittgården. Did they function as meeting spaces? No, I was told. The communal laundry rooms were for laundry work. Instead, the mother recalled that, according to local stories, housewives were 'supposed' to drink coffee and gossip on the gallery access decks.¹⁸ The residents confirmed that gossip took place in spaces dedicated to gossip.

These kinds of tales, in addition to those from historians, planners, other residents, and archivists, guided my interpretations of the archival documents as I learnt more about their messy histories and the everyday politics informing them. I encountered different actors face-to-face in libraries, which are, of course, the databases of historical norms of planning and architecture; in the archive of a local museum; in research settings; in town planning offices; in housing association offices; and in the estates' geographical sites.¹⁹ I would bring copies of documents with me, and the information in the documents was verbalized and shared across people and locations. Often, I would meet narratives that repeated normative ideas, say, about how a space was expected to promote residents in such-and-such activity. But on closer inspection, these women narratives turned out to offer more diverse possibilities for imagining social space. For instance, in my conversation with the mother and daughter, after talking with them for a while, the two women told me that they would, in fact, stop for a chat with neighbours when bringing and fetching their laundry to and from the communal facility. Even if the two women, as good citizens of the Swedish social democratic state, did what they were supposed to do when they first moved in, the women remembered gossiping in non-dedicated areas with a degree of what they described almost as the 'misuse' of normative estate life.²⁰

ERSKINE-LIKE GOSSIP AND COMPLAINT: BYKER

The architects' social commitment originated in more than the postwar period's democratic programme. It was also defined by their broader roles in the situations in which they operated, particularly in contact with residents—their so-called consumer-clients.²¹ At the time when work started in Byker, the Swedish architects established a site office, seeking to open the architectural design process to democratic influence.²² From this office, they maintained an informal, continuous relationship with residents for as long as the architects worked on the project. When the site office closed, all the files were boxed up; they are now kept at the RIBA Collections in London. From these files, along with material from the Drottningholm office kept at ArkDes Collection in Stockholm, we can learn about some of the efforts that REA's invested in embedding residents' concerns in their mainstream design processes.

The specialized documents obtained by architectural archives are typically categorized in view of buildings and their practical completion “more than their expanded social life,” as reiterated by Julia Dwyer and Jos Boys, who show how a much broader approach to artifacts changes how histories of architectural practice are reviewed.²³ The archival material of both the Brittgården and Byker projects largely follow the typical object-oriented logic. Key drawings are catalogued according to design phases and/or specific genres such as plans; diagrams; elevations or specific architectural features; and manuscripts, such as architects' correspondence with clients and contractors. In most architectural archives, it is unusual to find documents that acted in communicative processes with residents. However, it is not the case in the Byker archive. In the vast material kept from the site office, the architects retained evidence of their experimentation with various methods for engaging residents in the processes of planning and designing their housing.

The *Byker Redevelopment* has been widely acclaimed as exemplary, both for its contribution to postwar modernist architecture and for REA's unique efforts in community involvement. Both its architectural characteristics and the architects' social commitment were recognized in the Grade 2* heritage listing granted in 2007.²⁴ The redevelopment includes approximately 2,000 homes across the famed Byker wall, which was planned to block impact from a motorway to the north, and the low-density housing to the south. Different clusters of housing are connected by pathways and lush green spaces. Implemented over time in a rolling programme, this new urban form replaced the traditional Tyneside flat-terraced houses but maintained some of the existing structures, such as corner pubs. The aim from the start was that the phased redevelopment would allow existing residents to be rehoused locally. While the majority of residents ended up leaving the area during redevelopment, some

residents remained and engaged in communicative processes with the architects. Among records from the pilot scheme, the first phase of the redevelopment, I found traces of residents' voices in genres such as letters, lists, summaries, commentaries, memos from meetings, and more discursive texts, such as journal articles. Some of these sparse sources suggest how REA, across design projects and phases, evolved the aesthetic motifs for intimate, personal situations into onsite processes that engaged residents' everyday gossip and complaints. Whispering in the wings, as it were, this small amount of microdata came to act in both social and design processes.

We know from scholarship on gossip, and more specifically on what Patricia Meyer Spacks calls "good gossip," that gossip plays a central role in the continuous cooperation between people that is necessary for maintaining social order.²⁵ Furthermore, when intertwined in large-scale institutionalized processes like municipal housing development, gossip can function as a form of everyday politics and as an expression of informal power.²⁶ Despite this role, historically, the moral privilege of the public realm tended to devalue the domestic realm of gossips and complainers, and the small, shared truths of gossips, annotators, and diarists have mostly been associated with a negative relationship to power. To cite Silvia Federici, those who gossip are generally assumed to "presumably hav[e] nothing better to do and hav[e] less access to real knowledge and information and a structural inability to construct factually based, rational discourses."²⁷ Yet gossip, like complaint, remains important to establish an ambiguity that can be useful in transformative processes: from a rational perspective, the very idea of circulating intimate information disrupts the public eye. Any threat to leak information can be a promise to challenge established norms.

The Byker archive holds a similarly ambiguous status. On the one hand, REA operated as a state-sanctioned arm of explicit domestication. On the other, the architects made decisions that explicitly aligned design documents with the subversive powers of the estate's individual residents. REA's norm-disrupting position is illustrated in part by the architects' decision to establish their UK branch as a site office in the middle of the Byker redevelopment area. From here they experimented with methods such as questionnaires, walkabouts, lists of complaints, informal meetings, and conversations with residents that brought nitty-gritty and often personal matters to the architects' attention. As I followed routes opened up during archival research, I communicated with several members of the architectural team in Byker. I co-hosted a public seminar, where Vernon Gracie, the project architect, described the site office as follows: "We had an open door, so that anybody could come in to see what was going on [...] people could just walk into the office [...] If they wanted to complain, as they mostly did, or just wanted to have a chat."²⁸ The open door

About this issue, Mrs. Wallis wrote:

I am afraid I cannot live in this house any longer the noise is terrible from the people upstairs my nerves is getting worse [...] the child runs the floor night and day I can hear all their feet tramping back and forward and banging things on the floor [...] These houses were supposed to be sound proof [...] it's only a one bedroom flat the same as mine and yet there are four persons living there. I am paying four pounds a week rent and I have no pleasure whatsoever.³⁰

Following the archival documents in the order of construction, my search for residents' voices reveal feedback loops from design to use to design. For instance, in the office archive, Mrs. Wallis's complaint can be seen as a request to fix poor soundproofing. Information was shared between different actors, across different types of documents, and over the extended temporality of the project. As such, residents' voices can also be traced, if scarcely, into building information and a variety of other genres.³¹

In general, however, reports at the time—such as Mavis Zutshi's report referred to above that was one among several social studies—critiqued the redevelopment for not meeting aims for participation as initially planned. Such studies charged the project with limiting residents' influence to issues such as “really only choosing colors for their house.”³² This recognized lack of obvious success with participation may have to do with how complaints, like gossip and other everyday communicative processes, perform in ambiguous circular and tangled ways.³³ Residents' voices are compressed and sometimes stifled, when transmitted into bureaucratic storage systems. On record, the multiple inter-related concerns, worded in a letter of complaint, for example, or in a short diary note referring to a chat long enough to drink a glass of sherry, can be thought of as tidy memos of untidy processes.

Gossiping and complaining in the office and in letters and lists, some of the residents presented the architects with concerns of personalized, internal social relationships that sometimes needed addressing at a personal level. Still, their everyday gossip and complaint also reveal broader, systemic issues, as in the copy of Mrs. Wallis's letter, where issues of overcrowding and economic stress were brought to the architects' attention. Seen as a form of everyday politics, the minor matters tell us something about larger issues. And the architects brought residents' concerns with them not only into design tasks, but also into the more polemical level of their practice. When, for instance, REA translated and published an excerpt from the office diary in the architectural press in Sweden,³⁴ traces of residents' local complaints and gossip acted as professional discourse. While it is important to reiterate that the architects attended to residents' voices to inform and communicate with them during planning

HEIDI SVENNINGSSEN KAJITA

city emblem

CITY AND COUNTY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
P.J. DIXON, F.I.C.M., DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

**HOUSING DEPARTMENT
 CIVIC CENTRE
 NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE NE1 8PR
 TELEPHONE NEWCASTLE 28520**

In case of enquiry please ask for.....

MT/SC

2nd March 1972

RECEIVED
 3 - March 1972
 ACTION

Dear Mr. Gracie,

I am enclosing a copy of a letter I have received from Mrs. Wallis, 232 Kirk Street. As you will see she is complaining in the main about sub-tenants moving into the flat above. This, of course, will be dealt with by my department, but I thought you might be interested in her comment about the soundproofing in her flat.

Yours truly,

[signature]
 DIRECTOR OF HOUSING.

Mr. V. Gracie,
 Ralph Erskine & Partners,
 45 Brinkburn Street,
 Newcastle upon Tyne, 6.

MC

Vernon Gracie [?] M Wallis
 232 Kirk St.
 Byker

AEK RECEIVED
 AEK
 10 FEB 1972

what Management have been involved in this have to say.

Dear Mr Dixon,

I am afraid I cannot live in this house any longer the noise is terrible from the people up stairs my nerves is getting worse her daughter and child are still living there they have been there for months the child runs the floor night and day I can hear all their feet tramping back and forward and banging things on the floor I am afraid I cannot stand much more of this these houses were supposed to be sound proof, there is no privacy what so ever you can hear every word they say, and it also says on the rent book

sub letting it's only a one bedroom flat the same as mine and yet there are four persons living there I am paying four pounds a week rent and I have no pleasure what so ever I wish I had never come to this place I am under the doctor with my nerves I go out to work all day to keep myself and dred coming in this house at nights. I am afraid I will have to find lodgings some where till I can get another place. I have wrote to you before about this I filled a form in. Have you any one bedroom flats on addisons Rd or Melborne court I would be very grateful if you could help me out

M Wallis

Figure 7.5 : Author's visual transcript of the director of housing's letter to architects and Mrs Wallis's letter of complaint (2023). Original (1972) in Ralph Erskine, Byker, RIBA Collections

and design processes in the local situation, REA also mediated these residents' concerns in articles and lectures, in radio broadcasts, and in walkabouts and conversations with planners and politicians between and beyond geographical situations.

In fact, residents' concerns were given attention again and again: the note in the office diary about Mrs. Wann's visit to the office, mentioned above, was dated 14 May 1974. That excerpt was used again in 1976, when it was translated, typed, commented on, and printed in the Swedish journal *Arkitekten*. In this same publication, the diary excerpt was revised by the architects and complemented with a selection of photographs showing architects and residents gathered in a room full of paper, holding drawings, pointing to details, and engaged in conversation. For their audience of professional peers, REA not only sought to demonstrate the work of the architects, but they also documented commitment to engage residents in design processes. Ultimately, the documents of Erskine-like gossip and complaint operate as a kind of recording device that played residents' voices in different locations. Sometimes this information was heard, sometimes not.

EXPERTISE BEYOND BOUNDARY

The office archive accounts for both REA's design expertise and the architects' social commitment—an “extra work load,” as they called it—that they saw as an integral part of their professional obligation.³⁵ In this work—this research-through-practice—REA challenged boundaries of expertise in ways that have been widely influential on new forms of architectural practice.³⁶ The aim to meet both social and design obligations could be said to be ambiguously positioned in what scholars more broadly have described as a contradiction between social reproductive processes that require caring responsiveness and capitalist production in its various forms.³⁷ Kathrine Shonfield describes post-war building construction “as a dream of science, as an ordering, purifying system.”³⁸ In Shonfield's critique of this so-called purity, she uses the analytical gaze of anthropologist Mary Douglas on classification thinking to observe how, “in the context of construction, science's role is to render everything measurable, to attach a number to it, and to make sure each thing keeps to its assigned class.”³⁹

The concern for social relations that REA expressed in their attentiveness to ambiguous social processes, such as gossip and complaint, was an enigma among the ordering, purifying frameworks for architectural expertise that dominated at the time. “To be an expert,” Edward Said explains, “you have to be certified by the proper authorities; they instruct you in speaking the right

language, citing the right authorities, holding down the right territory.” In contradiction to this smooth system of expertise, Said describes “amateurism” as, “literally, an activity that is fuelled by care and affection [...] An amateur is [...] someone who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one’s country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as other societies.”⁴⁰ Seen from this perspective, REA were amateurs messing with authority.⁴¹

In fact, by placing their desks in the middle of the Byker site to inform and communicate with residents, the architects borrowed from ethnographic fieldwork strategies.⁴² Ethnography is traditionally thought of as the production of knowledge through encounters with other people and things. It depends, for the production, on fieldwork involving participatory observation and face-to-face interaction with communities in actual places. As an iterative-inductive mode of operation, it contradicts the ordering mode of postwar government-sanctioned housing design. By insisting on site-based ways of knowing, REA unsettled the smooth professional ethos of architectural standards, regulations, and norms that cannot account for such differentiations. And, as Zutshi’s evaluation explains, this ethos complicated residents’ direct influence on their Byker housing: “If it threatened to upset the smooth running of the machinery—then it was halted.”⁴³ Trying to bridge the unlike realms in their site office, REA transmitted the small and partial information given by residents into documents that could be dealt with by housing departments or in construction. Information was extracted, and data were tidied and removed from the peculiar ethnographic context to fit procedure. Thus, at the same time REA disrupted the notion of a ‘pure’ architectural expertise, they also disrupted ethnographic expertise fueled by amateurish care and affection. At the very least, the sparse evidence of residents’ gossip and complaint in the archive suggests a practice of such boundary-crossing professionalized classifications.

Architectural languages and techniques, bound by expertise, are expected to uphold clear, concise, and easily understandable information. In the postwar era, both state and professional organizations promoted standardized languages and techniques for information fit for mass and pre-fabrication. The construction of large-scale housing played a crucial role in advancing building technologies and the scientific paradigm of “purity,” to iterate Shonfield. This juncture is certainly not the most obvious place to begin pondering gossip and complaint. According to the aforementioned division between professional and amateur knowledge, which is underpinned by a purity rationale, it is often assumed that specialized languages are exclusive to experts and an obstacle for interaction in situations of everyday knowledge.

Yet as Karen Burns, in reference to Meaghan Morris, reminds us, the everyday is full of expertise:

The critique of elitist language assumes a universal speech situation that requires all participants at all times to speak plainly in a non-technical way [but] specialist language is everywhere in daily life; try reading the cricket reports in sports pages or knitting patterns without expert knowledge of these activities.⁴⁴

With this in mind, we can view Mrs. Wallis's gossip-mongering words about her upstairs neighbours as weaving together specialized languages. The letter shows Mrs. Wallis engaging bodily, technically, managerially, and certainly politically with her housing. She may be describing how noise levels affect her nerves, but her purpose is not to describe an experience or sensation. Instead, she demonstrates everyday technical insight into construction by pointing to the problem with soundproofing; she considers economy and population density. The letter combines languages and techniques of gossip and complaint with technical and socio-economic categories. Even if we deem this mere gossip, the housing officer passed the letter on to the architects *because* it contained specific information about soundproofing. Consequently, through this interpersonal exchange each actor comes to know more than is expected from their particular line of expertise. When picking up information from the piece of paper, the actors negotiate what is relevant.

Eichhorn argues that ethnographic research into textual communities (which emerge when people are brought together through shared texts—reading or writing practices in shared communicative and technological practices) can offer insights into new genres of marginal or hidden concerns.⁴⁵ By adopting the unfamiliar genres of gossip and complaint, then, the architects welcomed unfamiliar responses to their aestheticized fantasies for neighbourliness and harmonious “gossip groups.” The humdrum of tattle and grumble is promising because—when it is detected in the office archives—it brings attention to concerns often silenced. It is also promising because it combines professional, clear and concise languages with the caring and tangled ways of amateurs needed to sustain social space. Minor, site-based activities and actions, such as ‘sherry and a chat,’ do not immediately appear to offer solutions to large-scale problems. Still, this kind of gossipy activity “achieves whatever it achieves because it stands in relation to other forms of communication and social action,” as anthropologist Niko Besnier explains about the “everyday production of politics.”⁴⁶

While architectural language and techniques should typically avoid ambiguity, it is not uncommon for actors outside architecture to employ architectural images and texts for ambiguous purposes. Architectural mediations are

used by markets and forces of power for persuasive measures and to foretell change. As Keller Easterling argues, architecture acts like rumours that tend to follow the paths of whoever is in power. And, as she stresses, this happens for both right and wrong reasons, because architecture “is accustomed to telling itself that it is not invited to weigh in on official policy and so cannot bear any real responsibility for it.”⁴⁷ Gossip, complaint, and rumour all transmit small and large information along in informal ways. While gossip and complaint are intertwined in interpersonal relationships, rumour can happen without this personal attachment. Politically, architectural techniques are already used as means of persuasion in social housing agendas to interpret and promote fragments of ideas and policies such as “austerity,” “vulnerable areas,” and “ghettos.”⁴⁸ When tactics of rumour, complaint, or gossip shift from their oral immediate, face-to-face context into textual and visual contexts, they can gain scale. According to anthropologists Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, “the trick for literate forms of rumour (and gossip) is that they should mimic the oral form, preserving the informality and ambiguity while presenting things, rhetorically, in ‘black and white.’”⁴⁹ Importantly, when informal exchanges are mimicked in architects’ images and texts, these exchanges gain authority. As such, architectural mediations can transfer everyday agency into levels of power. Whether architecture is made useful to new economies or to purposes on the ground, it is already dealing in partial fictions and circular threads of information.

