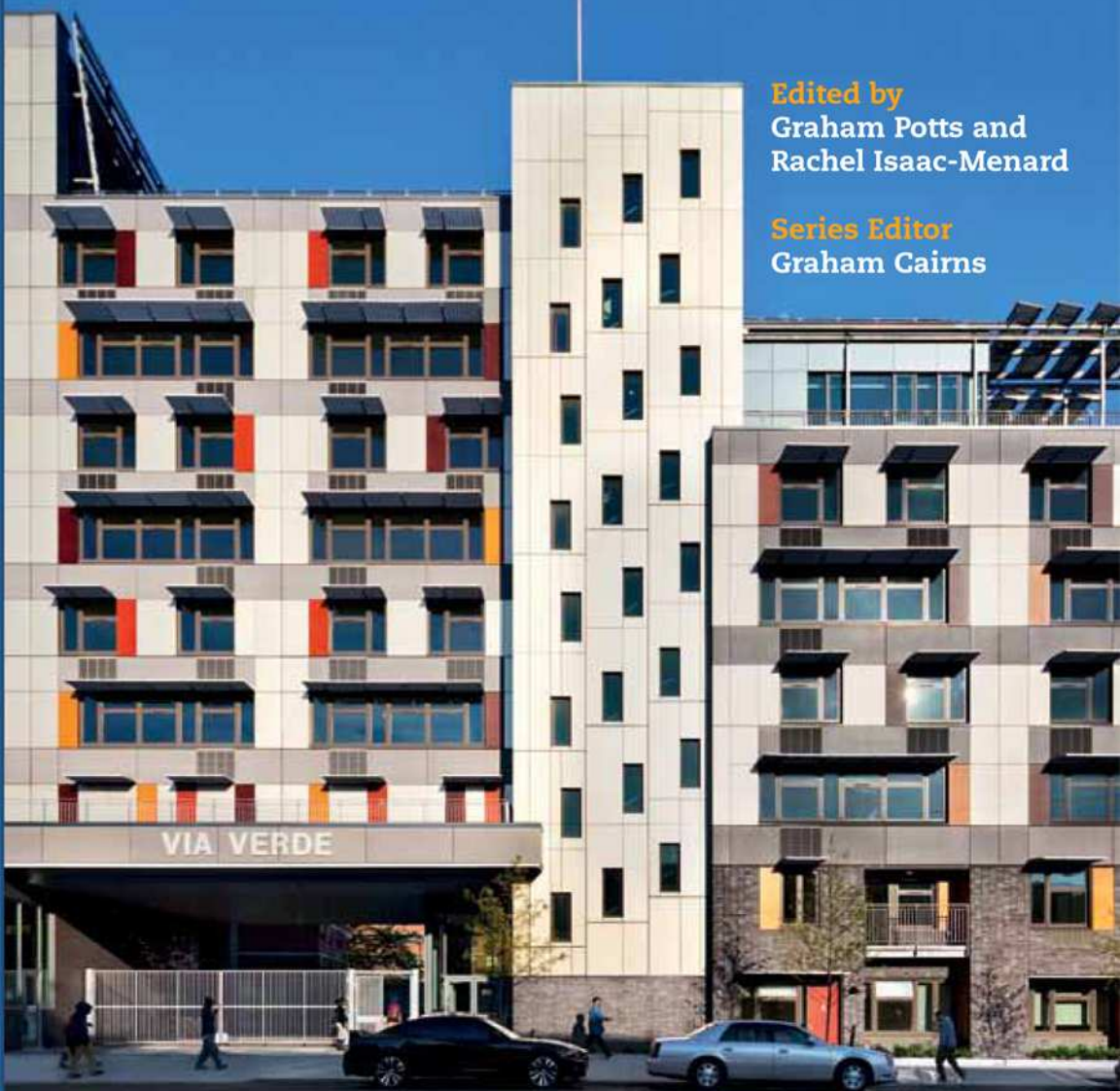


Housing the Future

Alternative
Approaches for
Tomorrow

Edited by
Graham Potts and
Rachel Isaac-Menard

Series Editor
Graham Cairns



HOUSING THE FUTURE

ALTERNATIVE
APPROACHES FOR
TOMORROW

SERIES EDITOR
GRAHAM CAIRNS

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ACTIONS TO RECOVER THE ABSENT CITY – SIMULTANEITY AND HYPER SOCIALIZATION – STRATEGIES OF INTERVENTION IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD ON THE PERIPHERY

