



LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS
MODOS DE HABITAR

ABADA EDITORES

LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS MODOS DE HABITAR

II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL CULTURA Y CIUDAD
GRANADA, 23-25 ENERO 2019



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La Casa. Espacios domésticos, modos de habitar
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Presentación	XIX
Juan Calatrava	

BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 1

Arquitecturas de la casa: el espacio doméstico a través de la historia

Lo público y lo privado en la forma urbis de Santiago 1910. El espacio doméstico en el Canon Republicano	22
Josep Parcerisa Bundó, José Rosas Vera	
La Alhambra habitada. Experiencias del paisaje desde el espacio arquitectónico..	37
Marta Rodríguez Iturriaga	
Housing and Children: Architectural Models from the Modern Movement	48
Alexandra Alegre	
Högná Sigurðardóttir. La misteriosa marca indeleble del origen	59
Julio Barreno Gutiérrez	
Las casillas de peones camineros y su implantación en la costa del sudeste de España	73
Antonio Burgos Núñez, Juan Carlos Olmo García, Francisco José García Castillo	
El <i>palazzo all'italiana</i>, de la casa del príncipe al principio urbano	82
Michele Giovanni Caja, Maria Pompeiana Iarossi	
The City and the House: Going Back to the Future	95
Antonio Alberto Clemente	
Traditional Urban Housing at Alentejo's "Marble Area"	104
Ana Costa Rosado	
La consolidación del cuarto de baño en las viviendas de la ciudad de São Paulo, Brasil	117
Clarissa de Almeida Paulillo, Tatiana Sakurai	
La cama <i>amueblada</i>: del objeto a la estancia	126
María de Miguel Pastor, Carla Sentieri Omarrementería	

The Spaces, the People and the Ways of Being at Home in the North of Portugal in the 19th Century	136
Alexandra Esteves	
Casa de John Soane en Londres (1792-1827). Luz, iluminación y patrimonio	143
Rosalía Fenutría Aumesquet, José Joaquín Parra Bañón	
Rita Fernández Queimadelos. Los proyectos de viviendas realizados en la DGRD (1943-1946)	154
Paula M. Fernández-Gago Longueira, Eduardo A. Caridad Yáñez	
Arqueología urbana en Barcelona: aproximación a los espacios domésticos entre los siglos IV-VI	167
Francesc Xavier Florensa Puchol	
Memoria e identidad: el espacio de almacenaje en el imaginario doméstico	178
Marta García Carbonero	
Between Doorkeeper Apartments and Housemaid Rooms: Ways of Living in a Changing Lisbon	188
María Assunção Gato, Filipa Ramalhete	
La casa popular de zaguán, patio y corral. Habitabilidad y protección para el siglo XXI	196
Vidal Gómez Martínez, Blanca del Espino Hidalgo, María Teresa Pérez Cano	
Casa en transformación: cocina y tecnología en el siglo XX en Cuenca (Ecuador)	206
María Augusta Hermida, María José Cañar, Guillermo Mauricio Torres	
Granada: la arquitectura doméstica de la ciudad cristiana	218
Carlos Jerez Mir	
Consideraciones históricas sobre la casa tradicional gallega y otras construcciones adjetivas	230
Francisco Xabier Louzao Martínez	
Modern, Rationalist and Mediterranean: Residential Architecture during the Italian Colonization in Libya	236
Andrea Maglio	
El confort en la vivienda canaria: de la arquitectura tradicional a los EECN	250
Eduardo Martín del Toro	
Instalaciones de la casa: el espacio doméstico en el siglo XX en España a través de la tecnología	261
César Martín-Gómez, José Manuel Pozo Municio	
El diedro casa ciudad en la arquitectura nobiliaria de Sevilla: la plaza del Duque	272
Pedro Mena Vega	
Un primer acercamiento a la <i>Quinta Nova da Assunção</i> en Sintra	282
Iván Moure Pazos	

The Construction of “Minho’s” Domestic Space in Portugal’s 18th Century.....	294
Flávia Oliveira	
Arquitectura moderna en la ciudad histórica. Adalberto Libera y la casa Nicoletti (Roma 1932).....	302
Carlos Plaza	
Casa Bellia en Turín: nuevos espacios para la burguesía.....	315
Alice Pozzati	
Live-Work Architecture. Learning from Peripheral Neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro.....	327
Ana Slade	
The Relationship Between Inhabitants and Vegetation in the Houses of Maceió in the 19th.....	339
Tharcila Maria Soares Leão, Josemary Omena Passos Ferrare, Veronica Robalinho Cavalcanti	
The Home and the World: Domestic Dynamics of the Postwar American Suburban House.....	350
Luísa Sol	
El hogar de Telva. Miradas femeninas al interior doméstico español 1963-1975.....	360
Jorge Tárrago Mingo, Cristina Sunga Zamora	
La casa jesuita en Granada: el Colegio de San Pablo.....	371
María del Carmen Vílchez Lara, Jorge Gabriel Molinero Sánchez	
La habitación en la arquitectura agraria granadina.....	381
Eduardo Zurita Povedano	

BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 2

El proyecto doméstico como núcleo de la modernidad: casa singular y vivienda colectiva, del Movimiento Moderno al siglo XXI

Habitar el arte: la casa del coleccionista como modelo experimental de espacio doméstico.....	394
Ángeles Layuno	
Domesticidad Mediterránea vs. Modernidad americana de Posguerra. Sert y Rudofsky.....	411
Mar Loren-Méndez	
Tradiciones en las políticas de vivienda pública.....	422
Josep Maria Montaner Martorell	