Building on the observation that specialist languages and techniques are a part of all that we do, gossip and complaint can come to act with other genres in the office archive. From here, gossip and complaint can come to perform in circuits of power. We have already seen how Mrs. Wallis’s letter and the excerpt of the diary were taken into new contexts among different expert communities. This Erskine-like conduct with gossip and complaint might be positively seen as an expertly caring way to support the democratic (re)production of space. However, it can also be negatively seen as enabling architecture to circulate prejudice and assumption (rather than seriously fact-checking empirical information). If residents’ own reproduction of space is to be considered central to transformation processes, then experts will have to be made accountable for processing untidy information—not in one-off evaluative exercises pre- or post-occupancy, but along the way and sometimes from unexpected sources such as gossip and complaint.

CONCLUSION

“Gossips’ living rooms” and “gossip groups” at first sight appear to be romanticized but also fixed and normative ideas. However, the archival records reveal how REA architects again and again exchanged information with residents about their ambiguous social relationships—both the kind of information they may have expected to learn and the kind of information they were not necessarily prepared for. Residents’ gossip and complaints did not always align with REA’s fantasies for social reproductive processes, but specific documents of gossip and complaint nonetheless supported both professionalized design processes and local sociality.

The promise that I want to emphasize here is how the documents favoured porous boundaries of expertise or, in other words, blurred distinctions between professionalism and amateurism. These small piles of paper became props in intertwined processes. They assisted the architects by opening a door (extracting all kinds of information), curiously attending to small details (floors, noise, vandalism, etc.), and sometimes parking information or failing to act (taking note of a ‘sherry and a chat’). The REA documents intertwine the purposes of spatial construction and purposes of people coming together. Furthermore, residents’ gossip and complaint were inscribed, if sparsely, in architectural documents that came to circulate, establish relationships, and build alliances in unexpected relationships and different perspectives of power. Along the way, these documents were reoriented towards the varied contexts that they acted upon and shaped—as such, residents’ voices became instrumental to new purposes.

While architecture and planning expertise has assumed a fairly harmonious, object-centred understanding of the social world, ethnographic expertise approaches the social as highly diversified, temporal, and partial. Documents of gossip and complaint can leak information between such unlike internalized lenses. “We don’t know what *may* happen when we create a record of what *did* happen. We don’t know what *will* happen to that record. It ‘could land anywhere.’ It is a hope, a promise, and also, perhaps, a threat,” writes Ahmed, who continues, “we don’t always know where complaints go, before they are filed. But even when complaints end up in filing cabinets, they can get out; we can get them out” (original emphasis).⁵⁰ It is hard to subtract information from entangled processes, and the small amount of data available on file in the archive provides only tidy clues of the tangle they amass. Yet even if scarce, this data can remind and hold architects accountable for often hidden matters and voices, when they mediate social orders. Transmitted to design processes, gossip and complaining utterances can—with difficulty—come to act in so-called expert ways of (re)producing the social in housing.

AFTERTHOUGHTS FROM THE ARCHIVE

The architect came in here and I said to him...well, a lot of people have said to him about these back-porch slabbing stones—that when it rains there’s a pool of water there. “Non-sense,” he says. I mean, we are living in the houses, we know the faults. But he’s just not taking any notice.⁵¹

NOTES

1. Mavis Zutshi, *Speaking for Myself: A Report on the Byker Redevelopment* (Newcastle: Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service, April 1978), 12, located in the Byker archives, ArkDes Collection, Stockholm.
2. The Skeffington Report, by Arthur Skeffington and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, is officially called *People and Planning: Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning* (London: HMSO, 1969).
3. See: Helena Mattsson and Sven-Olaf Wallenstein, *Swedish Modernism: Architecture, Consumption, and the Welfare State* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010); Miles Glendinning, “Multifaceted Monolith: The Hidden Diversity of Mass Housing”, *Images of Power and the Power of Images*, ed. Judith Kapferer (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 47–59; Miles Glendinning, “Architectures and Public Spaces of Modernism”, *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 200–19; Thomas Hall and Sonja Vidén, “The Million Homes Programme: A Review of the Great Swedish Planning Project”, *Planning Perspectives* 20, no. 3 (2005): 301–28; Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings in Drawings and Words* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1951).
4. See, for example, Housing Europe Observatory’s “Social Housing in Europe” profiles, specific country-based descriptions of social and municipal housing in European nations: <https://www.housingeurope.eu/section-14/research?topic=&type=country-profile&order=datedesc>.
5. Sara Ahmed, “What’s the Use?” feministkilljoys, posted October 18, 2018, accessed August 15, 2023, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2018/10/18/whats-the-use/>.
6. See: Philippe Boudon, *Lived-in Architecture: Le Corbusier’s Pessac Revisited* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1979); Helena Mattsson and Meike Schalk, “Action Archive: Oral History as Performance”, in *Speaking of Buildings: Oral History in Architectural Research*, ed. Janina Gosseye, Naomi Stead, and Deborah Van Der Plaats (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2019), 94–113; Jennifer Mack, *The Construction of Equality: Syriac Immigration and the Swedish City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Heidi Svenningsen Kajita, “Fragile potentialer i de store planer: rumlige og materielle dimensioner af

efterkrigstidens storskala boligbebyggelser i brug” (PhD diss., Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademis Skoler for Arkitektur, Design og Konservering, Copenhagen, 2016); Sophie Yarker, “Social Housing as Built Heritage: The Presence and Absence of Affective Heritage”, in *Heritage, Affect and Emotion: Politics, Practices and Infrastructures*, ed. Divya. P. Tolia-Kelly, Emma Waterton, and Steve Watson (London: Routledge, 2016), chapter 12. These studies, among others, challenge the often simplified representations of postwar housing and positively turn to possibilities in the quotidian everyday by combining analysis of urban form with ethnographies and other site-based evaluative processes. In this context, I want to thank Meike Schalk for comments on an early draft and Jennifer Mack, Svava Riesto, Katie Lloyd Thomas, and Sally Watson for chats and support.

7. Documents from the Byker site office (the office was set up for this project only) are kept in the RIBA Collections in London, and documents from the Drottningholm office in Stockholm are in the ArkDes Collection in Stockholm. Thank you to staff at the RIBA Collections and ArkDes Collection for their generous assistance during archival research.
8. Mark Isitt, “Ralph Erskine: Engelsmannen som ritade folkhemmet”, *Goda Grannar: Svenska Bostäders hyresgästmagasin* 5, no. 3 (September 1995): 4.
9. Ralph Erskine, “Democratic Architecture: The Universal and Useful Art—Projects and Reflections”, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 130, no. 5314 (1982): 647.
10. Ralph Erskine, “Familj och ‘Skvallergrupp’” [Family and ‘Gossip Group’], date unknown, ArkDes Collection, Stockholm.
11. Kungliga Bostadsstyrelsen, *God Bostad—idag, i morgon*, published in Stockholm in 1954, 1960, 1964, and 1975.
12. Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MoHLG), *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*, report of the Parker Morris Committee (London: HMSO, 1961). See also: MoHLG, *Space in the Home*, Design Bulletin 6 (London: HMSO, 1963); and MoHLG, *House Planning: A Guide to User Needs with a Check List*, Design Bulletin 14 (London: HMSO, 1968).
13. Kungliga Bostadsstyrelsen, *God Bostad* (1960), 45. Author’s translation.
14. See: Claes Caldenby, Eva Thörn, Per Göran Ylander, and Malin Weijmer, *Brittgården—ett bostadsområde av Ralph Erskine i Tibro* (Tibro Kommun, Sweden, 2013); Peter Collymore, *The Architecture of Ralph Erskine* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1994); Mats Egelius, *Ralph Erskine, Arkitekt* (Stockholm: Byggförlaget 1988); John Pendlebury and Jill Haley, “The Byker Community Trust and the ‘Byker Approach’”, in *Hope Under Neoliberal Austerity: Responses from Civil Society and Civic Universities*, ed. Mel Steer, Simin Davoudi, Mark Shucksmith, and Liz Todd (Bristol: Policy Press, 2022), 57–72; Peter Malpass, “A Reappraisal of Byker, Part 1: Magic, Myth and the Architect”, *Architects’ Journal* 169 (1979): 961–69.

- This selection of monographs, project descriptions, and articles about REA complements REA's own publications about their work, for example, Michael Drage, "Byker: Surprising the Colleagues for 35 Years—A Social History of Ralph Erskine's Arkitektkontor AB in Newcastle", in *Twentieth Century Architecture: The Journal of the Twentieth Century Society*, 9 (2008): 148–62; Ralph Erskine, "Tibro", *Arkitektur* 6 (1965): 167–175; Ralph Erskine, "Byker", *Arkitektur* 8 (1976): 4–14; Ralph Erskine, "Den lojala Arkitekten", *Arkitektur* 7 (1981): 4–9; Ralph Erskine, "Byker. Nybyggnad var bästa lösningen", *Arkitektur* 6 (1977): 23–24; Ralph Erskine, "Democratic Architecture: The Universal and Useful Art—Projects and Reflections", *Journal of the Royal Society of Art* 130, no. 5314 (September 1982): 642–59; Ralph Erskine, "Funktionalism eller dekorerad låda", *Arkitektur* 7 (1987): 36.
15. Photograph by resident Birgitta Gustafsson, date unknown, Brittgården, Tibro Museum.
 16. Kate Eichhorn, "Sites Unseen: Ethnographic Research in a Textual Community", *Qualitative Studies in Education* 14, no. 4 (2001): 566; see also: Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).
 17. Eichhorn, "Sites Unseen."
 18. Personal interview with residents who have lived in Brittgården since 1968 (unpublished), May 2019.
 19. Fieldwork activities included participant observation and personal interviews with residents and other actors in Brittgården (April–August 2019) and in Byker (January–March 2020); meetings with researchers at conferences, in libraries, and university settings (2019–22); meetings with curators, historians, and planners in archives and municipal offices (2019–22); and conversations with architects who worked on Byker Redevelopment, through personal interviews, email correspondence, and a seminar (2019–20). Thank you to everyone for generous input and practical help. This work was supported by the Independent Research Fund Denmark under Grant 9032-00006B in affiliation to the University of Copenhagen and Newcastle University 2019–23. I did fieldwork in Brittgården during postdoctoral research at KTH Stockholm—School of Architecture in 2019.
 20. Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).
 21. Caroline Purches (Ralph Erskine ark. kontor), letter to The Industrial Co-owner Movement, 1975, Byker, RIBA Collections, London.
 22. Ralph Erskine was also known to walk and observe life at the Brittgården estate during the phased-design process.

23. Naomi Stead and Cristina Garduño Freeman, quoted in Jos Boys and Julia Dwyer, “Revealing Work. Interrogating Artifacts to (Re)View Histories of Feminist Architectural Practice”, in *Architecture and Culture* 5, no. 3 (2017): 492.
24. For example, see Grade II* listing on Historic England’s website: <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1392118>. See also: John Pendlebury, Tim Townsend, and Rose Gilroy, “Social Housing as Heritage: The Case of Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne”, *Valuing Historic Environments*, ed. Lisanne Gibson and John Pendlebury (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 179–200.
25. Patricia Meyer Spacks, “In Praise of Gossip”, *The Hudson Review Inc.*, 35, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 19–38; Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (New York: Knopf, 1985). See also: Silvia Federici, “On the Meaning of Gossip”, in *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women* (Oakland: PM Press, 2018), 35–43; Heidi Svenningsen Kajita and Meike Schalk, “Idle Talk: Circulation Information Collectively”, in *Where Are the Women in Scandinavian Landscape Architecture?*, ed. Svava Riesto and Henriette Steiner (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming); Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew J. Strathern, “Gossip—A Thing Humans Do”, *Anthropology News*, January/February 20, 2020, <https://www.anthropology-news.org/articles/gossip-a-thing-humans-do/>; Melanie Tebbutt, *Women’s Talk? A Social History of Gossip in Working Class Neighbourhoods, 1880–1960* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995). I also want to express gratitude to my mother for demonstrating the joyful, useful practice of gossip and complaint. As a child, I watched and learned from her as she worked in her hairdressing salon, called Salon Hanne.
26. Niko Besnier, *Gossip and the Everyday Production of Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009).
27. Federici, “On the Meaning of Gossip”, 40.
28. Public seminar with architects of the Byker Redevelopment, organized by Per Hederus, Heidi Svenningsen Kajita, John Pendlebury, and Sally Watson, December 16, 2020. In this online conversation, project architect Vernon Gracie shared memories and reflections with fourteen of the other architects who worked in Byker between 1969 and 1983 (unpublished).
29. Ralph Erskine, excerpt from office diary, May 1974, Byker, ArkDes Collection, Stockholm.
30. Visual transcription of Mrs Wallis and Director of Housing, Letters, RIBA Collections, London.
31. Heidi Svenningsen Kajita, “Urgent Minor Matters: Reactivating Archival Documents for Social Housing Futures”, *Architecture and Culture*, published online August 10, 2022. Heidi Svenningsen Kajita and Katie Lloyd Thomas, “On File and As File: Tracing Communicative Processes in the Byker Archives”, presented at the symposium *The Practice of Architectural Research*, KU Leuven, October 2020. These papers and other texts currently in review present supplementary arguments for inscribing residents’ voices in architectural paperwork.

32. Zutshi, *Speaking for Myself*, 52.
33. Sarah Ahmed, “A Mess as a Queer Map”, feministkilljoys, posted December 23, 2020, accessed August 15, 2023, <https://feministkilljoys.com/2020/12/23/a-mess-as-a-queer-map/>. In her analysis of institutionalized complaint processes, Ahmed shows that a complaint cannot be understood as a simple outcry: a complaint requires repeated action and attention. In the map she draws of complaint, it looks like a tangled mess. See also: Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
34. Ralph Erskine, “Byker”, *Arkitekten* 8 (1976): 4–14.
35. Purches, letter to The Industrial Co-owner Movement.
36. New practices were promoted by the many influential building, planning, and landscape architects of the Byker team, in addition to the architectural community that studied at Newcastle University during the 1970s (e.g., members of Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative; see “Matrix Feminist Design Collective”, online at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/apl/alumni/graduates/matrix/>). More broadly supportive were the actors in the participatory design movement in 1970s Europe (for instance, see the listings on the Spatial Agency website, created by Tatjana Schneider and Jeremy Till, at <https://www.spatialagency.net/database/participation>).
37. See: Nancy Fraser, “Contradictions of Capital and Care”, *New Left Review* 100 (July-August 2016): n.p.
38. Katherine Shonfield, *Walls Have Feelings: Architecture, Film, and the City* (London: Routledge, 2000), 38.
39. Shonfield, *Walls Have Feelings*, 40.
40. Edward Said, “Professionals and Amateurs”, lecture 4 in the Reith Lectures 1993: *Representations of an Intellectual*, August 2, 1993, BBC Radio 4, transcript, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/radio4/transcripts/1993_reith4.pdf.
41. See also: James Longfield, “Making Byker: The Situated, Amateurish Practices of a Citizen Architect” (PhD diss., Newcastle University, 2016).
42. Ralph Erskine, “Architects on Architecture”, February 12, 1976, uploaded to Youtube by AA School of Architecture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAFjUEI0Rug>.
43. Zutshi, *Speaking for Myself*, 52.
44. Karen Burns, “Feminist Theory and Praxis, 1991–2003: Questions from the Archive”, in *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economics, Technologies*, ed. Hélène Frichot, Catharina Gabriellson, and Helen Runting (London: Routledge, 2017), 19.
45. Kate Eichhorn, “Sites Unseen: Ethnographic Research in a Textual Community”, *Qualitative Studies in Education* 14, no. 4 (2001): 565–578.
46. Besnier, *Gossip*, 12.

47. Keller Easterling, "Rumour", in *Dirt*, ed. Megan Born, Helene Furján, and Lily Jencks (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 74.
48. See, for example: Heidi Svenningsen Kajita, Jennifer Mack, Svava Riesto, and Meike Schalk, "Between Technologies of Power and Notions of Solidarity: A Response to Danish Ghetto Plan and Swedish Vulnerable Areas Documents", in *Architectures of Dismantling and Restructuring Spaces of Danish Welfare, 1970–present*, ed. Kirsten Marie Raahauge, Katrine Lotz, Deane Simpson, and Martin Søberg (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2022), 148-159.
49. Stewart and Strathern, "Gossip."
50. Ahmed, *Complaint!*, 298.
51. Zutshi, *Speaking for Myself*, 39.

PART 4

CULTURES OF TRANSFORMATION

HOUSING COMPLEXES IN BRAZIL

A Modernist Heritage

Flávia Brito do Nascimento

THE STATE AND HOUSING IN BRAZIL: THE PRODUCTION OF HOUSING COMPLEXES BETWEEN 1930-1960

Debates about urban workers' housing in Brazil date back to the first decades of the twentieth century when housing became a matter of concern among engineers, physicians, and other professionals.¹ As proposed by Francisco Liernur and Anahí Ballent, the modern housing complexes built in the 1930s and 1940s in Latin America are heir to the dialogues and local efforts beginning the twentieth century, influenced by ideas and discussions on matters such as the right to housing, the new forms of city building, and the role of the state.

A starting point of this debate was the First Housing Congress held in São Paulo in 1931, which was promoted by the architecture department of the city's Engineering Institute to establish technical standards for good hygienic housing construction. The general recommendation formulated on that occasion was the realisation of detached, single-family houses.² In a series of following scientific events and publications, the attention shifted towards the structural, cultural, social, and political changes in Brazilian society brought about by the Getúlio Vargas's administration, including social housing becoming a responsibility of the state, the leading role of architects and urban planners, and the relationship between households and the surrounding living environment.

