

Grazia Maria Nicolosi

Constrained inhabited space. Real or virtual?

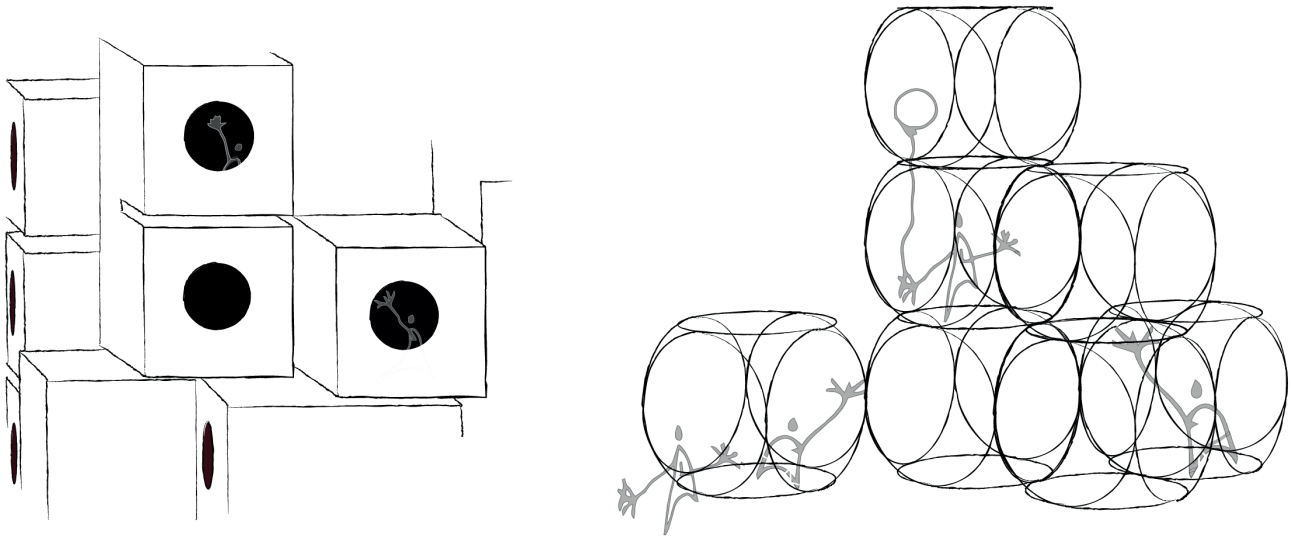
Abstract

Throughout the period of social withdrawal when each person, in a different way, had to tackle such an emergency as the pandemic, the proposed paper offers some reflections on the possibility that a non-resolving condition of the emergency will likely happen shortly. Namely, that an extremely catastrophic eventuality will occur. What would happen for humans and therefore for architecture if Covid-19 were not defeated? What are the consequences if humans, forced into persistent social distancing, are only allowed to live in a delimited, circumscribed, measured, virtual space?

Keywords

Cyberspace — Denaturalization — Smoothness — Micro-architectures — Meta-data

The period of social withdrawal that forced each person, in a different way, into persistent social distancing and to inhabit a delimited, circumscribed, measured space led to precise considerations of the relationship between man, space and living environment and of the meaning of death. What would happen if contemporary humans, nomadic inhabitants of the world, accustomed to considering one's personal home as a place in which to take refuge, were forced to live exclusively in the contraction of their own domestic space? This paper attempts to show that the months of social withdrawal have been the staging of a reality that, lacking in physical, social, recreational relationships has led man to renounce his own corporeality and to inhabit a place made of connections and exclusively virtual relationships. A world made of non-real, simulated space, of cyberspace that for architects like Marcos Novak could be the occasion for new poetic shapes and other rules for architecture. Non-gravitational, non-perspective, non-Euclidean rules. He writes about liquid architecture that pulsates and breathes and about cyberspace as the place in which complex information, inputs, simulations and metadata are programmed and processed to generate the outputs in the virtual reality. Cyberspace becomes for Novak a habitat 'for and of the imagination' (Novak 1991). What will be the consequences? Will capsules, micro-architectures, technological caverns that incorporate, fossilize, immobilize the human body be inhabited? Will the inevitable end for architecture be announced? Will blocks of meta-data be designed? Will there be a return to a primitive man? Novak (2001) writes about 'transarchitecture', about 'interactive media interspaces' and about 'telepresence'. What will be the destiny of humans? Will they disincarnate, will they get lost in the network? A network made of likes, of smoothness as Byung-Chul Han (2015) writes. On

**Fig. 1-2**

Kisho Kurakawa, *Nakagin Capsule Tower*. Sketch.