Introduction

This chapter explores intervention projects aimed at recovering the quality of public space and the private living conditions of residents in a typical Spanish neighbourhood, La Rondilla, on the periphery of Valladolid, Spain. La Rondilla (Figure 1) was developed in the 1960s on the formerly agricultural periphery of Valladolid which, at the time, was composed of new working-class neighbourhoods built by privately funded speculative construction. It is a dormitory town, dense and compact, but it lacks infrastructure and public spaces. It is composed of a succession of parallel six-storey blocks, separated by narrow streets. Its density of dwellings makes it desirable from the perspective of the *market*, but its minimum public spaces make it a place that is not so desirable for *living*.

In July 2013 La Rondilla was the subject of an international workshop, 'Accommodation for Other Ways of Life', in which twenty-two students of architecture from Valladolid, Madrid, Porto, and Rome, worked for ten days. The workshop analysed the urban space of this populous neighbourhood and developed design proposals at different scales – the neighbourhood as a whole, neighbourhood blocks, and housing. The aim was to increase the complexity of social spaces and improve the everyday lives of residents. Within the framework of this workshop contemporary social and urban theories were continually referenced to give the participants working models of intervention in the inherited city. This involved the re-appropriation of the roofs, lower floors, and the interstitial spaces of the housing blocks for collective enjoyment. These

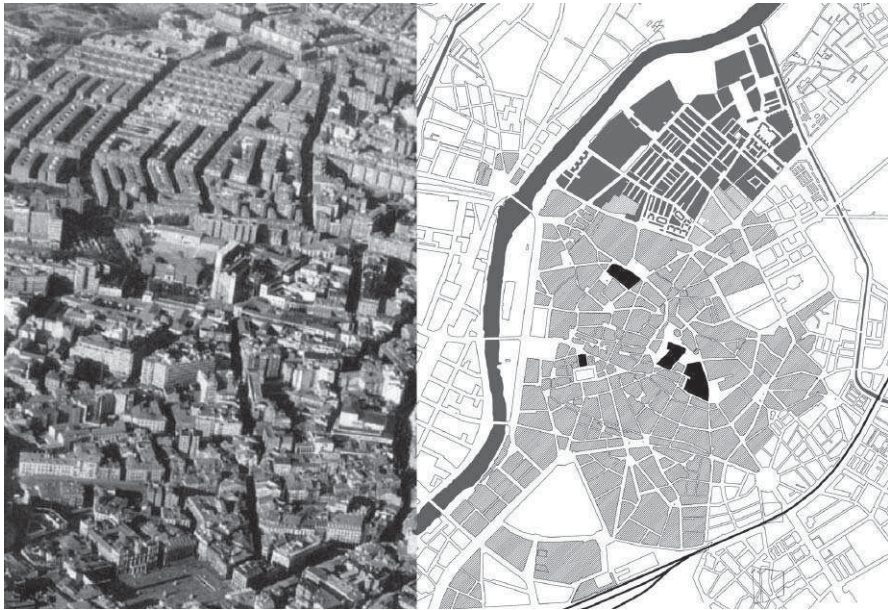


Figure 1. District of La Rondilla, Valladolid.

are models premised on recovering relational and meeting spaces and restoring the right to the city in the 21st century.