Among the various topics that were discussed in those years, a prominent position was occupied by the architecture and urban principles of the Modern Movement that, by then, had already been featured in a few editions of the CIAM congresses and had been disseminated in Brazil thanks to the lectures of prominent European architects, among them Le Corbusier. As discussed in the historiography of Brazilian architecture, housing became one of the pivotal issues used in the debate about modern architecture despite of the fact that

its relevance in the development of Brazilian architecture would be recognized only much later.³

The Brazilian state's first coordinated public policies on workers' housing were implemented by the Retirement and Pension Credit Unions (CAPs), followed by the Retirement and Pension Institutes (IAPs) founded between 1933 and 1937. The 1937 decree (n. 1789) had already provided for the construction of housing since the creation of the Ministry of Labour, Industry, and Commerce in 1930,⁴ and it was progressively revisited to make it possible for a broader network of actors/agencies to operate, such as in the case of the Pensions Institute. Yet the housing law did not produce the desired effect of expanding housing supply.⁵ The Decree 1749 of June 28, 1937 and the Tenancy Act of 1942 (which put a freeze on rents), in particular, were the legal instruments that triggered housing initiatives by the state. This system was coupled with a technical and administrative apparatus that regulated the process of designing and realising new housing projects. Different governance and architectural solutions were tested over the years, each depending on the responsible institutes and, in particular, on their technical and financial capacities.⁶ Once the housing construction law was enacted by the institutes, debates began to materialize into written documents, reports, articles and, ultimately, in projects and housing structures.

The IAPs stopped promoting housing development in 1964, when Brazil suffered a military coup, with the institutes being deactivated once the national social security system got unified. The building efforts of the previous decades had resulted in a housing stock that, although small when compared to the social demand for houses in Brazil, played a central role for the promotion of more advanced living standards and, in parallel, helped shaping a new cultural consciousness on matters like housing policies and architecture. (fig. 8.1)

Moreover, the realized building agenda had a significant impact on the urban landscape of many cities, as best rendered in the case of Rio de Janeiro's outskirts. The architectural and urban responses given by these various institutes resulted in a wide range of solutions.

The institutes were organized by professions, with some of the most relevant ones being the Institute of Industry, of Banks, and of Commerce. The financial disparity among the workers, the motivations of their directors, and the local conditions of each institute are the reasons for a wide array of urban and architectural solutions. Yet, if the acceptance of the architectural and urban principles of the Modern Movement was not always unanimous, the construction of working-class homes in Brazil generally relied on criteria such as constructive rationality and new formal experiments, which often hid class-based social strategies, not lastly the power of domestic architecture to morally educate the workers by means of their new homes. For many authors, indeed,

Institute	Number of Housing Complexes built
Instituto de Aposentadoria e Pensão dos Industriários - IAPI	51
Instituto de Aposentadoria e Pensão dos Bancários - IAPB	44
Instituto de Aposentadoria e Pensão dos Comerciantes - IAPC	40
Fundação da Casa Popular - FCP	31
Instituto de Previdência e Assistência dos Servidores do Estado - IPASE	19
Instituto de Aposentadoria e Pensões dos Empregados em Transportes e Cargas - IAPETC	17
Liga Social contra o Mocambo - LSCM	8
Departamento de Habitação Popular da Prefeitura do Distrito Federal – DHP	4
Banco do Brasil	4
Instituto de Previdência dos Servidores do Estado do Pernambuco – IPSEP	3
Instituto de Previdência do Estado de São Paulo - IPESP	3
Serviço Social Contra o Mocambo – SSCM	3
Instituto de Aposentadoria e Pensões dos Marítimos - IAPM	3
other institutes	28
Total	258

Figure 8.2: Housing complexes built by the institutes. Source: Flávia Brito do Nascimento, “Cotidiano Conjunto: Domesticidade e Patrimonialização da Habitação Social Moderna” (Post-doctoral thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 2021), 36

their construction activities soon after 1938, the Retirement and Pensions Institute for Bank Workers (IAPB) entered Brazil’s housing production scene in full force from the 1950s onwards.

Scholars Eulália Negrelos and Camila Ferrari assert that several Latin American countries adopted starting with the 1930s the idea of the ‘housing complex’ to tackle the shortage of decent housing—a solution that was institutionalized by many countries in the 1940s. According to them, the housing complexes were generally of two types: either a set of vertical multifamily blocks and/or buildings built on large plots of land or an extensive set of

Collective facilities	Number of Housing Complexes
Collective facilities general	207
Without data	23
Collective facilities that includes Laundries and/or Community Centers	18
Collective facilities only designed	10
Total	258

Figure 8.3: Housing complexes with collective facilities. Source: Flávia Brito do Nascimento, “Cotidiano Conjunto: Domésticidade e Patrimonialização da Habitação Social Moderna” (Post-doctoral thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 2021), 43

detached, single-family units each with its own private plot. While this distinction focuses on the building and urban types and the forms of the private homes, these projects, as highlighted by Negrelos and Ferrari, were supported by collective services, by a set of facilities (such as schools, gyms, clinics, commercial units and social centres), and by generous open spaces, therefore adhering to the neighbourhood unit concept.⁸

Housing complexes were heralded as an ideal model for state-promoted urban housing. In these projects, living units were complemented with collective services for all inhabitants. Looking at international experiences, as revealed among others by Dinalva Roldan, neighbourhood units and collective housing blocks were the main types of state-produced housing not only in Brazil but also throughout all of Latin America.⁹ Although Roldan believes that the original design intentions have been progressively hollowed out of their original meaning as a community space (fig. 8.3), the advancements these projects brought at the scale both of city planning and of architecture remain considerable. As a model, the neighbourhood unit was used in a diverse and flexible manner all over Brazil, transformed and adapted to local conditions—either in terms of form or political—or to the interests of the promoting agencies, usually from the perspective of how the collective spaces in the communal areas were used. Criticism was not lacking. The engineer Augusto Duprat, in an article for the magazine of the Clube de Engenharia, offered in 1957 a harsh assessment of this type of complex, which in his view “create real cysts in cities, as having a complex for bank workers, another for commerce workers, another for industrial workers, and so on, creates *de facto* segregation of families.” Furthermore, these projects adopt “a single type of house for all of Brazil, confusing standardization with typification. Local



Figure 8.4: Housing Complexes: Pedregulho, Passos d’Areia, Lagoinha. Source: Collection of the *Grupo de Pesquisa Pioneiros da Habitação Social*

habits and customs are not taken into account, as well as the purchasing power of the future user.”¹⁰ This criticism, while accurate at the urban scale, was faulty in relation to the kind of houses and apartments that were actually built by the institutes, which in reality varied substantially from project to project.

The result of this production is a set of around 300 housing complexes built by the various retirement and pension institutes spread across Brazil. The formal universe of these projects is quite broad and the production not homogeneous, with typological, technological, and urban variations which, if observed closely, also testify to a variety of theoretical and design ideas developed by the involved architects and planners. There are tall buildings amidst the consolidated urban fabric (fig. 8.4), large sets of slab buildings amidst green spaces combined with single-family homes, and spectacular solutions like the internationally renowned Pedregulho Residential Complex in Rio de Janeiro. All are important architectural achievements and made a profound impact on the Brazilian urban landscape, regardless of whether they were designed by renowned architects or produced in the technical offices of the institutes.

Although modern architecture preservation in Brazil has in the last twenty years acquired relevance, social housing preservation is still a challenge. The range of conservation problems is extremely diverse. And, more importantly, there is a lot of prejudice towards workers’ heritage or the role that heritage could play in these residential spaces. The “authorized heritage discourse”¹¹ in Brazil focuses primarily on the national heritage of the colonial period, and although there has been a significant widening thanks to new policies, workers’ or popular heritage still represents a huge challenge.

THE HOUSING COMPLEX AS HERITAGE

The beginning of the process of deterioration and abandonment of the housing complexes built in Brazil in the 1930s-1950s can be identified with the end of the institutes and the sale of the residential units. This process took place in the 1960s, when the complexes were no longer under the direct administration

of the institutes. The houses built during the 1940s and 1950s transcended the sense of a mere ‘roof over one’s head’—they were also aimed at conforming and educating workers. Administration of the units went beyond the bureaucratic or physical aspects and was often closely connected with social work programmes, in which social workers played an active role. Especially in the housing complexes of the Retirement and Pension Institute of Industrial Workers (IAPI), social workers played an active role in numerous aspects of private and public life. Teaching home management and child-rearing skills, and organizing social functions, such as parties and recreational activities, were within the scope of complex administrators and are still part of the memories of their residents.

The sale of the residential units meant a definitive end to the originally intended social project behind these homes. Afterwards, residents themselves started managing the buildings, though only the residential parts of the blocks. Consequently, the complexes lost their purpose as neighbourhood units offering collective services such as schools, day-care centres, health clinics, and social clubs. Residents were forced to reorganize themselves into condominiums, whose structure determined whether the blocks would be split or joined, according to the capacity of residents to form management associations.

At the Santa Cruz Housing Complex, in São Paulo, built by the IAPB (Bank Employees), residents with a rich background of union organizing managed to create a condominium legal structure for many blocks, ensuring the management of the entire housing complex. Other complexes followed other destinies, with condominiums being created for single block, resulting in individual buildings being fenced off, and in the progressive privatization of collective spaces, such as gardens and courtyards.¹²

There are cases in which the symbolism of the buildings has survived the dissolution of social programmes and the repurposing of the building for other uses. The Penha Housing Complex—built in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1940s by the Retirement and Pension Institute of Industrial Workers (IAPI) when it started to engage in the construction of large housing complexes made up of collective housing slabs—was equipped with a large open space, a school, and a social club, all still widely used. The social club, now run by the city of Rio de Janeiro, is known by its original name, the *Grêmio Recreativo e Esportivo dos Industriários* (GREIP). Created by residents in 1950, GREIP continues to play a very active role in the complex. It has become a cultural and political force in the neighbourhood of Penha, attracting users from Rio de Janeiro’s suburban area.¹³

At the Realengo complex, the first built by the IAPI, many residents have fond memories of the time when the institute managed the complex and of the social and community life they use to have. Known as *Moucuzinho* (little

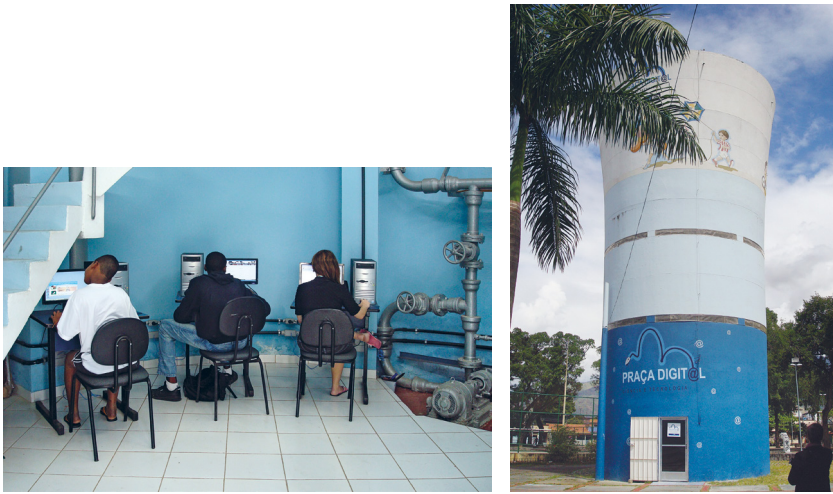


Figure 8.5: Water tank. Left: internal view; right: external view. Source: Collection of the *Grupo de Pesquisa Pioneiros da Habitação Social*

Moscow), the complex became famous as a gathering place for the militants of the Communist Party. Its residents are still very politically active, coming together to elect city and state representatives. The struggle to enjoy the spaces of the complex and for its resignification is clear in a resident's statement on the water tank being adapted for cultural activities, which are an emblematic feature of IAPI complexes. (fig. 8.5) Not coincidentally, the Realengo Residential Complex lost its identity as a heavily politicized industrial community linked to the Brazilian Communist Party around the same time when the National Housing Bank was created and the ties between its residents and the IAPI were severed. The level of identification of current residents with the retirement institutes has clear implications for the preservation of the dwellings and complex facilities.¹⁴

One peculiar aspect of the housing complexes built in the 1930s-1960s in Brazil is the demographic profile of their residents. Although many of these complexes have been sold or passed on by the original residents, some have retained their original social configuration, keeping the identity and memory ties from the time when the IAP programmes were implemented. It is interesting to note that, when the complexes were occupied, the residents did not always have a peaceful relationship with the state authority that owned the properties, especially on aspects such as the rules of coexistence, conduct, and management of the houses. The strong role of the state was represented by the presence of social workers and by prohibitions, such as that against building walls between houses.¹⁵ After so many years of occupation and the end of the



Figure 8.6: Santa Cruz Housing Complex, IAPB, São Paulo. Source: Collection of the *Grupo de Pesquisa Pioneiros da Habitação Social*

state-run housing programme, objects, materials, and personal memories nevertheless remain. The conflicts of the past have been given new meanings and, in general, have led to greater affective and memory bonds between the residents and their homes.

There are also many other complexes in which residents no longer have any ties with this past period. Understanding that these complexes were once part of a broader social project usually means the presence of affective bonds that are important for preservation purposes. Contrarily, the absence of such bonds can lead to disengagement and apathy. On these aspects, scholars, architects, and authorities should grasp the great diversity of the residents in these housing complexes, a direct result of the professional categories that were targeted by the housing construction plans of the institutes, and which motivated the development of different housing proposals.¹⁶ Often the professional category associated with a specific building assured that each complex was more likely to be inhabited by a certain type of inhabitant. This is the case of the IAPB of Santa Cruz, whose residents enjoyed a relatively higher socioeconomic status compared to other complexes. (fig. 8.6)

Ownership problems are at the centre of most management and conservation issues. Transfer of management to residents led to conflicts that were resolved on a case-by-case basis and according to the capacity of each group of residents to articulate their demands. Residents are responsible for trash



Figure 8.7: Vila Guiomar Housing Complex, IAPI, Santo André. Adaptations to the courtyard.
Source: Collection of Flávia Nascimento

disposal, collecting maintenance fees, installing new equipment, and solving everyday problems. Pressured by the increasingly common problems of urban violence, the residents of the housing complexes built on ample spaces open to the streets started feeling more vulnerable and called for security measures. However, they often cannot carry out or afford improvements, such as installing fencing around plots, which are usually very large and traditionally controlled by public authorities. Actions against urban violence were implemented on a block-by-block and unit-by-unit basis. Initiatives such as fencing off buildings interfere and go against the principles of the modern accessible open space in between residential blocks. The many reports of renovations and the state of individual houses is evidence that, despite the contracts, the properties began to be adapted to the daily lives and needs of the families once the institutes' programmes were shut down and the National Housing Bank (BNH) (fig. 8.7) was created in 1964. The result is that, today, especially in the house complexes, there have been so many changes that they barely resemble what they looked like during their construction period.

Looking at the architectural typologies, the state of conservation depends on several factors, such as the quality of the construction and the level of adherence to the original design, the form of occupation, and the bonds of



Figure 8.8: Paquetá Housing Complex, DHP, Rio de Janeiro. Source: Collection of the *Grupo de Pesquisa Pioneiros da Habitação Social*

affection between residents and their building. The prevalence of one of these factors can have a positive or negative influence on conservation. The Saco dos Limões Housing Complex in Florianópolis (capital of state of Santa Catarina), built in 1942 by IAPI and consisting of 100 housing units, is still mostly occupied by the original residents who identify with the project and maintain the houses with modifications that may be significant, but which do not alter their character.¹⁷

The Paquetá Residential Complex shows how variable the historical factors that influence the preservation of housing of social interest are. Designed by Francisco Bolonha for the Department of Popular Housing, built on its namesake island, this small complex (27 houses) is the only one built by the Department of Popular Housing in which the social programme was implemented over a longer period, with great involvement of social work agencies. Its residents today have a great appreciation for their living space, with many emotional ties, and, except for the open area in the back, the complex is in good condition. The window frames—an item that is frequently replaced not only in low-income housing—are still intact, all painted in the same tone of blue, and the houses still retain their original roof and volumetric dimensions. (fig. 8.8)

As already mentioned, the housing complexes were designed based on the principles of the neighbourhood unit. According to the precepts of modern architecture, the dwellings were built in serialized and standardized fashion,

using rationalized construction methods, arranged in slabs and oriented according to the best sun exposure, with internal spaces reduced to the bare minimum. There was a direct connection between the units and the surrounding open space with its lawns for leisure and sport activities. Indoor areas were strictly for private use, while other areas were controlled by the state and reserved for collective uses. The services near the living areas—such as the school, market, laundry, health centre, gymnasiums, sports courts, gardens with playgrounds, social clubs, and day care centres—were all essential to the functioning of the neighbourhood units and represent a form of collective organization common to many of them.

In many cases, the complexes were not built under the most favourable conditions, and the original projects were far from being completed. Due to construction costs or because of their location in the urban landscape, the complementary services were deprioritized or not even designed. Often only the residential buildings were built. In São Paulo, for example, the *Várzea do Carmo Residential Complex* by Atílio Corrêa Lima was only partially built, with nothing more than the residential buildings being erected. The intricate project featuring community facilities—such as a school, day care centre, health centre, movie theatre, restaurant, and open areas for leisure and sports—never came to fruition.

