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Santiago de Chile, 2024

MODERN FUTURES

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Editor

Horacio Torrent

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Santiago de Chile, 2024

MODERN
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY
FUTURES

Editor
Horacio Torrent

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CONTENTS

14 **Introduction** / Mario Ubilla, Horacio Torrent

16 **Modern Futures: Sustainable Development and Cultural Diversity** / Horacio Torrent

20 MODERN FUTURES

22 **The Role of Technologies in the Modern Movement and in the Future of Docomomo International** / Uta Pottgiesser

25 **The Role of Modern Architecture in Shaping Tomorrow** / Ana Tostões

28 **Docomomo. Then, Now, and the Future** / Maristella Casciato

30 **Revaluing Docomomo** / Huber Jan Hencket

33 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A. ADAPTIVE REUSE: IMPROVING BY DESIGN

34 01. ORIGINAL DESIGN INTENT, LAYERS OF HISTORY AND THE NEED FOR ADAPTATION TO A CHANGING WORLD
Chair: Scott Bruce Robertson

34 Original Design Intent, Layers of History and the Need for Adaptation to a Changing World / Scott Bruce Robertson

42 Decline of Department Stores and the Issue of "Third Places' in German Inner-cities: Decline, Obsolescence and Reuse Potentials / Anica Dragutinovic, Uta Pottgiesser

48 Adaptive Reuse of Modern Heritage: Attitudes in Relation with the Materiality of Déjà la. Case Study of the Citroën Garage (1934) Becoming Kanal (2018) / Chiara Fucelli

55 The Ocean Terminal Complex, Durban: The Search for Meaning in an Irrevocably Changed Context / Mike Scurr

62 Narrating the Layers of History: Exploring Temporal Changes and Practical Realities in School Building Renovations /Meric Altintas Kaptan, Aslihan Unlu

70 The Weissenhof Estate from the Point of View of the State Research Society for Economics in Construction and Housing (Reichsforschungsgesellschaft für Wirtschaftlichkeit im Bau- und Wohnungswesen, RFG) / Edyta Naworska

77 02. NOTABLE RENOVATIONS IN ORDINARY CONTEXTS
Chairs: Ana Carolina Pellegrini, Danilo Matoso Macedo

77 Notable Renovations in Ordinary Contexts / Danilo Matoso Macedo, Ana Carolina Pellegrini

84 A Church Changes Confession – a Transformation Project with Aesthetics between East and West in Munich (1980-1995) / Korinna Zinovia Weber

91 Pinacoteca Contemporânea / Carlos Alberto Maciel, Paula Zasnicoff

98 West Bund Shanghai. Think Tank for Art / Jacopo Benedetti, Carlos Eduardo Comas

106 Corporate Architecture in Brussels: From Obsolescence to Heritagisation. La Royale Belge as case-study / Jean-Marc Basyn

114 Preserving Through Transforming. Exploring the Conversion Processes of Emery Roth and Sons' Post-War Office Buildings in Manhattan into Residential Spaces / Caterina Barioglio, Elena Guidetti

121 03. TYPOLOGICAL EXERCISES AND THE SINGULARITY OF ITERATION
Chair: Maximiano Atria

121 Typological Exercises and the Singularity of Iteration / Maximiano Atria

125 The Confines in the Architectural Type Definition: The Modernity of Airport Terminals in the Extreme Regions of Chile / Boris Cvitanic-Diaz, Claudio Galeno-Ibaceta

132 Flexibility in School Architecture: The 1970s Mat-Buildings of Recife, Brazil / Larissa Morgana Leão Silva de Sousa, Fernando Diniz Moreira

139 The Gasometer in Viena / Markus Tomaselli

146 Concrete Abstraction / Jorge Gambini

153 Researching, Dismantling, Rebuilding: The Work of Emilio Duhart Revealed by Intervening on the Herman House / Loreto Lyon, Alejandro Beals

B. WELLBEING FOR ALL: SPACES FOR INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE LIVING

161 04. EDUCATING MODERN CHILDREN
Chairs: Louise Noelle Gras Gas, Catherine Rose Ettinger

161 Educating Modern Children. Local Solutions and Standardised Construction / Louise Noelle Gras Gas, Catherine Rose Ettinger

167 Learning through Experience: Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's Pedagogy in Hannes Meyer's Educational Building Projects / Raquel Franklin Unkind

174 Infrastructures of Child-Care: Establishing the Modern Language of Zagreb's Schools in the Agency of Ivan Zemljak / Mia Roth-Čerina

181 Cheste Worker University: Designing a Modern Educational Center Tailored for Children / Fernando Usó Martín, Maite Palomares Figueres

189 Pedagogical Experimentation and Modern Architecture: Experimental High Schools in Santiago, Chile / Ursula Exss

196 A Classroom to Change the World: The School Architecture of the Ministry of Public Works of Uruguay (1954-1965) / Alfredo Peláez Iglesias

203 05. ADOPTION OF REUSE AND SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION FOR EDUCATIONAL SPACES IN THE MODERN ARCHITECTURE
Chairs: Zainab A. Murtadhawi, Ula Merie

203 Adaptive Reuse and Sustainable Conservation for Modern Educational Architecture / Zainab A. Murtadhawi, Ula Merie

210 Repurposing Modern Heritage Schools in Kuwait: A Framework for Adaptive Reuse / Rabab Raes Kazem, Naser Ashour

219 Ideas Behind the Form: Overlooked Qualities of the Experimental School in Bratislava / Nina Bartošová

226 Social Sustainability through Adaptive Reuse. Case study: Mt. Pleasant High School, USA / Armita Eghbali, Maya Weber

234 School Architecture and Adaptive Reuse: The Case of the Inmaculada Concepción School / Verónica Esparza Saavedra

241 Collaborative Redesign of Modern Schools: Rethinking Spaces of Coimbra Lyceum / Gonçalo Canto Moniz, João Mendes Ribeiro, Carolina Coelho, Pedro Brígida, Duarte Miranda, Valentina Gutiérrez

250 06. HEALTHCARE COMPLEXES: THE FUTURES OF MODERN URBAN ENCLAVES
Chairs: Claudio Galeno-Ibaceta, Ana A. Amora

250 Healthcare Complexes: The Futures of Modern Urban Enclaves / Claudio Galeno-Ibaceta, Ana A. Amora

257 The Power of Adaptation: The Convertion of a Teaching Hospital into a Justice Complex / Ivo Renato Giroto

264 Paimio Sanatorium – The Masterpiece in Change / Jonas Malmberg

272 Obsolescence and Vulnerability of Modern Hospital Heritage. The Challenge of Rural Psychiatric Hospitals in Mexico / Iván San Martín Córdova

279 Lelé's Architecture of Care: The Sarah Kubitschek Hospitals as a Strategy for Birth Centres and Healthcare Spaces / Carla Zollinger

286 The Instituto de Puericultura e Pediatria Martagão Gesteira (IPPMG). Between Glory and Risk / Helio Herbst

C. SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGIES: RESEARCH INTO ACTION

293 07. CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND BUILT HERITAGE: OBSOLESCENCE, CIRCULARITY, INSTRUMENTS AND FUTURE
Chairs: Renato D'Alencon, Dominga Teillery

293 Circular Economy and Built Heritage: Obsolescence, Circularity, Instruments and Future / Renato D'Alencon, Dominga Teillery

300 Stubborn Architecture: Preindustrial Principles of Slowing Building Material Use in the Use-Stage / Tobias Hentzer Dausgaard

307 Everyday Residential Heritage and Circularity: Potential and Limitations of Docomomo Full Documentation Fiches / Claudia Massioni, Wido Quist, Roberto Cavallo

