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Abitare. Approcci interdisciplinari e nuove prospettive

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“Architecture is too important to be left to architects”. A non-architectural view on dwelling

Giancarlo De Carlo’s aphorism, dating back to the 1960’s in connection to the rupture with the Modern Movement and with a rationalized approach to architecture, seems the underlying headway to this volume, which proposes an interweaving of different approaches to the idea of dwelling.

Architecture is probably not only a matter for architects anymore, as this collection of essays seems to demonstrate. More precisely, the conception and design of houses has become the crossroad of specialized contributions that diverge from the realm of architecture, so much so that they sometimes seem to lose their specific role of ‘molders of space’, especially when it comes to designing houses. Houses, indeed, represent the juncture where various fields of knowledge and several practices meet in a dialogue, up to the point of rediscussing their status, from the anthropological level to the more specifically methodological or procedural one.

Dwelling is a complicated matter, as the dweller himself is key to all the choices of the construction program. This means that building a

house is not just about technical, functional, or economic issues – as probably intended by the Modern Movement – because it involves the very essence of mankind, thus calling in question the many aspects that constitute the act of ‘dwelling in a space’. Dwelling can be conceived as making sense of a portion of space or as a possible condition of human existence; besides, there exist innumerable ways to dwell, that is, very peculiar modes with which human groups settle in specific places or through which individuals organize their lives and call a place ‘home’.

But “a home is not a house”, as the philosopher Tonino Griffero recalls (*A home is not a house. Abitare è “coltivare” atmosfere*, in S. Pedone/M. Tedeschini (eds), *Abitare* (Sensibilia 8-2014), Mimesis, Milan 2016, pp. 133-154), who not only intends that the idea of building a house by no means leads directly to shaping space into a home, being this a precise prerogative of the dweller himself, but also establishes a relationship with the place generating a variety of atmospheres, according to Griffero’s understanding. Dwelling therefore shifts from being a human act practiced in a certain space and equipped for sleeping – eating – family living purposes, to a state of mind or a psychological condition. The affective and emotional dimensions of living seem to take the wind over other rational criteria of approaching the architecture of houses, as if freedom and variety of approaches and interpretations took over the exactness and the internal coherence to which architecture should correspond. With such a broad perspective, the idea of dwelling also becomes the clashing ground between very different and sometimes contrasting visions, some extrovert and others introvert, such as that of globalization as an inescapable trend versus the creation of very specific identities: yet all these pieces concur to the definition of the contemporary living condition of man on earth.

The book (“Dwelling. Interdisciplinary approaches and new perspectives”) offers a multifaceted view on the meaning of dwelling and establishes a fruitful dialogue between disciplines, involving the philosophical discourse, the historical and ethno-anthropological investigation, geographic and aesthetic experience, literary and cinematographic interpretations. The different topics stressed by each contribution, and the multidisciplinary perspectives adopted by their authors, render the many ways in which dwelling may be conceived and interpreted today. Although, it must be said, the book and the research activity embedded in each essay precedes the pandemic. Despite the plurality of interpretations, all converge upon the definition of a contemporary way of intending ‘home’.

The introduction (Giovanni Battista Cocco) explores the idea that dwelling implies the translation of a state of mind into architectural terms. This topic is further developed, but in philosophical terms (Luciano Boi), analyzing the opposition between the idea that buildings for dwelling stem from a rational and

intellectual practice based on mathematics and geometry, or much less determined phenomenological experiences that employ the senses, inevitably drawing the discussion back to Heidegger’s seminal work, which recalls the establishment of a reverse ‘*consecutio*’ underlying the sequence *bauen / wohnen / denken*. But dwelling is not all about a static feeling: it can instead unfold while in movement, that is when walking, here intended as an aesthetic experience that is rooted in man’s ancestral attitude to move through space (Luca Vargiu). The discussion then shifts towards a different scale, specific to historians and geographers, who stress the significance of dwelling beyond the correlation man/architecture, reaching out to the connection established between humanity and planet Earth and the geographical perception of space embedded in man’s DNA (Rachele Piras, Marcello Tanca). Two very different ‘cases of study’ are met first with the analysis of rural living on the Italian island Sardinia in a salient moment of Italian history, receiving a true *bouleversement* with the unification of the country, which triggered a radical reorganization of social and economic hierarchies (Roberto Ibbà); then with the intimist and affective reading of the many typical ‘case cantoniere’, or ‘roadman’s houses’, spread in Italy along the main provincial roads, considered today an architectural heritage but also an iconic presence in the territory linked to a historical phase of the country (Sergio Contu). A seemingly off-road topic is then approached describing the experience of the “anime”, a Japanese ecological movement against exasperated urbanization and soil consumption, which – despite the reversed east-west perspective – renders a reaction that is today globally shared (Cristina Cardia). Two essays close the book, reporting how cinematography and literature describe the awareness developed by architects toward the dramatic fracture separating the creative intentions of their design work and the perception of the public (Mauro Pala). Starting from a game of comparisons between the Italian *chansonnier* Fabrizio De Andrè and the writer Italo Calvino, they recognize the opposition between what appears negative and is not, and what appears positive and is not, as an encouragement to always read between the lines to meet true values (Andrea Cannas).

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