Yona Friedman, *Mobile Architecture*. Sketch.

such premises, two reflections have been achieved: the first one on the meaning of contemporary living which seems to induce men to look towards the past; the second one, on the meaning of contemporary architecture during a period when technology and science seem to dominate over humans. Looking at the past for dwelling in the 'house of a prophet' as is written by Kahlil Gibran (1923) or in the 'house of the future' (Bachelard 1957). For imagining a 'shell' like the one described by Walter Benjamin (1982). For wanting an 'anonymous house' (Rogers 1958) or to understand it as a 'social right' (Ponti 1957). For inhabiting the 'Bollington tower' of Carl Gustav Jung (1961) or a house 'as a metaphor of a body' (Augè 1994). A 'home for everyday life' (Rossi 1981) or a house for the 'events' (Tschumi 1994). Namely, a house to 'dwell' wrote Heidegger (D'Urso 2009). For Baudrillard (1988) humans live in the era of the disappearance of art and in the era of a society consumed by ephemeral values. Paul Virilio (2002) in *Discorso sull'orrore dell'arte* recognizes a progressive and precise desire to eliminate the art techniques and old means of expression, in favour of a typology of art defined by the author as 'the art of the motor'. This theorization is the transposition of the clash between men and the general and disarming confidence in technology, machines, dis-values linked to speed and hyper-technique. Why speed? If time is money, then speed is the power to make money. Humans are moving towards a sort of divinization of techno-science assuming that it is necessary and inevitable. What are the consequences? The gradual disappearance of perception, physicality and corporeality for humans in favour of automaton. But not all human perceptions are contemplated in cyberspace. And the question becomes more complex when the design of it takes place through stochastic algorithms or when the algorithmic process is iterated on the basis of random parameters. Greg Lynn FORM at the 2012 Biennale Interieur held in Belgium proposed the *RV prototype house*. He showed a rotating prototype, transposition of an ever-changing space without any relationship with the specificities of a context. The FOA studio designed the Virtual House in 1997. A ribbon wrapped around itself. For which site? Anywhere. A virtual house which shifts «constantly between a lining and a wrapping condition - a quality that seems suited to the cyborg's - partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity» writes Alejandro Zaera (1998, p. 40). The Asymptote studio directed by Hani Rashid and Lise Anne Couture designed the *Virtual Guggenheim Museum* in 2004 demonstrating that the imagination could also transcend the materiality. The virtual walls of the museum

change their shape according to the simulated ‘movements’ of the ‘visitor’. A really stimulating virtual space for the human mind. What are the constants of such architectures? Virtual or real objects without any physical sensory involvement of humans. In these experimentations, suggested only by a mathematical matrix of non-Euclidean space, the organism's physicality is forgotten. They are the result of metadata contained and managed by algorithms. They are surrogate and abstract models of a world devoid of diversity and imperfection. An artificial nature that generates a forgery and therefore a counterfeit aesthetic. Yet, Donna Haraway writes that the cyborg, hybrid between machine and organism, between social reality and fiction, makes humans free from ‘all forms of addiction’. The cyborg breaks the dualisms: machine-organism, nature-artifice, body-psyche, material-shape. This process of de-naturalization is opposed to what Gillo Dorfles (1968) sought when he wrote that artifice object could become a natural object. The *apocalyptic telos* of abstract individualism (Haraway 1995) is contrasted by an *aesthetic and sociological telos* necessary to maintain ‘the creative and experiential capacity of humanity’. One theory bases itself on a de-naturalization process of the automaton, the other one, on the organism, on the human being and their own capacity of naturalization. Because, Heidegger recalls, if there is a device capable of remembering, of creating, of elaborating better than humans, man will probably gradually lose their own ability to do it, namely, to carry out all those activities for which a mechanical system would work better. And, if it is true that social, historical, cultural, environmental and therefore also technological factors intervene in corporeality because the body is a complex organic system bigger than the sum of its components, one wonders whether, similarly, in the cyborg, the sum of the terms cyber and organism, is still included the corporeity of the human being. In this scenario of general anesthetization of human feelings, it is probable that we theorize about the end for man, for art and architecture. Paul Virilio (1980) wrote about the aesthetics of disappearance. Once again it is a cancellation. Similarly, to what happens in art for which the avant-gardes seem to want to cancel previous artistic techniques as if they wanted to eliminate history, the virtual space seems to want to remove the real one. For Allan Kaprow, the word *art* should even be deleted from the dictionary. Martin Heidegger (1976) puts himself in an intermediate position by stating that the action of revealing the truth, *Wahrheit*, also takes place through technique, as well as through the creation of artwork. The occurrence happens through the action of ‘being there’. Where is the place of the particle ‘there’ in cyberspace? For cyborg architecture the technology is the end to itself. The material space of architecture is destined to be reduced until it disappears in favour of the virtual space of the network. And, the Coronavirus seems to have forced us to do so. But, the months of lockdown, months of virtual connection, have shown that communication between human beings is not exclusively verbal or visual. What was missing was the perception of one's own body in relation to the body of others. The philosopher Massimo Cacciari (2004) writes that if the body is the first-place humans inhabit, how could the human being not look for other real places? And that although the soul may not have a fixed abode, an *a-oikos* because it is nomadic, *dynamis*, and intellectual energy, it is still necessary to have places to inhabit. Changeable and unstable but physical places. They are essential in order not to lose the human capacity to imagine, to plan, to get excited, to create. For Paul Virilio (2002) it would be necessary to restore value to the body and therefore to the architecture. There is no architecture without a human being. There is no Christianity without

