

The long 1960s: Cartographies of hope

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Cities are dynamic. They have rhythms, movement and a temporal dimension. It is useless to think of the city as a container and establish an order. Listen to the everyday life because the city is its streets, rhythms, the life between spaces, between its inhabitants. Above all, everything in-between.

Throughout our history, the concepts of city and housing have given rise to countless discussions, theories and movements. Phenomena such as the uncontrolled growth of cities, the emergence of megalopolises and global cities, the current mobility of people, the constant human questioning in search of an explanation for the future of our existence, generate a void for speculation and new narratives. The future of cities or urban agglomerations is an issue that has generated various theories that have been mutating over the time.

Designers of the built environment have had an intermittent relationship with the social agency following the Social Utopias imagined in 18th century. Perhaps the first utopian socialist was an English lawyer, statesman and writer, but above all, a curious character, Thomas More (1478 – 1535). Today, we may know More best for his invention of a word – and for his development of an idea that would be exported around the world. This concept would shape books, philosophies and political movements as varied as Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Mahatma Gandhi's doctrine of passive resistance and the founding of the state of Pennsylvania. The idea was 'utopia' becoming well-known when he wrote about an imaginary socialist society in his book *Utopia* (More, 2016). Utopian Socialism appeared as is the first current of Modern Socialism thought by the work of Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, Étienne Cabet and Henry George. It is often described as visions and outlines for imaginary or futuristic ideal

societies. But the movement reached the climax with Marx and Engels who developed *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. They considered utopian thinkers were spreading idealism and naivety not based on a real material conditions of existing society.

These interests were re-aligned in the 1960s during the decades following the end of The II World War. Modern utopias often appear in catastrophic moments focused on the emerging human, social, cultural, political and spatial conditions. The war marked the history of mankind. In addition to the death of millions and the disappearance of entire cities, it was a moment that triggered the emergence of distinct but interconnected intellectual movements and new trends within architecture and urbanism such as the search for solutions, technological developments and socio-political relations of architecture with other disciplines.

It represented a period of significant research and creativity for architecture. Nowadays, in the dissolution of disciplines and competencies, thinking from the permanence becomes absolutely inoperative. At a time like the present, when everything changes, it seems appropriate to review those architectures that in the mid-sixties renounced everything that had sustained their prestige. The New Thinking turned architecture into a medium.

With the architects' focus on the construction of complete cities, and as a consequence of the gap between the social problems and the response of architecture and urbanism, emerged movements to rethink the city, the processes that take place in it and the way in which these should be conceived and designed.

In 1961, the most well-known group Archigram was founded in London. Its members were young architects (Warren Chalk, Peter Cook, Dennis Crompton, David Greene, Ron Herron and Michael Webb) who advocated the intensive use of high-tech to solve the habitability problems faced by the United Kingdom -and the whole world- in those years. They were looking for new and utopian ways out, developing unrealistic projects to respond to the neo-hippy movements of the 1960s. At the end of the 1950s there was a phenomenon of massive urbanization worldwide, so influenced in part by Buckminster Fuller's studies they designed its first major project, the Plug-in-City, a mega-structure made up of a large frame into which rooms could be fitted as individual units. *"A new generation of architecture must arises with forms and spaces which seems to reject the precepts of 'Modern' yet in fact retains those precepts. We have chosen to bypass the decaying Bauhaus image which is an insult to functionalism. You can roll*

out steel – any length. You can blow up a balloon – any size. You can mould plastic – any shape. Blokes that built the Forth Bridge – they didn't worry.” (Greene, 1961)

From Budapest but settled in Paris as an architect, Yona Friedman developed most of his work in parallel with Archigram linked to the manifesto *Mobile Architecture* with his first major project *Ville Spatiale*: “*We all know how cities are they can eventually, become different*” (Friedman, 2015). Superimposing on its existing environment the city was built with a large-scale architecture from which the columns and supports that hold the modules that make up the city emerge. A utopian city that dreamed of making huge urban environments, modular, mobile and that would host all the services that a city needs.

Another of the great names of the Utopian Movement is Constant, born in Amsterdam in 1920, who created his first project *New Babylon* between the late 1950s and the 1970s, as a counterpoint to the pop aesthetic of Archigram's projects. Constant proposed a city based on a large elevated structure, supported by enormous columns that rise up from solid ground or from the water. The structure supports a large network of districts designed in different levels to shape the utopian dream of an amorphous city in constantly growing, without a beginning, without an end.

Although Archigram were eschewed a directly political stance, their vision of a dynamic architecture inflecting contemporary culture influenced other groups, including those who used Archigram's system to imagine a socially and politically engaged architecture. One such group was Archizoom, whose name was a direct reference to Archigram's fourth fanzine issue entitled, ZOOM! Amazing Archigram. Founded in Florence in 1966 by Dario Bartolini and Lucia Bartoloni they developed a great production in the fields of design, architecture and large-scale urban planning. They invented a new term early-appeared in the Installation Manifesto, an exhibition held at Jolly2, in Pistoia: “*Superarchitettura is the architecture of superproduction, superconsumption, superinduction to consume, the supermarket, the superman, super gas*” (Bartolini, 1966). In Italian design, the Radical period took place in the late 1960s, with a shift in style among the avant-garde. The most-known project for this movement was the *No-Stop-City*, designed in 1970 by Archizoom.

