

Antonino Margagliotta, Paolo De Marco
#Stayhome.
New forms of domestic living

Abstract

Hygienic-sanitary regulations have always influenced urban planning theories, cities transformations and forms of dwelling. While waiting for the medical solution, the answer to Covid19 goes through spatial considerations. The most immediate changes can begin from home, with a poetic thought and in opposition to the idea that everything depends solely on technology. The reasoning about the domestic space implies reflection on new needs (which the emergency has exacerbated) and on the search for quality, with a revision of the living minimums. Isolation has opened our eyes to possible domestic landscapes and, if the house is still the principle of dwelling, from it - with a multi-scalar vision - wider changes and transformations can be targeted. From this point of view, the contemporary project recovers some reasons and experiences of modernity as a reference for further elaborations.

Keywords

Emergency — Architecture — House — Confinement — Existenzminimum

Health emergencies have always influenced urban planning theories and transformations of cities, as well as the contributions from medicine have influenced the definition of new forms of living and of architecture.

In the eighteenth century, the antibacterial properties of lime helped to spread the myth of white in architecture at the same time that Winckelmann was elaborating his theories on classicism; in turn, the first urban planning laws of the nineteenth century linked planning action to hygiene regulations, motivating the *street levelling*, *cuts* and *demolition* of historic fabrics of many European cities.

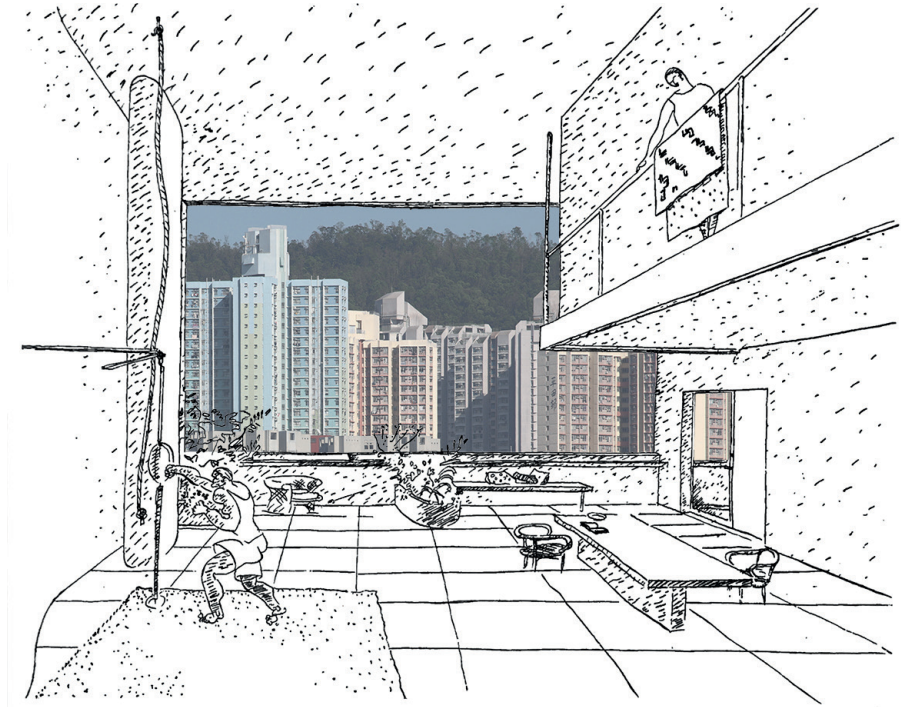
The spatial experiments of the early decades of the twentieth century in health centres soon converged into the health and hygiene standards of the home (Colomina 2018, Barras 2020): the large glazed openings and the sunny terraces of the sanatoriums first appeared in the *machine à guérir* and immediately later in that *à habiter*; therefore the houses and residential complexes were equipped with terraces and garden roofs to welcome nature into the domestic space and carry out the actions of a healthy life; these principles have also innovated schools with open-air teaching in classrooms that can be fully opened and ventilated or that are totally duplicated outdoors. And yet, the health recommendations were taken as a metaphor of the *new spirit* innovative principles for which the *law of Ripolin*, formulated by Le Corbusier, *whitewashes* the language, the home and the life of modern man: «There are no more dirty, dark corners: *Everything is shown as it is*» (Le Corbusier 2015, 191)¹. Finally, medical terminologies end up by hybridizing the words of architecture for which still today we speak of *skeletons*, *bones*, *skins*, *pathologies* that explain the similarities with which the architects presented buildings as spatial devices to protect the

Fig. 1

Photomontage of the domestic open space of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille and the crowding of the contemporary metropolis.

**Fig. 2**

Photomontage of contemporary metropolitan landscape with the hanging garden of a collective residence by Le Corbusier (1928).



body and the psyche.