De la Weissenhoff a Oporto, un camino de servicio	430
José Manuel Pozo Municio	
Le Corbusier's <i>Immeuble-villas</i> and an After Lunch Remembrance	441
Marta Sequeira	
Le Corbusier. <i>Une science de logis</i>	454
Jorge Torres Cueco	
La casa productiva. Propuestas para la autosuficiencia alimentaria durante la República de Weimar	470
David Arredondo Garrido	
<i>Modernità y mediterraneità: sincretismo habitacional de Luigi Figini y Gino Pollini</i>	482
Emilio Cachorro Fernández, Cristina Medina Valverde	
El <i>piano Fanfani</i> en Roma: la torre de viviendas y la casa patio	496
Ana del Cid Mendoza	
Feet on the Sand: Living Spaces in Apartment Buildings by the Sea in Maceió, Brazil	510
Camila Antunes de Carvalho Casado, Maria Angélica da Silva	
Atomic-age Housing. The Fallout Shelter in Cold War America	521
Chiara Baglione	
De la manzana a la supermanzana. Recuperación e innovación en la cultura urbanística	531
Raimundo Bambó Naya, Javier Monclús Fraga	
La ventana y el balcón sobre avenida Providencia (1931/1981): evolución y permanencia de la arquitectura doméstica	544
Pedro Bannen Lanata	
Towards the Modern Block: Evolution of an Urban Type in Kay Fisker's Prewar Architecture	554
Guia Baratelli	
La casa en Isle of Wight (1955-1956) de James Gowan, austeridad en la modernidad británica	566
Alicia Cantabella Gallego	
<i>Villeggiatura</i> urbana: una residencia secundaria en el núcleo urbano de São Paulo	576
Sara Caon	
Otrredades en la habitabilidad de un Monterrey moderno: primeros edificios de departamentos como alternativa a la vivienda unifamiliar	586
María de los Ángeles Castillo Soriano, Alberto Canavati Espinosa	
Brutalismo doméstico. Un espacio para la contemplación	597
Rubens Cortés Cano	

La Casa Barata dos Santos como experimento, por Nuno Portas y Nuno Teotónio (1958-1962)	608
Mª Ángeles Domínguez Durán	
Exploraciones cartográficas comparadas de paisajes residenciales: polígonos vs periferias ordinarias	620
Isabel Ezquerro, Carmen Díez-Medina	
The House as Experiment: House in Sesimbra (1960-64) by Portas and Teotónio Pereira	634
Hugo L. Farias	
La piedra en la casa moderna	645
María Ana Ferré Aydos	
Las casas unifamiliares no construidas del programa <i>Case Study Houses</i>	657
Pauline Fonini Felin	
Modern Housing and Duplex Apartments: Study of Discourses and Practices of a Typology	670
Sabrina Fontenele	
Polígonos de vivienda. Relevancia del diagnóstico en la regeneración urbana de espacios libres	681
Sergio García-Pérez, Javier Monclús, Carmen Díez Medina	
A City of Order: on Piccinato's Ataköy	692
Esen Gökçe Özdamar	
Paisaje y ciudad en las viviendas de la Universidad Laboral de Almería	702
José Ramón González González	
La imagen de arquitectura en la construcción del subconsciente colectivo	713
Carlos Gor Gómez	
Prácticas Concretas	725
Pablo Jesús Gutiérrez Calderón	
Tropical and Colonial: Single Houses as a Modern Lab in Angola and Mozambique (1950-1970)	737
Ana Magalhães	
Casa y Monumento: Roma habitada	748
Sergio Martín Blas, Milena Farina	
Las viviendas para empleados realizadas por las grandes empresas en la España de la posguerra	760
Miriam Martín Díaz, Enrique Castaño Perea	
Lecciones de Louis Kahn: la sala y la casa en Rogelio Salmons y Livio Vacchini	771
Clara E. Mejía Vallejo, Ricardo Merí de la Maza	

Interior Biopolitics—Domesticity as Mass Media in the Making of Swedish Social Democracy	783
Carlota Mir	
El arte de lo doméstico. Las casas de Alison y Peter Smithson	795
Carmen Moreno Álvarez, Juan Domingo Santos	
La vivienda colectiva como reactivador de hechos de vida urbana	806
Sebastián Navarrete Micheliní	
The Façade as an Interface in the Housing Architecture of Rio de Janeiro: Design Repertoire	819
Mara Oliveira Eskinazi, Pedro Engel Penter	
Manuel Gomes da Costa. La casa algarvia del arquitecto	831
José Joaquín Parra Bañón	
A Wealth of Typological Solutions from the Twenties: Vienna and Frankfurt	842
Alessandro Porotto	
Un pueblo entre los muros de un cortijo	856
Ana Isabel Rodríguez Aguilera	
This House Is Not a Home	872
Ugo Rossi	
Los dibujos de Rafael Leoz sobre vivienda social	883
Jose Antonio Ruiz Suaña, Jesús López Díaz	
La calle sube al edificio. Vivienda en galería en Madrid, 1949-1956	897
María del Pilar Salazar Lozano	
Casas como células. La metáfora biológica y los nuevos hábitats plásticos, 1955-73	908
Massimiliano Savorra	
El hogar que envejece	918
Marta Silveira Peixoto	
Repetition and Geometry: The House of the Painter Zigaina Designed by Giancarlo De Carlo	928
Luisa Smeragliuolo Perrotta	
Plinio Marconi's Public Housing Projects between Innovation and Historical Continuity	938
Simona Talenti, Annarita Teodosio	
Casas patio y bloques: las formas de la vivienda para la ciudad moderna, Arica 1953-73	949
Horacio Enrique Torrent Schneider	

Doméstico y prefabricado: vivienda unifamiliar en Collado Mediano de Alejandro de la Sota	961
Miguel Varela de Ugarte	
Modern Living: Particularities in Rio de Janeiro	971
Denise Vianna Nunes	
Equipando la casa moderna. España, 1927-1936	982
María Villanueva Fernández, Héctor García-Diego Villarías	

BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 3

La vivienda contemporánea desde el punto de vista patrimonial

Un carmen en el barrio del Realejo de Granada	997
Ricardo Hernández Soriano	
T y Block House, dos viviendas en Nueva York	1007
Antonio Álvarez Gil	
Experimentos de casas en el paisaje. Lo cotidiano y lo sublime	1020
Rafael de Lacour	
Cooperativas vecinales para la recuperación patrimonial de barriadas. Sixto (Málaga)	1031
Alberto E. García-Moreno, María José Márquez-Ballesteros, Manuel García-López	
Domesticidades del proyecto social del Régimen a través de los poblados de Bárcena (León)	1043
Jorge Magaz Molina	
La casa como memoria viva: injertos domésticos en ruinas vernáculas	1055
David Ordóñez Castañón, Jesús de los Ojos Moral	
PAX – Patios de la Axerquía. Rehabilitación urbana y de casas-patio con procesos cooperativos	1068
Gaia Redaelli	
La casa contemporánea en el cine: estrategia de difusión y promoción del patrimonio cultural	1080
Iván Rincón Borrego, Eusebio Alonso García	
Rehabitar después de Habitar	1092
Conceição Trigueiros, Mario Saleiro Filho	

BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 4
La casa: mitos, arquetipos, modos de habitar

Notas sobre la casa como jardín.....	1104
Xavier Monteys	
Interiores de exteriores. La otra raíz del habitar.....	1116
José Morales Sánchez	
Género y modos de habitar en la Andalucía del siglo XIX.....	1127
Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa	
La casa veneciana, desde fuera.....	1139
Francisco A. García Pérez	
Muerte de la ciudad y desintegración de lo urbano. La casa como refugio.....	1151
Juan Carlos Reina Fernández	
The Home and Its Transformations in the Daily Life of a Brazilian Social Housing Complex.....	1164
Fernanda Andrade dos Santos, Eda Maria Góes	
El jardín secreto de Luis Barragán.....	1177
Paloma Baquero Masats, Juan Antonio Serrano García	
A «Part of Sky and a Part of Sea, Even Alone»: Luigi Moretti Villas.....	1189
Gemma Belli	
La cocina como principal motor de cambio en la vivienda moderna y contemporánea.....	1199
Juan Bravo Bravo	
Casa contra arquitectura, Bernard Rudofsky y el “arte de habitar”.....	1212
Alejandro Campos Uribe, Paula Lacomba Montes	
El espacio doméstico en las exposiciones: nuevos conceptos durante la 2ª mitad del s. XX.....	1224
Manuel Carmona García	
La cocina-moderna en la vivienda colectiva española de la primera mitad del siglo XX.....	1236
María Carreiro Otero, Cándido López González	
Espacios de sombra y aire, transiciones en la arquitectura mediterránea.....	1248
Antonio Cayuelas Porras	

Habitar los hospitales: el bienestar más allá del confort	1259
Pilar Chías Navarro, Tomás Abad Balboa	
La cocina genérica: del marco físico a la atmósfera esencial	1272
José Antonio Costela Mellado, Luis Eduardo Iáñez García	
The House of Silence: The Franciscan Dwellings in the Colonial Convents of the North-East of Brazil	1282
Maria Angélica da Silva	
Arquitectura y jardín en la vivienda doméstica española del movimiento moderno	1294
Manuel de Lara Ruiz, Carlos Pesqueira Calvo	
The Italian House vs The American House. Decoration and Life-Style in the 50's...	1309
Elena Dellapiana	
Casas de vidrio – 1950: análisis de cuatro ejemplos coetáneos	1321
Ana Esteban Maluenda, Héctor Navarro Martínez	
Microarquitecturas a medida. Experiencia de arquitectura social	1330
Antonella Falzetti	
The Made-to-Measure House: From an Ideal Home to a Palace Between the 19th and 21st Centuries	1341
Maria Teresa Feraboli	
Holiday Houses in Italy in the 1930s	1351
Adele Fiadino	
Habitar la materia: apilar Cerdeña. Casa de vacaciones en Arzachena, Marco Zanuso	1361
Mario Galiana Liras, Miguel A. Alonso del Val	
1978. La Gran Casa, o sobre el interior en la obra de Enric Miralles	1372
Carolina B. García Estévez	
Donde termina la casa y empieza el cielo	1384
Ubaldo García Torrente	
Green Housing Dream. From Welfare Equality to Deregulation and Desire: Understeshöjden, 1989	1397
Andrea Gimeno Sánchez	
The “Medieval House” of Coimbra: Archeology of Architecture in the Demystification of Archetypes	1407
António Ginja	
La casa de luz tenue. A propósito de Alvar Aalto, Luis Barragán y Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas	1418
José Miguel Gómez Acosta	

Un análisis de la casa excavada-subterránea basado en la Sintaxis Espacial.....	1428
Antonio J. Gómez-Blanco Pontes	
King's Foundation: House, Power and Modernity in King Manuel I's inventory (1522-25).....	1440
Luís Gonçalves Ferreira	
“Raumplan-dwellings”: domesticidad y espacio en proyectos de Sejima-SANAA..	1449
Aida González Llavona	
La casa moderna en Cereté, una lección patrimonial.....	1461
Massimo Leserrí, Merwan Chaverra Suárez	
When a Big House Opens Its Doors: The São Marcos Hospital in Braga (17th-18thCenturies).....	1471
Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo	
El mito de la casa pompeyana entre los siglos XIX y XX.....	1478
Fabio Mangone, Raffaella Russo Spina	
Tiendas de campaña en Marte.....	1493
Josemaría Manzano-Jurado, Santiago Porras Álvarez, Rafael García Quesada	
La casa patio tradicional de la medina marroquí.....	1506
Miguel Martínez-Monedero, Jaime Vergara-Muñoz	
La forma tectónica de la casa: lo ontológico frente a lo representacional.....	1518
Alejandro Muñoz Miranda	
Habitar el cerro: la casa del arquitecto Bruno Violi en Bogotá.....	1530
Serena Orlandi	
Comida a domicilio.....	1541
Nuria Ortigosa Duarte	
Domestic Topographies: The House of Lino Gaspar, Caxias, 1953-1955.....	1551
Maria Rita Pais	
La ritualidad higiénica como domesticación espacial en el arte contemporáneo....	1563
José Luis Panea Fernández	
The Housing General Histories and Classes in Literature.....	1572
Fabrizio Paone	
“Paraísos” en el armario: homosexualidad y negociación doméstica en la California prebélica.....	1587
José Parra-Martínez, María-Elia Gutiérrez-Mozo, Ana-Covadonga Gilsanz-Díaz	