315 Assessing the Environmental Impact: Office Building Reuse as a Sustainable Alternative to Demolition / Taylor Rose Quibell, Mario Santana Quintero

323 Curtains for Crown Hall: A Bioplastic Adaptation / Ryan Leigh Roark

330 Has Fossil Modernism Led us to a Dead End? / Wolfgang H. Salcher

337 **08. CONCRETE LONG-SPAN BUILDINGS' ADAPTIVE REUSE: SUSTAINABLE RETHINKING OF PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE AND INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE**
Chairs: Francesco Romeo, Giovanni Multari

337 Concrete Long-Span Buildings' Adaptive Reuse: Sustainable Rethinking of Public Architecture and Industrial Heritage / Francesco Romeo, Giovanni Multari

345 What if? Open Questions and Design Scenarios on the Upcycling of Long-Span Structural Components from 20th Century Authorial Architecture / Alberto Bologna, Margherita Maurea

352 Vilnius Concert and Sports Palace – Transformation of the Preservation Approach / Aušra Černauskienė

359 Methodological Approaches Through the Use of Advanced Information Systems (BIM-GIS and CDE) for the Management and Valorisation of 20th-Century Industrial Heritage / Antonio Maria Nese

366 Re-inhabiting the Modern Factory: The Former Milk Plant by Luigi Cosenza / Francesco Iuliano, Lorenzo Renzullo

373 The Marchiondi Spagliardi Institute and the Marxer Institute: Good Practices for the Care of Reinforced Concrete and New Forms of Dialogue with Existing Spaces / Bianca Maria Rodriguez, Chiara Assante

380 **09. PREFABRICATION IN REINFORCED CONCRETE AND INTERNATIONAL TRANSFERS DURING THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY**
Chairs: Pedro Ignacio Alonso, Hugo Palmarola

380 Towards a History of International Transfers in Large-Concrete Panel Systems / Pedro Ignacio Alonso, Hugo Palmarola

386 The Birth of Stavoprojekt, a Socialist Attempt to Collectivise Design Practice and Standardise Buildings and Technology / Petr Vorlík

394 Transposing the Discourse of Industrialised Construction in Housing Between Lisbon and Luanda During the 1970s / Inês Lima Rodrigues

401 The Role of Prefabrication in Housing Construction in the 1970s in China: The Case of Diplomatic Residential Compounds in Beijing / Yimei Zhang

407 Exporting Soviet Monumental Art from Soviet Tashkent to Europe and Siberia: The Works of Alexander, Nikolai and Pyotr Jarsky between 1969 and 1999 / Philipp Meuser

D. BETTER CITIES: APPROACHES TO MODERN VALUES

415 **10. RESHUFFLING URBAN LAND: MODERN IDEAS FOR NEW URBAN MORPHOLOGIES**
Chairs: Francisco Díaz, Marco Trisciuoglio

415 Reshuffling Urban Land: Modern Ideas for New Urban Morphologies / Francisco Díaz, Marco Trisciuoglio

422 The Drivers and Outcomes of the Urban Renewal in Oklahoma City: Looking Back, Looking Forward / Selena Bagnara Milan

428 Building the Model City of Socialism: Post-WWII Reconstruction of Nemiga Street in Minsk, Belarus / Dasha Kuletskaya

435 CIAM Young Generation's Ideas of the Street as a Tool to Question Conventional Hierarchies of Postwar Spatial Structuring / Elena Giaccone

442 Alternative Cities. The PEVE Programme, Mass Housing Proposals, and Urban Form Transitions in 1970s Argentina / Santiago Gomes

449 The Lot in Modern Architecture Urban Planning: The Case of Brasília Pilot Plan's Central Sectors, 1957 / Helena Bender

456 **11. 'INFORMAL' MODERNISMS: URBAN DESIGN, PLANNING NARRATIVES, AND NEW CITIES**
Chairs: Kuukuwa O Manful, Emmanuel Kusi Ofori-Sarpong

456 'Informal' Modernisms: Urban Design, Planning Narratives, and New Cities / Kuukuwa O Manful, Emmanuel Ofori-Sarpong

462 Palmas (TO): Contradictions among the Ways of Living in a New City's Block / Mariana Verdolin dos Santos

469 The Work Encampment: A Utopia by Rodrigo Lefèvre / Ana Carolina Buim Azevedo Marques, Ana Paula Koury

476 Socialist Practice of Modern Planning in the 1950s'China: the Case Study of Minhang Satellite Town and the Associated Rural Planning Project / Pengcheng Zeng

483 Narratives Within a Narration: Bridging Modernism and Cultural Identity in African Literature and Architecture / Ntetleng Orepa Mosidi

490 Between the *Musseque* and the Neighbourhood Unit: Spotting "*Compagnons de route*" Architectures in Luanda (1961-1975) / Ana Vaz Milheiro, Leonor Matos Silva

496 **12. THE NATURAL HOUSE IN THE MODERN CITY: IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES, TECHNICAL DEVICES AND URBAN PROJECTS**
Chairs: Joaquin Medina, Horacio Torrent

496 The Natural House in the Modern City: Ideological Principles, Technical Devices and Urban Projects / Horacio Torrent, Joaquín Medina

502 The Growing City. The Hybrid Character of Nature in Schwagenscheidt's *Raumstadt* Concept / Moran Lev

510 From Eden to Babylon. The role of Nature in Lima's Neighbourhood Units / Sharif S. Kahatt

517 Modern Housing Production on the Axis of Industry: The Expanding Boundaries of Istanbul / Yıldız Salman, Burak Oztürk

523 Villages, Houses and Gardens. Catholicism's Contribution to Social Housing in Uruguay / Mary Mendez

530 Devices for the Perception of Nature. Richard Neutra's Suburban Single-Family Houses / Matthias Brunner

E. CONTEMPORARY LIFE AND THE MODERN PUBLIC SPACES

536 **13. ADAPTING MODERN PUBLIC SPACE TO ACTUAL NEEDS**
Chairs: Elke Schlack, Juliane Von Hagen

536 Adapting Modern Public Space to Actual Needs / Elke Schlack, Juliane Von Hagen

543 Take the Heat: Adapting Modern Public Space to Accommodate Older Adults' Needs / Ana Martins, Gisela Lameira, Ana Silva Fernandes, Rui Jorge Garcia Ramos

550 Public Space for Childhood, Art and Biodiversity in Burle Marx's Plaza Perú in Buenos Aires: Between Documenting and Demolishing or Restoring and Rebuilding / Martín Capeluto

557 Redefining the Role of Public Space as an Urban Connector in the Lord Cochrane Housing Complex in Viña del Mar / Anna Braghini

564 Open Spaces in Modernist Housing Complexes: Urban Ambiance in Three Cases of Santiago de Chile / Ximena Arizaga

571 Adapting a Brussels Urban Regeneration Tool to the Specific Characteristics of a Large Social Housing Estate. The Case of the Sustainable Neighbourhood Contract (CQD) Peterbos / Morgane Bos, Giulia Marino, Alexandre Bossard, Chiara Cavalieri

579 **14. COMMUNITY LIFE AND MANAGEMENT OF NEIGHBOURHOOD UNITS**
Chairs: Flavia Brito Nascimento, Umberto Bonomo

579 Community Life and Management of Neigbourhood Units / Umberto Bonomo, Flavia Brito Nascimiento

586 The Implementation of the Salvador Residential Complex: From Modern Conception to the Contemporary Appropriation of its Common Spaces / Joaquim Nunes Junior, Ana Carolina Bierrenbach, Aline Maria Barroso

593 Just Patios Make Cities? A Review of the Town Planning Associates Project in Maracaibo, Venezuela / Andrea Castro Marcucci, Daniel Belandria Gutiérrez

