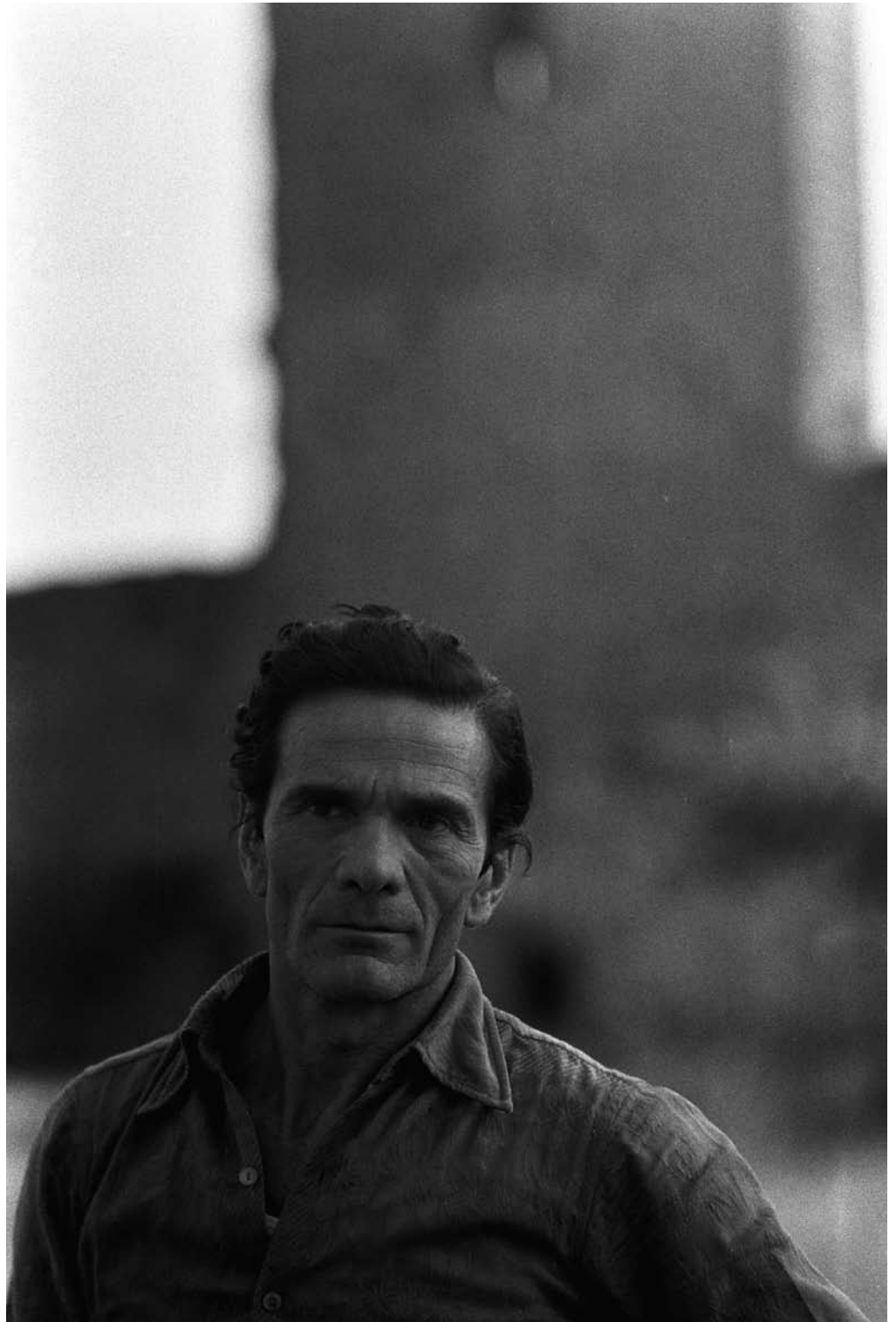


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Pier Paolo Pasolini a Torre di Chia, 1974
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ELEMENTAL

Da Quinta Monroy a Conjunto abitacional Violeta Parra

Francesca Privitera

Quinta Monroy è il nome dell'agglomerato abusivo, composto da 97 famiglie, che si sviluppò a partire dagli anni '60 nel centro di Iquique, una città nel deserto di Atacama nel nord del Cile.