The Pedregulho Residential Complex was left to fend for itself for several years, with residents struggling to keep their apartments in good shape. Despite being abandoned by the government and not owning the apartments, the residents of the Pedregulho appropriated the buildings, making many internal renovations and adaptations. In the 2000s, according to data from Helga Silva,¹⁸ around 50% of the residents were from the first waves of occupation in the 1960s—mostly service and industrial workers, as well as civil servants. They are mainly from a working class that enjoyed upward mobility in a period of economic stability for the country, with access to consumer goods that are symbols of recent social transformations in Brazil. Since the apartments are owned by the government of the state of Rio de Janeiro, which never managed their occupation, the units are transferred or sold in contracts between the parties. In this context, with residents faced with a void left by the authorities and the many visits by architects, there were growing expectations for a restoration project.

In 2015, the completion of the restoration works in Block A of Pedregulho brought new visibility to the complex. The renovation project was kickstarted after inadequate works by the government, which owns the complex. That led to a movement to restore the building, which was then identified as cultural heritage. Such a movement—led by architect Alfredo Britto and the Residents' Association represented by its director Hamilton Marinho and involving trade associations and public authorities—put pressure on the owner of the building

to carry out the necessary works. The restoration of a modern complex, the only of its kind in Latin America, came with all sorts of challenges in relation to the materiality and habitability of the place. The iconic intervention in just one of the blocks puts the rest of the complex on hold, with expectations for the restoration to be expanded to the whole neighbourhood unit. Indeed, the open areas and communal buildings, such as the schools, the laundry, and the market, are still in an advanced state of disrepair.

The vast open areas and gardens in between housing blocks were and still are a fundamental part of these housing complexes' configuration. In some places, these are the only green area in their surroundings, as is the case of Vila Guiomar, in Santo André, designed by Carlos Frederico Ferreira, which is considered the city's green lung.¹⁹ As a collective asset that relies on the management and collaboration of everyone involved, maintenance is extremely difficult, leaving many gardens abandoned and unused, despite a severe lack of public outdoor spaces in outer city neighbourhoods.

Vila Guiomar suffers from the same abandonment process. There are large open areas that do not have a specific purpose or where ownership status remains unclear. These spaces are often little used and in poor state of disrepair. Fences were installed around properties. These open areas are frequently abandoned or underused, riddled with tall weeds, garbage, and lacking proper maintenance. This condition is not specific to housing complexes, but it is something that can be observed in Brazilian cities in general, where fears over urban violence are leading to the progressive privatization and isolation of homes and buildings from public space. Many of the complexes are surrounded by fences, separating spaces that should remain permeable and in contact with the urban fabric. (fig. 8.9)

The Passo d'Areia housing complex in Porto Alegre is an example of good maintenance of open outdoor spaces, despite the numerous alterations and improvements to the residential buildings. The gardens here are not only well maintained but are also a place for residents to meet and enjoy some outdoor activities. This stems from the process of transformation and occupation of the complex after the units were sold in the 1960s. Located in a prime neighbourhood within the city's real estate expansion area, the original blue-collar residents were progressively replaced starting in 1964 by a middle-class population which—despite making numerous and compromising additions such as installing TV antennas, air conditioning, fences, and electronic gates—has well maintained important aspects of the open spaces.²⁰

The situation of the IAPI in the Mooca neighbourhood in São Paulo is similar to the one just described. While the central and building-free area remained the property of the federal government, the residents took care of its maintenance, surrounding it with gates that are open at specific times. All



Figure 8.9: Mooca Housing Complex, IAPI, São Paulo. Source: Collection of the Grupo de Pesquisa Pioneiros da Habitação Social

other open spaces were divided, altering the character of the urban project. Once the units were sold, each building formed its own condominium, keeping part of the front and back yards. Little by little, the social areas were turned into parking garages. Another positive solution for the open spaces is represented by the IAPI in Salvador. The restrictions to the construction of garages, coupled with the well-organized maintenance of trees and gardens, offer a rare understanding of the modern concept of housing in its urban dimension.

The housing projects under study were mostly built on vast portions of suburban land, which led to complexes arranged in large city blocks, organized along internal, pedestrian-only streets, where housing blocks are laid out and surrounded by vehicular streets. In the mid-1940s and 1950s, before the country opted to put the automobile industry at the centre of its national development policy, private cars were not a reality. Nor did individual ownership of automobiles represent the ideal worker that was being moulded during those ‘New State’ years. The situation today is different, and the need for parking has by now become a reality in virtually all housing complexes. Interventions to meet this demand are harsh and affect buildings and their open spaces. In many cases, the free area under the *pilotis* gave way to cars; in others it was the gardens and communal outdoor spaces that were sacrificed. There are more drastic solutions, such as building individual annexes next to the block.



Figure 8.10: Realengo Housing Complex, IAPI, Rio de Janeiro. Source: Collection of the *Grupo de Pesquisa Pioneiros da Habitação Social*

The lack of public administration in these estates associated with the family expansion has led to privatization and personalization of the spaces. At the Realengo Residential Complex, for example, the closing of the ‘Bauhaus balconies’ came with some shock. The appropriation of the balconies is a recurrent theme in the complexes, whatever their form or position in terms of the internal layout of the house, with residents opting to expand the living room or turning the space into a new room. (fig. 8.10)

The most frequently replaced architectural elements in residential complexes are the window frames. Because they are a point of contact between the apartments and the outside, their replacement has a significant impact on the unity of the façades, especially because of the shape of the blocks, which stand out for their slab forms and for being isolated in the middle of vast green spaces. The original frames were generally handcrafted in timber, with detailed design and were replaced by industrial aluminium windows.

The breeze blocks, characteristic elements of modern Brazilian architecture especially in Rio de Janeiro, had no better luck. Difficulties in finding the same pieces meant that the originals were simply removed or replaced for other available models. In the IAPI residential complexes built to resemble the Penha Housing Complex, which became the institute’s standard model in the 1950s, the stairwell is illuminated by a strip of ceramic breeze blocks. These

have usually been painted, removed, or replaced, as can be seen in the Penha and Bangu complexes in Rio de Janeiro.

As for the exterior appearance, the most common strategy in the renovation processes led by the government is painting the blocks in vivid colours, to distinguish them and break the vaunted monotony and impersonality of large buildings. These, as far as they meet the legitimate claim for individuation, do not respect the colour scheme and modern language of the project, creating new objects. In the rare cases in which the residents themselves manage to carry out renovation works, they tend to paint the façades or parts of them, creating a patchwork effect on the complex or on the façade itself.

There is a diversity of examples and problems alike, which reveal the complexity and particularities of specific cases. In-depth studies are essential for each complex, covering architectural aspects (with metric and conservation assessments), the history of the project, construction and the promoting body, the trajectory of the residential buildings, and communal areas over time, in addition to consistent and participatory involvement of residents.

CONCLUSION

The social housing complexes built in the 1940s and 1950s are a living testimony of housing policies in Brazil. In very unequal urban situations, they stand marked by various transformations. Brazilian cities have changed and so have the houses, in the forms of appropriation, domesticity, and family compositions. What was once a dwelling ‘of its time’ is now a dwelling of ‘a different time’, and the ways of working and living associated with that dwelling have undergone radical changes. Careers in banking and industry—an element that originally represented a common life experience in the complexes, and which created a very strong identity among inhabitants—are now part of a past in which the welfare state was committed to educating the working class.²¹

The descendants and residents of the groups under study are still very much organized around their parents’ identity, which they reportedly perceive as their own, as links of personal and family existence. Through memories, it was possible to understand how the home is an important anchor for these subjective experiences. Despite undergoing many transformations, the home and the complex remain a manifestation of previous existences and give meaning to the present, connecting a material to an affective and cultural heritage. What each resident inherited from their family is now part of a wealth of shared experiences.

Oral history can show us how significant the residents' daily experiences were, as well as their relationships with the objects and spaces in their life trajectories. The memory of each person showed the emotions and affections that residents developed towards their living spaces. And they are the ones who multiply the meanings of each of these complexes in the contemporary city. Their individual memories made the permanence of these dwellings emerge beyond everyday meanings. Memory played the fundamental role of showing new significances far beyond the techniques deriving from architectural criticism, allowing us to think about housing complexes not only based on new references, but also from the point of view of the residents' appropriations, their values, tensions, and criticisms of inhabiting experiences. A look into the everyday life of the housing complexes showed the personal relationships that are established between social subjects and heritage. In a contemporary world marked by consumption and the need for the present, in what François Hartog called *presentism*,²² the marks of the present have accumulated very unevenly, just as the forms of selection have been unequal.

My hypothesis is that housing in general and social housing in particular are privileged objects to mobilize the issues of use and protection, as their field of constitution—as part of modernity and the contemporary world—only makes sense with the motivations of intellectuals (architects and urban planners) who promoted them based on the canons and ideological assumptions of the transformation of men, women, and workers. And it is in the supposed 'deviations' of the uses of these cultural assets that it becomes clear that they only exist in everyday life, in the social uses that the residents make of them over time. In that sense, social housing is the opposite of heritage legitimacy, because it was built upon the idea that workers lacked necessary knowledge, from the time it was first conceived in the nineteenth century to the completion of the housing complexes in the twentieth century. At the moment when these complexes are being transformed by residents, in addition to a period marked by the absence of the state that originally constituted them as the manifestation of public policies on social welfare, heritage needs to negotiate with its specialized knowledge and technical expertise to understand the motivations and meanings of "inhabiting the monuments."²³

NOTES

1. Telma Correia, *A Construção do Habitat Moderno no Brasil, 1870-1950* (São Carlos: Rima/Fapesp, 2005); Marisa Carpintéro, *A Construção de um Sonho* (Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 1997); Nabil Bonduki, *Origens da Habitação Social no Brasil* (São Paulo: Estação Liberdade, 1998).
2. *Anaes do 1º Congresso de Habitação* (São Paulo, May 1931); Carpintéro, *A Construção de um Sonho*, 135-136; Ana Paula Koury and Maria Luíza Freitas, “Cidade-Jardim dos Comerciantes em Olaria”, in *Os Pioneiros da Habitação Social*, eds. Nabil Bonduki e Ana Paula Koury (São Paulo: Editora Unesp/Sesc, 2014); Paulo Bruna, *Os Primeiros Arquitetos Modernos: Habitação Social no Brasil 1930-1950* (São Paulo: Edusp, 2010).
3. Carlos Martins, “Hay algo de irracional...”, *Block*, no. 4 (December 1999): 8-22.
4. Nilce Aravecchia-Botas, *Estado, Arquitetura e Desenvolvimento: A Ação Habitacional do IAPI* (São Paulo: Unifesp, 2016), 142.
5. Caliane Almeida, “O Engenheiro Arquiteto Rubens Porto e os Institutos e Caixas de Aposentadoria e Pensões (IAPs/CAPs)”, *Risco*, no. 8 (2008): 35-48.
6. Aravecchia-Botas, *Estado, Arquitetura e Desenvolvimento: A Ação Habitacional do IAPI*, 142; Ana Paula Koury, “Modern Housing Estates and the Production of the Brazilian City (1937-1960)”, *Planning Perspectives* 34 (2019): 1-31.
7. Camila Ferrari, “Produção Habitacional em Grande Escala em São Paulo e Buenos Aires” (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2018); Nabil Bonduki, *Os Pioneiros da Habitação Social* (São Paulo: Unesp/Fapesp, vol.1, 2104), 50; Bruna, *Os Primeiros Arquitetos Modernos: Habitação Social no Brasil 1930-1950*.
8. Camila Ferrari and Eulália Negrelos, “O conjunto habitacional na produção da metrópole na América Latina entre as décadas de 1930 e 1970: um olhar a partir de São Paulo”, *Revista Eletrônica da ANPHLAC*, no. 34 (August/December 2022): 186-213.
9. Dinalva Roldan, “Unidades de Vizinhança em Suas Conexões Latino-Americanas” (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2019).
10. Augusto Duprat, “O problema da habitação”, *Revista do Clube de Engenharia*, no. 251 (July 1957): 43-52.
11. Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006).
12. Alexandra Frasson, “Habitação social e arquitetura moderna: a apropriação dos conjuntos residenciais dos IAPs (1940-2000)” (Master diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2000), 182-191.
13. City of Rio de Janeiro, “Ramos, Penha e Olaria”.
14. Wilma Mangabeira, “Lembranças de Moucouzinho (1943-1964)” (Master diss., IUPERJ, 1986).
15. Mangabeira, “Lembranças de Moucouzinho (1943-1964)”.

16. For details on IAP housing programmes and projects, see: Bonduki, *Os pioneiros da habitação social*.
17. Carolina Palermo Szücs, Luciana Monte Alegre Trivella e Marina Ester Fialho de Souza, “Preservando o Patrimônio da Vila Operária do Saco dos Limões”, 5º *seminário Docomomo Brasil*, 2003.
18. Helga Silva, “Moradia mínima para a máxima existência: o conforto no Conjunto Pedregulho” (PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2011).
19. Cíntia Pessolato, “Conjunto IAPI – Vila Guiomar. Santo André-SP. Projeto e história” (Master diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2007), 162.
20. André Lapolli, “Como destruir um patrimônio cultural urbano: a Vila do IAPI, ‘crônica de uma morte anunciada!’” (Master diss., UFRGS, 2006), 70-71.
21. Aravecchia-Botas, *Estado, Arquitetura e Desenvolvimento: A Ação Habitacional do IAPI*.
22. François Hartog, *Regimes de Historicidade – Presentismo e Experiências do Tempo* (Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2013).
23. Citing the expression from Daniel Fabre and Anna Iuso’s book, “Les monuments sont habités.” Daniel Fabre, Anna Iuso, *Les Monuments Sont Habités* (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, Ministère de la Culture, 2015).

MODERNISM IS DEAD, LONG LIVE MODERNITY

The Bijlmer and the Project of ‘Incompleteness’

Andrea Migotto

WAYS OF BEING INCOMPLETE

It is not uncommon to use the word ‘incomplete’ to describe the mass housing projects of the twentieth century built according to the canons of architectural functionalism. Italian scholar Paola di Biagi elaborated on this situation by stating that “the current problem of the public peripheries depends on the fact that they have largely remained incomplete, especially in their built conformation and in the uses allowed by the open space and by collective infrastructures.”¹

Incompleteness firstly describes the material state of something perceived to be fragmentary and unaccomplished.² That postwar large-scale housing complexes remained something of an unfinished business has by now become an accepted trope, to the point that it is almost customary to scrutinize these projects in search of something that went wrong compared to the grand original promises. However, a critique based solely on the inherent shortcoming of high modernist design culture is destined to remain flawed in part. As Hugo Priemus pointed out at a conference on the worrying obsolescence of postwar housing estates (1986), the consequences not only of inefficient management schemes, but also of unclear governance responsibilities and poor maintenance operations, have all played a major role in radicalizing the shortcomings inherent to design choices.³ In short, it was not all architecture’s fault.

A broader investigation of the causes of incompleteness has also occupied scholars in the attempt to evaluate the legacy of large-scale estates mostly financed and developed by public institutions. These projects were the unmistakable result of cultural and ideological narratives as well as of economic and political choices that became the touchstone of Western societies in the thirty years after World War II.⁴ Addressing the often problematic realizations of this period, scholars referred to, or suggested, the idea of incompleteness to describe the rise and fall of functionalism in architecture and urban planning,

eventually dismissing it. This crafted notion enabled them to measure projects in relation to shifting material and cultural standards and to establish a bond between a past reality, the collective perception of it, and the system of cultural assumptions that are meaningful in a certain historical period. Trying to make sense of the bad reputation of several British modernist architectures in both public opinion and academia in the 1990s, Adrian Forty sharply described the intellectual, and ideological, device at work in this case. He suggested that the perceived failure of these artefacts lay less in the quality of the buildings themselves than in the change of subjective and collective self-perception of the subjects experiencing them.⁵ Indeed, the interpretation given since the 1980s of the postwar realizations was framed by dominant narratives that pushed social consciousness toward a radical break with the welfare state utopias.⁶

Yet, seeing the past as incomplete might also enable an opposite approach, namely the possibility to disclose unforeseen continuities and semantic relations between past and present. Turning a fragment inherited from the past into a ‘reactive object’, we are compelled to question it and act on it. As philologist Glenn W. Most remarked, “precisely by being incomplete, it [the object] stimulates our imagination to try to complete it, and we end up admiring the creativity that would otherwise have languished within us.”⁷ This latter is a crucial mechanism to consider when approaching well-established postmodern *credos* such as the uncompromising rejection of postwar architectural realizations. As political theorist Wendy Brown once sharply contended, in a word the prefix “*post-*” does not so much separate two temporal periods as generate a “particular condition of afterness in which what is past is not left behind, but, on the contrary, relentlessly conditions, even dominates a present that nevertheless also breaks in some way with this past.”⁸

Incompleteness, used in multiple ways and with variegated meanings, has been a crucial notion in the intellectual debate on postwar large-scale housing in the late twentieth century. Since the mid 1970s, however, these estates have become something more than just conceptual props to build up new historical narratives. They have turned into factual and urgent design questions. The obsolescence of the buildings, the rising vacancy rate of apartments, the shift in taste and in cultural standards of the population, and the problems connected to social segregation have forced architects and institutions to address the future of these buildings, through either demolition or transformation.⁹ Apparently escaping the field of intellectual speculations and cultural polemics, all these questions seem to ask for pragmatic answers, even blatantly technical if possible. Interestingly, this approach is what still characterizes mainstream contemporary takes on postwar housing refurbishments. The technical act of transforming a building—especially in the case of generic constructions like mass-housing projects—or at least upgrading it is essentially severed from the

cultural premises and the projective consequences of this operation. In other words, what can change is only the quality of space and of materials as such. Embodied social and cultural concepts, on the contrary, cannot be changed.