600 The Empart I Housing Complex in Iquique, Chile. Collective Housing in a Desert Landscape / Victor Valenzuela-Grollmus

606 Re-negotiating Modernity: Appropriation and Everyday Life at Centro Urbano Antonio Nariño in Bogotá, Colombia (Liliana Andrea Clavijo García

613 Social Housing and Urban Ideals: A Case Study of Quito, Ecuador / Verónica Vaca Proaño, Néstor Llorca Vega, Enrique Ferreras Cid

621 **15. RE-EXAMINING THE MODERNIST CIVIC BUILDINGS FROM THE "GLOBAL SOUTH"**
Chairs: Ying Zhou, Cecilia L. Chu

621 Civicness and Tropicality: Re-examining the Modernist Civic Buildings from the "Global South" / Ying Zhou

627 Urban Textured Paintings: Exploring Chen Chi-Kwan's High-Rise Modern Architecture and Overall Ink Paintings from the "Global South" / Ning Tsai

635 Architecture for Children: Colonial Architects, Climate Design and Enduring Nursery Buildings (1957-1964) / Ana Vaz Milheiro / Beatriz Serrazina, Inês Lima Rodrigues

642 Between Tropicality and Modernism: Exploring Robert G. Boughey's Architectural Synthesis in the Global South / Fatema Tasmia

649 Flexible Architecture for New Education: Nordic Institute for Development Management (IDM) in Tanzania / Maryia Rusak

F. LANDSCAPES AND TERRITORIES OF THE MODERN: TODAY AND TOMORROW

655 **16. POST-INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPES: PROJECTING VALUES AND USES FOR NEW LIFE CYCLES IN THE ANTHROPOCENE**
Chair: Osvaldo Moreno

655 Post-industrial Landscapes: Projecting Values and Uses for New Life Cycles in the Anthropocene / Osvaldo Moreno

661 Spring Bay Mill; The Transformation of a Peculiar Modern Industrial Heritage Site / Ross Brewin

668 Modern Pre-existing Structures and Urban Renewal: Cristina Xavier's Intervention at the Headquarters of O2 Filmes / Monica Junqueira de Camargo

675 Working on the Landscapes of Labour Between Ancient and Modern: Pin-point Projects for Industrial Archaeology in Tivoli / Edoardo Currà, Spartaco Paris, Carlo Vannini, Andrea Bonamore

683 Modernism on the Post-Industrial Riverfront: Heritage Site or Obsolete Relic? / Elizabeth M. Keslacy

690 The Social Construction of Post-industrial Heritage Values in Poblenou: New Urban Landscape Visions / Melina Guirnaldos Diaz

697 17. RADICAL ROOF GARDENS: DREAM SPACES OF SOCIAL COHESION AND PRIVATE RETREAT
Chairs: Nathaniel Robert Walker, Joseph Watson

697 Radical Roof Gardens: Dream Spaces of Social Cohesion and Private Retreat / Joseph Michael Watson, Nathaniel Robert Walker

703 Caipiras' Roof Gardens in Rio de Janeiro / Silvana Nicolli

710 The Itamaraty Palace Roof Garden and a Possible Image of Brazil / Ana Paula Polizzo

716 One Thousand and One Flights: A Rooftop Airport Oasis in the Arabian Desert / Joss Kiely

722 A nocturnal roof garden for spectacles. The Luminous Ship by Carles Buïgas / David Caralt

729 18. MODERN HERITAGE AND URBAN PRODUCTION
Chair: Magdalena Vicuña

729 Modern Heritage and Urban Production / Magdalena Vicuña

733 Addressing the Modernist Legacy Through the Historical Townscape: Re-evaluating Public Architecture of the 1970s-1980s in Ghent (Belgium) / Evert Vandeweghe

740 Modern Urban Landscape: Traces of Identity, Vectors of Sustainability. The Case of the Matthei Neighbourhood in Osorno / Hugo Weibel Fernández

747 Sun, Space, Greenery and Global Warming. The Potential of the Modern Housing Landscape in Climate Change Mitigation / Rodrigo Gertosio Swanston

753 Urban Values Heritage: Gilberto Gatto Sobral's Modern Architecture in Cuenca, Ecuador / Paola Preti, Fernanda Aguirre, Veronica Heras

759 Architecture of the Property State: Public Ownership of Land & the Production of the Built Environment in Post-Independence Singapore / Jacob Meyers

766 19. MODERNISM AND DIPLOMACY: PAYING IT FORWARD AT U.S. EMBASSIES (ROUND TABLE)
Chairs: Kathleen Gerner, Jorge Salcedo

766 Modernism and Diplomacy: Paying it Forward at U.S. Embassies / Jorge Salcedo

774 Case Study: The Major Rehabilitation and Expansion of the U.S. Embassy in Athens Greece, Originally Designed by Walter Gropius (1959-1961) / Kathleen Gerner

779 A Case Study in Modernism and Diplomacy: The Major Rehabilitation and Restoration of the Brutalist U.S. Embassy in Montevideo, Uruguay, Originally Designed by I.M. Pei (1959-1969) / Troy Thompson

785 Case Study: Historic Intent and the Renovation of Eduardo Catalano's U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires / Juan Villafañe

792 Maintaining Cultural History and Meeting 21st Century Expectations – Embassy in Montevideo as Example for Major Diplomatic Renovations / Frederick J. Poehler

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

798 A. RESEARCH AND DISSEMINATION AS OPEN FIELDS

799 20. ENGAGED RESEARCH: EXPLORING AND STRUGGLING FOR THE ARCHITECTURE OF WELFARE STATES
Chairs: Peter Szalay, Henrieta Moravčíková

799 Engaged research: Exploring and Struggling for the Architecture of Welfare States / Peter Szalay, Henrieta Moravčíková

806 Continuity and Transformation of Post-War Modernist Architecture: The Case Study of the Former Communist Party Headquarters in Košice, Slovakia / Monika Kácová

812 Away from Nostalgia: A New Approach for the Forgotten Welfare State Industrial Facilities / Maximiano Atria

818 Wider than Welfare: Industry, Infrastructure and Eradication / Richard Brook

824 The Aylesbury Estate: Shifting Narratives on Urban Renewal / Lucia Concetta Vincelli, James Aston Lansbury

831 Architectural Conservation and Political Resilience: The 2023 Attack on the Palace of Congress in Brasília / Danilo Matoso Macedo, Ana Carolina Pellegrini

838 21. INTERDISCIPLINARY APROACHES
Chair: Paulo Dam

838 Transdisciplinary Approaches in the Construction of the Modern: Peru as a Quest / Paulo Dam

844 Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's Innovative Schools: The Modern Revolution of Objects / Mara Sánchez Llorens, Fermina Garrido López

852 Libeskind House: The Construction of a Modern Ambience Trough the Protagonism of Joaquim Tenreiro's Work / Luciana Tombi Brasil

859 Digital Documentation Workflows and Training for the Conservation and Planning of Niki de Saint Phalle's Tarot Garden / Mario Santana Quintero, Flavia Perugini

866 The Link Between Architecture and Psychology in Japan: Yoshinobu Ashihara's Landscape Theory / Zahra Ramezani, Kenji Watanabe

874 22. MODERN MOVEMENT AS A MEDIUM FOR EXPRESSION AND AS A DISSEMINATION TOOL IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA
Chairs: Susana Landrove Bossut, Sara Pérez Barreiro

874 Modern Movement as a Medium for Expression and as a Dissemination Tool in Audiovisual Media / Susana Landrove Bossut, Sara Pérez Barreiro