Alla fine del 2001 il governo incarica Elemental, guidato dall'architetto Alejandro Aravena, di pianificare un insediamento destinato alle famiglie della Quinta Monroy.

Il progetto è sviluppato nell'ambito del programma *Vivienda Social Dinámica sin Deuda*, destinato alle fasce più povere della popolazione. Il programma prevede una spesa di 7500 dollari per unità abitativa compresi l'acquisto del terreno e le opere di urbanizzazione primaria. Tale cifra permette di realizzare circa 30 mq. per abitazione in terreni con valore di mercato quasi nullo. La conseguenza è l'allontanamento delle residenze sociali dai centri cittadini, l'affollamento, l'abbassamento della qualità architettonica e urbana il degrado fisico e sociale degli insediamenti.

La proposta di Aravena si basa sull'inversione di tali presupposti. Le famiglie sono re-insediate sullo stesso terreno occupato illegalmente per circa trent'anni. Il disegno urbano è composto da isolati residenziali sviluppati intorno a corti aperte comuni. È previsto il coinvolgimento attivo dei futuri abitanti attraverso laboratori di progettazione partecipata e interventi in autocostruzione. Le abitazioni di circa 36 mq. sono concepite come *mezza casa* da completare successivamente.

Nel 2004 sono consegnate agli abitanti della Quinta Monroy le chiavi delle loro abitazioni. L'insediamento, nel giorno dell'inaugurazione, appare in costruzione. La struttura realizzata non è la

soluzione finale, è un'opera aperta, promessa di spazio e di vita, sospesa tra presente e futuro, tra la sostanza del costruito e l'incertezza di quello che verrà. La parte "consegnata" alle famiglie, dalla composizione *elementare*, nel senso etimologico del termine, realizzata con il supporto della prefabbricazione, costituisce il palinsesto sul quale avverrà l'accrescimento del complesso insediativo. Essa determina l'orientamento per i futuri sviluppi delle abitazioni realizzati dagli abitanti in autocostruzione. La standardizzazione integrata con forme urbane spontanee e con i laboratori partecipativi di progettazione darà origine ad una forma urbana condivisa dalla comunità, non sovrimposta a priori ma frutto dell'integrazione feconda tra iniziativa pubblica e cittadini.

L'omologazione degli elementi industriali rigenerati dall'azione creativa umana dell'autocostruzione, invece che generare monotonia e straniamento costituiranno, come nelle sperimentazioni americane di Walter Gropius sulle *case in serie aumentabili*¹, il presupposto di un'etica comunitaria e di una possibile dimensione umana dell'industria. L'utilizzo della prefabbricazione nel progetto per la Quinta Monroy non determina rigidi schemi abitativi ma costituisce la regola necessaria sulla quale innescare la vitale trasgressione dell'autocostruzione, dando origine ad un modello di accrescimento esemplare per le successive sperimentazioni che prevedono l'integrazione di interventi abitativi informali.

Gli ampliamenti, che riflettono le esigenze individuali delle famiglie, colmano i vuoti di un *edificio poroso*² incidendo sia sull'immagine architettonica delle singole residenze sia su quella spaziale