The workshop led to the development of four thematic approaches: 1. Break, free, recover; 2. Inhabited roofs; 3. The inclusion of new building benchmarks; and 4. The street belongs to everybody. These approaches tested different mechanisms of appropriation which were defined as *Spacing the House*, *Inhabiting the city*, *Inhabiting the sky*, and *Recovering the absent city*. The need to reorganise planning, financial, legal, institutional, and private agreements so as to implement these ideas does not invalidate their capacity to improve the quality of residential construction and life. Such changes are needed and, as a result, proposed.

Simultaneity and Hyper-Socialization

Without streets

In the iconic Neorealist film *The Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio de Sica, 1948), we see a new neighbourhood at the beginning of its life. It is devoid of infrastructures and has mud streets. People take water from a fountain and fill their buckets with it in order to bring it to their houses. One of the first scenes shows the lead couple talking about their problems while they walk from the fountain to their house, located in the one of the blocks in the new district. It is a scene reminiscent of La Rondilla. Developed some

years later, La Rondilla had, by the 1970s, become denser and more compact than the district shown in de Sica's film, but similarities remained. The *Ribera de Castilla* was a large area between the district and the Pisuerga River devoid of infrastructure, such as parks and other public facilities, which were located there after many civic protests.

Neighbourhoods and mud

La Rondilla then, was born disconnected from the traditional city and lacked the appropriate public services and spaces. It was also built without the minimum spaces needed for the development of modern urban life and lacked a variety of scales and functions – streets, squares, parks, etc. – which could have served as a support for social relations. The architecture also reflects a lack of sensitivity to the environment, an incapacity to articulate diverse urban spaces, and the formal automatism of its volumes which, repeated over and over again, produce monotony in height and volume. This contrasts with the vibrant harmony of Valladolid's older buildings whose towers and churches reveal the former economic and territorial power of the city.

There are several paradoxes that accompanied the urbanization process of this district. Before its construction, there was a landscape of orchards which surrounded the historical centre of Valladolid. As a result of the industrialization of the 1960s, immigration from the small rural areas of the province and the region took place. A significant number of the workers in this new industrial city became the buyers and inhabitants of the new buildings. This district was called *dormitory town* because this was virtually the only necessity that it provided. Initially, there were no other services such as parks and schools, but after a decade of social and political wranglings these were added. However, the absence of free space in the city's interior meant they were located in the periphery which was an illegal garbage dump.

From the three fields, or layers, that Lefebvre¹ identified – *the rural, the industrial, the urban* – *the urban* was put at risk in La Rondilla due to the absence of appropriate spaces for community for development of the everyday in the city and the places of encounter between citizens, for example. The disposition of blocks also favoured the isolation of its few public spaces. The streets did not find a continuity that could promote the diversity of moving and crossing of the urban.²

House and city

Reflecting on the problem of housing leads to the reflection on the idea of the city. Aldo van Eyck expressed this duality, comparing it with the one existing between the leaf

1 Henri Lefebvre, *La revolución urbana*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1983 (1970), 34-35.

2 In her analysis of the Rockefeller Center Jane Jacobs demanded the convenience of an alternative street to mitigate the excessive length of the blocks: '...can be compared the decay of these long blocks with the use fluidity that an extra street is able to produce'. Jane Jacobs, *Muerte y vida de las grandes ciudades*, Madrid, Capitán Swing, 2011 (1961), 214.

and the tree³. He expressed a fractal conception of the issue by interpreting the self-similarity of different structures at different scales.⁴ In this conceptualization, the level of complexity continued independently of the size of the social group and, ultimately, the different scales in which our lives develop – from the most private, to the most collective and social.⁵

House and city are two different scales of our way of inhabiting the two extremes of the problem, and this inhabiting lies at the heart of our relationship with the world and our relationship with other people. So, when we talk about the concepts of intimacy, privacy, collectivity and community⁶ we are discussing historical evolutions that have accompanied social ups and downs which, at times, have been very convulsive. The architecture of the house and the architecture of the city necessarily involve this relationship between humans and place – offering spaces of different degrees of privacy and public spaces for meeting.