880 Stimulating Historical Identity through Alternative Media / Emma Veronese

887 Towards a New Metropolis: The Machinist Utopia in Urbanism and Cinema / Luciano de Topin Ribeiro

894 Experiences of Modern Space in the Central Valley of Chile / Glenn Deulofeu

901 Exploring Late-Modernist Domesticity in a Wooden Flexible House Versus a Concrete Brutalist House / Els De Vos

907 Parafictions of the Glitched Estate in Central Hill / Alessandro Columbano

B. SCOPE OF MODERN: EXTENTS AND APPROACHES

914 23. BEYOND MODERNISM
Chair: Lidwine Spoormans

914 Beyond Modernism / Lidwine Spoormans

921 Portuguese Architecture in the 1980s: Into a Dreamlike Everyday Life / Jorge Figueira

929 Irony and Experimentation in Jaretti and Luzi's Architecture (1960-1974) / Maria Luisa Barelli, Davide Rolfo

936 Parque Guinle Post-Modern? / Nathalia Cantergiani, Mara Eskinazi, Mônica Luce Bohrer

944 French New Towns: Last Avatar of the Welfare State or New Avant-Garde Proposals? / Catherine Blain

951 Modernism and Countercultural Architecture: Not Exactly a Neat Cut-Off / Elena Poma, Franz Graf

958 24. MONUMENTAL MODERNISM: LEGACY OR WASTE?
Chairs: Claudia Costa Cabral, Fernando Diez

958 Monumental Modernism: Legacy or Waste / Claudia Costa Cabral, Fernando Diez

965 Housing Problem in Italy and Large-Scale Buildings in Second Half of the 20th Century. A Fragile Heritage / Francesca Albani

971 Mending Wall – Continuity in the Modernist City: Interpreting Smallbrook Ringway Centre, Birmingham / Michael Dring

978 New Old London: Modern Large-Scale Housing for the Traditional City / Jaime Silva, Ana Tostões

985 Ibirapuera Gymnasium: Renewal of Use, Private Concession and Preservation in São Paulo / Renato Anelli

992 Revisiting Merihaka's Parking Structures P1 and P2 / Karita Rytivaara

1000 25. BEYOND CIAM: TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS OF LATE MODERNISM
Chairs: Marta García Carbonero, Brett Tippey

1000 Beyond CIAM: Transnational Networks of Late Modernism / Marta García Carbonero, Brett Tippey

1007 Situated and Creative. Two Acts on Housing Design, Participation, and Methods in Latin American Late Modernism / Guido Campi

1013 Exploring Beyond Borders: The Significance of *Pequeños Congresos* in the Valuation of Spanish Architecture / Ana Esteban Maluenda

1020 From Valparaíso to Vancouver: Pan-American Networks and Poetic Visions of a Unified America / Oscar Andrade Castro

1026 Unveiling Post-Independence Discourse of Modern Indian Architecture: Insights from *Design Magazine* (1957) / Pappal Suneja

1032 Prishtina Shunning Critique: Yugoslavia's Encounter with the Radical Architecture Movement / Edmond Drenogllava

C. THEORIES AND HISTORIES IN TIMES OF CONTROVERSY

1039 **26. AUTHENTICITY IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE**
Chairs: France Vanlaethem, Éve Wertheimer

1039 Authenticity in the Face of Climate Change / France Vanlaethem, Eve Wertheimer

1046 Preserving Authenticity after Seismic Retrofit and Reuse in Japan / Toru Ajisaka

1051 Bridging Cultural Significance and Risk Assessment: Compared Analysis from Conservation Management Plans in Portugal and Cuba (1960-1966) / Teresa Cunha Ferreira, Davide Del Curto, Pedro Murilo de Freitas, Andrea Garzulino, Rui Fernandes Póvoas

1059 A Comprehensive Framework to Increase Modelling Credibility in Modern Buildings Energy Simulations. The Case Study of Chauderon Complex Façade by Jean Prouvé in Lausanne (1969-1974) / Giuseppe Galbiati, Franz Graf, Giulia Marino

1065 The Sustainable Shine Dome: Toward a Sustainability Plan for the National Heritage Listed Australian Academy of Science Building / Michael Jasper, Tracy Ireland

1071 **27. NONCANONICAL CURATORIAL NARRATIVES. RETHINKING THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION**
Chairs: Maria Cristina Cabral, Ana Esteban Maluenda

1071 Curatorial Narratives: Rethinking the Role of the Exhibition / Maria Cristina Cabral, Ana Esteban Maluenda

1077 Presenting Architecture, the Archive and Microhistories: The Opening Exhibition of the New Home of Hungarian Architecture / Ágnes Anna Sebestyén

1083 A New Period Eye: Learning to See Venezuela's Modernity with Docomomo Venezuela Exhibitions / Frank Alcock

1091 Beyond Modernism: Curatorial Clashes and Transformations in 1983 Portuguese Architectural Exhibitions / Ana Neiva

1098 War's Toll of Italian Heritage: Unveiling Italy's Postwar Reconstruction through Transnational Exhibitions / Jiayao Jiang

1105 Contested Modernities: Architecture and Propaganda in the *Exposição Nacional do Estado Novo* (Rio de Janeiro, 1938) / Catarina Flaksman

1111 **28. REMAPPING MODERNISMS: CONTEMPORARY DEBATES**
Chairs: Ruth Verde Zein, Patrícia Santos Pedrosa

1111 Remapping Modernisms: Contemporary Debates / Ruth Verde Zein, Patrícia Santos Pedrosa

1118 The Narrative Triad of Nikolaus Pevsner: Recognising the Content Profile and Structure of the Book *Pioneers of Modern Design* / Tais Ossani

1125 Lina Bo Bardi: the Bad and the Ugly - Contemporary Formal Problems / Patrícia Pereira Martins

1132 Being Modern, Building Modern. *L'Union Féministe Egyptienne's* headquarters in Cairo in 1932 / John Hanna, María Novas Ferradás

1138 The Value of the Material. An Economic Re-reading of the Modern Ideal in Chile / Paula Orta Camus, Cristian Muñoz Díaz

1146 Towards a Transient Understanding of Modern Built Heritage Documentation and Research / Adina Hempel

D. CONSERVATION TRAINING: THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

1154 **29. HOW CAN EXHIBITIONS HELP CREATING A SUSTAINABLE AND RESPONSIBLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE FUTURE?**
Chair: Bárbara Coutinho

1154 How can Exhibitions Help Creating a Sustainable and Responsible Attitude Towards the Future? / Bárbara Coutinho

1160 Towards a Reparative Architectural History / Eduardo Augusto Costa, Junia Cambraia Mortimer

1167 Discovering a New Narrative: Interpretation Method Practices in the Exhibition *Modernism for the Future 360|365* / Viltė Migonytė-Petrulienė

1174 Archive Narratives. Curatorial proposals based on archive collection documents / Michelle Llona Ridoutt

1180 Elizabeth Mock's Curatorship at MoMA: a New Approach to Architecture and Architecture Exhibitions and its Echoes in Europe / João Miguel Couto Duarte, Maria João Moreira Soares

1187 Food Party: Reflections on Community Engagement through Food Projects in Architectural Exhibitions / Leyuan Li, Max Bravo

1194 **30. EDUCATION TO CONSERVE MODERN HERITAGE: METHODS AND TOOLS**
Chairs: Chandler McCoy, Andrea Canziani

1194 Education to Conserve Modern Heritage: Methods and Tools / Andrea Canziani, Chandler McCoy

1201 The CMAI's International Training on the Conservation of Modern Heritage / Margherita Pedroni

1209 Joint Master RMB, Re-use of Modernist Buildings / Michel Melenhorst

1217 The Conservation Planning as a Contribution to Education and Training for Twentieth-century Heritage Conservation / Santiago Beckdorf