Contrarily to this take, I would suggest that it is instead in this field, of design more than of historical and strictly intellectual debate, that more generous considerations about modernism, and modern culture in general, were nurtured and that more nuanced views on how to retrofit the past, materially but especially culturally, took shape. These views took the form not only of written arguments, but also of planning strategies and concrete spatial decisions. Controversial, sometimes furtive ideas of incompleteness were therefore used operatively to substantiate, orientate, and further explain design decisions, suggesting a reinterpretation of the high modernist heritage through architectural choices. Surprisingly, this peculiar domain of the critique against postwar housing architecture—namely, that pursued through refurbishment project proposals—and of consequent critique on the critique itself has been fairly overlooked so far by professional architects and historians.

In my attempt to shed light on this aspect, I will look into the chronicles of a paradigmatic example of welfare state mass housing, the Bijlmermeer estate in Amsterdam, known colloquially as the Bijlmer. My focus is on the 1980s, the decade when its transformation became an urgent political and architectural matter. My hypothesis is that both the strategies engineered by the local institutions to save the scheme from its decadence and, as a counterbalance, the two projects drafted by Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) in 1986–87 offer pristine examples of how diverse interpretations of incompleteness were inherent to the articulation, development, and dissemination of planning and architectural proposals—not only as a means to technically specify the terms of refurbishment but also, and perhaps more radically, to rework the idea of modernity itself as expressed and performed by the housing complex.

WHAT WENT WRONG

Work on the Bijlmer began in 1966.¹⁰ Located in the south-eastern periphery of Amsterdam, this new district was envisioned in the early 1960s to accommodate the city's booming population after the war.¹¹ Following reiterated revisions, the final design was drafted by urban planner Siegfried Nassuth. The plan included the realization of 40,000 apartments organized in nine-storey hexagonal slabs. An orthogonal grid of high-speed roads connected the entire site, with gargantuan car-park structures flanking the main arteries to ease resident access to housing.¹² In the intentions of the Amsterdam city planners, the construction of the estate underpinned a broader urban transformation.

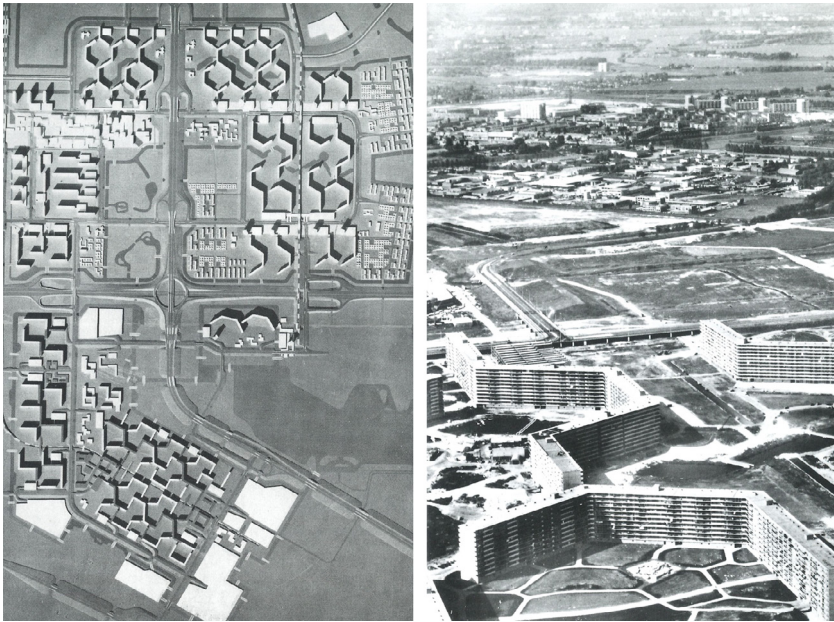


Figure 9.1: Left: maquette showing the Bijlmer development project as originally designed. Right: the high-rise hexagonal-shaped housing bars under construction. Source: Mariëtte van Stralen, *Siegfried Nassuth* (oeuvreprijs 1998, stichting fonds voor beeldende kunsten, vormgeving en bouwkunst, 1998)

By offering a fully planned residential environment in a ‘natural’ setting equipped with collectivized amenities, the municipal government attracted the growing Dutch middle class—in particular, specialized workers and families with a wage income—to the urban outskirts. This made it possible not only to improve the living conditions of dwellers but also, by moving them out of the central areas, to unlock the redevelopment of this by-then dilapidated part of the city into a shiny office and commercial district.¹³ (fig. 9.1)

If ever there were to be a perfect expression of the unsurpassable achievements of a growing industrial society, the Bijlmer was designed to be so. The unconventional shape of the slabs—a design trick that made it possible to soften the imposing monotony of prefabricated construction—derived from a system of internal walkways that connected the entire site and provided the quickest access to collective amenities. Extensive, artificially created lawns were made available for residents to spend leisure time with their families, enjoying commercial and care facilities a stone’s throw from home. In the original version of the scheme, the ground floor of each slab was also equipped with (ultimately unrealized) care and leisure services to facilitate encounters

and meet the various needs of tenants. On a smaller scale, the apartments showcased all the advantages that modern families could dream of. They were the largest ever to be seen in the Netherlands—an average of 100 sqm. for a standard nuclear family of four—arranged according to strict functionalist principles and offering all the latest technological advancements to provide privacy and comfort.

The fact that, just a decade after work had started, the massive district planned for 100,000 Amsterdammers¹⁴ lay in a desolate state was the signal that the architectural, social, and financial principles underpinning housing production during the welfare state held no longer. The reasons behind the failure of the Bijlmer were several, easy to identify yet hard to disentangle. The rising inflation of the late 1960s and the difficult natural condition of the site, originally a polder, boosted construction and maintenance costs, leading the plethora of housing companies involved in the project to the verge of bankruptcy. Essential commercial and educational facilities, public amenities for leisure and transport connections were never completed or remained largely undersized. In parallel, deeper changes in Dutch domestic culture caused industrially produced high-rise slabs and apartment typologies to look prematurely outdated in the eyes of the public. After 1968, moreover, there was growing dissatisfaction with social housing considered to be the ultimate manifestation of state paternalism. These changes upset the carefully studied socio-economic structure of the original plan, in particular the calculations to pay back the gargantuan public investment.

One factor proved decisive. Relatively soon, middle-class families refrained from moving in and opted instead for urban apartments or private homes which better met their living standards.¹⁵ The place of these middle-class families was taken, as of the early 1970s, by lower-income tenants and waves of migrant families arriving from former Dutch colonies like Suriname and Antilles.¹⁶ These groups, mostly larger families, did not find welcoming conditions, either. Besides material inadequacy, since 1967, following national housing reforms, the rate of monthly rents had started to rise and had visible consequences on living conditions.¹⁷ It was therefore common to find overcrowded apartments, shared by multiple households to amortize costs, in addition to a myriad of vacant units which were simply too expensive to rent out. Real living conditions hardly matched the expectations of idyllic and peaceful living advertised a decade earlier, as clearly rendered by the high burglary rate and widespread vandalism.

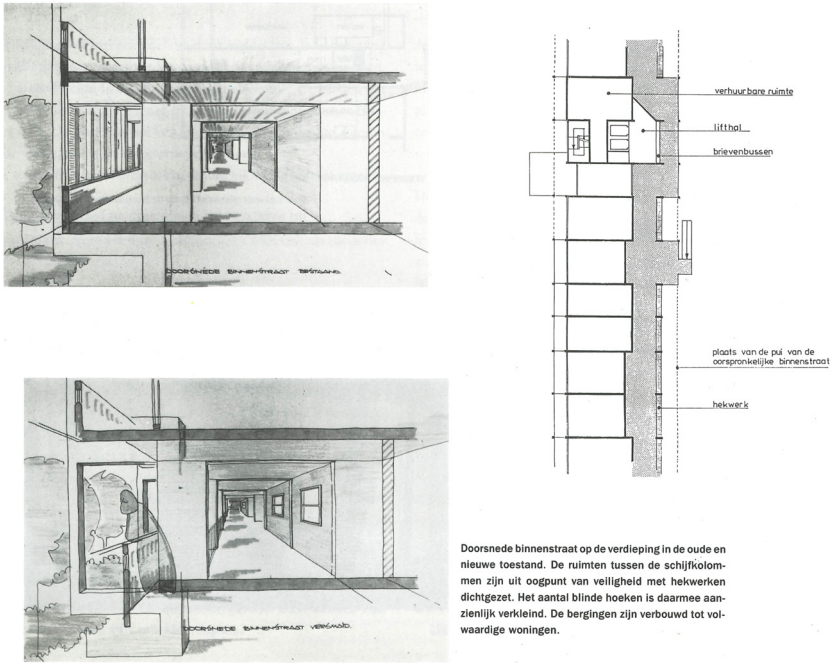
Physical degradation and social exclusion soon drew public attention and generated a generalized stigma against the neighbourhood which lasted for decades.¹⁸ Journalists, politicians, and public opinion were struck by the inhuman living conditions in the area. Functionalist architecture was not just

aesthetically scary but guilty of generating alienated living, ethnic segregation, and social deprivation. Not only that, key personalities within the profession—Aldo van Eyck and Herman Hertzberger, among them—spoke out against the Bijlmer, recognized as the embodiment of delirious modernist dreams to plan society at the cost of individual agency and desires. Frenchman Bernard Huët saw in the Bijlmer the ultimate failure of the expectations of technocratic modernism and portrayed it as the tragic conclusion of that epic journey, begun with Berlage, of rationalist urban planning in Amsterdam.¹⁹ For architects, the Bijlmer became a symbolic target to redeem an entire generation from the sins of the masters.

INSTITUTIONAL USES OF INCOMPLETENESS

In the early 1980s, the decaying state of the Bijlmer forced public stakeholders to act. Two prototypical renewal strategies can be identified in this regard. Social housing corporations (*woningbouwverenigingen*), the owners and managers of the estate, opted for a pragmatic approach: acupunctural interventions to solve the most urgent technical and spatial problems mapped in the buildings. An exemplary project was the one presented (and partially realized) by Dutch firm Bokelman van Leeuwen. It proposed a series of quick fixes intended to surgically counter the decaying estate and stabilize its uses. These included the introduction of typological differentiation, the integration of missing non-residential activities, the spatial improvement of internal collective space—in particular, the infamous ground-floor inner streets, the careful compartmentalization of the elevated galleries, and the repair of damaged concrete structures.²⁰ (fig. 9.2)

Landlord companies approached the rehabilitation of the Bijlmer as they would the healing of a sick body. Yet, upon closer inspection, the body in question was not merely architectural but also social. What looked like urgent measures to counter material decay were also carefully studied spatial alterations to enhance the control of housing companies over use of the estate by the inhabitants.²¹ The intention was to normalize tenant behaviour, for example, by emphasizing private responsibility and avoiding what was perceived to be the misuse of collective areas, with the primary goal of lowering maintenance costs rather than empowering tenants. This agenda found its most complete expression in 1979, when renowned American planner Oscar Newman was asked to submit a project (never realized). Newman decided to test his successful spatial tactics to achieve ‘defensible spaces’. The project aimed to tame the unsettling dimension and spatiality of the open spaces by transforming the hexagonal slabs into a panopticon-like urban structure through which



Doorsnede binnenstraat op de verdieping in de oude en nieuwe toestand. De ruimten tussen de schijfkielommen zijn uit oogpunt van veiligheid met hekwerken dichtgezet. Het aantal blinde hoeken is daarmee aanzienlijk verkleind. De bergingen zijn verbouwd tot voorwaardige woningen.

de ARCHITECT

Figure 9.2: Excerpt from the refurbishment proposal developed in 1984 by the Dutch architectural office Bokelman van Leeuwen. The project suggested intensive operations to reinforce the concrete structure of the buildings, enhance and enlarge the existing dwellings and, crucially, to fragment the largely unappropriated collective spaces of the internal streets (image). Source: *De Architect*, no. 9 (1987)

visibility over access and activities was granted from every apartment. Security was the primary step to achieve both a better life and a more sustainable administrative practice for the companies involved.²²

The other stakeholder involved in the Bijlmer was the municipality of Amsterdam and, operatively, its planning council. Unlike social housing corporations, the government looked at the revitalization of the Bijlmer from the perspective of the city as a whole. Future transformations were to be organically orchestrated in the context of new managerial strategies for urban development. In 1984 the ownership of land and buildings was unified under a single public agency, *Nieuwe Amsterdam*, fully responsible for administrative tasks and redevelopment plans.²³ The high vacancy rate—almost 10% in the early 1980s—was immediately reduced to contain the financial losses of stakeholders. In 1987 a new report (*Effect Rapport '87*) reframed the terms for the revision of the whole estate. An interesting document, the Memorandum

“Intensive Neighbourhood-Oriented Management”, coupled future redevelopment plans with housing-market predictions and proposed a rather cynical reading of the situation in the neighbourhood.²⁴

The argument of the municipality was twofold. Firstly, the Bijlmer was problematic only if considered from a local perspective. Looking at the overall Amsterdam housing market instead, the estate was an essential outlet to absorb the growing housing pressure. It offered a large and localized stock of affordable dwellings for low- or no-income households that were neither economically profitable for new developments nor welcomed in the city’s middle- and upper-class districts. Secondly, according to the document, it was incorrect to picture the neighbourhood population as a homogeneous and equally problematic entity. The thousands of apartments accommodated a multitude of households, each with diverging interests, immediate needs and, most importantly, future desires. All these parameters were to be considered for a valuable and responsive reprogramming.²⁵ The cynicism of the Memorandum consisted in the acceptance of the exceptional socio-spatial reality of the Bijlmer, preferring to solve policy issues at the municipal scale rather than upgrading its architecture. Not only was the decay itself of the slabs manipulated as a planning tool: only a portion of the existing buildings—that dedicated to long-term residents (mostly low-income families)—would be upgraded according to the planning committee. The remaining units, for which no relevant maintenance and upgrading measures were needed, would be allocated to short-term renters looking for temporary affordable homes while waiting to rent or buy a house in a more attractive location. (fig. 9.3)

Drawing on the objective material and managerial shortcomings of the project, institutional actors employed the notion of incompleteness to pursue a twofold agenda. On the one hand, exploiting the generalized consensus in public opinion, they dismissed functionalist architecture as responsible for the degraded living conditions of tenants, clearing political and administrative actors of their responsibilities. On the other, they followed a quantitative approach to existing problems that reduced refurbishment visions to a matter of purely technical adjustments, mostly to achieve financial benefits through improved management, at the scale of either the city or the buildings.²⁶ If these objectives were legitimate, the spatial means used to achieve them ended up perpetuating practices of segregation of the local population. These were not only political—the Bijlmer vs Amsterdam—or architectural but also social, preventing them from engaging with the possibilities of a changing society.

MODERNISM IS DEAD, LONG LIVE MODERNITY

Tabel 1: rekenmodel drie strategieën Bijlmermeer

		I		II		III	
		Prijsverlaging/		Kwal.verhoging/		Sloop	
		"Wachtkamer"		"Blijvera"			
		p.jaar	contant	p.jaar	contant	p.jaar	contant
1. Tijds horizon in jaren		10					
2. Jaarlijkse huurverhoging		.02					
3. Jaarlijkse lastenstijging		.03					
4. Alle bedragen per woning (12000 stuks)							
5. STRATEGIE: >>>>>							
6.							
7.							
A. EXTRA JAARLIJKE EXPL.KOSTEN							
8.	onderhoudskosten	500	4055	500	4055		
9.	vandalisme	40	324	40	324		
10.	mutatie-onderhoud	375	3042	125	1014		
11.	veiligheid	pm	pm	pm	pm		
12.	beheersapparaat	170	1379	40	324		
13.	conciërges	750	6083	0	0		
14.	huurderving oninbaar	300	2317	40	309		
15.	expl.res. / herfinanc.	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm	pm
A.	TOT. JAARL. EXTRA	2135 +	17200	745 +	6027	pm +	pm +
B. PRIJSVERLAGING							
16.	verlaging kale huur met gemidd. f110 per maand	1320	10193				
17.	IHS-besparing 60%	-792 +	-6116 +				
B.	TOT. PRIJSVERLAGING	528 +	4077 +				
C. INVESTERINGEN							
18.	achterstallig onderhoud		1400		1400		
19.	verbeteringen		4000		13000		
20.	doorgaan flatsplitsingen		pm		pm		
C.	TOTAAL INVESTERINGEN		5400 +		14400 +		
D. LEEGSTAND >2%							
21.	per procent	51	394	64	494		
22.	percentage: 5% 0%	255	1969	0	0		
23.	IHS-besparing	pm	pm	pm	pm		
D.	TOTAAL LEEGSTAND	255 +	1969 +	pm 0 +	pm 0 +		
E. SUBTOTAAL A t/m D			28646		20427		pm
F. SLOOP							
24.	derving huuropbrengsten	4449	34357	6034	46593	4950	38223
25.	besp.normalle expl.lasten	-2419	-19621	-2419	-19621	-1800	-14600
26.	feitelijke kap.lasten	-4900	-34416	-4900	-34416	-4900	-34416
27.	besp. rijksbijdrage		-19680		-7443		-10793
28.	boekwaarde incl. grond		37000		37000		42000
29.	boekwaarde gesplitste flats		4500		4500		3000
30.	sloopk. + herhuisvesting		26878		26878		20000
31.	subtotaal		48699		60935		54207
32.	reductiefactor i.v.m. 10 jr uitstel 51% 51%100%		24756		30976		54207
33.	extra leegstand 10%		3938		4942		
34.	totaal		28694		35918		54207
35.	kans		25% +		25% +		100% +
F.	TOTAAL SLOOP		7174		8980 +		54207 +
G. TOTAAL E + F			35820		29407		54207
H. BREAK EVEN ANALYSE							
36.	winst 1 jr. uitstel sloop	2168		2168			
37.	extra jaarlasten (zie A)	-2135		-745			
38.	dekking extra leegstand	33		1423			
39.	d.i. leegstand >2%	1%		22%			

Figure 9.3: Chart with cost comparison of the three different retrofitting strategies imagined for the Bijlmer. The three strategies described in the document, in Dutch, read: 1. Make the estate attractive for short-term tenants, 2. Improve homes for long-term tenants, 3. Demolish the estate. Source: Rooilijn, no.4 (1988).