Even now, while waiting for a medical solution, the answer to Covid19 goes from spatial considerations as at the moment only space can mitigate the infections, isolate and confine; However, the emergency has highlighted already evident environmental and urban criticalities which, in any case, will survive the pandemic itself. But since cities will slowly change, due to the inertia to transformations and the complexity of phenomena on an urban scale, many reflections – and in any case necessary and immediate results – can start by thinking about the spaces we live in and, in particular, the house seen from the interior. Concentrating the reasoning on what already exists also allows us to stem a feared *urban dispersion* that would cause disastrous results for the territory and the countryside.

In the period of isolation we have enhanced – or questioned – our spaces: the house has become the *threshold* that if on the one hand it has imposed a boundary on our lives, on the other hand it has made evident new needs



Fig. 3
Ryue Nishizawa, *Garden house*,
Tokyo, 2012.

and opened our eyes to possible landscapes. Perhaps, unexpectedly, the confinement gave back to the house a different value from the real estate one and has rediscovered the ancient meaning of *domus*, that is, a space for family and for sharing. The house has returned to being, in an explicit way, the domestic refuge, the place that guards and protects, which represents the primary and primordial sense of living. Staying at home, *dwelling*, was an opportunity to reflect on spaces under the light of renewed needs, for possible actions that can then be extended from the home, with a multi-scalar vision, to *things* and the city. And since the house has always been the *principle of dwelling*, from it, it will certainly be possible to proceed towards wider changes and transformations.

A first level of intervention (for reasons of logic and feasibility) concerns our homes to bring them back, after so much talks about *nomadism*, to the value of permanence and to face actions of everyday domestic life with a *poietic* thought: the needs of emotional life and personal intimacy, of healthy eating and living, of work or distance learning (even for the entire family unit), the needs of body and spirit, of contact with nature, the possibility of isolate oneself even in general isolation. After all, the house (especially in the city) has always been the family's private space, totally separated from the urban exterior (public and collective) – except for the balcony, now rediscovered as an external projection of the private space (Gabrielli e Tettamanti 2020, 29-32)² and transformed into a *scenario* of domestic life – as well as separated from the activity of work and leisure.

The *internal* question therefore concerns the need to *make* and *give space* to these activities, overcoming the consoling misunderstanding that it concerns only technology, since this – says Umberto Galimberti – «does not open scenarios of meaning or salvation, but it simply works: as Pasolini said, it is not progress but development» (Crippa 2020)³. This is confirmed by the introduction, for some time now, of remote work which was intended as a mere question of technological instrumentation without implications for space; we must instead think about this, as telematic work will be encouraged and enhanced: *apps* are not enough, we need suitable spaces that house does not always have (Zevi 2020, II).

Proceeding in terms of complexity, a *project* action is therefore to keep the house in order – in an architectural sense – and *free* it from the clutter, bring it back to the spirit of necessity, to the ethical and aesthetic aspiration of essentiality; also because, if the shape of the house and lifestyle influence each other, this leads to the establishment of a strategy for daily sustainability, for the reduction of waste and garbage, for the conscious consumption. The challenge also concerns design, to establish a new cultural and emotional bond between man and his objects, to refer new consumption and the rules of living to sensory and *emotional values* as suggested by the concept of *hot house* (Branzi 1984)⁴.

The arguments become even more emblematic if the house is contextualized in the urban landscape; not so much, however, in *social distancing living* (the house in the countryside, in the village or in the country, in a few months transformed from problem into resource) as in *shared* living in metropolitan areas and crowded conurbations which, as the news has shown, constitute the real ground for spreading epidemics. In these configurations, the house is the apartment (by definition, the place to stay apart), a domestic space that is affected by interactions with the urban scale and allows us to think about a city *by compartment*. In these contexts, the project can recover and re-establish principles and experiments already began in

**Fig. 4**

Ryue Nishizawa, *Moriyama house*, Tokyo, 2005.

**Fig. 5**

Waro Kishi, *House in Nipponbashi*, Osaka, 1992.

architecture, including some ideals that have fueled the transformations of the Modern; it also induces to update the minimums of living – the concept of *existenz-minimum* – to guarantee spaces of adequate size and offer a certain quality of life in an extended and general way. This is the further level of intervention regarding the design of the new, which can refer, then, to the utopias on collective housing (the recent theme of *social housing*) which has given rise to many architectural and urban innovations; It is also possible to recover the ideas expressed in the *unités d'habitation* which, with their service spaces or *to create community*, allow outdoor activities or can have green spaces on the roof (then, detached from the ground with the *pilotis*, the *unités* evoke large ships that lift their moorings and give salvation); the social and spatial value of phalanstery (of utopia and concretizations) or of large settlements with autonomy of services in which often the internal courtyard (the *shikumen* used by Chinese planners long ago) is often a place of meeting and socialization, filter between private space and the city (Sennett 2020, 13).