incarnation. There is no art without its medium. What is the antidote? Virilio identifies a way out in the accident. Every time a new technological product or a new technique is invented, the corresponding accident is also conceived. The invention of the ship coincided with its shipwreck. The incident of art with its representation. For Virilio, the accident makes it possible to regain value. Could Covid-19, therefore, be the accident of virtualization?

Bibliography

- AUGÈ M. (1994) – *Ville e tenute. Etnologia della casa di campagna*, Elèuthera, Milan.
- BACHELARD G. (1957) – *La poetica dello spazio*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari.
- BAJ E. e VIRILIO P. (2002) – *Discorso sull'orrore dell'arte*, Elèuthera, Milan.
- BAUDRILLARD J. (1988) – *La sparizione dell'arte*, Abscondita, Milan.
- BENJAMIN W. (1982) – *Parigi capitale del XIX secolo*, Einaudi, Turin.
- CACCIARI M. (2004) – “Nomadi in prigione”. In: A. BONOMI e A. ABRUZZESE (edited by), *La città infinta*, Mondadori, Milan.
- CUOMO A. (2015) – *La fine (senza fine) dell'architettura. Verso un filosofical design*, Deleyva Editore, Rome.
- D'URSO S. (2009) – *Il senso dell'abitare contemporaneo*, Maggioli, Santarcangelo di Romagna.
- DORFLES G. (1968) – *Artificio e natura*, Einaudi, Turin.
- GIBRAN K. (1923) – *Il profeta*, Feltrinelli, Milan.
- HAN B.-C. (2015) – *La salvezza del bello*, Figure nottetempo, Milan.
- HARAWAY D. (1995) – *Manifesto Cyborg. Donne, tecnologie e biopolitiche del corpo*, Feltrinelli, Milan.
- HEIDEGGER M. (1976) – “Costruire, abitare, pensare”. In: G. VATTIMO (edited by), *Saggi e discorsi*, Mursia, Milan.
- JUNG C.-G. (1961) – *Ricordi, sogni, riflessioni*, Rizzoli, Milan.
- NOVAK M. (1991) – “Liquid Architecture”. In: M. BENEDIKT (edited by), *Cyberspace: First Steps*, The MIT Press, Cambridge.
- NOVAK M. (2001) – “Liquid, Trans, Invisible: The Ascent and Speciation of the Digital in Architecture. A Story from Digital”. In: P. CACHOLA SCHMALK, *Digital/Real Blobmeister: First Built Projects*, Birkhäuser Publications, Frankfurt.
- PONTI G. (1957) – *Amate l'architettura*, Rizzoli, Milan.
- ROGERS E.-N. (1958) – *Esperienza dell'architettura*, Einaudi, Milan.
- ROSSI A. (1981) – *Autobiografia scientifica*, Il saggiaiore, Milan.
- TSCHUMI B. (1994) – *Event-Cities. Praxis*, The MIT Press, Cambridge.
- ZAERA A. (1998) – “La reformulación del suelo/Reformulating the Ground”. *Qua-derns*, 220.
- VIRILIO P. (1980) – *Estetica della sparizione*, Feltrinelli, Milan

Maria Grazia Nicolosi (Catania, 1985) PhD in Architectural and Urban Composition with a thesis entitled *The particlizing of matter between order and chaos, analisi e sperimentazione*, she is a student of the subject in Architectural and Urban Composition (SSD ICAR/14). She conducts research activities aimed at architectural design and computational experimentation. He participated in the Erasmus program at the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Valladolid. She conducted several study trips, to London in 2013, to Japan in 2017 and to the ICD in Stuttgart in 2018. She has written essays on researches of national interest P.R.I.N. In 2019 he published the volume entitled *Contaminazioni dal mondo fluttuante. A proposito di avanguardie*.