



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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La casa y la ciudad: retrospectiva al futuro

The City and the House: Going Back to the Future

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Resumen

«La ciudad es una casa grande, lo mismo que la casa es una ciudad pequeña». Esta tesis de Leon Battista Alberti (1452), describe un papel central de la casa en la construcción de la ciudad, una idea que ha sido cierta durante siglos hasta el año 1867, cuando Ildefonso Cerdà dijo: «Independencia del individuo en la vivienda, independencia de la vivienda en la ciudad». Esta oración marca el abandono definitivo de la relación entre lo parcial (casa) y lo total (ciudad). Lo anterior se da por varias razones, de las cuales se destacan: etimológico, metafórico y la transición de la ciudad de dimensiones circunscritas a un «nodo de tráfico universal». La movilidad prevalece sobre cualquier otro tema urbano. Históricamente, es muy importante reflexionar sobre este período para ver el futuro del hogar y la ciudad en el ámbito de las políticas respecto al cambio climático.

Palabras clave: urbe, ciudad, movilidad, habitar

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

Abstract

«The house is a small city. The city is a big house». This Leon Battista Alberti's thesis (1452), delineates a central role of the house in the construction of the city. An idea that has been true for centuries. Until 1867, when Ildefonso Cerdà said: «Independence of the individual in the housing, independence of the housing in the city». This sentence marks the abandonment of the relationship between the part (the house) and the whole (the city). Definitely. For a variety of reasons. Three main ones: etymological, metaphoric and the transition of the city from circumscribed dimensions to a «node of universal viability». Mobility prevails over any urban theme. Historically, it is very important coming back to reflect on this period to look at the future, of the house and the city, in the field of the climate change policy.

Keywords: urbe, city, mobility, to dwell

Topic: Architectures of the house: the domestic space through history

Introduction

«The Italian architectural treatises established an inaugural relationship with space. The birth of this new relationship dates exactly from the first and most masterful among them, the *De re aedificatoria* [...] of 1452».¹ This relationship is considered inaugural because Leon Battista Alberti's work marks a clear break with respect to previous texts. Moreover, references to the past, in the form of citations that cross the whole *De re aedificatoria*, do not lend a sense of reverence. In fact, they serve as a way of taking leave of the masters of antiquity and those of more recent times, since there are no «mandatory laws; but, taking their instruction as a starting point, we will try to prepare new solutions and thus achieve a glory equal to their own, or, if possible, even greater».² It is an act of dismissal that adopts a critical distance to the conceptual apparatus of the past without, however, negating, or worse, disowning it. It is an act of dismissal that derives from the awareness that that same conceptual apparatus belongs to a time that has now passed. However, taking leave means that the retrospective gaze is not so much aimed at shutting off what has been, as much as opening up to what will be. And it is in this sense that one should read Alberti's desire to revisit the city; to reformulate the questions; to search for a new perspective. An interpretive effort that opens up to all the urban components: «if what the philosophers say is true, that the city is like a great house, and the house is in turn a small city».³ It is the metaphorical transition from the body that is a building to the body that is a city. Alberti implements a move, conceptual and scalar, from the single building to the city. And without contradicting it, it goes beyond Vitruvius's idea that «no temple could present a system of construction without symmetries and without proportion; if it did not have an exact calculation of its members, as in the case of a well-formed man».⁴

Inside the *De re aedificatoria*, the dwelling assumes an important role because it becomes the architectural matrix of the urban space: «in the house the atrium, the hall and similar environments must be made in the same way that in a city the forum and great avenues are made: not in a marginal, recondite or cramped position».⁵ On closer inspection, the metaphor of the body-city is an interdependence which indicates the necessity of correlation between the part and the whole; continuity between the single element and the entire field of the built; of the relationship of reciprocity between the building and the overall spatial structure. These points introduce some questions: if the *De re aedificatoria* marks the beginning of the interdependence between home and city, what is its purpose? Is it possible to identify the historical moment in which the house will no longer be decisive in the transformation of urban space? And further, at which point does the theoretical and design itinerary of Alberti face a crisis? In the first instance, it is possible to state that «the form of the treaties developed over approximately four centuries, up to the first half of the nineteenth century. The Albertian paradigm has in fact conditioned the formal order and the conceptual and technical contents of subsequent texts».⁶

The rules and principles of the *De re aedificatoria* show the first signs of crisis in 1842, when Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, in *Dizionario storico dell'architettura*, writes under

¹ Françoise Choay, *La regola e il modello*, trans. Ernesto D'Alfonso (Rome: Officina, 1986), 17.