The *everyday* of the human is, then, constructed at different scales or, as Lefebvre affirms, at *multiple levels*. In dealing with this phenomenon we are faced the inevitable fragmentation of the urban. In other words, in our desire to understand the problem we break up knowledge, short-circuiting its necessary interrelations and thus put a more agreed and coherent solution at risk.⁷ From the house to the city, from the room to the metropolis, we construct spaces at different scales (district, neighbourhood, street, etc.) for the satisfaction of our individual and urban necessities. We do this through creative activity.⁸

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- 3 Aldo van Eyck expressed his ideas in the Forum magazine (1962-63) thus: 'tree is leaf and leaf is tree – house is city and city is house – a tree is a tree but it is also a huge leaf – a leaf is a leaf but it is also a tiny tree – a city is not a city unless it is a huge house – a house is a house only if it is also a tiny city'. Aldo van Eyck, Building a house, in VV.AA., Aldo van Eyck, Amsterdam, Stichting Wonen, 1982, 44-45.
 - 4 Benoît Mandelbrot, Los objetos fractales. Forma, azar y dimensión, Barcelona, Tusquets, 1996 (1975).
 - 5 Science offers this global conception through the concept of Gaia – according to which the earth behaves like a self-regulating system that tends towards balance. The theory of 'Gaia' was first elucidated in 1969 by James Lovelock.
 - 6 Christopher Alexander and Serge Chermayeff, Community and Privacy, New York, Doubleday, 1963
 - 7 According to Manuel Delgado, the social space of Lefebvre has a hydrostatic and hypercomplex condition '... dominated by relative fixations, movements, flows, waves and understanding'. Manuel Delgado, El animal público, Barcelona, Anagrama, 1999, 38.
 - 8 Reflecting these ideas, Bernard Waldenfels states: '...everydayness constitutes the intersection of social conditions and individual necessities'. Bernard Waldenfels, De Husserl a Derrida, Barcelona, Paidós, 1997 (1992), 139.

Strategies of Intervention in a Neighbourhood on the Periphery

Actions

Within the framework of the workshop discussed here, we analysed the *production of the space*, and examined the possibilities of intervention for change and regeneration. In order to engage in this inherited urban form we have to deal with interrelating levels of a complex social space that range from the house to the city scale. It is important to realize this, as our ability to transform it depends on the ability to read it. The district of Rondilla in Valladolid suffers major deficiencies and what is needed to make it a good contemporary urban and domestic space is significant.⁹

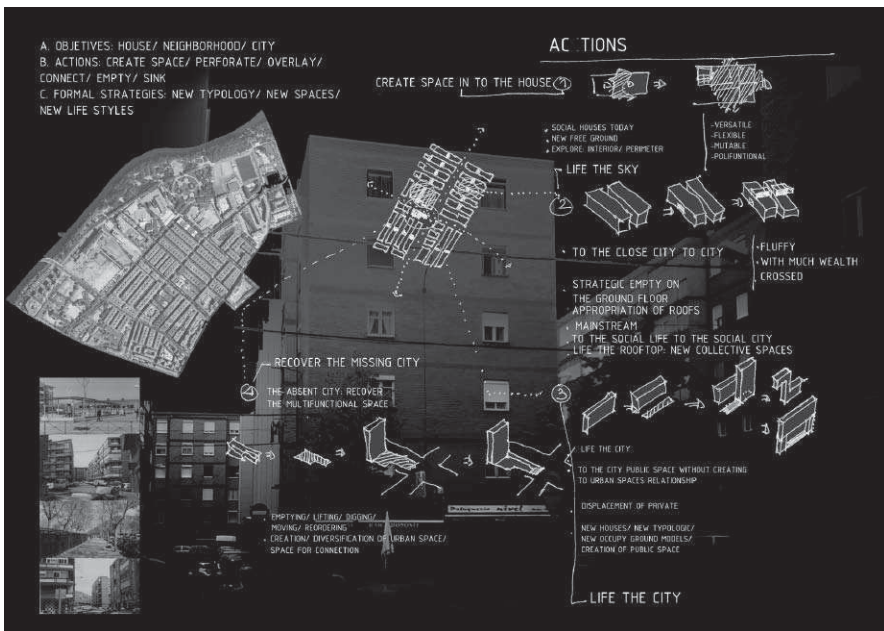


Figure 2. Concept ideas proposed include: Spacing the house; Inhabiting the sky; Inhabiting the city; Recovering the absent city.