1224 Remapping Modernism: MAPA Peru Arequipa 2023 / Carlos Torres Flores, Mariano Quiroga Robles, Rosabella Alvarez-Calderón Silva Santisteban

1232 What Do We Want from Architectural Education? / Artina Qehaja

1239 **31. RE-EDUCATION FOR REUSE OF MODERN SPACES. SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION AS A PLATFORM FOR INCLUSIVE DIDACTIC AND RESEARCH**
Chairs: Carolina Quiroga, Gonçalo Canto Moniz

1239 Re-education for Reuse of Modern Spaces. Social and Environmental Dimension as a Platform for Inclusive Didactic and Research / Gonçalo Canto Moniz, Carolina Quiroga

1246 Education, Research, and Extension Practices on Sorocaba City (Brazil) Modern Architectural Heritage / Taiana Car Vidotto

1254 Implementing Democracy in Socialist Architecture. Adaptation of Former Soviet Schools for Contemporary Education Needs in Lithuania / Liutauras Nekrosius, Dolf Broekhuizen

1261 Pimp Danish Modernism: Drawing as a Pedagogical Tool for a Sustainable Future / Angela Gigliotti, Fabio Gigone

1268 Transforming a Conventional Rigid Classroom into a Stimulating Space / Adéla Šoborová

1276 (Re)signifying and (re)designing Modern School Playgrounds. Experiments on Collaborative Design in Portugal / Patrícia Lourenço, Alexandra Alegre, Teresa Heitor

E. EVERYDAY LIFE AND MODERN INTERIOR

1285 **32. ADAPTIVE MODERN HOUSING: SHIFTING NOTIONS OF COMFORT AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF DOMESTIC SPACE FOR CONTEMPORARY LIVING**
Chair: Zara Castelo Ferreira

1285 Adaptive Modern Housing: Shifting Notions of Comfort and the Transformation of Domestic Space for Contemporary Living / Zara Castelo Ferreira

1292 Modern Archaeologies: Sustainable Strategies for Social Housing Building in Athens, 1950-1970 / Chrysostomos Theodoropoulos

1300 Spatial Decolonisation of the Modern Middle-class Housing of Mozambique / Patricia Noormahomed

1308 Departure from the Chandigarh Style: Contemporary Adaptations to the Regulated Marla House / Priya Gupta

1315 Reflections on Minimum Space Living in Macau / Niccolò Arnaldo Galliano, Ana Tostões

1323 Exploring the Evolution of the Mass-Empty Space Relationship for Social Sustainability in Shushtar New Town: Insights from Kamran Diba's Design / Parisa Etemadi, Helder Casal Ribeiro

1330 **33. CAPTURING TIME INSIDE ARCHITECTURE**
Chairs: Ana Tostões, Marta Silveira Peixoto

1330 Capturing Time Inside Architecture / Ana Tostões, Marta Peixoto

1337 Recognizing Cultural Values in Changes to Modern Interiors / Juliano Loureiro de Carvalho

1344 Melchiorre Bega Corporate Interiors (1959-70): Transience and Care / Sara Di Resta

1351 Modern Over Modern. The SOM Interiors Restoration of Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House (1967-1975) / Davide Galleri

1358 Museum Building as a Living Archive and a "Time Machine". The case study of MUDE – Museu do Design, Lisbon / Bárbara Coutinho

1365 Modernity and *Cubanidad*: Clara Porset, Time, and Ideology / Jean-François Lejeune

1372 **34. TEXTILES IN THE MODERN INTERIOR: DISCOVERING THE HIDDEN LOCAL AND GLOBAL STORIES BETWEEN THE WEAVES**
Chairs: Eva Storgaard, Deniz Hasirci

1372 Textiles in the Modern Interior: Discovering the Hidden Local and Global Stories between the Weaves / Eva Storgaard, Deniz Hasirci

1379 Weaving (as a Disciplinary Reference for) Stained-Glass Windows in Modernist Liturgical Interiors / Zsuzsanna Böröcz

1386 "Origin: Modernized from Ancient Turkish Motifs:" A Case Study on Hereke Sümerbank Carpet Collection in 1965 / Didem Yavuz Velipaşaoğlu

1392 Tapta-Simone Guillissen-Hoa: Collaborations and Crossing Borders Between Textile Arts and Modern Architecture / Apolline Vranken, Virginie Mamet

1399 Dumbara Weaving – Minnette De Silva Threading a "Modern Regional Architecture in the Tropics" / Inês Leonor Nunes

1406 Educating Communities Through Industry: John Cotton Dana's, *The Heritage of 3000 Years of Art in Modern Rugs and Carpets Exhibition and Floor Coverings Exhibitions*, 1929-1930 / Anita Puig

1411 **35. THE MODERN INTERIOR: ESSENTIAL QUALITIES THAT REMAIN**
Chair: Zsuzsanna Böröcz

1411 The Modern Interior: Essential Qualities that Remain / Zsuzsanna Böröcz

1418 Women's Advisory Committee-VAC and Johanna Kroep-de Jonge: the Legacy of Dutch Women's Agencies in Modern Interiors / Carolina Quiroga

1426 Reclaiming the Outdoors: Challenges in Retrofit, Design for Ageing and Well-being in Modern Movement Access Galleries and Walkways / Gisela Lameira, Luciana Rocha, Rui Jorge Garcia Ramos

1434 From Provincial to International: Modern Interiors of a Curitiba in Transition / Giovanna Polonio Renzetti, Ruth Verde Zein

1441 Rationalist Architecture in Seville: José Galnares and the Project for the Tomás Alehouse / Antonio Huertas Berro, Germán Reyes Mota, Pablo Millán Millán

1448 Timeless Quality in a Social Housing Estate for All: The Transformation of Domestic Space and Lifestyles in Olivais Norte (1960s-2020s) / Zara Ferreira, Ana Tostões

F. BREAKING UNITS: DIVERSITIES OF MODERNITY

1456 **36. OUT OF THE CENTER: MEMORY AND ROLES OF OTHER MODERN HERITAGES**
Chairs: María del Pilar Sánchez-Beltrán, María Macarena Cortés Darrigrande

1456 Out of the Center: Memory and Roles of Other Modern Heritages / Macarena Cortés, María del Pilar Sánchez-Beltrán

1464 Multi-storey Buildings in Lima (1939 – 1970): A Peruvian Genealogy of a Modern Type / Javier Atoche Intili

1471 Memory, Legacy and Identity: Modern Heritage in Angola and Mozambique / Ana Magalhães

1478 The Ethics of Preservation or Repurposing of Yugoslav WWII Monuments / Tatjana Aleksić

1484 "*Un pueblo sin memoria, es un pueblo sin futuro*:" Memories of Modernism and Violence at the National Stadium of Chile / Valentina Rozas-Krause

1491 The recourse to the authenticity in the modern architecture of Mobutu's Zaire / Manlio Michieletto

1499 **37. INTERSECTIONS OF ETHNICITY, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND MODERN ARCHITECTURE**
Chairs: Ivo Giroto, Maarten Goossens

1499 Intersections of Ethnicity, National Identity, and Modern Architecture: A View from Latin America / Ivo Giroto, Maarten Goossens

1506 Lúcio Costa on Aleijadinho: Race and the Building of the National Architecture / Jaime Solares Carmona

1512 Modern White: The Intersection of Racial Identity and Pentelic Marble Architectures in Twentieth-Century Athens / Angelos Chiotis

1520 A Network from the Middle of the World: Modern Architecture and Cultural Hybridization in Quito / Ingrid Quintana-Guerrero, Chiara Lucia Stornaiolo Jácome

1527 (Re)discussing Miscegenation in the Historiography of Modern Architecture / Alex Matos