THEORIZING INCOMPLETE MODERNITY

As soon became visible in the approach of public institutions, the urgent call to retrofit the Bijlmer in the early 1980s happened in step with a broader cultural effort to rethink not only the historical value of modernism but the very trajectory of modernity itself. In 1980 Jürgen Habermas wrote the seminal essay *Modernity. An Incomplete Project*. Since modernism was “dominant but dead”, the matter was now to defend the validity and continuation of the modern project.²⁷ For Habermas, the idea that modernity is a project dated back to the Enlightenment. Shaping new structures and practices for science, morality, and art, the eighteenth century engineered modernity as the rational path for the achievement of universal progress embodied in principles such as human harmony, social emancipation, and individual freedom.

The targets of Habermas’s text were so-called postmodern ideologies which, since the late 1960s, had argued for the end of modernity. Emphasizing the dangers of growing individualism and consumerist conformism, these voices advocated the recovery of historical traditions and cultural variety as a means to express concrete identities against the alienation of Fordist society.²⁸ The German philosopher deemed these arguments instrumental to the rise of new master narratives underpinning burgeoning strategies of capital accumulation that would stop any future emancipatory horizon. Holding strong to the teleological roots of modernity, he redefined it as an “incomplete project.” The intention was to save the emancipatory agenda of modernity while condemning both the failure of high modernism and postmodern reactionary stances.

A crucial point of the argument was that it sharply detached modernism from modernity. As German historian Reinhart Koselleck once argued, modernity is built on a twofold temporal elaboration regarding the future. On a meta-historical level,²⁹ modernity complies with a peculiar philosophy of history that posits time as a linear trajectory projected towards unidentified progress. Yet, within this framework, historical facts tend to undergo a continuous process of acceleration towards the future which secularizes the latter and generates the endless unfolding of different presents, each characterized by peculiar forms of production, political structures, cultural and aesthetic discourses.³⁰ This acceleration makes modernism historical and outmoded, but enables modernity to persist.

This double perspective helps to disentangle the work of Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and his office OMA since the mid 1970s and, eventually, their involvement in the Bijlmer. In those years, Koolhaas delved into the reevaluation of modern architecture beyond the exhausted myth of functionalism and the incomprehensible fanfare of simulacra proposed by postmodernism.³¹ For Koolhaas, the crisis of functionalism resulted from the will to conceptualize

widely perceived to be the emblem of modernist failures, acquired for Koolhaas a positive connotation for being the field of endless possibilities.³⁶ The ‘discovery’ of the Bijlmer as the place where postwar objectives were left unfinished proved to be the timely occasion to test his argument for grafting the forms of a new modernity onto a past one.³⁷ Yet, rather than a progressive modernity like the one called for by Habermas, his would take a different path. (fig. 9.4)

“REVISIE BIJLMER” (1986) AND “HERINRICHTING BIJLMER” (1987)

Encouraged by the Amsterdam planning office, in 1986 OMA submitted a first proposal for the transformation of one exemplary sector of the Bijlmer.³⁸ The project, entitled “Revisie Bijlmer”, interpreted the material and programmatic failures of the Bijlmer in light of the limits inherent to Fordist society. (fig. 9.5) The main accusation levelled at the architects and planning authorities of the 1960s was that they were stuck in an “architecture of social remedy”.³⁹ In Koolhaas’s opinion, welfare state urbanism frustrated the potential of collective existence reducing it to planned forms of socialization authoritatively imposed to meet productive and leisure standards.⁴⁰ Dwellers were treated like passive and infirm subjects, reduced to universal behavioural codes of

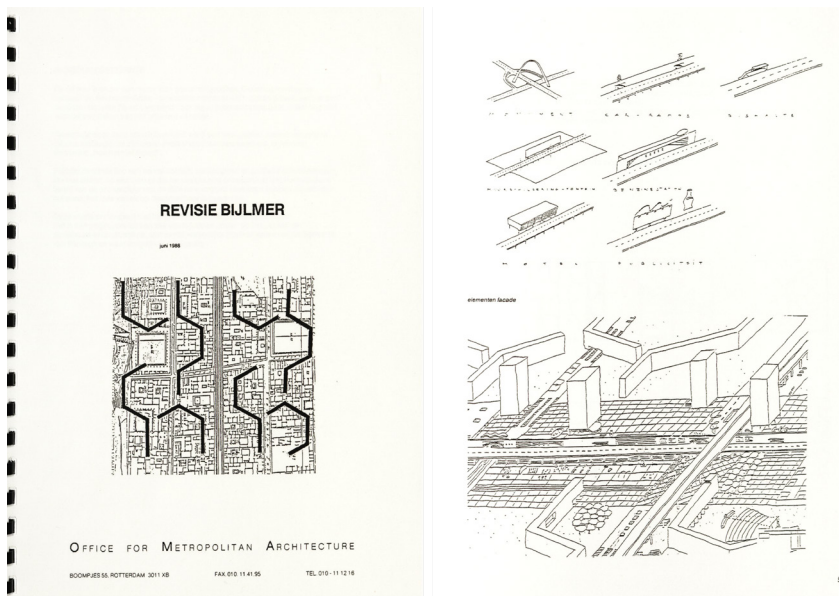
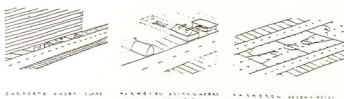


Figure 9.5 (above and next page): Cover and project description of the 1986 OMA proposal for the redevelopment of a prototypical sector of the Bijlmer, entitled ‘Revisie Bijlmer’. Courtesy of CCA Archives

care, movement, and consumption, “happy with an urban life scaled down to walking, paddling, fishing, playing, etc.; in other words, with purely innocent activities”.⁴¹ We can generalize this contention, noticing how postwar public housing policies shifted from an emancipating perspective that guaranteed minimum universal rights enabled by the redistribution of wealth to a situation where, due to the crisis of the welfare state, the provision of minimal services became the maximum of what inhabitants (by then, lower-income tenants) could expect and desire.⁴² Limiting collective facilities to essential services for care, shopping or undefined leisure not only prevented effective social emancipation but strengthened the inhabitants’ sense of segregation.

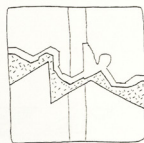
The “Revisie” plan proposed to transform the undefined unbuilt areas between the slabs into a horizontal social condenser filled with metropolitan activities.⁴³ Car parks were rearranged and organized according to a bar-code figure at the base of the slabs, allowing for pick-up and drop-off closer to the doorstep while revealing the aesthetic potential of increased social mobility. Vegetation and plants were redesigned to expose their artificial character, in amusement-park fashion: planted areas were densified and cut according to strong geometric shapes, alternating with vast lawns for leisure. The elevated metro viaduct became a ready-made colonnade over a new public ground to organize weekly markets and spontaneous gatherings. Additionally, some

1
Afschaffing van de parkeergarages; het gecontroleerd toelaten van autoverkeer op het maaiveld in de vorm van geasfalteerde „avenues” die langs de gebouwen lopen en die afwisselend voor parkeren en andere activiteiten gebruikt kunnen worden.
Langs de randen van deze banen ontstaan combinaties van garage, berging en het principe van volkstuinen waarop de bewoners tevens een stuk grond bewonen.



afschaffing parkeergarages

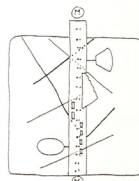
2
Concentratie van het homogene parklandschap tot een werkelijk, min of meer centraal gelegen park; waarin typische parkachtige voorzieningen liggen: speelruimten, priëlen, barbecues, picnic gebieden, etc.
Deze concentratie gaat gepaard met een uitsparing van de rest van het maaiveld wat daardoor overzichtelijker en beheersbaarder wordt.



concentrate parklandschap

11

3
Versterking en verdubbeling van het metroviaduct tot een maaiveldboulevard waaraan een aantal grootschalige, eenmalige voorzieningen: strand, voetbalveld, plein, etc.
Bovendien een aantal commerciële en culturele voorzieningen die hiermee doordringen tot in het hart van de wijk.



verdukt boulevard

4
Uitbreiding van het gebouwen arsenaal, waar toepasselijk met nieuwe typologieën: tuintalons, lage woonblokken, torens, etc. voor grotere differentiatie en visuele variatie.



nieuwe typologieën

12

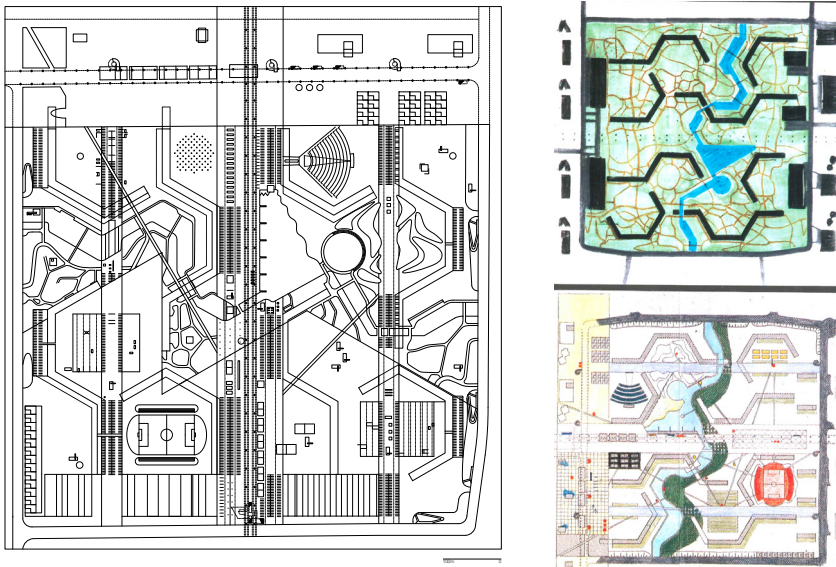


Figure 9.6: Left: plan of the Bijlmer sector designed by OMA. Drawing by the author. Right: schemes of the original landscape setting and of the urban refurbishment plan proposed by OMA (1986). Source: *Urbanisme* no. 218

parts of the sector could be densified with new housing typologies (towers, low-rise slabs, urban villas, patio houses, and individual homes) to better respond to the demands and ways of living of a variety of users. Monumental unbuilt grounds, framed by hexagonal slabs, were treated like urban rooms, each characterized by specific programmes (sports, theatre, gardening, playgrounds). (fig. 9.6) Finally, the project advanced some roughly outlined scenarios for the refurbishment of the residential buildings. These were radical options to change the programmatic interaction between slabs and the open spaces, turning the former into a mix-use social condenser.

Two aspects best express how OMA intended the refurbishment to update the original design in light of the ethos of a new modernity. The first concerns the organization of the city. The choice to work on a prototypical sector underscores a fierce attack on postwar planning devices and especially the ‘neighbourhood unit’, that successful intellectual and planning tool widely used to reorganize industrial cities after the war according to CIAM zoning norms while reconstituting domains of spatial proximity and social relations typical of community life.⁴⁴ Although the essential separation between the domestic, the productive, and sphere of collective leisure was not questioned in the new plan, OMA opposed the idea of the city as a hierarchically organized, centripetal whole composed of segregated social and programmatic parts. The new sector was designed to

become a city-in-itself, a legitimate self-supporting spatial fragment of Amsterdam able to be meaningful. This notion was achieved by the presence of intensified possibilities for shopping, leisure, entertainment, and collective interaction.

The second crucial aspect is that the “Revisie” plan did not question the functions and architecture of domestic space. We know all too well how reforming the home stood at the core of architectural investigations between and after the wars—especially in the early CIAM meetings—as a way to rationalize productive and social relations.⁴⁵ While Koolhaas motivated his choice by stating that inhabitants had few complaints about the apartments, we can read this apparent inattention as indicative of a long shadow cast by modernity on the social. With the postwar acceptance of functionalist rationales for typological organization (which became canonical guidelines for national building regulation), domestic space became the naturalized device by which to shape social, gender, and citizenship relations of the welfare state with regard to a dominant household type: the nuclear family.⁴⁶ Although the socio-economic paradigm at the base of postwar growth was a thing of the past by the mid-1980s,⁴⁷ refusing to challenge the private domestic realm, OMA hypothesized that the crisis of the Fordist city could simply be addressed by rearranging and enhancing opportunities for consumption. The private and the collective remained strongly separated.

In 1987, the office presented a follow-up project entitled “Herinrichtingen Bijlmer”.⁴⁸ (fig. 9.7) This time, the proposal was a comprehensive plan to revitalize not only an exemplary sample of the estate but the whole Bijlmer settlement. The reason for broadening the scale of the project was a crucial administrative reform approved that year. After lengthy political debates, the Bijlmer and the south-eastern neighbourhoods obtained the official status of “borough of Amsterdam” (i.e. Zuid-Oost). It led to the creation of a local government and the decentralization of administrative power.⁴⁹ OMA seized the opportunity offered by the reform. The borough, liberated from its long-standing dependency on the centre of Amsterdam, was finally ready for a process of urban redevelopment that would have transformed it into an attractive area for investments and functional intensification. More than that, Amsterdam Zuid-Oost was to become the truly attractive core of the capital in a period when the historic centre had exhausted the potential for further speculative investments.

To support the metamorphosis of the entire borough into an independent new town, OMA integrated two principles: that of the sector (discussed in the “Revisie”) and that of car infrastructures. Already in a 1970s note—republished in *S, M, L, XL* under the title “the Las Vegas of the Welfare State”—Koolhaas pointed to the motorway connecting the Bijlmer to Amsterdam and the wider region as the most promising element for the redevelopment of the site. Drawing on Venturi and Scott Brown’s study of Las Vegas, he argued that the street could assume more than a technical function—that of

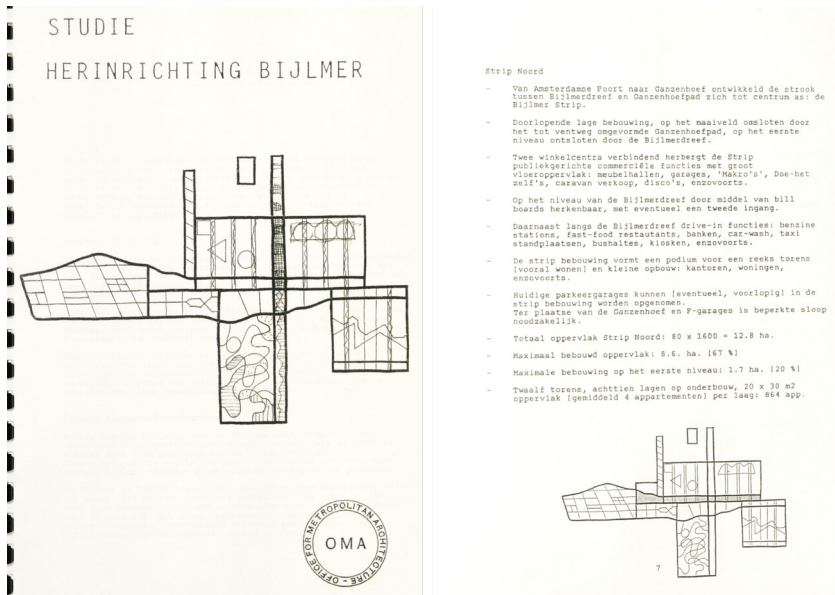


Figure 9.7: Cover and project description of the 1987 OMA proposal for the redevelopment of the Bijlmer and of Amsterdam south-east neighbourhood entitled 'Herinrichting Bijlmer'. Courtesy of CCA Archives

“transport”—indicated by the Athens Charter.⁵⁰ Two qualities were identified: First, an aesthetic one to physically and symbolically represent the increased mobility and freedom of the population. Freedom of movement stood for freedom of shopping and entertainment. Secondly, a utilitarian and economic potential. The street is the primary element for urbanization which not only enables access but also gives value to land and multiplies real-estate value.