9 In *The Production of the Space*, Lefebvre promises to demonstrate: 'the active – the operational or instrumental – role of space, as knowledge and action, in the existing mode of production. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford, UK, Blackwell Publishing, 1991 (1974), 11.

The workshop, 'Accommodation for other Ways of Life', critically analyzed the situation at hand so as to contribute intervention proposals that would put the resilience of its urban and architectonic conditions to the test. It was a process that allowed us to think about the contemporary city more generally, and propose intervention strategies that are at once specific and, potentially, generic. These strategies deal with different scales: the housing unit, its mechanisms of grouping, the existing construction typologies, and those which would result from the intervention proposals. It also allowed us to look at the collective spaces, the resulting new spaces, and the relationships between them that are the result of this initial phase of theory and practical analysis. Four topics were proposed at the outset: *Spacing the house*; *Inhabiting the sky*; *Inhabiting the city*; *Recovering the absent city*. These strategies, or creative actions (Figures 2–5) were all intended to update the inherited city. Each strategy implies a dialectic relationship with reality, the will to transform it, and the application of a highly contingent process.¹⁰

Some of the categories that Lefebvre identified in the urban form are useful to conceive these intervention strategies that allow the overlapping of new and old systems of spatial organization in the neighbourhood: *multiplicity*¹¹, *simultaneity*¹², *updating*¹³.

Spacing the house

Modern architecture has widely explored the quality of space and, in particular, the relations that can exist between the interior and exterior, and the spatial richness that this implies. In this context, space is configured by light and views which, if absent, mean that we cannot consider the space in question as habitable. By way of example, consider a photograph of the architect Herman Hertzberger. In it, an elderly couple is sitting having something to eat on the boot of a car, which is open. Not intended to be a habitable space, the boot becomes a living space with the aid of light, privacy, and the views – even if only momentarily. It is a good example of the concept of *appropriation*.¹⁴

The cinema director Jacques Tati, identified the obsession of modern architecture with the relations between interior and exterior and its yearning for the house to enjoy the outside space. In a scene of *Mon Oncle* (1958), Monsieur and Madame Arpel, proud of their modern house with a garden, are sitting right outside the house, looking towards

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- 10 These notions are all inspired by the work of Arendt: Hanna Arendt, *La condición humana*, Barcelona, Paidós, 1993 (1958).
 - 11 'Social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another'. H. Lefebvre, *The production of space*, op. cit. 86.
 - 12 'The form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity'. H. Lefebvre, *The production of space*, op. cit. 101.
 - 13 'Every social space is the outcome of a process with many aspects and many contributing currents, signifying and non-signifying, perceived and directly experienced, practical and theoretical'. H. Lefebvre, *Ibid*, 110.
 - 14 The appropriation, as Lefebvre clarifies, does not allude to the property, but rather time and space. Henri Lefebvre, *De lo rural a lo urbano*, Barcelona, Editorial Peninsula, 1978 (1970), 186.

the inside to watch the TV, which is in the living room. In this example, the exterior space of the garden is a complementary support of everyday domestic life. In both cases, inside and outside coexist and this reminds us of Lefebvre for whom a project that approaches Hölderlin's poetic living must aspire to synthesise two opposed principles: *utopia* and *pragmatism*.¹⁵ To this, we could add, inside and outside.