Profundidad espacial. Abriendo el muro. De la habitación sin nombre al jardín de invierno.....	1599
Marta Pérez Rodríguez	
Rooms. Aldo Rossi and the House in Ghiffa: Symbol, Dust and Desire.....	1609
Michelangelo Pivetta, Vincenzo Moschetti	
La colina habitada: características morfológicas y modos de habitar el campo.....	1620
Luigi Ramazzotti	
El <i>studiolo</i> como teatro de la mente.....	1632
Jaime Ramos Alderete, Ana Isabel Santolaria Castellanos	
Modos de habitar en contexto de montaña: la región oriental del Atlas en Marruecos.....	1641
Miguel Reimão Costa, Desidério Batista	
La casa en Santiago de Chile a fines del siglo XVIII: valores materiales y simbólicos.....	1652
Marisol Richter Scheuch	
Hombres de condición inquieta y despegada: el fascinante espectáculo de la precariedad.....	1660
Carmen Rodríguez Pedret	
Maid Rooms and Laundry Sinks Matter: Modern Houses in a Non-modern Context.....	1671
Silvana Rubino	
Inquietante domesticidad.....	1679
Alberto Rubio Garrido	
Houses for Whom? Between the Habitat and the Inhabiting, on Henri Lefebvre's Quest.....	1688
Teresa V. Sá	
Una casa es una «machine de l'émotion».....	1698
Javier Sáez Gastearena	
Espacio doméstico e higiene. Políticas del habitar en Sevilla entre los siglos XIX y XX.....	1710
Victoriano Sainz Gutiérrez	
La vivienda de los fareros, entre la casa y la máquina.....	1720
Santiago Sánchez Beitía, Fernando Acale Sánchez	
Naturalezas en la intimidad; acerca del jardín en los espacios domésticos contemporáneos.....	1732
Juana Sánchez Gómez, Diego Jiménez López, Isabel Jiménez López	
Cármenes, pequeñas historias domésticas.....	1743
Juan Antonio Sánchez Muñoz, Vincent Morales Garoffolo	

Algunas casas modernas: de la caverna al hogar	1755
Rafael Sánchez Sánchez	
Recuerdos de una escalera. Experiencias domésticas desplazadas en la obra de Siza	1764
Juan Antonio Serrano García	
¿No habitar es modo de habitar? Siglos de permanencia de mitos y criminalización	1778
Sonia María Taddei Ferraz, Evelyn Garcia da Cruz, Paula Andréa Santos da Silva	
Tres modos de habitar la casa popular: cereal, vid y olivar	1787
Salvador Ubago Palma	
La expresividad de la racionalidad: La casa estudio para Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo	1800
Luis Villarreal Ugarte	
Habitar en Iberoamérica	1811
Graciela María Viñuales	

BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 5

Miradas externas: la casa en la pintura, el cine y la literatura

Habitar la aventura: casas de Jules Verne	1824
Juan Calatrava Escobar	
Casas vacías, olvidadas y recordadas: arte, literatura y memoria	1836
Marta Llorente Díaz	
La villa Arpel: machine à habiter, “donde todo se comunica...” (Mon Oncle, J. Tati, 1958)	1850
Antonio Pizza de Nanno	
El relato doméstico desde una estrategia vertical	1855
Agustín Gor Gómez	
Fondos de escena en el cine de Ozu	1868
Carlos Barberá Pastor	
Habitar tras la Transición: los hogares cinematográficos de P. Almodóvar y A. Gómez	1879
Ruth Barranco Raimundo	
Espacios domésticos en transición y la ciudad moderna en Ohayo (1959) de Yasujiro Ozu	1888
Bernardita M. Cubillos Muñoz	

La casa Stahl, una vida de ficción	1898
Daniel Díez Martínez	
Habitaciones para la escritura: el autor y su espacio de trabajo	1909
Tomás García Píriz, F. Javier Castellano Pulido	
Ámbitos privados de la residencia colectiva en el imaginario cinematográfico español	1920
Josefina González Cubero, Alba Zarza Arribas	
Los registros de la luz. Vermeer y Hopper	1929
Luis Eduardo Jáñez García	
Allí reside el tiempo, mi infancia. La cabaña telúrica de Andréi Tarkovski	1940
Alejandro Infantes Pérez, Javier Muñoz Godino	
La casa, la calle y el territorio. Narraciones fotográficas de Guido Guidi	1951
Marco Lecis	
Entre la literatura y el cine. La casa de Sokúrov en <i>El segundo círculo</i>	1961
Pablo López Santana	
Habitar un espacio, contemplar un paisaje: mujer, jardín y arquitectura doméstica en China (desde el siglo X hasta el XVIII)	1972
Antonio Mezcuá López	
Registro de una mirada, Cape Cod House	1981
Jorge Gabriel Molinero Sánchez, María del Carmen Vílchez Lara	
La casa como metáfora del viaje. Fotógrafos y arquitectos en Mallorca	1993
María Josep Mulet Gutiérrez, Joan Carles Oliver Torelló, María Sebastián Sebastián	
La mirada indiscreta: la ventana en el cine como generador de emociones	2004
Patricia Pozo Alemán	
El telar es el cuerpo, el cuerpo es la casa	2016
Anita Puig Gómez	
El espacio doméstico en el cine de Jacques Tati: del bloque tradicional a la vivienda sobre ruedas	2024
Helia de San Nicolás Juárez	
Fisonomías arquitectónicas. La mediatización de casas de personalidades en Galicia	2034
Jesús Ángel Sánchez-García	
Mujeres y jardines en la China clásica: espacios domésticos en <i>Sueño en el Pabellón Rojo</i>	2046
Beatriz Valverde Vázquez	
Notas autobiográficas de los autores	2054