1533 Transcontinental Modernity in Ahmedabad: Contributions by Geeta and Gira Sarabhai / Maria João Moreira Soares, João Miguel Couto Duarte

1540 **38. SHAPING THE NARRATIVE: THE IMPACT OF RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN ARCHITECTURE ON THE LEGACY OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE**
Chairs: Ana Gabriela Godinho Lima, Giovanna Augusto Merli, Klara Brůhova

1540 Revisiting the Modern Architecture Canon: Parallels and Distinctions in Brazil and Czech Republic through Feminist Perspectives / Ana Gabriela Godinho Lima, Giovanna Augusto Merli, Klára Brůhová

1547 Remapping Modern Architecture: Three Modern Buildings by Female Architects in Maceió/AL / Manuella Marianna Carvalho Rodrigues de Andrade, Ítalo Monteiro de Oliveira Mariano Gomes

1554 The Archival is Political / Fabiola Solari, Manola Ogalde Gutiérrez

1560 Uruguayan Female Architects Research / Soledad Cebey, Laura Cesio, Daniela Fernández, Nadia Ostraujov, Tatiana Rimbaud, Elina Rodríguez

1567 Women in Modern Architecture: Regionalism, Otherness, and Gender in the Brazilian Northeastern Region / Guilah Naslavsky, Maria Luíza Rocha Mariz Valença, Rafaela Silva Lins

1574 **39. ARCHITECTURE DISCOURSES AND CONSERVATION STRATEGIES**
Chair: Elvira Pérez

1574 Architectural Heritage Discourses and Conservation Strategies / Elvira Pérez

1578 Towards a Construction of Heritage Assessment Criteria for Modern Architecture in Ecuador / Fernanda Monserrath Aguirre Bermeo, Verónica Heras, Santiago Vanegas

1586 Modern Territories and Local Architectures: Peru's Tourism Hotels from 1930 to 1970 / Trilce Bravo Guzman

1593 Situating Indian Architectural Discourse: Transnational Networks of Late Modernism / Saurajeeta Bose Paul

1601 Change to Preserve. A Conservation Strategy for Tashkent Modernist Heritage / Sofia Celli, Davide Del Curto, Ekaterina Golovatyuk

1609 **40. MODERNISM AND HERITAGE IN LATIN AMERICA AND AFRICA: CHALLENGES OF SHARED AND CONTESTED (ROUND TABLE)**
Chairs: Warebi Gabriel Brisibe, Nwola Oluwakemi Uduku, Ernesto Valero Thomas

1609 Modernism and Heritage in Latin America and Africa: Challenges of Shared and Contested Heritage / Nwola Oluwakemi Uduku

1616 "No Holds Barred;" Behind Modernist Hotels in Nigeria and Brazil / Warebi Gabriel Brisibe

1624 Modernism and Heritage in Latin America and Africa: The Case of Sustainability Policies at UNAM's School of Architecture in Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City / Ernesto Valero Thomas

1630 Whose Memories, Whose Heritage? Reflecting on the Spatial History of the Americas / Fernando Luiz Lara

1637 Modern Architecture and Ornament? / Ikem Stanley Okoye

1643 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

1644 **ORGANIZATION**

1644 **SUPPORTERS**

1646 **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WORKSHOP**

1647 **DOCOMOMO INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS & INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS**

monumentality also aimed to express a country without colonialist or imperialist residues but, in any case, and in its own way, European. The Seville Pavilion was also a singular appropriation of postmodernism: a patchwork of ideas, high-tech architecture made with poor materials, apparently improvised steel structures, and a chaotic decorative use of the traditional blue-tiles.

The Seville Pavilion expressed the idea of a modern country, soon after Portugal joined the CEE/EU (1986). A very revealing photograph show us the by then prime-minister Cavaco Silva rejoicing at the model display of the structure while the Spain prime-minister Filipe Gonzales looks at it very attentively.

6. CONCLUSION

Portuguese postmodernism was closer to the temporal ambivalence and fictional sensibility presented by Heinrich Klotz in *The History of Postmodern Architecture* than the taxonomic surveys portrayed by Charles Jencks. As Klotz wrote in its attempt to define postmodernism, "not only function but fiction as well"[5], or what he called the "fictionalization of architecture." This precept permeates his reading of the movement, and it's a crucial key to understand the Portuguese experience.

All the cases described or mentioned in this paper aimed to cross architecture with other artistic expressions, in an almost delirious state. They had a sense of urgency, an almost violent desire to intervene in the public and/or in the intimate arena. Frequently they are, at the same time, playful and sinister, festive and somber.

The body of architecture was subjected to mutilations, dissonances, reconstitutions, fragmentations. As a consequence, the human body was put to a test and architecture became a trial, an ultimate experience. Architecture dressed up for the night: with pediments, porticoes, arches, round openings, columns, flags, friezes, rainbow colors, accidental geometries, constructivist dilacerations, free-style traditionalisms.

The anxiety but also the playfulness of that era is expressed in the photograph of António Variações with "scissor eyes", and in the drawing of the "concrete gums" of Graça Dias, preparing to bite. The 1980s in Portugal were the stage of countless mundane, populist and turbulent buildings and designs, almost authoritarian in their will to communicate. Democracy was finally at work. ■

5. Heinrich Klotz, *The history of Postmodern Architecture*, 5.

BIOGRAPHY

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IRONY AND EXPERIMENTATION IN JARETTI AND LUZI'S ARCHITECTURE (1960-1974)

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ABSTRACT

Sergio Jaretti (1928-2017) and Elio Luzi (1927-2006) were active in Turin, Italy, from the mid-1950s onwards. Their work, both praised and criticised over time, is today at the centre of a process of investigation and critical re-evaluation, which is leading to the recognition of its density of themes and meanings.

In one of their first buildings, the Obelisk palace (1954-59), the two architects express, in a provocative, ironic and surreal manner, a radically critical position concerning the orthodoxy of the modern movement. After having underlined their position, Jaretti and Luzi pursued their research between the 1960s and 1974 (when their professional paths parted), with an approach at times appearing uniquely analogous to certain northern European works. This paper, availing itself of archival and bibliographic research and of the direct analysis of the buildings, focuses on this phase of the architects' production, including outstanding works such as the via Curtatone house (1962-65), the Pitagora towers (1962-68) and the Mirafiori tower (1970-74). We aim to underline the experimental features of such works, which emerge both in discontinuity and continuity with some of the themes of the modern movement. Indeed, on the one hand, one can notice the adoption of a renewed *plan libre*, which leverages the enjoyability of living spaces, even in the relationship with the outside environment; and on the other hand, one can identify an expressive use of materials, which rejects any mythologization of technological innovation.

1. THE BEGINNINGS

"I am not a rationalist, but I am a functionalist": this statement by Luzi is emblematic of an attitude free of ideological or formalistic superstructures that accompanied the entire oeuvre of the architects from Turin Sergio Jaretti Sodano (1928-2017) and Elio Luzi (1927-2006). The careers of the two architects unfolded almost entirely in north-west Italy: after graduating with Carlo Mollino from the Faculty of Architecture at the Politecnico di Torino and some very early work carried out separately, in the mid-1950s Jaretti and Luzi formalised a partnership that would last until 1974, when their paths separated. Their work together was almost entirely dedicated to the theme of the residence and produced only a few, mostly unsystematic written reflections.