Inhabiting the city

The city is the space that people have created to establish relations.¹⁶ The diversity of relationship has shaped different typologies of urban spaces and these, in turn, tell us about the idiosyncrasy of each community – about the way in which people develop their existence. When approaching an apparently technical problem, like the organization of the traffic in Philadelphia, Louis Kahn (1954) analyzed the flow and circulation of traffic, identifying different situations (road, pedestrian, crossing, intersection, access to parking, etc.). He reflected the graphic coding of these onto maps, making an existential interpretation of the system of relations that arose from urban traffic. Situationists raised the system of urban relations to another level still, redrawing the map of Paris as a psychogeographic cartography in which the city appeared fragmented and recomposed, according to its affective drift – *détournement* – its existential and random wandering. However, they also proposed a review of our understanding of the city as a mere market for goods and a place of objects (buildings).¹⁷ Both cases are alternatives to implosive developments that allow us to articulate different urban structures from inherited ones, making *spacing the city* a possibility.¹⁸

Instead of the current rigid layouts of the neighbourhood, with their clear distinctions between what is private and what is not, this workshop looked to suppress the borders, *crossing them*, by using the techniques of *appropriation* and *détournement*¹⁹. *Détournement* consists of the appropriation and creative reorganization of existing elements.

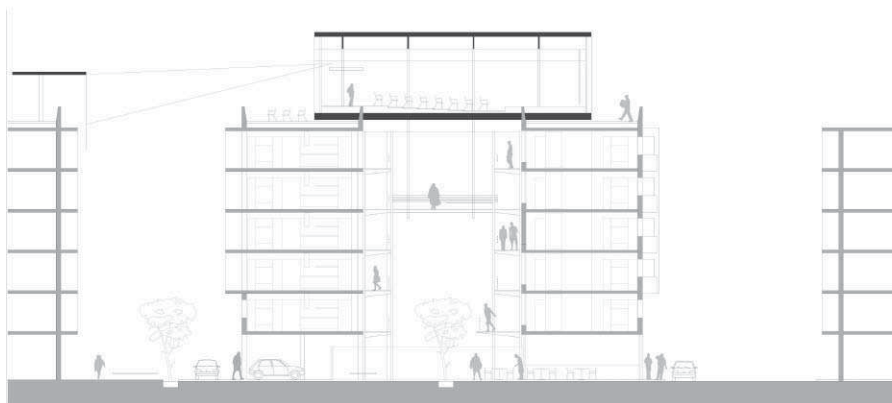
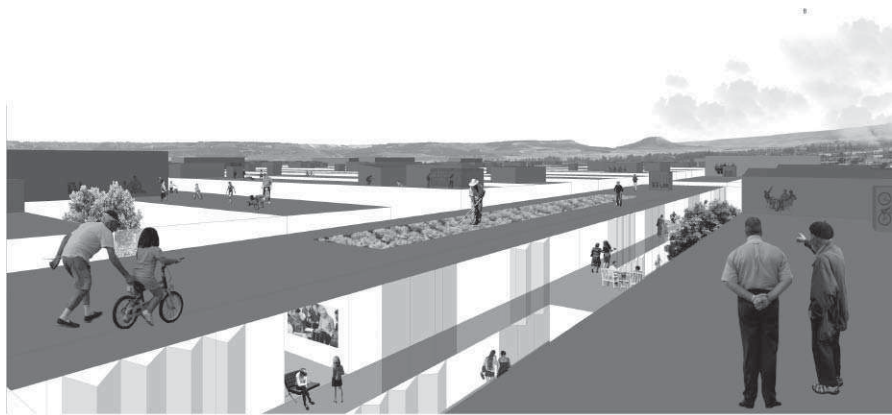
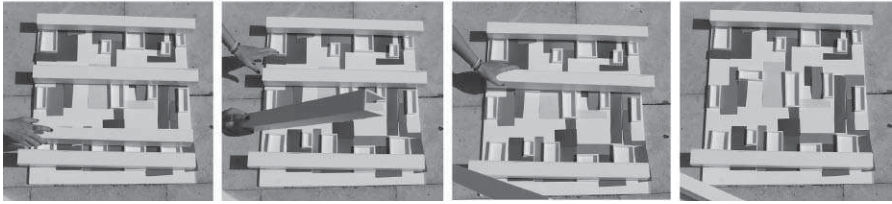
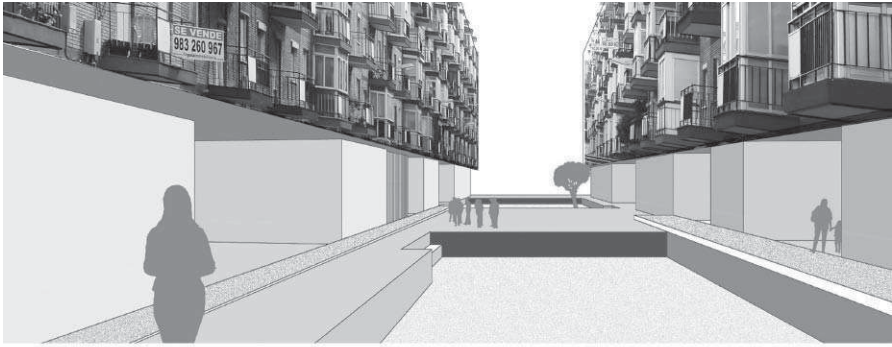
15 These dichotomies are reflected in Lefebvre in his thoughts on place, practice and living. H. Lefebvre, *La revolución urbana*, op. cit. 187.

