Model Trouvés.
Architectonical Archaeology of Future Possibilities

In the post-war period a group of young architects decided to set up new directions to rethink the practice of urbanism. They called themselves Team X. It was a reaction against the ideas spread by some of their professors, who were members of CIAM. This organization, known as *Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne*, was the platform where the International Style defined its guidelines from, under the direction of Le Corbusier. The CIAM started in 1928 and finished in 1959 as a result of the counterproposals made by the young Team X.

The CIAM conceived urbanism as an extension of the avant-garde ideas, in the same antitraditionalist fashion. The organization placed itself in the core of the urban development for the welfare society, supposedly beyond the political views of the places where their work was implemented.

Their programme started with the aim of having a strong influence in the development on the cities across continents. Accordingly to their international aspiration, they systematically ignored the contexts where their projects were implemented. The ideas they unfolded as a response to the problem of fast growing housing were extremely aggressive towards the inhabitants of cities. The theory of *functionalism* developed by them was part of a universalistic logic with no deep understanding of local cultures. The techniques were applied without taking into account the different countries and without linking the buildings in their symbolic capacity with the context cosmogonies. The same approach was applied to city planning —an abrasive tradition not unknown in Modernity, as in the Haussmann Plan for Paris, that planned demolishing the entire city centre and erecting from scratch.

The group distinguished between the already classic *garden city* and their own conceptualization, the *concentrated city.* One of the main differences in their proposal was that city grids were not anymore conceived in an axial organization, but oriented to the sun to make the most of its energy and light. They insisted on the ability of urbanism to standardize everyone's living conditions from a prominent idealism, reflecting upon the collective organization while intending to keep individual freedom, and at the same time, emphasizing on recreational time. Some of the elements of their programme[1] were efficient organizations, new building techniques, working with scales and proportions, uses of land legislation, unity of visual groups, facilitation of circulation for vehicles and pedestrians, and free disposition of ground planes. The influence of these ideas was largely spread, as it can be seen in innumerable city plans or buildings around the globe.

The good intentions of this discourse made constructions that can be compared to an artificial language. Their rules were beautifully composed and accurately designed when conceived in ideal situations. But when they were confronted to reality, they lacked all the strata that randomly enter in the composition of the grammar, the sounds, the new words or idioms made by the mainly unconscious collective layering. A language that is alive grows, modifies and adapts by the users' influence. It necessarily cannot be *absolute*. In spite of its elegance, Modern Style could be considered an architectonical Esperanto. It was a utopian project conceived for a better collective life for everyone but projected by a small core of enlightened minds, where everyone was nobody. Identity was erased from the equation, and the concept of *place* was just conceived as a divisible, countable an extensible *space* in order to create from scratch a flat proportioned plan draw in paper inserted into the physical world. Functionalism did not function very well. A rational emptiness can be felt in those silent plans for an impersonal crowd.

In response to the premises of the CIAM, the Team X —who introduced themselves as a family, in opposition to the highly bureaucratized structure of the CIAM— was to look to the city as a social space with its own vivid language. They challenged the functionalist ideas of standardization with conceptual tools coming from existentialism and structuralist anthropology. According to them, it was not possible to homogenize the housing projects since there are always particular situations. Their proposal consisted on conceiving cities from three perspectives: association, identity, and flexibility. They would occasionally use a fourth element, the *cluster*, a very suggestive term to refer to new social realities yet without a name. From the association, they would work according to the way people socially organized themselves: house/home, street, district and city; all these elements were understood under social parameters that imply different ways of understanding territory, ways of living and values. Thus space became a place of meeting and socialization, sharing and interchange, where the inhabitants can create a tapestry of links. The city is

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[1] MUMFORD, Eric: *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism 1928-1960,* 2002

conceived as a variable community, where the individuals can belong to. Because of that, forms must be adapted to work toward a symbolic system that generates a sense of belonging, contributing to build identity. Team X conceived cities as a flexible organism that is made of changes, ready to be adapted to new situations to come and to embed new architectonical projects or citizens' interventions.

In a very close relation to the thoughts of Team X, the ongoing series *Inopias* by Antonio R. Montesinos set out some questions to challenge urbanism. One of the main points of this architects family group was to reflect upon the urban design understanding the users' perspective. Montesinos states his practice exactly at this point. He rehearses through possible city models strongly inspired by the Modern Style, but with the aim of tergiversate and exhaust them. The sketches were made of materials found on site, very often modest matters that are accumulating dusk in a dark storage or found in the street. The compositions are carefully made to accomplish a single perspective, the one defined by the camera lenses. The tergiversation of the utopian models also proposes a prospective practice, since it is played in a trial-error methodology in a very ludic approach, which can be also tracked in the series of drawings *Igual Medida*, a set of isometric plans developed with the same grid but resulting in different solutions.

In these findings he proposes three levels of archaeology. The first one is extrapolated from the classic technique of *object trouvé*. Those forgotten or rejected materials are given a second live, which goes beyond the avant-garde method. This system presents the materiality itself of he found objects. In his installations, the *micro* scale is related to a bigger cartography. The junk used in the compositions tells us about its origins—massive production of plastic from oil exploitations or imported woods, which implied a highly industrialized economic system— but also the reasons of its rejection—overproduction and obsolesce-based economies. The second archaeology strategy would be the harvest of past utopian city plans, where he recovers their proposed solutions but also their conflicts. The combination of these two strategies could be called *model trouvé*. Trough the examination of the conceptual ruins, it could be stated the same thing as the physical ruins: *these landscapes host an ambiguous architectonical structure; ambiguous because it is difficult to determine whether it is about to collapse or it is in the process of being erected*[2]. This exercise serves to bring over the table a proactive discussion about which kind of urban models people could want to live in. This conversation also questions the inhabitants of a city which level of commitment they wish within the city and with the others. The third archaeological procedure is a playful one. With past shapes, Montesinos articulates a physical narration that opens up new possibilities in their recombination, using models as a projection mechanism. This proposal follows a similar strategy to the self-publication *Afinidad Visual Operatia*, recalling Aby Warbug's methodology to understand continuities and possibilities of narration within the shapes of different cultures. From this ludic approach, improvisation, imagination and desire appear as a possible designing system that set out a necessarily uncompleted city in contrast to an absolute reductionist truth. When exploring the possibilities, the city appears as an always-unfinished organism, as the Team X presented it. This incompleteness aims not to the future development planned by architects or politicians, but to the practice of the citizenship to build the space through their collective layering, as it happens in language. A city should be practiced, negotiated and built by the inhabitants, as well as its design.

In his humble scale, Antonio R. Montesinos works from both a critic and a fascination to urbanism. He presents the city plan as a game. This performative role play of the citzen-as-bottom-urbanist set up a critical question: are city planners using the city as a board game to develop their conceptions? When one thinks about how repetitive the solutions of the CIAM architects were, introducing very similar models over and over again everywhere without any regard to the citizens' desires or real needs, one arrives to the conclusion that the city simply was a virtual construction for them, it was the "ideal" grid to randomly distribute their constructions. Unfortunately, their influence is still very present and Team X's echoes are frequently not the ones that resonate in the streets. *Inopias* serves as a platform to open up a debate about the possibilities of a different city design, one made from citizens rehearsing and negotiating. In these exercises a bottom urbanism may appear, one that makes possible formulation spaces to the inhabitants of a place in order to develop the city under the sign of their desire. This could be a playful vivid language with its pointing conflicts and sedimentary solutions.

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[2] VERGNE, Philippe, preface fo GONZALEZ-FOERSTER, Dominique, *chronotopes & dioramas*, Dia Art Foundation, New York, 2010.