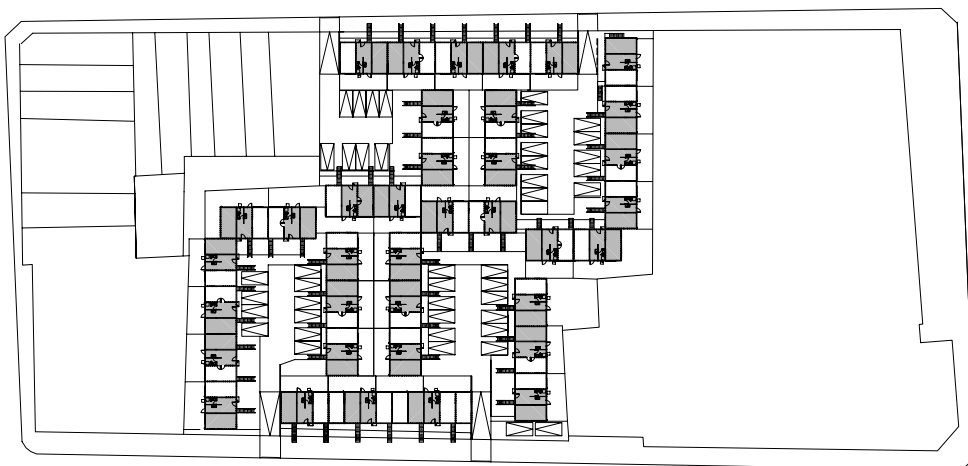


Quinta Monroy
Iquique
Chile
2003-2004

Progetto:
ELEMENTAL
Alejandro Aravena
Andrés Iacobelli
Alfonso Montero
Tomas Cortese
Emilio de la Cerda

Committente:
Chile Barrio program,
Chilean Ministry of Housing
and Urban Development

Foto:
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© Takuto Sando
© Cristobal Palma



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Pagine precedenti:

1

Dicembre 2004. Vista del complesso residenziale "consegnato" agli abitanti. L'ossatura sulla quale avverranno gli ampliamenti autonomi da parte di ogni famiglia

foto © Tadeuz Jalocha

2

Pianta del primo piano. La configurazione di insieme con isolati aperti su corti comuni garantisce il miglior utilizzo del suolo coniugando flessibilità e regolarità

3

Giugno 2006. Vista delle residenze dopo gli interventi di autocostruzione

foto © Cristobal Palma

4 - 5

Modello assonometrico. La struttura realizzata garantisce al suo interno gli ampliamenti delle abitazioni da 36 mq. fino a 72 mq. coniugando ordine e variazione



3



4





6

6
Dicembre 2004. Lo spazio delle corti comuni
foto © Tadeuz Jalocha

7
Giugno 2006. Gli interventi di autocostruzione
definiscono in modo sinergico l'immagine
architettonica di ogni singola residenza e
quella spaziale delle corti
foto © Takuto Sando

8
Vista dell'accampamento abusivo Quinta
Monroy al centro della città di Iquique

9
Vista del complesso residenziale Quinta Monroy
re-insediato sullo stesso terreno. Le corti di
forma circa quadrata non sono solo spazio di
circolazione bensì spazio pubblico e di relazione



8



9



10

10
Dicembre 2004. Con il finanziamento pubblico sono realizzate tutte le parti che difficilmente le famiglie avrebbero potuto realizzare da sole
foto © Tadeuz Jalocho



11

11
Giugno 2006. L'interno di una residenza completata in autonomia dai suoi abitanti
foto © Cristobal Palma



delle corti comuni, luoghi d'interazione tra dimensione individuale e collettiva. Le *variabili di flessibilità*, come le chiama Gregory Bateson³, previste all'interno dell'insediamento di Iquique sono tali da permettere, come in un organismo biologico sano, la crescita del sistema evitandone il collasso, a differenza di quanto succede nelle altre periferie sudamericane, nelle quali l'autocostruzione provoca un accrescimento urbano patologico tendente alla saturazione dello spazio. Al contrario a Iquique, la costruzione individuale diventa costruzione collettiva di una riscattata identità urbana e sociale,

lo spazio che ne deriva rispecchia senza mistificazione la società che lo realizza richiamando alla memoria quel principio etico di lealtà dell'architettura invocato da Ruskin oggi spesso dimenticato. Il progetto di Elemental non è solo la risposta immediata ad un problema abitativo, il suo DNA è urbano, è costruzione di valori condivisi, libertà, uguaglianza, democrazia. Dalla radice della Quinta Monroy, in un tempo contratto tra oggi e domani germina il *senso della città*, sigillato dalla dedica del complesso residenziale all'intellettuale e artista che ha dato voce ai diritti del popolo cileño e

che ne ha ricostruito l'identità attraverso la ricerca delle radici più profonde. Da questo momento la *Quinta Monroy* sarà conosciuta come *Conjunto habitacional Violeta Parra*.

¹ Cfr. G. C. Argan, *L'architettura di Gropius in Inghilterra e in America*, in Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Torino, 1988.