A related group, also based in Florence and formed in the same year by Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, was Superstudio. They criticized mainstream architecture for ignoring and aggravating environmental and social problems. It was a major part of the Radical Architecture of the late 1960s. In 1969, they presented one of their most famous conceptual architecture works –

Continuous Monument: An Architectural Model for Total Urbanization designing an anti-architectural proposal used grid systems as a way to mediate space. Superstudio aimed for social change through architecture.

By the second half of the 1970s, the Radical movement dissolved but had an influence on Studio Alchimia and the Memphis group. In the beginning of the 1980s continuing on the ideas of the Anti-design movement, Ettore Sottsass gathered a group of young Milanese architects and designers. They wanted to pursue an ironic approach to design in which surface decoration was paramount. The group drew inspiration from Art Deco, Pop Art and 50s kitsch. The designers adopted the name Memphis after the Bob Dylan's song *Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again* that played during one of their meetings. They had no official manifesto, and as the design critic and Sottsass's wife Barbara Radice wrote: "*The roots, thrust and acceleration of Memphis are eminently anti-ideological*" (Radice, 1985)

The influence of these radical groups is seen in the change of conceiving architecture not as a static building but as a form of cultural criticism and finally as a social and political practice. However, we lack the capacity to articulate what forms of social impact are really within the scope of the architect. It is something more humanistic. In the *Urban Revolution* Lefebvre postulated that it is not the function of the architect to define a new conception of life, but that it is this new conception that should allow the architect to build his work. Then it will serve as a social condenser not as the capitalist relations of now, but of new relations always under construction.

In the 1970s, the oil crisis affected the way architects thought and planned around the world. Now terms such as crisis, recession, homelessness, utopia reappear in the urban imaginary and all these proposals are re-studied and reinvented in search of new solutions.

Surely it will be necessary to forget the individualism from which the Archistar System bombards us and return to thinking in collective and social terms, like those that took place during the 1960s Architectural Utopias.

From utopías to heterotopies and the social craft.

The 1960s had an intellectual effervescence of the so-called *Trente Glorieuses*, the "thirty glorious ones" in France. A period of three decades of industrial, technological and intellectual development marked by the end of the II World War in 1945, the implementation of the Marshall Plan, ending with the Oil Crisis

in 1973. The intellectuals of that time became involved in debates concerning the social and political craft transformation and development of society.

In the midst of such effervescence, space became the central and fundamental concept of transformation, studied from different perspectives. There were ones who defined space by an emotional and perceptual way such as the Phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) on the one hand, the space through the Marxist ideology of Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 2016) or the Situationalism of Guy Debord (McDonough, 2004). On the other hand, others who treated the space as conceptions of power, rights and possibilities formulated in different ways by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze or Félix Guattari. Therefore, space is not just a product but a means to establish and expand common practices.

What kinds of subjectivities might develop when we cross the thresholds that separate alienated life from other spaces? This is characterized by the loss of identity, this means that the individual suppresses his personality and then becomes malleable to what the external world indicates and proposes. When we open the threshold between hopelessness and hope, powerlessness and power, change is in our own hands and spirits.

When we face these spatial experiences, we are modifying in a certain time and space this precarious perspective of the city. As Michel Foucault published in *Des Espaces Autres* (Foucault, 1967) we talk about heterotopias. A specific type of space, which has within it powers, forces, ideas, regularities or discontinuities. Other Spaces that can be classified according to the time or place to which they belong and they open up the possibility of creating new spaces with their own logic. Heterotopias are utopias in action, incomplete, partial, unfinished. But unlike utopias, they are not idyllic worlds that claim to exist outside the system of which they seek to emancipate themselves. They emerge in the liminal spaces, places that are created in the cracks of the system. Heterotopias are offered to us as those spaces of resistance, parentheses in the system whose objective is collective experimentation with new ways of being and living under non-hegemonic conditions. Resistance, experimentation, reinvention spaces of Other Spaces. In heterotopias a complicated job is done: creating networks of meanings and connections between people, articulating a sense of community and identity that paves the way for collective action. The transformative capacity of heterotopias does not rest solely on their mental dimension but mainly on the emotional and practical aspects that allow connecting the ability to imagine a better world with the spaces and actions that make it possible. Therefore, if hope

and transformative action must walk hand in hand, why don't we begin to think about heterotopies within the academic context? Establishing heterotopias within the academic world means going beyond theorizing mental phrases or happy ideas on paper but putting a model of the world in black on white for others to grasp in this model and put it into practice. Perhaps it is time to migrate from certain certainties. The construction of social space is a collective movement that is always unfinished, a terrain of invention for and against our dreams. Remembering this throws us into the adventure of taking the living movement of the city and giving an account, in our daily way of living it, of other paths that lead us to a place closer to the care of life. We need to support them. Follow them. Spread them as the utopian architectures movements.

In the book *Invisible Cities*, Calvino defines the moment nowadays we live in our cities where the power to change exists if we, as citizens, not be conformed with what is already imposed. *"The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."* (Calvino, 1972)

Erica Soler Casanovas, Oktober 2020

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Èrica Soler Casanovas was born in Spain, 1993. She was graduated from Elisava University School of Design, in 2017. Holding a Master's degree program with the thesis titled „Nobody told me about that this space existed and ongoing“. Participated in European projects of design and social transformation. Specifically interested in decoding the spatial practice discourse for new tools to achieve a social change through design. Always interested in the most powerful impact design can have on ethical, social and political areas. Part designer, part researcher, part writer, and above all human, working on projects for cultural institutions, creative companies and schools between Barcelona and Berlin.

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