² Leon Battista Alberti, *De Re Aedificatoria*, trans. Giovanni Orlandi (Milano: Il Polifilo, 1966), 68.

³ Alberti, *De re...*, 64.

⁴ Vitruvio, *De Architectura*, trans. Antonio Corso, ed. Elisa Romano (Torino: Einaudi, 1997), 183.

⁵ Alberti, *De re...*, 338.

⁶ Rosario Pavia, *L'idea di città. Teorie urbanistiche della città tradizionale* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1994), 15.

the entry for city: «generic name that gives an aggregate of houses, districts, of squares, of neighbourhoods, even if this complex of houses is closed by a walled enclosure or ramparts that oppose its enlargement, as if it occupies an unlimited terrain».⁷ A definition that records the results of the large dimension; the loss of urban form of the major European capitals; of the irreversibility of the phenomenon. But it does not go any further. It is only with the *Teoria generale dell'urbanizzazione* (henceforth *Teoria*) that it will become clear that the object of study is no longer the city. Ildefonso Cerdà y Sunier understands that he is in a moment of transition in which the urban phenomenon has undergone a metamorphosis, becoming something different from what it has always been. A change that renders obsolete all analytical-design instrumentation. A radical transformation that overturns the ancient values. The *Teoria*: «published in 1867 [...] to establish and justify the choice of the structure adopted by him in his Plan for the expansion of Barcelona (1859), is in fact simultaneously the first in order of time and the most fully developed».⁸ However, it is a systematization that in its attempt to rationalize to the full the new «textual structure of theories of urbanism»,⁹ introduces the premise of the crisis in the relationship between home and city, for a variety of reasons. Three principal ones. One of the terms of interdependence will be erased from the dictionary: the city disappears. Secondly, metaphors change: the body becomes an organism and the cure will be medicalized. Lastly, the urban scale will take its first steps towards those planetary dimensions that yesterday appeared as a hazard and that today are, instead, reality.

1. Without comparison term

It is synchronous: urban planning arises, the concept of city dies. This is the incipit of the *Teoria*: «I will incite the reader to study a completely new material, intact, virgin. Since everything was new, I had to look for and invent new words to express new ideas, the explanation of which was not in any lexicon».¹⁰ The act of foundation of urban planning is therefore not marked by constructive programs, plans, road sections, or design hypotheses but by «new words to express new ideas». It is the radical reformulation of metaphors, of vocabulary and of disciplinary boundaries. Adding new words, specifying their meaning, is the effort to identify the field of action of a discipline in the nascent state. It is the will to give an autonomous language to a new subject. It is the need to mark the distance between past and present: «the application of the engine as a driving force marked the end of one era for humanity and the beginning of another».¹¹ And this is precisely the reason why Cerdà states that «the term city did not serve my purpose»¹² and expresses the need to find a new word «to indicate this set of different and heterogeneous facts called the city».¹³

⁷ Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, *Dizionario storico di architettura*, trans. Antonio Mainardi (Mantova: Fratelli Negretti, 1842), 460.

⁸ Choay, *La regola...*, 304.

⁹ Choay, *La regola...*, 304.

¹⁰ Ildefonso Cerdà, *Teoria generale dell'urbanizzazione*, trans. Ada Ceruti (Milano: Jaca Book, 1985), 81.

¹¹ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 72.

¹² Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 81.

¹³ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 72.

The inadequacy of the term becomes the prerequisite for starting the search for a new word that more closely adheres to the reality of the territory; that reduces the gap with the urban phenomenon; that knows how to combine the reasons of the etymology with those of planning.

«I could have used some derivative of *civitas*, but all these words were already loaded with meanings far removed from what I was trying to express. After having tried to use and abandoned many simple and composite words, I remembered the word *urbs* which, reserved for the almighty Rome, was not transmitted to the peoples who adopted its language, and lent itself better to my ends».¹⁴

The choice of the term *urbs*, however, after discarding the possibility of using *civitas*, has the etymological meaning of granting preference to the physical part of the city rather than to the community; to its infrastructures more than to the citizens; spatial arrangement before its inhabitants.