² Cfr. A. Aravena, A. Iacobelli, *Elemental: manual de vivienda incremental y diseño participativo*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2012

³ Cfr. G. Bateson, *Ecology and Flexibility in Urban Civilization*, in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chandler Publishing Company, 1972

The atmosphere of the “descent to the sea”, with its spare assortment of utensils on the sand, the lightness which derives from rigorous work, from memory, from knowing how to do well with little resources, seems to migrate – in an era characterised by doing too much, and badly – from Venice’s Lagoon to the Alentejo. Enchantment and disenchantment on a strip of land wedged between the estuary of river Sado and the ocean, a natural park where new constructions are apparently not allowed. Four fishermen’s cabins with the traditional straw roofs – two built with bricks and two with wood and reeds – become the “CASAS” of COMPORTA, through the restoration-transformation by the Mateus brothers. The idea of the project, the dialectic criteria of the issues pertinent to re-usage, is already a part of the interpretation of the four buildings: disposed in a semi-circle in such a way as to form a sandy courtyard open on the sea, they are intended as the various rooms of a single dwelling [for inhabiting the summer]. Their division/distinction, caused perhaps by the analytic attribution of destinations – three of them, in fact, become rooms – is exhibited yet at the same time recomposed by wooden boardwalks which spread over the scorching sand, almost as if stressing the unifying morphology of the courtyard. All the openings that face the courtyard become doors, expressing the role of IMPLUVIUM, which is defined by a virtual in-existent portico.

If the restoration of the two brick houses – a bed and a bathroom in each – consists in a thermal adjustment through the doubling of the walls, transfigured by the priceless white plaster which gives back the oceanic light, the adaptation of the two wooden houses, a more complex endeavour, seems to be at the origin of the idea of the project itself. The two wooden houses/rooms were disassembled and reassembled following a careful interpretation of old local construction techniques, which result in a wooden structure that is the same both on the interior and the exterior, thus becoming space and decoration at the same time. The reeds, which are placed alternately and supported by horizontal wooden strips, characterise the elegant texture of all the walls. But the new interpretation of the place has its vertex in the house/room of the last cabin: it is the sand, which continued in the interior, constitutes the flooring. Thus walking barefoot on the beach continues inside the cabin, on the sand which also houses comfortable sofas draped in white cloths.

Maybe it is the archetypal form of the buildings, an air both ancestral and contemporary at the same time – together with evocations of illuminist theorems on the cabin as ordinary model – that gives the four structures such a surprising depth. In building two CABANAS not far from there, the Mateus’ seem to want to continue the precious landscape of the Reserva Natural do Estuário do Sado. A landscape of water and stilts: a lagoon/estuary that the ocean tides constantly mutate, alternating to the splendour of the blues of sky and water the sandy grey of the sea-beds of intricate and invisible canals from which rises a forest of stilts. A world of wood for walking on water, for mooring small vessels and inhabited by cabins and fishermen.

Two small parallelepipeds built with recycled wooden planks disposed vertically. The two structures acquire sureness in the landscape declining their own individuality through almost invisible gestures: a misalignment between the two which at the same time underlines the affinity and diversity of the geometry of the roofs, determined by the necessary inclinations for the disposal of rain water. It is once again the case of a functional hendiadys: the two small rooms – measuring around 10 sqm each – are in fact complementary, a cabin contains the bed and the services which, surprisingly, also constitute the entrance and can be opened towards the landscape; the second cabin is devoted to the day activities. Wooden planks placed on the beach unite the temporal dimensions – day and night – while a boardwalk communicates it with an old jetty, the true border between land and water. The material unity (old wood) and the modality of its realisation – the sincerity of the structure characterises both the interior and exterior spaces – gives the whole a chromatic unity which surprisingly blends in with the almost invisible horizon.

I have build a castle on the sea, of 3,66 x 3,66 meters, *for my wife*, said LC about his well-known Cabanon, pre-fabricated in Corsica and carried by ship to Cap Martin, not far from the house of his friends Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici. In Roquebrune, on a path that almost reached the sea where everything was small: the door, the stairway and the access to the cabin through the vineyards. Only the site was grand: a splendid bay with steep cliffs.