The project of the new in shared living should assume different rules – almost with a revision of urban planning standards – to account for the today *needs*: internal social spaces; domestic green, at ground level or on the roof (to be encouraged with bonuses and strategies for restructuring, but without incurring the aestheticization of the green), to ensure truly accessible vegetable gardens or vegetated spaces, equipped for the sporting activity of condos and children; patios, habitable balconies and loggias for each house (preventing them from turning into verandas); natural lighting; coworking spaces – as a neighbourhood hub – to go to during the smart working hours, to separate the space of the home from that of work; spaces for study in homes (in the period of confinement any horizontal surface of the house, including the kitchen table, became a workstation) perhaps guaranteed by adaptability, as it is with accessibility for the disabled. Sanitation parameters will then be necessary for the common areas, ventilation and lighting for the rooms, control and *purification* of the space with the arrangement of essential, removable and light furniture, and integrated – according to the Loosian principle – in the wall thickness. However, the challenge must also look at ethical and existential issues

since the project, of any house, must help to feel and create *community*. To be alone and not feel alone, so as not to become dormant and get sick with another virus – the plague of insomnia of *One hundred years of solitude* – which has as its evolution from not sleeping to the inexorable loss of memory, the cancellation of «consciousness of one's own being», yielding «to the spell of an imaginary reality [...] which was less practical but more comforting». And without forgetting those who have no home.

Notes

¹ In 1925 Le Corbusier enunciated the *Loi du Ripolin* (Law of Ripolin, a famous French brand of paints), inviting the use of the «extremely moral» white of lime to clean the houses of ornaments and welcome the new spirit of modernity. Ethical and spatial principles are linked to define lifestyles and the new language of architecture.

² Suddenly the balconies, as well as the terraces and verandas, were rediscovered as privileged places in the home to communicate with the street, the neighborhood, the city, becoming devices for communication and reaching, thanks to the media, much wider audiences. This and other recently published books document situations and reflections that emerged during the period of confinement.

³ For some time now we have been living in the so-called age of technology that assists man in almost all the practices of everyday life, moving him away from the earth; the months of the lockdown – according to Galimberti – showed the precariousness of this system of purely technical relationships.

⁴ Andrea Branzi's book summarizes some research themes of radical design of the seventies and eighties, formulating a new proposal for a design aimed at a domestic civilization; the hot house represents the cultural and emotional link between man and everyday objects and identifies the emotional value as «the only one capable of constituting a point of reference within new consumption».

Bibliography

BARRAS V. (2020) – *Espazium*. [online] Available on: <<https://www.espazium.ch/it/attualita/la-dimensione-spaziale-ha-sempre-fatto-parte-della-medicina>> [Last access 24 July 2020]

BILÒ F. e PALMA R. (2020) – *Il cielo in trentatré stanze. Cronache di architetti #restatiacasa*, Letteraventidue, Siracusa.

BRANZI A. (1984) – *La casa calda. Esperienze del Nuovo Design Italiano*, Idea Books Idea Books, Milan.

COLOMINA B. (2018) – *X-Ray Architecture*, Lars Muller Publishers, Zurich.

CRIPPA D. (2020) – *Il Giorno*. [online] Available on: <<https://www.ilgiorno.it/milano/cronaca/coronavirus-galimberti-1.5164755>> [Last access 24 July 2020]

ELEB M. e BENDIMERAD S. (2018) – *Ensemble et séparation. Des lieux pour cohabiter*, Mardaga, Paris.

LE CORBUSIER (2015) – *L'arte decorativa*, It trans. DARDI D., Quodlibet, Macerata.

SENNETT R. (2020) – “Come dovremmo vivere? La densità nelle città del post-pandemia”, in *Domus* n. 1046 (may).

ZEVI T. (2020) – “Come vorremmo le città post-coronavirus”, in *Domus* n. 1047 (june).

Antonino Margagliotta, graduated in Building Engineering and Architecture in Palermo, PhD and currently Associate Professor of Architectural and Urban Composition in the Engineering Department of the University of Palermo. He is Coordinator of the Degree Course in Building Engineering - Architecture.

Among his books: *Le forme del dialogo* (Abadir, Palermo 2006), *Aesthetics for living* (Libria, Melfi 2010), *Progetti in una mano* (Arianna, Geraci Siculo 2014), *Strada Paesaggio Città. La città in estensione tra Palermo e Agrigento* (Gangemi, Roma 2015), *La bellezza efficace* (Libria, Melfi 2018), *Omaggio a Dedalo* (40due Edizioni, Palermo 2019). Ha pubblicato lavori di architettura nelle riviste *Abitare*, *Almanacco di Casabella*, *AND*, *Casabella*, *Costruire*, *Parametro*, *L'industria delle Costruzioni*, *Il Giornale dell'Architettura*.

Paolo De Marco (Erice, 1988), construction engineer-architect, he studied at the Universidade de Coimbra and graduated with honors from the Department of Architecture of the University of Palermo. PhD in Arquitectura, Edificación, Urbanística y Paisaje at the Polytechnic University of Valencia.

He carries out research and collaborates in teaching in Architectural Design courses of the Department of Architecture of the University of Palermo. He is the author of essays on the theme of white color in architecture, on design teaching and on recent architectural experiences (*CIAB9*, 2020; *Agathòn*, 2019; *A.MAG*, 2019; *Technè*, 2018; etc.). È autore del volume *Abitare l'inabitabile* (40due Edizioni, Palermo 2016).