OMA subdivided the Bijlmer into several qualitative surfaces—areas characterized by uniform physical features—gravitating around the intersection of two equipped fast-traffic roads called “Strips”.⁵¹ The main road, the east-west axis, was designed to accommodate the metropolitan version of welfare state collective facilities, offering attractive locations for retail and education as well as civic and cultural functions. The upper part of the Strip offered “public-oriented commercial functions with large floor areas: furniture halls, garages, malls, caravan sales, discos, and so on” in addition to “gas stations, fast-food restaurants, banks, car washes, cab stands, kiosks and so on.”⁵² On the lower side, “super-lots are assigned a specific theme within a large spectrum of cultural and public activities: district council, office, social services, library, theatre, church, hotel, housing, school”.⁵³ The north-south axis leading to Amsterdam—the vertical Strip—was planned, by contrast, to become a

MODERNISM IS DEAD, LONG LIVE MODERNITY

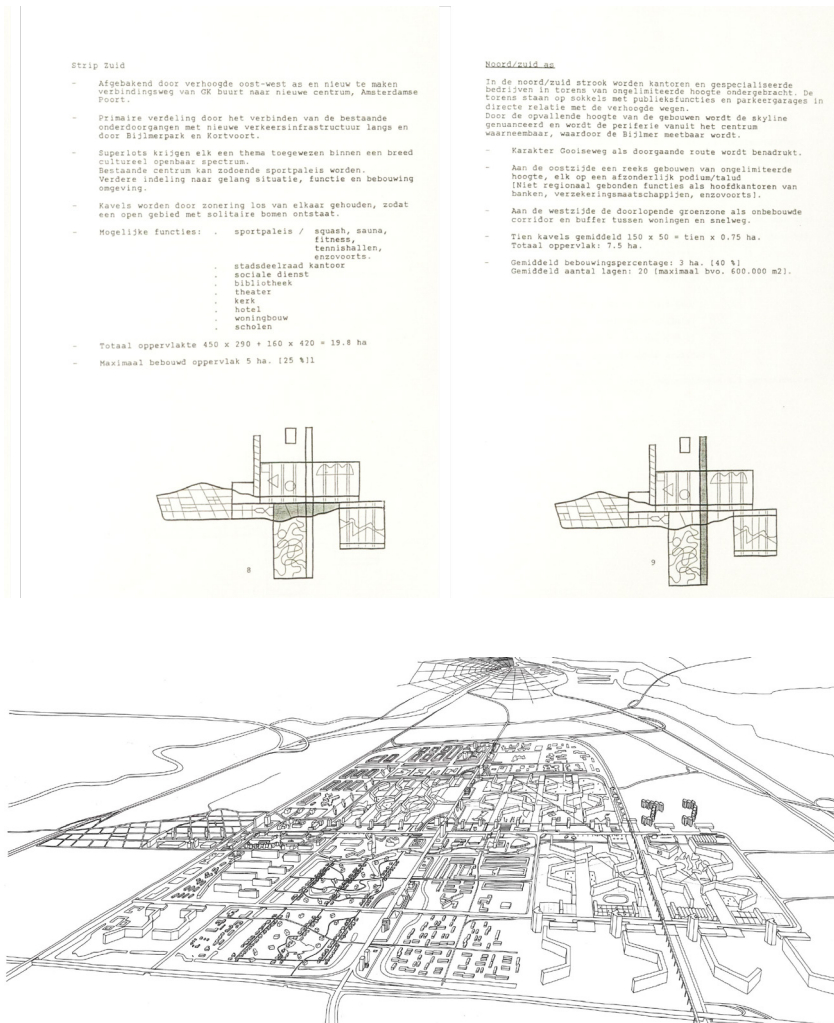


Figure 9.8: Bird's-eye view of the 'Herinrichting Bijlmer' proposal, emphasizing the character of new centrality of the borough in relation to the historical urban core of Amsterdam. Source: *Archis*, no.11 (1987)

prime location for free speculation in urban development. The latter was to become the physical symbol of the new status of the Bijlmer, making possible the construction of a sequence of towers of possibly unlimited height placed upon podiums for garages and public uses. Other programmatic areas for leisure and working were arranged around the central structure of the intersecting axis. (fig. 9.8)

THE MASTER'S TOOLS WILL NEVER DISMANTLE THE MASTER'S HOUSE: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF OMA'S PROPOSALS FOR THE BIJLMER

It is hard to evaluate the legacy of OMA's proposals for the Bijlmer since both remained on paper. Despite being praised by some policymakers and resident associations who opposed the indiscriminate demolition of the estate in those years, politicians and planning authorities of Amsterdam dismissed the work as unrealistic and unrealizable. Motivations were of both an economic and cultural nature. At the end of the 1980s, the city decisively opted to cut public expenditures and embrace new practices of urban management to encourage private investments for urban renewal and homeownership-oriented developments.⁵⁴ Municipal practices of resource reallocation and support of private speculation became standard answers—and not solely to contain inflating public debts. They were the concrete effort, aligned on burgeoning neoliberal models, to put in place new mechanisms of economic growth and guarantee the competitiveness of the city in a globalizing economy. Social housing, one of the biggest public expenses, came unsurprisingly under attack. This policy resulted in the 1989 Nota presented by State Secretary Enneüs Heerma which, ending the social and civic obligations of affordable housing production indicated in the 1901 Woningwet, enacted the process for social housing corporations (*woningcorporaties*) to become independent housing players, officially separating affordable housing production from government programmes and financial control.⁵⁵

Moreover, the unfeasible nature of a radical Bijlmer retrofitting was also underpinned by a long-standing cultural battle that indiscriminately condemned high modernist aesthetics and building typologies and all they stood for. Attempts to rejuvenate the image of large-scale residential blocks failed to undermine the widespread perception—or, rather, a common prejudice—that postwar high-rises embodied the oppressive homogeneity, mortification of individual desires, and state paternalism typical of the welfare state. The aesthetic rejuvenation attempted by Koolhaas to soften the harshness of the Bijlmer by functionally and perceptively reprogramming its collective areas fell short in light of the domestic standard pursued at the time. This was the middle-class, cosier, small-scale private family home or apartment on the fringes of the city that would monopolize the Dutch market with the VINEX programme during the 1990s.⁵⁶

To elaborate on our initial argument, however, it is important to place the seminal and ambiguous character of OMA's proposals in the broader context of postwar estate transformations. More precisely, it is worth asking how the device of incompleteness was used—with unprecedented clarity—as a design

tool to bridge the exhausted heritage of postwar functionalism with the burgeoning socio-economic paradigms of the 1980s and beyond. Indeed, the refurbishment strategies enacted by social housing corporations and by the Amsterdam planning office equally embraced a certain understanding of incompleteness to face the shortcomings of the estate and its problematic position within the city. Yet these actors endorsed the idea that upgrading essentially meant to solve the troublesome relationship between the space of architecture and the practice of inhabitants. As such, renovation could be reduced to the utilitarian, budget-oriented management of what existed. Architectural and urban projects were surely given an active role in reshaping social relations. These, however, were of a markedly conservative or even paternalist nature—for example, to rectify resident behaviour, foster individual responsibility, perpetrate class-segregation in the city—and destined to remain a backward vision with no positive output due to the inability to rephrase the nexus between public housing provision and ongoing socio-economic changes. By contrast, OMA, re-enacting the core belief of modernity,⁵⁷ intended to reconnect architectural and urban form with the historical changes of the time. In doing this, to avoid the risk of longing for a romantic past or reproducing outdated paradigms, retrofitting should accommodate the variety and freedom of uses, the ever-growing demands and the multiplying desires of social subjects in the next step of development.

However, as progressive as such a position may seem, OMA's projects ultimately hid a no less conservative vein. It is no secret that the addressees of the plan and the operative agents for its realization were large private corporations and public institutions aligned on speculative market interests. Moreover, the architectural representations of both proposals suggested the recursive search for a new 'grand narrative' that architecture—and architects—could support. Endorsing the driving role of capitalistic development and the metropolis as the locus to foster private accumulation, OMA reproduced the idea of an unquestionable leading narrative for social progress. This time, it was not directed by the bogeyman of state planning authorities but by the free-market strategies that, to find new paths for endless economic-growth and prosperity, openly embraced the ideology of personalized choices of living and consuming.⁵⁸ In this transition, utopia went out of the window. As T.H. Marshall famously argued, the social infrastructures (housing, leisure amenities, care welfare facilities) of the postwar welfare state were engineered to materially redistribute universal social rights and achieve equal status among citizens notwithstanding economic differences.⁵⁹ OMA's refurbishment, on the contrary, offered the blueprint for a model of development where emancipation could happen only drawing upon, and widening, the inequalities of living conditions and status between social classes.⁶⁰

We deduce from our review that the operative use of incompleteness can take several forms and pursue alternative goals. Yet, if a common thread exists between the examples discussed, this appears to be the inability to argue for a truly progressive, empowering, and socially just future. Therefore, one question naturally arises: how can we unravel the puzzle posed by this term as regards the revision of the postwar estate and, more generally, the reassessment of the modern project? We can hypothesize that ambiguities are inherent to the operative use of incompleteness, that is, in the very act of establishing a relation between past and present, judging the former from the perspective of the latter. In doing so, we recurrently run the risk of reproducing the contradictions embedded in the cultural discourses we retrieve. In other words, modernism might be dead, but modernity and its cultural assumptions live on thanks to the category and operativity of incompleteness. Without combining the assessment of material artefacts with a thorough critique of dominant structures typical of modernity—such as the idealization of society as a uniform entity; the coupling of economic growth with progress and generalized welfare; the naturalization and reproduction of gender, working status, or ethnic differences; or the reiterated practices of dispossession and monopolisation of decisional power—incompleteness can only lead to a superficial reassessment of an aesthetic (the refusal of the modernist style, say) and functional nature (programmatic, for example). This not only fails to disentangle rooted aporias, but it also reiterates or naturalizes them.⁶¹ In this regard, Habermas's discourse also falls short. Art historian Pamela Lee, in a seminal study on the perception of time and infinity in the art of the 1960s, refreshed the Hegelian notion of negative infinity, which might help us to grasp the vicious cycle encountered by engaging with incompleteness.⁶² According to Hegel, negative infinity is a logical impasse whereby critical reason fails to overcome the internal aporias of the present state, resulting in the endless reiteration, whether conscious or not, of existing contradictions into the future. Although the bearer of enriching potentials, the acritical view of the past as incomplete can fall into the reproduction of disempowering principles, substantiating in this way Audre Lorde's haunting warning that “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house”.⁶³

OMA's vision for the Bijlmer subscribes to this scheme. Instead of reworking the structural contradictions that generated social alienation in the estate, it set out to shape the city according to hegemonic economic interests and new ideologies of economic growth. I remarked how the “Revisie Bijlmer” rested on two main arguments, namely, the reorganization of the city and the primacy given to programmes for collective individualized consumption. As such, the plan failed to reframe historical statutes of modernity such as the clear-cut separation between the realm of production and that of living (e.g., workspaces

and dwellings) or that between the public and the private sphere (private homes and collective spaces for consumption and leisure, all aspects whose cultural and spatial obduracy proved to be the source of widespread inequalities in the following years).⁶⁴ A clear example of this can be found in how local tenants were endlessly disempowered, reproducing their status as passive recipients of welfare. In his seminal work on the estate, Evert Verhange described how, around 1980, coinciding with the rampant public stigma against the estate, the tenants of the Bijlmer started to collectively organize to obtain better living conditions. They organized protests against rent increases, lobbied for the completion of essential infrastructures (e.g., the metro line to commute between home and work) and insisted on the construction of educational facilities for children. Tenant associations created rooms for gatherings, cafés, and even a local TV and radio station for the neighbourhood.⁶⁵ Institutional indifference eventually led to the failure of collective organisation. Funnily enough, when, in the 1987 “Memorandum for Intensive Management”, institutions contemplated whether to implement forms of decentralized management to increase the decisional power of dwellers, they concluded that the massive presence of short-term renters in the Bijlmer prevented the formation of strong social bonds. They forgot to mention that this was the result of municipal planning policies that had constantly jeopardized the growth of local social engagement. OMA’s projects failed altogether to address the agency of local tenants as potential initiators of a critical revision of the modernist estate based on collectively organized and uneconomic practices.

CODA

The long shadow cast on the Bijlmer by the principles embedded in OMA’s two project proposals can be better perceived retrospectively. Indeed, throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, the whole Bijlmer underwent a radical transformation. In 1992, a cargo airplane even crashed into one of the slabs causing the deaths of 43 inhabitants—the Bijlmermeer. Perhaps that was an omen that times have changed. Soon after, proving Koolhaas’s original intuition right, the Amsterdam city planners recognized that the area offered optimal logistic conditions—essentially cheap land and existing infrastructures—for the decentralization of large private enterprises, public administration offices, and commercial activities outside of the congested city centre. Since 1996, the construction of a new football stadium surrounded by malls, theatres, cinemas, hotels, and private leisure facilities was heralded by the municipality as “a locomotive for the Bijlmermeer” through which “good, fast and a lot of money could be earned without too much municipal effort”.⁶⁶ (fig. 9.9)

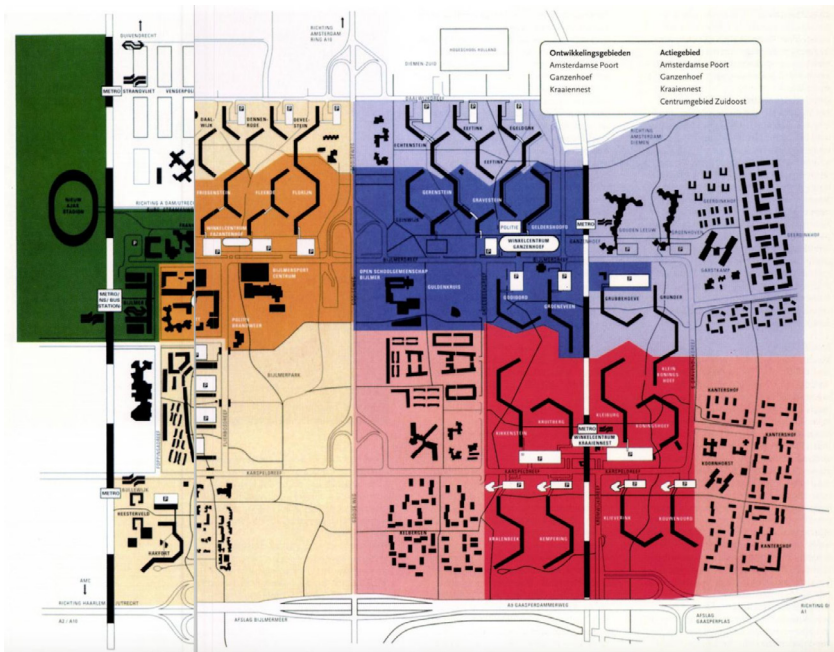


Figure 9.9: Master plan for the redevelopment plan of the Bijlmermeer in the early 2000s.
Source: *De Architect*, no. 10 (1997)

To create the ground for market competition depended on making the best use of three essential elements from which capital value can be created in the city: land, labour input, and financial investments. Eventually, however, the real-estate valorisation of the Bijlmer was only possible through extensive demolition of the social housing complex of the 1960s and the development of new private property homes responding to the dominant middle-class aesthetic and tenure desires. Manuel Aalbers has argued that to support market speculation, “the city is ‘made safe’ for corporate investment by cleaning it from the ‘other’, in some way undesirable, groups”.⁶⁷ Social cleansing was just the collateral, often untold, facet of the prejudicially accepted purge of modernist aesthetic nightmares. (fig. 9.10)

To conclude, Koolhaas’s attempt to revive modernist buildings and urban forms by advocating for a new metropolitan modernity proved naive when confronted with the devouring appetite of the speculative capitalism he himself had endorsed. Yet, looking back at both OMA’s projects and the institutionally promoted refurbishment programmes of the mid-1980s, we recognize a task that, considering the mounting pressure to revisit the social housing stock of the postwar period, is nowadays more urgent than ever. The



Figure 9.10: Aerial view of one of the remaining modernist structures built in the 1960 and the metro viaduct in the foreground, surrounded by smaller-scale private developments that have occupied the original site of Nassuth’s project, privatizing and fragmenting the open spaces of the city

transformation of these estates can no longer ignore the fact that the improvement of physical complexes and urban settings is not just a matter of meeting technical standards and matching social demands. It also necessitates confronting, putting in perspective, and eventually taking a position on the current validity of that set of beliefs, social mechanisms, and cultural expectations that we call the modern project.