Translation by Luis Gatt

Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo

Dream house by Alberto Pireddu

(page 44)



In 1942, Ernesto Nathan Rogers relies on *Confessions of an anonymous* among the pages of “Domus” the description of his dream house, a beautiful house, “warm” and worthy dwelling place of human life:

This is my ideal home: away from you, enough for singing out of tune and being not heard, yet so close so I can greet you by waving hands and you could answer me.

It grows from the ground like a plant and is yet sovereign of the nature, assertive man trace. A piece of land at the bottom and a piece of sky at the top: among countless flowers, someone perfumes just for me and, in the night, a square of stars – among the infinite – lights up only for me.

My house changes face at the turn of the seasons; changes fronds rejuvenating itself every spring, in summer it has the coolness of the woods; colored in autumn, wrapped by the winter snow, underneath, my family germinates waiting for the sun. Let the walls be limits to the outside world, not obstacles: may they open all outside, may they close, half-close: eyes with eyelids and eyelashes or, perhaps, pores that could breathe the universe and bleed harmful moods.

My house is a body, as my body, holder of sorrows and joys, next to your border.

In penetrable bodies¹.

Rogers seems to materialize his dream not far from Noto, Sicily, in a small holiday house designed by Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo².

Here, among the almond and olive trees in a gentle slope towards the sea, two volumes functionally and formally distinct, interpenetrate under the same roof: the “manor house”, with its solid structure of reinforced concrete, and the iron body of the “guest’s residence”.

Equipped with a mechanism that determines movement on metal rails, animates the life of the house, protecting it during the winter and allowing it to unfold for the arrival of spring when, with the first sun, the walls finally open to illuminate the interior. In the changing size loggia, the large living room and the manor bedroom meet the *enfilade* of the guest’s accoutrements.

The lodge is a rarefied space, a room facing the sea, suspended on a metal grid. The building, in fact - by seeking a continuity of quotas with some existing buildings and trying to reach the sea horizon, over the treetops - does not touch the ground, but stands on concrete beams firmly anchored to the hill, while a steel structure supports the metal cage of the sliding volume and its relative staircase. And yet the house has “its own roots”³, encloses a private world taken away from indiscreet glances, so that no one can reveal the secret.

The project summarizes some key points of the poetry of Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo. Among them, it calls into question the Vitruvian *firmitas* through movement, the contraction and expansion of the architectural body and the idea that this may not last forever, but endowed with an “own life, that at a certain point turns off”⁴, a belief that seems to find echo in the words of Rogers “I do not ask my house to be eternal, but enclosed like an embrace”⁵. The same materials used denounce the acceptance of an impossible eternity – the concrete, which is now produced depending on the expected lifetime for a building, gas concrete of the partitions, the okumè of the ventilated walls – as well as the mechanical apparatus intended for an inevitable technological obsolescence.

‘Poor’ or at least ‘ordinary’ materials, commercially available and sometimes reminiscent of an industrial world, which architect experiments on numerous occasions, by placing them together poetically. It happens, for example, in the control tower in Marina di Ragusa⁶, in which a glass box is suspended on two opaque volumes externally defined by a coating of wooden planks and zinc-titanium panels; in the Scoglitti holiday house⁷ whose body of reinforced concrete confuses its own imperfections with those of the surrounding abusive landscape while portions of reinforcement not included in the cast support containers of the suspended beds; in the family house in Ragusa⁸, where selecting the steel for the platform and outside stairs reveals the wish to make addition parts recognizable compared to the work of removal on the main volume and reuse of the ruins to create a new, direct, relationship with the garden.

Then, the deep care for human life and transformations that it produces in architecture that, in a continuous changing of rules, cannot reach a final arrangement. This is, after all, the big idea behind the editorial project of the book *Loose Ends*, recently published, with its endlessly decomposable storyline and his papers impossible to be ordered, in a total abolition of all code structure.