In the *Teoria* the word city disappears; it becomes a name without direct reference in reality; emblem of a dead language; the last remainder of a vocabulary now exhausted, conceptually unproductive and ineffective. It is the *urbe* that is the object of the new regulations. Both because of a semantic necessity, given that «our language does not have adequate terms to express the concept to which I refer»,¹⁵ both because «the application of the engine as a driving force marked the end of one era for humanity and the beginning of another».¹⁶ A new era in which all the instrumentation, that for centuries had presided over the design of the city, would become obsolete; unusable; sterile.

2. Metaphors

Three statements to build two new metaphors. The first: «urbanization, whose origin and development is generally attributed to chance, obeys, instead, immutable principles, fixed rules».¹⁷ The second: urban planning has «its own place among the sciences that teach man the path of his perfection».¹⁸ And finally, the role of the urbanist, which consists in «putting oneself completely in the hands of science and obeying it blindly by abstraction from all that exists, to subjugate achievements to its uncontested principles».¹⁹

To apply these principles, Cerdà has no doubts as to which is the most appropriate methodology: «an anatomical work [...] in the most intimate and hidden depths of the urban and social organism».²⁰ Words that open the *Teoria* and introduce the metaphor of the urban organism. From *De Re Aedificatoria* onwards, the reference to the body takes on the symbolic value of harmony, balance and proportion between the parts. It is for this reason that the metaphor of the city-body becomes the fundamental measure, both in the construction of the house and in that of the city. With the urban organism, a passage takes place that radically

¹⁴ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 81.

¹⁵ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 83.

¹⁶ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 72.

¹⁷ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 83.

¹⁸ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 83.

¹⁹ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 170.

²⁰ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 79.

changes the conception of the human body. And it transforms the way of understanding and perceiving space with relevant operational repercussions: the idea of a city as a closed form in which all the parts are correlated and proportionate is set aside. In the urbe, we must avoid all those «considerations of extension or hierarchy that do not concern the science of urbanization».²¹

The urban planner can no longer stop at the external appearance of the body. The biological organism requires an in depth observation. The subsoil will be included in the skills of the science of urbanization. And it will have an extraordinary importance, because below the road level there is «a great number of works of art, of times, of big and small pipes» which, forming «the venous system of a mysterious being with colossal dimensions [...] allows the development of urban life».²² The city becomes an aggregate of parts and the urbanists the «cold anatomists of the urban organism»,²³ whose mission is to understand «the active germ of the grave disease that gnaws the bowels of humanity».²⁴ A disease that makes the urban planner a true and proper doctor. In the construction of the clinical picture, the times coincide. The urban planner, too, proceeds in three phases: anamnesis, diagnosis and prognosis. This is what Cerdà expresses: «it is necessary to preliminarily educate society, make it aware of the evils it suffers, understand its causes, and point out its remedies».²⁵

Faced with the anatomical and functional alteration of the urban organism, the part of the work that is assigned to the urbanist is the cure: this is also a metaphor transition. In the city-body the term cure is consideration, concern, caring and constant thought. In the urban organism, the cure is instead a complex of therapeutic means and medical prescriptions or, as Cerdà says, the «effective remedy» to eradicate «the evil at the roots».²⁶

3. Beyond measure

«Independence of the individual in the home, independence of the habitation in the city, independence of movements in urban streets»: so it is written this way in exergue of the *Teoria*. And thus the separation between home and city is ratified. Definitively. And even if the «point of departure and arrival of all roads is the abode or dwelling place of man»,²⁷ the main objective is the construction of the «great road network that crosses our globe».²⁸ The house as architecture and its relationship with the city are set aside. Cerdà's priorities are others: mobility and infrastructure. His considerations on the historical evolution of urbanization are oriented by a certainty: «locomotion will be the starting point of our research in every urban age and the means of control of our observations».²⁹ And a little further on adds that «the true transformation

²¹ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 83.

²² Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 116.

²³ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 143.

²⁴ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 79.

²⁵ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 79.

²⁶ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 75.

²⁷ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 120.

²⁸ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 122.