NOTES

1. Paola Di Biagi, *La Città Pubblica. Edilizia Sociale e Riqualificazione Urbana a Torino* (Torino: Allemandi, 2008), 20 (my translation).
2. William Tronzo, ed., *The Fragment. An Incomplete History* (New York: Getty Publications, 2009).
3. Hugo Priemus, “Post-War Public High-Rise Housing Estates: What Went Wrong with Housing Policy, with the Design and with Management?”, *The Netherlands Journal of Housing and Environmental Research*, no. 2 (1986): 157-85.
4. Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete, and Dirk van den Heuvel, eds., *Architecture and the Welfare State* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).
5. Drawing on the existentialist reflection of J.P. Sartre, Forty talks of a ‘reflective perception’ triggered by the architecture of the Welfare State. In other words, the

- representation of private individuals as constituents of the public by means of architectural space. See: Adrian Forty, “Being or Nothingness: Private Experience and Public Architecture in Post-War Britain”, *Architectural History* 38, (1995).
6. See, for example, the exemplary work by Alice Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (London: Hilary Shipman Ltd., 1985) as well as the pioneering work by Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).
 7. Glenn W. Most, “On Fragments”, in *The Fragment. An Incomplete History*, ed. Tronzo, 8-20.
 8. Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 21.
 9. Charles Jencks, “The Death of Modern Architecture”, in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 9-24. See also: Gérard Baudin and Philippe Genestier, “Faut-il vraiment démolir les grands ensembles?”, *Espaces et Sociétés* 124-125, no. 1 (2006): 207-22.
 10. Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab. Histories of Global Mass Housing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 13. Frank Wassenberg noted that the plans for the estate were publicly presented in 1964 by the mayor of Amsterdam, Van Hall. The same mayor inaugurated the estate four years later. See: Frank Wassenberg, *Large Housing Estates: Ideas, Rise, Fall and Recovery. The Bijlmermeer and Beyond* (Delft: Delft University Press, Imprint of IOS Press, 2013), 77-79.
 11. The planning of the Bijlmer came after the completion of the famous AUP plan by Cornelis van Eesteren between the wars and implemented in the 1950s. The latter foresaw the growth of the urban population, but it eventually proved to be undersized. See Kees Somer, *The Functional City. The CIAM and Cornelis van Eesteren, 1928-1960* (Rotterdam: NAI Publisher, 2007). The most complete and compelling history of the Bijlmer from its origins to the 1980s is Evert Verhange, *Van Bijlmermeerpolder tot Amsterdam Zuid-Oost* (Den Haag: SDU Uitgeverij, 1987).
 12. For a thorough assessment of the different versions submitted for the project, see: Mariëtte van Stralen, *Siegfried Nassuth* (Oeuvreprijs 1998 stichting fonds voor beeldende kunsten, vormgeving en bouwkunst, 1998).
 13. Wassenberg, *Large Housing Estates: Ideas, Rise, Fall and Recovery*. See also: Wouter Bolte and Johan Meijer, *Van Berlage tot Bijlmer. Architectuur en Stedelijke Politiek* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1981).
 14. *Om de Nieuwe Toekomst van 100,000 Amsterdammers*. Het Gemeentebestuur van Amsterdam aan de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal (Amsterdam, 1962).
 15. The *Nota Huur- en Subsidiebeleid* (1974-75), approved by Housing Minister De Uyl, was the first public policy document to explicitly support private rent and home ownership over social rent. This policy was made to favour housing turnover, encouraging households to move from older units to newly developed

- ones by reinforcing the so-called individual rent subsidy (financial help given to households to counter the increasing liberalization of the market). The *Nota 1974* marks the milestone of a decade of housing reforms in the Netherlands, one characterized by a growing plea for ‘liberalisation’ of the housing market after two decades of strict public control and planned investments (1945-65). See: “Wet Bevordering Eigen Woningbezit”, accessed December 22, 2020, <https://www.jongbloed.nl/code/inkijkexemplaar/9789013066593/>.
16. See the issue dedicated to ‘De Bijlmermeer’ in the magazine *Rooilijn*, no.4 (1988).
 17. The liberalization of the Dutch housing market started in the period 1967-73 under two housing ministers, Wim Schut and Bé Udink, in clear opposition to strategies of wage control through large public investments in the housing sector typical of welfare state policies. The essential strategies to enact housing liberalization were the removal of the capped-rent legislation in the private rental market, the elimination of public financial subsidy for social housing (lower interest rate for loans dedicated to social housing construction), the gradual reduction of the ‘object-oriented’ subsidy, the introduction of the ‘individual rent subsidy’, and the approval of a new cost-rent calculation system which shifted costs from the public to individual tenants with relevant rent increases. For an overview of the evolution of the Dutch housing market, see: Edo Arnouldssen and Jacq van de Ven, “Huurbeleid en Individuele Huursubsidie”, accessed December 22, 2020, at www.tpedigitaal.nl/sites/default/files/bestand/huurbeleid_en_individuele_huursubsidie.pdf.
 18. Bran van Dijk and Jan Korthals Altes, “Criminaliteit en Volkshuisvesting. De Bijlmer als Case”, *Rooilijn*, no.4 (1988). For a critical account of the phenomenon of vandalism in postwar housing estates, see: Colin Ward, ed., *Vandalism* (London: The Architectural Press, 1973).
 19. Bernard Huet tackled the architectural failure of the Bijlmer in an article entitled “Franse Architect Bernard Huet: Bijlmermeer een Monsterachtig Concept. Nederlaag van het Visioen van de Stad”, 1987.
 20. F. Bokelman and J. van Leeuwen, “Revitalisering Bijlmer. Verbetering aan Geinwijk, Gerenstein en Echtstein”, *De Architect*, no.9 (1987): 51-55.
 21. On how tenant responsibility, privacy, and territoriality became the driving notions for a critique of postwar social housing architecture, see: Kenny Cupers, “Human Territoriality and the Downfall of Public Housing”, in *Neoliberalism on the Ground: Architecture and Transformation from the 1960s to the Present*, ed. Kenny Cupers, Catharina Gabriëlsson, and Helena Mattsson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020), 357-79.
 22. On Newman’s theory, which became extremely influential for public housing rehabilitation from the 1970s onwards, see: Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space. People and Design in the Violent City* (London: Architectural Press, 1972).

23. Donald van Dansik, "Bijlmermeer en Uithof door het OMA Geanalyseerd", *De Architect*, no.25 (1986): 25-31.
24. Martin van der Zwan and Steven Lenos, "De Bijlmer en de Luwte op de Woningmarkt", *Rooilijn*, no.4 (1988): 107-11.
25. van der Zwan and Lenos, 107-11.
26. Frank Wassenberg, *De Bewoners over de Toekomst van de Bijlmermeer. Een Onderzoek naar de Mening van de Bewoners over hun Wijk en over de Voorstellen van de Werkgroep Toekomst Bijlmermeer* (Delft: Delftse Universitaire Pers, 1990), 2-16.
27. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity. An Incomplete Project", in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Washington: Bay Press, 1980), 3-15.
28. On this aspect, see for example the last chapter of the seminal work by Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness* (London: Alfred a Knopf Inc, 1974).
29. The discourse that investigates the notion of history itself rather than its contents.
30. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 9-25.
31. Franco Raggi, "Puritanical Hedonist", *MODO 58* (1983): 26-28. For an overview of OMA's works, see: Roberto Gargiani, *Rem Koolhaas/OMA* (Bari: Laterza, 2006).
32. This assumption is evident in the seminal document of modernist urban planning: Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter* (New York: Grossman, 1973). See also: Paola Di Biagi, "La Carta d'Atene. Manifesto e Frammento dell'Urbanistica Moderna", in *La Carta d'Atene. Manifesto e Frammento dell'Urbanistica Moderna*, ed. Paola Di Biagi (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 1998), 25-57.
33. Mil De Kooning, "The Economics of Imagination", *Vlees en Beton*, no.4 (1985), n.p. Recently republished in ed. Christophe Van Gerrewey, *OMA/Rem Koolhaas: A Critical Reader* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019), 111-18.
34. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1997).
35. Rem Koolhaas, "Le Splendeur Terrifiante du XX Siècle", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 238 (1985): 15.
36. Rem Koolhaas, "Imaginer le Néant", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 238 (1985): 38.
37. Koolhaas started to work on the Bijlmer as a professor at TU Delft in the early 1970s. I thank Christophe Van Gerrewey for pointing out to me Koolhaas's early work with his students on the Bijlmer.
38. OMA, "Revisie Bijlmer", 1986. CCA Archives, Montreal (Canada).
39. Rem Koolhaas, "The Las Vegas of the Welfare State", in Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S.M.L.XL*. (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), 861-77.
40. See Statement 35 of the Athens Charter. Le Corbusier, *The Athens Charter*.

41. OMA, “Revisie Bijlmer”. See also the considerations of the architect published in Koolhaas, “The Las Vegas of the Welfare State”, 867
42. Fabrizio Paone, *Controcanti. Architettura e Città in Italia 1962-1974* (Padova: Marsilio Editore, 2009), 276-81.
43. OMA, “Revisie Bijlmer”.
44. Lewis Mumford, “The Neighborhood and the Neighborhood Unit”, *Town Planning Review* 24, no. 4 (1954), 256-70; Donald Leslie Johnson, “Origin of the Neighbourhood Unit”, *Planning Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (2002), 227-45.
45. The discussion within CIAM II was exemplary. See *L’Abitazione Razionale. Atti dei Congressi CIAM 1929-1930*, ed. Carlo Aymonino, Polis n.10 (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1971). For additional considerations on the topic, see: Andrea Migotto and Marson Korbi, “Between Rationalization and Political Project. The ‘Existenzminimum’ from Klein and Teige to Today”, *Urban Planning* 4, no. 3 (2019): 299-314.
46. As well described in Melinda Cooper, *Family Values. Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (New York: Zone Books, 2017).
47. As broadly and sharply discussed in Gosta Esping-Andersen, *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), See in particular Part II of the book, titled “The New Political Economy”, 95-142
48. OMA, “Studie Herinrichting Bijlmer”, 1987. CCA Archives, Montreal (Canada).
49. Dick Bruijne et al., *Amsterdam Zuid Oost Centrumgebied Zuidoost en Stedelijke Vernieuwing Bijlmermeer 1992-2010* (Bussum: Uitgeverij Thoth, n.d.).
50. Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Stephen Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1977).
51. OMA, “Studie Herinrichting Bijlmer”.
52. OMA, (my translation).
53. OMA, (my translation).
54. “Plan Voor Renovatie Hoogbouw Bijlmer Voorlopig van de Baan”, n.d.
55. Hugo Priemus, “Improving or Endangering Housing Policies? Recent Changes in the Dutch Housing Allowance Scheme”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22, no. 2 (1998): 319-30.
56. Jelte Boeienga, Jeroen Mensink, and Joost Grootens, *Vinex Atlas* (Rotterdam: 010 Publisher, 2008).
57. Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 102-117.
58. Pier Vittorio Aureli, “Architecture and Counterrevolution. OMA and the Politics of the Grands Projets”, *OASE*, no. 94 (2015): 44-48.
59. Thomas H. Marshall, “Citizenship and Social Class”, in *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 1-85.

60. See: Tim Jackson, *Prosperity Without Growth* (London: Earthscan, 2009).
61. One of the sharpest critiques of the philosophical foundations of modern society—built upon eighteenth-century liberal thinking and presupposing the uniformity and harmony of the social body based upon the structuring and legitimization of internal differences between subjects—can be found in Moira Gatens, *Feminism and Philosophy. Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).
62. Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 276-78.
63. Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”, in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 110-14.
64. As discussed in Eleanor Jupp et al., *The New Politics of Home: Housing, Gender and Care in Times of Crisis* (London: Policy Press, 2019).
65. Verhange, *Van Bijlmermeerpolder tot Amsterdam Zuid-Oost*.
66. Harm Tilman, “Locomotief Voor de Bijlmermeer. Stedebouwkundig Plan Omgeving Arena”, *De Architect*, no.9 (1996): 77-81.
67. Manuel B. Aalbers, “The Revanchist Renewal of Yesterday’s City of Tomorrow”, *Antipode* 43, no. 5 (2011), 1696-724.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Umberto Bonomo is an architect and associate professor at the School of Architecture of the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, where he serves as director of the UC Cultural Heritage Centre. He graduated from the Università Iuav di Venezia and received his doctoral degree in Architecture and Urban Studies at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (2009). His scholarship lies at the intersection between theory and practice and focuses on social housing and heritage issues and on the relation between the urban and rural territory. His work has been presented at the biennial exhibitions of Chile, São Paulo, and Venice. His essays have appeared in *Casabella*, *Domus*, and the *Giornale dell'architettura*. He is an active member of Docomomo Chile and has developed consultancies and studies, among others, for the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage of Chile, for the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ECLAC, and for the Inter-American Development Bank.

Flávia Brito do Nascimento is an architect and historian as well as professor at the School of Architecture and Urban Planning at University of São Paulo (USP), where she serves as director of the Centre for Cultural Preservation. She received her doctoral degree in Architecture and Urbanism from the University of São Paulo (USP) and has done post-doctoral research at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. She has previously worked at the Brazilian National Heritage Institute IPHAN and has published several books and articles on heritage and social housing history in Brazil, among which *Entre a Estética e o Hábito: o Departamento de Habitação Popular 1946-1960* (2008), *Blocos de Memórias: Habitação Social, Arquitetura Moderna e Patrimônio Cultural* (2016), and *Domesticidade, Gênero e Cultura Material* (with J. Mello, J. Lire and S. Rubino, 2017). Her latest research focuses on domesticity, gender, and heritage in social housing.

Gaia Caramellino is an architect and historian as well as associate professor at the Politecnico di Milano. Her research addresses the history of housing discourses, practices, theories, and cultures and the processes of knowledge transfer in architecture and urban design. She has been a visiting scholar at the CCA in Montreal, the Kyoto University, and the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, where she co-chaired the research project *The Terms of Habitation*. She has published several books, including *Europe Meets America: William Lescaze, Architect of Modern Housing* (2016); *The Housing Project* (with S. Dadour, 2020); *Postwar Middle-Class Housing* (with F. Zanfi, 2015); and *Storie di Case. Abitare l'Italia del Boom* (with B. Bonomo, F. De Pieri, and F. Zanfi, 2013). Her work has been supported by the Graham Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies. She co-chairs the EAHN interest group on housing and led the research project *Architectures for the Middle Classes in Italy, 1950s-1970s* (2010-14).

Federico Coricelli is an architect and a teaching and research assistant at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. He graduated from the University of Florence and obtained his doctoral degree from the Politecnico di Torino. From 2019 to 2022, he worked as a research assistant at the Future Urban Legacy Lab at the Politecnico di Torino, where he led and participated in various interdisciplinary research projects. His research and professional work have been published in various journals, books, and magazines. Since 2017, he has been a partner at UHO, an architectural office based in Paris.

Jesse Honsa is an architect and doctoral candidate at KU Leuven. His PhD project *Housing Economies of Scale* considers how the scale of organisations and projects has influenced the living unit. He has around ten years of experience as a practising architect, mainly working on large-scale housing and urban design, collaborating with OOZE Architects in Rotterdam, DB Mimarlik in Istanbul, Rutz Architekten and AGPS architecture in Zürich, and Aardvarchitecture in New York City. He has presented work at the Venice Architecture Biennale (2021), the World Islamic Economic Forum (2013), and the Istanbul Design Biennial (2012). Honsa holds degrees from The Berlage Center for Advanced Studies in Architecture and Urban Design at TU Delft and the Rhode Island School of Design in the United States.

Heidi Svenningsen Kajita is an architect and assistant professor in the Section for Landscape Architecture and Planning at the University of Copenhagen. Kajita works for social change in everyday spaces focusing on the history and transformation of welfare state large-scale housing. She draws on

emerging ethnographic-architectural methodology to combine knowledge of users' everyday practices, normative frameworks for the built environment, and architects' drawn and written work. Currently she works on the research projects *Practicing Complaints* (2022-2023) and on *(Im)possible Instructions: Inscribing Use-Value in the Architectural Design Process* (2019–23). She has a background in feminist pedagogy and in urban design; she is co-founder of Bureaus and is part of Aktion Arkiv, a group of researchers and artists using collaborative methods and formats, such as witness seminars and exhibitions, to publicly bring together diverse actors around urban cultural, historical, and political issues.

Michael Klein is an architect and researcher, working at the intersections of architecture, urbanism, art and cultural theory at the Research Unit of Housing and Design at TU Wien. Having studied at the Academy of fine Arts in Vienna, the TU Wien and the École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris, he holds a degree in architecture and a PhD in philosophy and cultural studies. His theoretical interest lies on housing and other spatial infrastructures, everyday life, historiography, aesthetic and political theory. In his work, he investigates how the restructuring of space can be both a governmental device as well as a tool of democratisation. He is a board member of *dérive-journal for urban research* and the Austrian Society for Architecture (ÖGFA). His work includes *The Design of Scarcity* (with J. Goodbun, A. Rumpfhuber and J. Till, 2014); *Modelling Vienna – Real Fictions in Social Housing* (with A. Rumpfhuber, 2015) and *Building Critique: Architecture and Its Discontents* (with G. Heindl and C. Linortner, 2019) as well as the film *60 Elephants. Episodes of a Theory* on the theoretical work of Yona Friedman (with S. Pirker).

Andrea Migotto is an architect and researcher. He studied at the Politecnico di Milano and at TU Delft and obtained his doctoral degree in Architecture from KU Leuven (2023). His doctoral research investigated the contemporary architecture of social housing in light of rising social and institutional changes. Between 2016 and 2017, he has worked for architectural firms in Melbourne and Brussels, where he is currently an independent architect. His approach draws upon the combination of intellectual criticism, historical research, and design-based experiments with the scope of challenging established discourses and practices within the profession and the public sphere. His main theoretical interests are the architecture of domestic space and the transformation of modern artifacts and urban settlements built in the second half of the twentieth century.

Nicola Russi is an architect and associate professor at Politecnico di Torino. He studied at TU Delft and Politecnico di Milano, where he obtained his doctoral degree in 2007. In 2008 he founded the architectural practice Laboratorio Permanente in Milan with Angelica Sylos Labini. The studio has taken part in numerous international design competitions, won the international competition for the master plan of Farini and San Cristoforo railway yards, participated in the 14th and the 16th Venice Biennale, and received the Honourable Mention at the 2012 Italian Gold Medal Architecture Awards, with the project *The Landscape Has no Rear*. Since 2017, he has been a member of the board of directors of ANCSA and is responsible for the Gubbio Prize. His teaching and research activity has been published in numerous books and magazines, including *Domus*, *Abitare*, and *Architecture Ireland*, and he is the author of *Backgrounds* (2019).

Martino Tattara is an architect and associate professor at KU Leuven. His research and teaching focus on issues related to the transformation of domestic space in relation to pressing socio-economic challenges. He is the supervisor of multiple research projects centred on the design, theory, and history of housing, including an ongoing work on the transformation of the single-family house. He is also currently working on a critical reassessment of Brazilian architect Lucio Costa's project for Brasilia. Together with Dogma, the architectural practice he co-founded, he has been working in recent years on multiple housing projects and studies. This work has been exhibited at different venues, including the HKW Berlin 2015, the Venice Biennale in 2016 and in 2021, the Chicago Architectural Biennial in 2017, the Seoul Architecture Biennale in 2019, and the Triennale di Milano in 2023. Dogma's most recent publication is *Living and Working* (2022). Tattara holds degrees from the Università Iuav di Venezia and the Berlage Institute Rotterdam.