16 This notion reflects the thoughts of Saskia Sassen. See: Saskia Sassen, *La ciudad global*, Buenos Aires, 1999, p. 42

17 L. Andreotti et altri, *Situacionistas: arte, política y urbanismo*, Barcelona, Actar, 1996.

18 Post World War Two precedents for this include: designs for the Centre of Frankfurt by Candilis, Josics and Woods (1963); the extension of the Camera of Representatives in Rome by Giuseppe and Alberto Samonà (1967); and the competition for the Centre Pompidou in Paris (1970).

19 Lefebvre favours appropriation over domination. See: H. Lefebvre, *The production of space*, op. cit. 164-168.



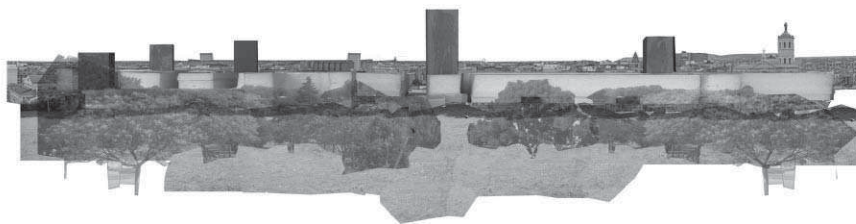


Figure 3. Scale model and exterior perspective. Concept ideas proposed include: Finding voids in the ground floor; to use as social space; regrouping of the interstitial spaces between blocks and old streets; crossing circulation; locating houses at high levels.

Figure 4. External perceptive and section. Concepts proposed: use roofs as new social space; use the inner courtyards as 'sponge spaces'; create new accesses the houses; ensure the visibility of collective spaces.

Figure 5. Site section and model. Concepts proposed: create a new skyline for the neighbourhood; create new squares; ensure the legibility of the structure of social spaces

Inhabiting the sky

We have mentioned some projects in which the relation between the building and public space is no longer conventional. The same applies to their relation with the land. These projects explored the possibilities of public spaces not being located exclusively on the ground. Instead, they were to be located on the roofs which ceased to be the end of the building and were transformed into the beginning of new relationships in the community²⁰ – a spontaneous theatre.²¹

In the 1960s, some experiences linked to art and pop culture questioned, in a brilliant and audacious way, what and where the public space of collective action and representation could be.²² Trisha Brown, in her performance *'Man Walking down the Side of a Building'* (1970), in which the facade of a building was used as the stage along which a man descended, moved the traditional theatrical space into the city itself.²³ This reflected ideas that were emerging in the 1960s, when contemporary dance and music went out to the streets and explored interactive relationships with public space. For example, on 30th January 1969 people stopped in the street, amazed by the sound that came from the roof of number 3 Savile Row in London. While the police tried to keep order, The Beatles were giving a live concert on the roof of the Apple Records building.²⁴