Habitaciones de servicio y lavaderos: casas modernas en un contexto no moderno

Maid Rooms and Laundry Sinks Matter: Modern Houses in a Non-modern Context

Silvana Rubino

PhD in Social Science, Associate Professor, State University of Campinas, srubino@unicamp.br

Resumen

Esta presentación es sobre dos casas modernas en São Paulo y Río de Janeiro. La Casa de Cristal (Casa de Vidro) fue construida en 1951 para ser la residencia de la Lina Bo (1914-1992), la autora del diseño, y Pietro Bardi (1900-1999). La Casa Carmen Portinho (1903-2000) es de 1950, diseño de Affonso Reidy (1909-1964) para vivir allí con su pareja Carmen. Las casas revelan los impasses de la "modernidad" en un país donde el trabajo domestico (malamente) pago prevalecía. La Casa de Cristal tiene una propuesta de espacio abierto que contradice su habitación de empleados. Portinho estableció normas rígidas para la vivienda que ella había construido como jefe del Departamento de Vivienda Popular en Río de Janeiro, pero ninguna de ellas se aplicaba a su propia casa. La idea es utilizar estas dos casas emblemáticas para pensar en la brecha entre el avance de las propuestas y su práctica.

Palavras clave: habitación social, Carmen Portinho, feminismo, domesticidad, Lina Bo Bardi

Bloque tematico: La casa: mitos, arquetipos, modos de habitar

Abstract

This presentation is about two modern houses in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The House of Glass (Casa de Vidro) was built in 1951 to be the residence of the couple Lina Bo (1914-1992), the author of the design, and Pietro Bardi (1900-1999). The house Carmen Portinho (1903-2000) is a 1950 design of Affonso Reidy (1909-1964) in to live there with his partner Carmen. The houses reveal the impasses of a "modern life" in a country where domestic paid work prevailed. The House of Glass has a proposal of space that contradicts its maid rooms of employees. Portinho established rigid norms for the housing she had built as head of the Department of Popular Housing in Rio de Janeiro, but none of them applied to her own home. The proposal here is to use these houses to reflect on the gap between advanced proposals and their practice.

Keywords: social housing, Carmen Portinho, feminism, domesticity, Lina Bo Bardi

Topic: The house: myths, archetypes, forms of inhabitation

The engineer and feminist Carmen Portinho was the first woman to graduate in urbanism in Brazil, in *Universidade do Distrito Federal* in 1939 presenting a dissertation named *The construction of Brazil's new capital in Planalto Central*. It's a research that goes into details about the buildings and the apartments in the city, thinking in food supply and even in the cleaning of the house, including discussions about the housewife. The main point, of course, was a functional project, an equipped kitchen and laundry services made by professionals.

Above the 'pilotis', a floor was reserved exclusively for the mundane chores. Organizing those chores will be the only way to avoid unproductive fatigue and vain waste of time for the housewife. In this floor, will be localized a big power plant of domestic chores. Corporate organization will take the responsibility of those domestic services. The food groups, meat, vegetable, fruit, etc, obtained directly from warehouses, situated in the industrial zone, will be taken to the refrigerators built in the floor destined to mundane chores. Well-installed and equipped kitchens will grant meals at any time. Professionals will also make the cleansing of the apartments, so will the laundry and all other chores needed in a home. A maid to take care of the children and do small services will be enough for each household. The servant problem, so hard to find a solution, can be solved this way.¹

Where would live this maid? This is not explained in the project's text and there is no illustration. The theme of the maid, however, was part of the debate of the CIAM meeting in 1929, the same that presented to the architects, the Frankfurt Kitchen from Austrian architect Grete Schute-Lihotzy, and it was delivered by Walter Gropius the speech that approach the servant problem:

The finding of the inferiority of individual domestic services gave origin to the design of a business in domestic services that would free each woman from part of her domestic duties. This is thanks to a central organization that works better and more resourcefully than a housewife would even if she put all her efforts in it. The major challenge is to find domestic cleaners that are friendly to those ideas.²

The servant problem, was a regular topic in Europe and the United States in the firsts decades of the 20th Century. For Carmen Portinho, housing was a «public utility services with the main goal of the complete reeducation of the Brazilian workman that (...) should be included among the required services that the government must provide, such as water, electricity, gas, sanitation, etc.».³ Being a public service, housing included as domesticity perspective, directed specially for it's main user. «Housing that made women into domestic slaves, always worried with cleaning and maintenance, and where the luxury, in a shocking waste, usually replaced the comfort».⁴

In 1948 Carmen, at the time section head of the DHP, the Department of Popular Housing, position where she gave licenses and inspected popular housing, was designated director. The event was received with rejoice by feminist movements which celebrated with parties.⁵ The first

¹ *Revista Municipal de Engenharia*, May (1939): 292.