The book itself is an architecture of “measures, rules, notes, wishes, requests ...”⁹, a house of cards, blank or pre-written, never equal to itself. Moreover, while quoting Gaston Bachelard, the dream house may not be definitive, because if it were so, the soul could not “find his vast life”¹⁰:

Perhaps it is good to keep a reserve of dreams towards a house that we will live later, later and later, so much later that we will not have time to realize it¹¹.

Translation by Arba Baxhaku

¹ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *Confessioni di un anonimo del XX secolo*. 9° *La casa dell'Anonimo*, in “Domus” n. 176, agosto 1942, p. 333.

² Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, Lars Müller Publishers, 2014, FCN.2009.

³ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *cit*.

⁴ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Sulla lingua*, in *donn'Architettura*, by Maria Grazia Echeli, Mina Tamborrino, Milano, FrancoAngeli 2014, p. 269.

⁵ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *cit*.

⁶ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., PMR2.2008.

⁷ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., GNS.2002.

⁸ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., SPR.2001.

⁹ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Sul processo*, in Id., *Loose Ends*, cit.

¹⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *La poetica dello spazio*, Bari, Edizioni Dedalo 2006, pp. 87-88.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

ELEMENTAL

From Quinta Monroy to Conjunto habitacional Violeta Parra
by Francesca Privitera

(page 52)



Quinta Monroy is the name of an unauthorised settlement by 97 families, which grew up in the 1960s in the centre of Iquique, a town in the desert of Atacama in northern Chile. In late 2001 the government tasked the practice Elemental, led by the architect Alejandro Aravena, with planning a settlement for the families of *Quinta Monroy*.

This project was developed in the context of the programme *Vivienda Social Dinámica sin Deuda*, addressed to the poorest sectors of the population. The programme calls for spending 7500 US dollars for each residential unit, including purchase of land and basic infrastructures. An amount sufficient for setting up about 30 square metres per dwelling on land having near-zero market value. This has brought about the flight of social residence from town centres, overcrowding, lowering of architectural and urban quality and physical and social degradation of settlements.

Aravena's proposal is based on reversing these premises. Families are relocated onto the same land they have been illegally occupying for some thirty years. The layout consists of residential blocks set up around common, open courts. Future inhabitants are supposed to be actively involved through shared planning workshops and self-building. The dwellings, measuring about 36 square metres each, are intended to be *half-houses*, awaiting future completion.

In 2004, residents of *Quinta Monroy* received the keys to their homes. On the day it was inaugurated, the settlement was still under construction. The structure was not a finished solution, but an *open worksite*, a promise of space and life, suspended between the present and the future, between the substance of what had been built and uncertainty about what was to come. The part handed over to the families, of an *elementary* – in an etymological sense – composition, made using prefabrication, was the palimpsest upon which the settlement was to grow. It established the orientation for future developments of homes self-built by their inhabitants. Standardisation integrated with spontaneous urban forms and with participated planning workshops will give rise to an urban form shared by the community, not imposed from above but the outcome of fertile integration between public initiative and citizens.

Standardisation of industrial elements regenerated by the creative human element of self-building, instead of generating monotony and alienation will lay – as in Walter Gropius' American experimentation with *serial incremental houses*¹ – the foundations for community ethics and a possible human dimension to industry. Use of prefabrication in the *Quinta Monroy* project does not set down strict residential patterns, but provides the necessary rules on which to graft the vital transgression of self-building, giving rise to a model for expansion which will set the example for later experimentation calling for integration of informal residential interventions.

Extensions, which reflect the individual needs of families, fill in the gaps of a *porous building*² and affect both the architectural image of each residence and the spatial image of shared courts, areas of interaction between the individual and the collective dimension.

As in a healthy biological organism, flexibility variables – as Gregory Bateson calls them³ – provided for within the settlement of Iquique allow growth of the system, preventing it from collapsing, unlike what happens in other South American outskirts, where self-building brings about a pathological urban growth which tends to saturate available space. On the contrary, in Iquique, individual building becomes collective construction of a redeemed urban and social identity, and the space arising from it mirrors the society which makes it and avoids any mystification, bringing back to mind the ethical principle of *obedience, invoked by Ruskin and so often forgotten today.