The work that ensured their immediate recognition at a local level and some resonance (and controversy) at a national level[1] was the Obelisk palace (1954-59)[2] in Turin. The building featured a tight articulation of interior spaces, flats organised on several levels or with double-height ceilings, and no repetitive floor plan. Staircases, mezzanines and perspectives from interior balconies, through to the rooftop "belvedere", multiply the viewpoints and the possibilities of enjoying the space, reinterpreting some recurring elements of the villa typology. These distributive features, however, took a back seat in the general perception of things compared to the completely unorthodox appearance of the building. An envelope "continuous and flexible like human skin"[3], made of artificial stone elements, characterises the building, evoking forms of Catalan modernism and aspects of Wright's research. It was a real virtuosic tour de force for both designers and construction companies. The architects openly stated their intention to move away from what was perceived as a stale and academic late-rationalism, with a touch of irony and a certain surrealism. They weren't alone: in 1957, the publication of the Bottega d'Erasmo and other works by Gabetti and Isola and Giorgio Raineri in *Casabella-Continuità*[4] gave rise to controversy over the "Italian retreat" from the modern movement[5] and introduced the term "neoliberty" (greeted with some annoyance by those involved) into the debate[6].

Considered in the context of Jaretti and Luzi's professional and cultural journey as a whole, the initial venture of the Obelisk palace seemed to be a demonstrative element, both for the architects and for the construction company (Manolino) with its craftsmen. The architects continued their unconventional research with relatively simpler solutions in other buildings during the 1950s (the Manolino house in Chieri, 1955-56; the house in via Pietro Cossa, 1956-57; the house in piazza Statuto, 1958-59[7]).

2. HOUSES, "STIMULATING DOMESTIC LANDINGS"[8]

In the 1960s, during the intense building activity that accompanied the Italian economic boom, the two architects continued their research into residential themes. It can be difficult, considering formal aspects alone, to establish links between the works of the first period and those of the decade that followed: however, several lines of continuity can be traced in the pursuit of personalisation of living spaces and in the experimental tension focused on the technical and material dimension of design.

At the same time, however, we can see a decisive and highly original progression beyond that, in a direction that seems to find points of contact with certain experiences outside Italy. In addition to the houses in via Saluzzo (1960-62) and corso Orbassano (1961-62), and the "sister" villas that the two architects built for themselves (1963-65), among the works completed during this period, the house in via Curtatone (1962-65) and the Pitagora towers (1962-68) best highlight the most innovative features of this research, which also relies on an ironic and astute interpretation of building and town-planning regulations.

Exploiting the contradictions between the maximum volume allowed by building regulations and the smaller volumes actually permitted by the new Master Plan of Turin (1959)[9], the two architects organised the project according to what they called a "desirability diagram", emptying the buildings at the base and concentrating the habitable surfaces increasingly on the upper floors, with flats that were progressively sunnier and quieter, as well as more commercially attractive.

Certain themes typical of the Modern, from which the young Jaretti and Luzi seemed to have ostentatiously distanced themselves from the Obelisk palace, reappear in a manner revisited to the point of being almost unrecognisable, in the search for expressiveness and the humanisation of architecture: the pilotis plan, the distinction between structure and non-bearing enclosure, windows *en longueur*, the *plan libre*, the intensive building developed vertically.

Having abandoned the traditional bourgeois atrium of the multi-storey house, the ground floor became a unique pilotis floor, with cylindrical reinforced concrete columns flanked by a multitude of other brick columns, introducing an element of spatial complexity and at the same time functional ambiguity, as their actual reason for existing (they house the ducts for the systems, downpipes, rubbish chutes) was not immediately comprehensible. In the house on via Curtatone[10] this space is articulated, at different heights, around two circular water tanks. Their roundness is reflected in the walls around the staircase and the lift shaft. It is a joyful artificial landscape, rich in stimuli, which welcomes and accompanies the inhabitants, and was conceived in direct relation to the outdoors.

The "tree-like" structure of these buildings, expanding upwards, disintegrated façades, decomposed volumes and allowed for great freedom in the organisation of the plans of the different floors (there is no "standard plan"). In via Curtatone, the flats, which are all different, still seem to reflect the villa typology: inevitably side by side, but separate in their singularity; designed for unknown inhabitants, trying to guess their needs and desires; characterised by windows and large balconies, but generated by a centripetal plan which, seeking an intimate dimension of living, is organised on each floor around the distribution spaces and internal cloisters.

1. Paolo Portoghesi "Dal neorealismo al neoliberty." *Comunità*, no. 65 (December 1958): 79.

2. Maria Luisa Barelli and Davide Rolfo. *Il palazzo dell'Obelisco di Jaretti e Luzi. Progetto e costruzione*. Roma: Gangemi, 2018.

3. Elio Luzi "L'architetto." In *Le Case Manolino*, edited by Luca Barello, Andrea Luzi, 31. Buttigliera d'Asti: Il Tipografo, 1996.

4. *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 215 (April 1957).

5. Reyner Banham "Neoliberty. The Italian retreat from modern architecture." *Architectural Review*, no. 747 (April 1959): 232-235.

6. Eugenio Gentili, Ernesto N. Rogers "Ortodossia dell'eterodossia." *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 216 (September-October 1957): 2-4; Gabetti R., Isola A., Rogers E.N. "Risposte ai giovani," *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 217 (November-December 1957): 2 and 69. For a comprehensive reconstruction of the events, see D'Amato C. "La «ritirata italiana» dal Movimento Moderno. Memoria, storia e questioni di stile nell'esperienza del neoliberty," and Cellini F. "La polemica sul neoliberty," *Controspazio*, no. 4-5 (October-November 1977): 50-51 and 52 respectively.

7. Davide Rolfo "Il fascino discreto della borghesia. Costruire su un lotto difficile. Piazza Statuto, Torino," in *Storie di case. Abitare l'Italia del boom*, edited by Filippo De Pieri, Bruno Bonomo, Gaia Caramellino and Federico Zanfi, 397-415. Roma: Donzelli 2013.

8. Roberto Gabetti "Opera autentica, piccola, piccola." In *Le Case Manolino*, edited by Luca Barello, Andrea Luzi (Buttigliera d'Asti: Il Tipografo, 1996): 12.

9. "Il Piano Regolatore Generale di Torino 1959", *Atti e Rassegna Tecnica della Società degli Ingegneri e degli Architetti in Torino*, no. 3 and 4 (March and April 1960).

10. Marisa Cerruti "Edifici residenziali di Jaretti e Luzi." *L'architettura. Cronache e storia*, no. 154 (August 1968): 300-303.

The same themes return with ever greater intensity in the Pitagora towers[11]; the designers adopted an isolated block type, ensuring ventilation and multiple views. The design envisaged the successive realisation of three tower buildings, linked by a continuous porticoed basement. In the tower at the corner with piazza Pitagora, in particular, the irregularly shaped plot required the design of a multi-faceted volume, ruling out all standardised composition of the façades. The construction system, similar to that of the building in via Curtatone and many other constructions by Jaretti and Luzi in the same years, also took on the role of defining a common language, flexible and adaptable to the different situations of a large building site. The load-bearing structure in reinforced concrete and the brick cavity walls are exposed, as they are in many other buildings of the time. But this current technology is reinterpreted here in an entirely original way: the circular columns adopted on the pilotis floor, slender and therefore paired two by two, produce a sort of fragmentation and intensification of the sightlines, and are connected to the square-section pillars of the upper floors with a DADO system. For the cavity walls, Jaretti and Luzi "invented" a solution that was both economical and capable of alluding to a masonry tradition well rooted in Piedmont, with the adoption, for the outer wall, of solid facing shiner bricks, with the frog (intended in the normal position to house the mortar) shown with a decorative function. In order to keep the roller shutter boxes flush with the interior walls, the thin cavity walls (30 cm) were thickened in correspondence with the openings and projected towards the outside, articulating the design of the elevations by means of subtle and continuous variations. This solution was complex to implement and, having initially been made possible by an artisanal organisation of the building site, was abandoned in the third and last tower, built almost in the Seventies.