² In the original: "«La constatation de l'infériorité du travail ménager individuel a fait naître la conception de vastes entreprises ménagères que déchargeant chaque femme d'une partie de ses obligations ménagères. Ceci se fait grace à une organization centrale qui travaille mieux et plus économiquement que ne pourrait le faire une ménagère, meme si elle consacrait tous ses moyens. La difficulté est toujours gradissante de trouver des domestiques favorise celle conception.»*Die Wohnung für Existenzminimum*, II Internationalen Kongresses für Neues Bauen in Frankfurt am Main 1930, Verlag, Englet & Schlosser, Frankfurt AM Main French copy made by the magazine *Techné*. Arquivo dos CIAMs, ETH Zurich.

³ Lauro Cavalcanti. *Casas para o povo*. Master degree's dissertation in Anthropology, Rio de Janeiro, Museu Nacional, 1987, in. *O moderno em construção*, edited by Ana Luiza Nobre and Carmen Portinho (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1999): 43.

⁴ *Revista Municipal de Engenharia*, janeiro (1942), quoted by Ana Luiza Nobre, 44

⁵ Flavia Brito do Nascimento, "A casa privada e o conjunto público de Carmen Portinho e Affonso Reidy". In *Domesticidade, gênero e cultura material*, edited by Silvana Rubino et al (São Paulo: EDUSP, 2017), 179.

work of the new department was a big and exemplary housing complex. In 1950 Carmen created the Social Service of the Housing Complex Mendes de Moraes, in which graduated social assistants, family educators and recreation technicians assisted the dwellers, listened to their complaints, identified possible non-compliances to the regulation, looking forward «to guide the critical spirit towards the *good taste* and the excellence in visual arts, in music and in cinema, to promote classes of home economics».⁶

In other words, teaching how to live. The Pedregulho dwellers were low city-employees, such as servants, guards, garages and in rare cases, teachers, that came from precarious housing or poor houses in worker's villages. Although the bibliography marks that they didn't know how to live in community, I want to believe that they didn't know how to live in a community as proposed by the housing complex, and that they clearly had neighboring bonds, in their social relations and their conflicts. Carmen acknowledged the relevance of social assistants. In her text published by *Correio da Manhã* after returning from England, she stated that housing complexes must always include social assistance: «the worker must, before anything, be educated to life in society, which will be relatively easy if they are given the means of education necessary as well as decent life conditions».⁷ Thus, was a part of the program to teach how to use the areas of collective use, teach kids not to play in the building halls and teach bathers to shower before betting in the pool.

Although Reidy used to state that the actions of an architect must go from the domestic tool to the urbanism, - which is nothing more than a Bauhaus' dogma – as Carmen had already detailed aspects of everyday life, specially for women, in her project for a capital, it is possible that exists there a conversation between both. If each dweller should buy their own furniture, the kitchen comes with planned furniture and a built-in ironing board. Kitchen, as we know, was always a place where female architects/engineers/designers operate, after centuries being ignored by architecture, seen as a utilitarian space to be used by women and servants.⁸

About Pedregulho there is plenty of bibliography. The question remaining the complex is regarding its authorship: Reidy, Carmen, DHP or all of these together in a work's social division that places that chooses the architect's name to be placed as final and only author? I agree with the opinion of researcher Flávia Brito do Nascimento, in her pioneer work about the DHP:

Publicized to death, the Pedregulho was almost always connected directly with its author, the architect and urbanist Affonso Reidy. The town hall's Popular Housing Department, the organizing body, is lightly mentioned. When there's a compromise, the engineer Carmen Portinho is mentioned, the director of DHP for almost its entire existence, and responsible for most of the execution of the projects. It's not about putting the work and genius off the spotlight, but to include them and discuss it as part of a greater habitation project for Rio de Janeiro, result of a historical process in which many characters had a role to play.⁹

Carmen's feminist path appeared in the project, making that the working woman's “exhausted hand” that would live in the complex didn't find a laundry sink in every unit, but instead a

⁶ Ana Luiza Nobre, 57.

⁷ “Habitação popular”. *Correio da Manhã*, March 17 (1946).

⁸ “There was probably no arena in which women had as much influence in modern architecture as kitchen.” Mary McLeod. “Domestic reform and European modern architecture: Charlotte Perriand, Grete Lihotzky and Elizabeth Denby.” MoMA, *Modern Women. Women artists at the museum of modern art*. (New York: MoMA, 2010): 180.

⁹ Flávia Brito do Nascimento, *Entre a estética e o hábito. O Departamento de Habitação Popular (Rio de Janeiro, 1946-1960)* (Rio de Janeiro: Secretaria Municipal das Culturas, 2008), 104.

collective laundry room. Aside from the feminist perspective, it was taken into account the possibility of clothes hanged in the window, which would tarnish the beauty of the building's front. It wasn't a successful proposal, even with the social assistants giving time to teach how to use the laundry machines, imported from the U.S, people improvised with buckets, bowls, and even cases where the pool water was used to do the family laundry.

There were other complexes created by the Department of Popular Housing, even if not as iconic. But is important the statement of Francisco Bolonha, that among other realizations, such as the project for housing complexes in Paquetá (1952) and Vila Isabel (1948) was a collaborator of Pedregulho.

In Vila Isabel there was a funny event: I projected laundry rooms with a sink and Carmen was mad, because she wanted collective laundry rooms. I insisted 'I needs a laundry room with a laundry sink! People won't wash their floor cloth in the laundry machine!' and her response: 'I will only allow for you to put the laundry sink in the kitchen', I had to agree. So much that, if you visit the complex, will se excellent apartments, but with this issue. No laundry room.¹⁰

Maybe Carmen couldn't find good examples to follow in the modern architecture literature. Kitchen, yes, there were many, although Frankfurt's kitchen had gained prominence in publications. But laundry room, a place for laundry... by tradition it was a place outside the house, far from it, in the yard or even in the rivers. In other words, from the symbolic point of view, the laundry room is inferior to the kitchen, were food belongs and hierarchically superior to were dirt belongs. Maybe because of that it was important for the project to get away from the laundry room.