The project of Elemental is not just the immediate answer to a housing problem. Its DNA is urban, it is the construction of shared values, liberty, equality, democracy. From the root of *Quinta Monroy*, in a time negotiated between today and tomorrow, there springs forth the *sense of the city*, sealed by the dedication of the residential complex to the intellectual and artist who gave

voice to the rights of the people of Chile and who helped to understand their identity through a quest for their deepest roots.

From then on, *Quinta Monroy* will be known as *Conjunto habitacional Violeta Parra*.

¹ Cfr. G. C. Argan, «L'architettura di Gropius in Inghilterra e in America», in *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus*, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Turin, 1988.

² Cfr. A. Aravena, A. Iacobelli, *Elemental: manual de vivienda incremental y diseño participativo*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2012

³ Cfr. G. Bateson, «Ecology and Flexibility in Urban Civilization», in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chandler Publishing Company, 1972.

Volpe+Sakasegawa

Under the volcano. An Italian house in Southern Japan
by Andrea Volpe

(page 60)



"Then, against the will of the captain and of his sailors, we reached Japan. Neither the devil nor his ministers could have stopped us. Finally Almighty God led us to these lands which we desperately wanted to reach on the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in August 1549.

*Without any possibility to enter any other port, we went ashore in Kagoshima: the homeland of Paulo de Santa Fé, where we were welcomed, as much by his relatives as by everyone else, with great love and affection."*¹

Thus, Saint Francis Xavier came ashore in one of the most important cities of southern Japan, seven years after the "discovery" of the Land of the Rising Sun reported by Portuguese adventurers who had fortuitously reached Tanegashima, the main island in the Osumi archipelago. From that moment, Kagoshima became the main entry-point for any westerner willing to explore the mysterious land of *Zipangu*, the mythical country whose existence was first introduced to Europeans by Marco Polo's well known travel chronicle.

Consequently this region of Kyushu, the southernmost of the four primary islands forming the *Tennō's* empire, saw for almost a century both the militant proselytism of the Society of Jesus and the growing profit of the Portuguese arquebus trade. It was from Kagoshima, too, where Bernardo, the Japanese disciple of Francis Xavier, came. Historians believe Bernardo to be the first Japanese to set foot in Europe, in 1553 on his way to Rome, where he arrived two years later to meet Ignatius of Loyola and supposedly Pope Marcellus II.² Kagoshima, facing the broad, deep bay of Kinko, is dominated by the imposing profile of one of Japan's most active volcanoes, Sakurajima, which frequently covered the city with its black dust. The ancient capital of the Satsuma Domain has recovered only recently its historical links with the Mediterranean, having become the first Japanese city to forge a cultural relationship with an Italian city since 1960. The bay and the hyperactive volcano, endlessly spreading black powders over the city, are the strongest features of Kagoshima's landscape and link it to Naples, its sister city.

Both are southern towns, both possessing a similar morphology, these two cities seem to share also the temper of their inhabitants. Kagoshima people are flamboyant indeed and quite different from the cold elegance of Tokyo's or Kyoto's sophisticated residents. There exists a sort of Kyushu version of southern hospitality one can find in other Japanese port towns like Nagasaki or Fukuoka, for example, or maybe it would be better to say, which one can find in every other southern place in the world.

Located just one hour away by bullet train from Fukuoka, the city where Aldo Rossi built his notorious Palazzo, Kagoshima offered us the chance to build a small architectural exercise in Take. In this fast-developing central neighborhood property prices are constantly rising because of its proximity to both the new *Shinkansen* railway station and to the main avenue of the town (named *Napoli-dori*). As such, Sanyo House Company asked us to design a model house especially tailored for this burgeoning area and conceived like a sort of manifesto of the Italian architectural identity. This was no easy task, though, since the technology we were obliged to use was local and had to be standardized and cheap, matching the kinds generally used by the contractor themselves; namely, a traditional anti-seismic wood structure walled with wood sandwich panels, a combination offering a thickness of only ten centimeters. Moreover no Mediterranean spatial typologies like patios or courtyards could be included in the design layout, in order to maximise the high value of the ground. Last but not least a pitched roof was considered mandatory so that the volcanic black rain could be easily washed away.

To solve this conundrum, we therefore chose a dialectical approach, in an at-