Conclusions: to Recover the Absent City and the Right to the City

In an engraving of Valladolid from the 16th century (Braun and Hogenberg, Valladolid 1574), the city was silhouetted against the sky. In the foreground is the cultivated land. Behind that, the low and extensive buildings of the urban centre of the small town – the vibrant sequence of towers and churches that together made up the districts, parishes, and convents of the city. This vibrant image, plastically active and eloquently revealing the crucial areas of the city, is clearly different and distant from the dull and excessively

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- 20 A contemporary precedent for this includes The High Line, Diller and Scofidio + Renfo. More historical precedents can be found in the work of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer and Peter and Alison Smithson. For comments on Le Corbusier in this regard, see: Eusebio Alonso, *Estrategias alucinatorias en el ultimo Le Corbusier*, in VV. AA., *Critic/All Actas*, Madrid, critic/All Press, 2014, 55-73; Eusebio Alonso, *De Ronchamp al Hospital de Venecia. Mito religioso y memoria colectiva en el último Le Corbusier*, in VV. AA., *Arquitectura, símbolo y modernidad*, Valladolid, Universidad, 2014, 349-366.
 - 21 Again, for ideas on this in the writing of Lefebvre see: Henri Lefebvre, *El derecho a la ciudad*, op. cit. 100.
 - 22 These activities find echoes in Arendt. See: H. Arendt, op. cit. 21-22.
 - 23 Victoria Perez, *¡A bailar a la calle! Danza contemporánea, espacio público y arquitectura*, Salamanca, Universidad, 2009.
 - 24 For relevant comment by Lefebvre of the ideas and issues underlying such pop-culture phenomena, see: H. Lefebvre, *El derecho a la ciudad*, op. cit. 68.

horizontal image of the neighbourhood of La Rondilla. It is an image we see as a precedent for our proposals (Figures 3–5).

In the film with which we started this chapter with, Sica's *The Bicycle Thief*, after the many ups and downs, the protagonist (and us, as sympathetic spectators) realizes that his difficulties are the same as those of his fellow citizens. When his son lends him a hand and he seems to have overcome his desperation, the camera moves away and lets us see that they walk together, but also next to so many others in the city, also struggling to overcome their difficulties. It coincides with the voice-over of a hopeful narrative.²⁵ It is not only buildings that overlay our cities, but our lives as well. This too is something we need to remember in our interventions with the city and, in particular, its housing.

The work carried out in the workshop 'Accommodation for Other Ways of Life', taught us lessons. These contributed, in the first place, to developing specific strategies of intervention in a residential piece of an inherited city. These strategies, we suggest, allowed the development of design proposals that update the neighbourhood's urban conditions and the quality of its social space. We also suggest that the critical analytical tools developed are applicable beyond this particular case study and that the theoretical social and urban concepts employed in the initial part of the process gave us the creative and intellectual tools needed to discuss space, urban society, and alternative design approaches

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Housing The Future – Alternative Approaches for Tomorrow offers three perspectives on the problems of housing today with an eye on tomorrow. It brings together world-leading practising architects with academics from seven countries and teams of international students. World leaders in the field of residential design, such as UN Habitat Award winner Avi Friedman, present built projects whose design criteria and aims they lay out in text. Academics from the UK, the USA, Spain, Germany and elsewhere follow these project descriptions with extended essays from a more theoretical perspective but remain focused on the realities of practice. Finally, ideas on current housing problems from the next generation of designers are brought together in student projects from Europe and North America. With an introduction by Dr Graham Cairns, this book highlights the practice of residential design internationally at a time when affordable housing provision is seen as a critical issue by designers, planners and policy makers alike. This book is the first in the 'Housing the Future' series.

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