Carmen Portinho's house is from 1950, when Pedregulho was becoming complete, and was approved by the Town Hall under the section: "Popular housing", which means, it could not have more than 70m² in area. Henrique Mindlin in his *Modern Architecture in Brazil* describes the house as «permanent residence and shelter of a young engineer, actively interested in modern art and currently director of the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, and that, as sector head of the Department od Popular Housing of Rio de Janeiro's Town Hall, was the main responsible for the construction of Pedregulho». ¹¹ In the same book, Mindlin mentions the area of the cleaning lady.¹² Contrary to the couple Gregori and Mina Warchavchik's house or even the couple Bardi's glass house, her house wasn't a manifest-house, it was just a house, although with very peculiar dwellers. Carmen visited the Warchacvhik's house in 1930 and according to Flávia Nascimento the visit inspired her in ideas about domesticity as reported in a article for *Correio da Manhã*:

It's gonna be hard to forget the odd yet extraordinary feeling I felt visiting that picturesque, super modern corner. I envied for a moment the happiness and well-being of that lucky couple, who by building such a home for themselves, managed to made one of the most beautiful architectonic dreams come true. It made me think in my house in a Spanish colony-style, designed by me when I was leaving school. I reimagined this ideal home that I never build and don't intend to, ever. I rather see it in my dreams, matchlessly beautiful, than destroyed by putting my dream into reality.¹³

¹⁰ Américo Freire and Lucia Lippi Oliveira (org), *Capítulos da Memória do Urbanismo Carioca* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Folha Seca, 2002), 51.

¹¹ H. Mindlin, *Arquitetura Moderna no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, IPHAN/MINC, 2000 [1956]): 76.

¹² Mindlin, H., 76.

¹³ *Correio da Manhã*, August 24 1930. Quoted by F.B.Nascimento, "A casa privada e o conjunto público de Carmen Portinho e Afonso Reidy", in *Domesticidade, gênero e cultura material*, edited by Silvana Rubino et al. (Paulo: EDUSP, 2017), 174-5.

Her manifesto was Pedregulho, her home was a shelter and residence, far enough from downtown for a divorced engineer living with her partner. It was however a design for a housing complex, even if the size of the land and the social status of the couple weren't compatible with the label. The neighborhood where it was located, in the west-wing of Rio de Janeiro had the requirements for a housing complex, even if the land had 9 thousand m² – curiously, the exact same size of the land from the Glass House of the Bardis.¹⁴

Curiously, the bibliography barely mentions this fact, and when it does, it is with an annoying neutrality, such as Alfredo Britto did in 1999, when mentioning the house:

The essentials: living-meals, room, studio, kitchen, bathroom and laundry room must have at least 70m² so it would benefit from the “housing complex” support, with which it is ensured for the owner exemption for the license fee and the funding of four bags of cement each month. For two civil servants it meant a fantastic particularity. A trick made that the terrace, shown in the approved project and for its attributes, not included in the area total, transform into a marvelous room that penetrates from above in the wild, supported by the pilotis and completely surrounded by that area. The house ended up with 95m².¹⁵

A room that in the first blueprint was just a “bedroom” became the “maid's room”: in the second blueprint there is two beds and an ironing board. Long after the house is finished, an article about female engineers told that in Carmen's house there were no problems, because her husband was an architect, and as such, was interested by his profession. They were a couple with no children and all the domestic chores was done by good domestic servants.¹⁶

In Pedregulho, as it was already pointed out, the laundry room was in a separate area, away from the housing units, and it was all mechanized, even in early national industry of appliances, because all laundry machines were imported from the United States.

And Carmen's house had not one, but two laundry sinks.

The house in Itaipava was built by Carmen herself, with stones from a river in the surroundings. Around 100 m², it has a living room, a bedroom, kitchen, office and bathroom in the upper deck. In the lower deck, the stairs connecting to the house, a room and a bathroom for the maid and outside these rooms, a giant laundry sink.

The Glass House, planned to home for Lina, overshadows the fact that it was made for a client, a museum director that was the architect's husband. Here the same dynamic seems to be reversed, the house for an architect was made for his wife, a museum director. The houses in Jacarepaguá and Itapava were houses whose terms of agreement between client and architect regarding, dimension, program, workmanship, location, etc... we don't know. Examples that may remind of another couple's house, from earlier, built in the Netherlands. The house Schröder, project from 1923-4 from Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964) was imagined with such a large participation from the client Truus Schröder-Schröder that the architect signed the project along with her. If the house came to be acknowledged as iconic to Dutch architecture and the modernism in general, is because the social and intellectual goals of Thus were part of the

¹⁴ For a better notion of the scale of dimensions of the plot, the plot for Pedregulhos is around 5,8 times larger.

¹⁵ Testimony of Alfredo Britto to *Toda minha vida*, op. cit. p. 80. Added emphasis.

¹⁶ Nascimento, “A casa...”, 189.

process: «As client, as much as designer, as much as feminist, Schröder helped to outline the ways of modern architecture».¹⁷

As a partner, client, engineer, urbanist and feminist, Carmen also did, in a more intense way. It's clear when one turns to the *House of Glass*.

Francesco Tentori, biographer of Pietro Maria Bardi recalls with irony his astonishment when he saw the servants' rooms. He assumed that it was an appropriation, by Lina Bo Bardi, of the memory of colonial Brazil. In the *House of Glass* the service area is strictly separated from the body of the house by a courtyard and a door. Between this and the block where the Bardi couple lived, the kitchen makes the transition, which is not very different from any bourgeois house or apartment built in that decade and even today. The employees had a *minimum housing*, independent of the rest of the house. Also Giò Ponti noticed this situation of the place of work and of the workers of the house, denominating this part of *viscere* (guts), arguing that this house had two sectors: one stripped for the visitors and another opaque, sheltered and secret – *segretto* – for the housemaids.