Every solution chosen was adopted on the basis of functional reasons and incontrovertible, almost "natural" chains of logic, applying a "method [of design] of 'fighting collaboration' [...which] led us by painful but inexorable degrees to discard all solutions that, having only formal arguments on their side, failed to prevail over the enemy collaborator, and to accept, sometimes with repugnance, choices based on 'objective' arguments"[12]. A similar reasoning would later lead Luzi to highlight the need to dispose of every preconceived idea on both the "construction elements" and the "spaces" they delimit, abandoning the terms generally used to define them. In order to convey the idea, he stated: "not 'windows' but holes to catch the light, so never a 'window' (a done and standard idea) but something different in each specific case"; and "cancel labels such 'balcony', 'living room' [...] and reinvent 'space for being outdoors in the dwelling not at ground level', 'a place to see friends, or carry out activities in the home during free time, etc.'"[13]. Tracing human functions and activities has no "purifying" connotation here, on a formal level, but rather that of responding appropriately to the implicit demands of the inhabitants. In these ways, however, the two architects developed a figurative language that was to become their distinctive stylistic signature.

11. Jaretti Sodano S., Elio Luzi "Le torri Pitagora a Torino." *L'architettura. Cronache e storia*, no. 131 (September 1966): 286-291; Jaretti Sodano S.,Luzi E. "Turmhäuser in Turin." *Baumeister*, no. 5 (May 1967): 576-578.

12. Sergio Jaretti Sodano, Elio Luzi "Le torri Pitagora a Torino." *cit.*: 287.

13. C. Torta, C.S. Zorzan *Jaretti & E. Luzi testimoni ed artefici dell'architettura piemontese del dopoguerra*. degree thesis, Politecnico di Torino, Faculty of Architecture, a.y. 1981-82, supervisor C. Ronchetta, co-supervisor M. Parenti.







Figure 1. Jaretti and Luzi, the via Curtatone house, Turin, Italy (1962-65) (on the left, photo by Lucio Beltrami; on the right, photo by S. Cavallo, in Jaretti Archive, Politecnico di Torino).

Figure 2. Jaretti and Luzi, the Pitagora towers, Turin, Italy (1962-68). A drawing of the two first towers (Jaretti Archive, Politecnico di Torino).

Fig. 3. Jaretti and Luzi, The Mirafiori tower, Turin, Italy (1970-74). A detail of the façade.

3. "TECHNICOLOUR FOR THE CITY WITHOUT QUALITY"[14]

In a later phase, between the end of the 1960s and the early 1970s, Jaretti and Luzi's confrontation with the demands of student protest and their reflection "on the limits of a professional activity that is increasingly perceived [...] as a place of mediation of decision-making processes implemented outside and above the field of expertise"[15], led the two architects to explore new approaches, as in the residence in via Ormea (1967-70), the residential and commercial building in via Breglio (1969-71), the residential complex in strada del Drosso (1970-74) or the Mirafiori tower (1970-74), the last of which was to be completed jointly. Despite a growing mistrust in the

14. Sergio Jaretti "Technicolor per la città senza qualità." *Modo*, no. 39 (May 1981): 38-41.

15. Gustavo Ambrosini and Giovanni Durbiano "Architetture di Jaretti e Luzi, 1955-74, 1975-95." *Edilizia popolare*, no. 242 (November-December 1995): 34-64.

architect's possibility to influence the city's growth processes, Jaretti and Luzi did not renounce the use of alternative and, to some extent defensive, strategies in the face of the rigidity of urban planning constraints and the decline in the level of skill possessed by the workforce.

The ironic attitude towards any ideological or bureaucratic superstructure seemed to transcend into, at times, bitter sarcasm: experimentation with the use of colour and "catalogue" materials took the place of elaboration "based on design". In the architecture built during these years, the distinction between the supporting elements and volumes supported becomes more and more evident, bringing to the fore a structural grid with a rigid orthogonality.

In the Mirafiori tower, in particular, the cylindrical pillars now almost adhere to the outer walls, highlighted by the chromatic contrast between the black-painted concrete and the concrete block façade walls originally conceived to shimmer in natural light. Unrestrained use of colour also characterises the balcony parapets, the shutters and, as a further pop element, the cylindrical coloured fibreglass cabinets highlighted on the balconies. The dense composition, set on a predefined floor plan, culminates in a paradoxical rooftop pool covered by a parabolic vault.

That of Jaretti and Luzi is a mocking approach that does not represent a formal rejection of the themes of Modernism (as upheld by most post-Modernist interpretation), but a last ditch attempt to humanise a context, both in terms of design and regulation, in which the degrees of freedom of the individual – designer and inhabitant – are increasingly reduced.

4. LOOKING AROUND

Jaretti and Luzi were never interested in a structured theoretical elaboration, which they always regarded with suspicion. Part of their own expressive research seems, instead, to be based on the careful and critical analysis of the day-to-day reality of the profession and of regulatory constraints, on the observation of changes in building production and construction sites.

They did not work within the academy, but for a brief, late exception in the case of Luzi, and their works were only partially published. This unabashed "splendid isolation" which, in retrospect, they proudly claimed[16], did nothing to facilitate the consideration of their works by critics.

The two Turinese architects have always moved with great freedom between the dogmas and anti-dogmas of modern architecture; their re-elaboration of some typical elements of Modernism poetics does not derive from a preconceived distancing, but from a profound critical and liberal spirit, and from an attitude that always places man's "pursuit of happiness" at the centre.

Some aspects of their work present similarities with the coeval research of architects such as Aldo van Eyck and, above all, Herman Hertzberger. There are no documented exchanges between Jaretti and Luzi and the Dutch group, whose architectures began to be published in Italy, apart from a few exceptions[17], in the second half of the 1960s, and no evidence that the two Turin architects knew Habraken's seminal book[18], published in Italian only in 1974. However, it seems interesting to highlight a certain "evolutionary convergence" going beyond the Modern Movement, which was more methodical and "scientific" in the Dutch case, and more intuitive in the Italian. Besides the similarity of certain constructive and formal solutions (DADO-column system, exposed brickwork or concrete blocks), an expressive use of materials that rejects all mythologization of technological innovation and the idea of technical progress as a value in itself, as well as certain predilections in the organisation of space, it is the humanistic approach and faith in the possibilities of architecture to interpret changes in society and improve human life that seems to unite the work of Jaretti and Luzi and the Dutch architects.

Some research documents, following the separation of the two architects, still show the interest (at least of Jaretti) in an open design approach, with reference to the experiences – as well of Habraken – of Alexander, Erskine and Kroll[19].

The research conducted so far does not permit us, at least for the moment, to draw certain conclusions, but it opens up the complex question of placing Jaretti and Luzi's work in not only an Italian but a European scenario. At the same time, the research contributes to highlighting the complexity of the evolution of Modern themes, through non-obvious paths. ■

16. Sergio Jaretti "Figli di un dio minore nell'architettura del Novecento a Torino." In *Quaderno del Pensatoio*, no. 22 (February 1988).

17. Jan van Goethem "Casa dei ragazzi ad Amsterdam." *L'architettura*.

18. Nicolaas John Habraken *Supports. An Alternative to Mass Housing*. London: The Architectural Press, 1972; first edition in Dutch: *De dragers en de mensen. Het einde van de massawoningbouw*. Amsterdam: Scheltema & Holkema, 1961). *Cronache e storia*, no. 72 (October 1961): 386-402.

19. Sergio Jaretti, Elisabetta Calderini and Gianluca Cosmacini. *Quaderni del Pensatoio*, no. 1 (March 1983). *Partecipazione, qualità, persona*.

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