By designing this independent accommodation, this minimum space for dwelling, Lina translate in a quite bourgeois manner the achievements of the CIAM of 1929, Frankfurt, which was dedicated to discuss the housing of the workers, the so-called minimal habitation. It was at that moment that the Frankfurt Kitchen became known as a practical and taylorist space for the modern woman who worked and took care of the house. This kitchen is designed for social housing, *siedlungen* for the German working class. Two objects of discussion of 1929 re-emerged in the modern house of Lina Bo Bardi: the functional kitchen, although spacious and used by maids, and a small apartment for worker-class, although in the same house. One could say that the service apartment has spatial qualities that place it well above not only the colonial slave quarters but also the employee rooms in other residences. But this scheme somehow mirrors an urban scheme: the bourgeois housing in a privileged neighbourhood and the housing of the worker in a periphery or suburban of the city, two parted spaces.

She wrote: "the house is spacious, especially as far as service facilities are concerned", and in the chapter these apartments belong to the type of "minimal apartments, species of cells - for one or two girls at most". It is the secret that amazed the Italians Tentori and Ponti, and an evidence of the blind faith of modernism about its gains and the gamble in a universal man. Progressive and democratic as a neighborhood in Frankfurt in the Weimar Republic, the minimal apartments were, rather, a hidden room in a modern house in Morumbi in São Paulo of the 50s.

About the kitchen: it may be inspired by the Frankfurt kitchen, designed by the Austrian architect Grette Schütte-Lihotsky, shown in *Die neue Wohnung und ihr Innenausbau* in 1925, and immediately included in various housing projects constructed in the city by Ernst May. The unit in question was a *Kochküche*, a kitchen made for cooking, small with an aura of modernity that came from the use of electricity. The novelty crossed back over the Atlantic and in 1934 the book *Modern Housing*, written by Catherine Bauer and published in New York, lauded Schütte-Lihotsky's kitchen as one of the foremost achievements of the new architecture.

¹⁷ Alice Friedman and Maristella Casciatio, "Family matters: The Schröder House, by Gerrit Rietvelt and Truus Schröder". In *Women and the making of the Modern House. A social and architectural history*, Alice Fiedman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

If we consider its dimensions, the kitchen of th Bardi's house could be compared to the functional American kitchen, a more spacious and more equipped version of the Frankfurt kitchen - after all it was a bourgeois house, while the latter was intended for housing complexes - but Lina Bo Bardi did not represent the suburban housewife of the *Kitchen Debate* that entertained North America during the cold war. The kitchen was both German and American, far from the traditions of domestic space in Brazil.

However, In an article published in 1958, Lina showed a photo of her own hands cleaning the dishes, with a legend: "The dishwasher eliminates everything humiliating in this type of work: the fat and waste are not touched by the hands, as a special rubber spatula helps to remove the latter to the crusher, which eliminates them". This passage refers us to all notions of impurity, danger, filth, pollution, and taboos related to them, as treated by Mary Douglas in his classic *Purity and Danger*. The kitchen is the place of the debris of the house, but the dirt is also in the eyes of the beholder: "When we honestly reflect on our brushings and cleanings," wrote the British anthropologist Mary Douglas, "we realize that we are not mainly seeking to avoid diseases and rather (we are) separating, demarcating boundaries, making visible statements about the home that we intend to create from the material home.

As in the 1950s the middle class of São Paulo continued to rely on the domestic worker and Lina proposed an equipped kitchen full of domestic appliances. The result, however, of this new technology, from the point of view of the delicate relationship between the owner of the house and her housekeeper, was the lack of prestige of the latter's traditional knowledge, which resisted innovation. At that moment in Brazil the household appliances began to appear while the servants remained in the houses: the enlightened bourgeoisie thus enjoyed the better of two worlds.

This became quite clear when, visiting the *House of Glass* in 2010, I asked to examine the household appliances. They were intact, untouched. When I commented so with the housekeepers, the response came quickly: "The employees did not know how to use them." If such an observation does not minimize the proposal of a modern kitchen in a modern house, it is certainly revealing of the gender, generation and class constraints that, perhaps despite some efforts and intentions, end up being revealed in domestic architecture in Brazil.

But is time to return to the houses of the Carmen-Reidy couple, and their laundry sinks, to question the sociological impossibility of believing in the universal man, in projects that aimed to serve a faceless client, in chairs that anyone would sit. Carmen and Reidy highlight that subjects socially situated made their project for an "other" without concern in listening or inquire the client. In making their own homes, a choice system was conducted using identity components, and the modern architecture seen as a reason was certainly part of this identity. Therefore the houses of Jacarepaguá and Itaipava, beautiful, cost-effective and modern, pointed the limitations of projects for a collective client, that is so abstract and idealized that even with the best intentions, didn't take the client into account.

Apparently, the solution for the "servant problem", announced in her plan for a capital and put in practice in Pedregulho, did not apply to any social group. But the servant problem was basic for us to understand the expansion of a Brazilian modern architecture, not with manifest-houses, but with their acceptable versions. This distance between what's designed for a collective and what's put in practice wasn't a debate only in Brazil, after aal even in designing the well-known Frankfurt Kitchen, the Austrian architect Margarete Schütte Libotzky also had never used a

single kitchen. «The truth of the matter was, I'd never run a household before designing the Frankfurt Kitchen, I'd never cooked and had no idea about cooking».¹⁸

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¹⁸ Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, quoted in Julia Kinchin and Aidan O'Connor, *Counterspace. Design and the modern kitchen* (New York: MoMA, 2011), 20.