²⁹ Cerdà, *Teoria...*, 157.

of our urbes took place at the time of the transition from equestrian to wheeled locomotion».³⁰ The *Teoria* opens up new horizons, especially in relation to the fact that: «electricity and steam, the telegraph and the railways eliminate distances and establish more frequent relations between the more distant regions».³¹ It is the observation of an irreversible tendency that will weaken the relationship between project and context, topography and territorial identity, *forma urbis* and *genius loci*: «the urbe, considered as an appendix of the great universal road system is nothing more than a sort of stopping place [...] more or less important, according to the number of industries, deposits and dwellings that compose it».³² Faced with a land project that not only breaks the centuries-old embankments of the walls but also aims to extend itself to the entire surface of the earth, the house can no longer be the matrix of urban space.

Replete terram is written in the exergue. «Fill the earth» is the imperative that God pronounces twice. The first, after creating man and woman, God said: «Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth; subdue it and dominate over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that crawls on the earth» (Genesis 1, 28). The second when, after the universal flood, God told Noah and his sons: «Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth» (Genesis 9, 1). A double imperative whose boundaries extend to the whole Creation. The Earth is the planimetric expanse to which Cerdà applies himself. In his *Teoria*, there is no limit to expansion; no demographic sizing; no identification of frontiers not to be crossed. And, in fact, its fundamental operative principle, which concludes the exergue, is: «ruralize the urban, urbanize the rural». The underlying hypothesis is to establish the rules of growth, not its limits. To say how to do it, not where to stop. The opposing categories city/countryside, centre/suburbs are permanently abandoned. And with them, the idea of a traditional city.

4. Preliminary conclusions

The relationship between the house and the city crosses a significant part of the *Teoria*. However, not infrequently, we are faced with statements that appear more as principle rather than functional tools from the technical point of view. This is what happens when Cerdà tries to relate the part to the whole. «What is the urbe? A set of houses linked by a more or less perfect road system, it does not matter. What is the house? Neither more nor less a set of streets and places of habitation, like the city». Two questions that seem a tribute to the importance of the architectural treatises; and not real questions capable of triggering new research hypotheses. Two answers that reveal the foundations of the idea of the city that Cerdà has in mind. And the following comparison confirms it: «the great urbe and the house urbe differ only in size and in the societies that live in them: a large and complex society on the one hand, a society composed of few people and simple on the other».³³ Here too, the comparison is rather a rhetorical artifice than an indication for the urban project, as was the metaphor of the body-city in the *De re aedificatoria*, and in the subsequent treatises. On the other hand, the decision to abandon the term city, in favour of urbe, was not made because Cerdà needed a synonym. It sanctions an epochal passage; it is the semantic aspect of the territorial project; it becomes an attempt to remedy the distance created between words and things. And again, the metaphoric

³⁰ Cerdà, *Teoria*..., 163.

³¹ Cerdà, *Teoria*..., 142.

³² Cerdà, *Teoria*..., 122.

³³ Cerdà, *Teoria*..., 132.

passage of cannot be seen as the mere updating of a rhetorical figure. It is something else; is to underline a new vision of the world; to trigger a reflection from a different point of view; to structure a different way of thinking and speaking with respect to the past. And what might we say regarding the *Replete terram*? Of the imperatives to ruralize the urban, and urbanize the countryside? Or the idea of urbe as a node in universal viability? It is difficult to make such a conceptual, theoretical and operational metamorphosis coexist, with the possibility that «the city could everywhere have maintained a form similar to that of the house»,³⁴ or with other statements of similar content.

These contradictions conceal, in reality, another metamorphosis: the urbe has started a new way to inhabit. Therefore Cerda: the condition for which «peoples lived closed in on themselves, solitary and isolated from each other», is rapidly evolving because «electricity and steam, the telegraph and the railways eliminate the distances [and] establish more frequent relations between the more distant regions».³⁵ The horizon of movement goes well beyond the boundaries of the walls and urban space is no longer an extension of the private house. Two certainties that begin to weaken the link between the dwelling and its etymological root: «the latin *habito-as*, which is “to have, to possess”, insists, in its frequent form, on a “habitual possession, to continue to have”, which opens the verb to the idea of *ownership* and to that, mutually reciprocal, of *belonging*».³⁶ In the city of the past there existed a fiduciary relationship between individuals, a rooting of the place and a collective identification, because the territory was the repository things, costumes and tradition, and the people who lived there, even though they did not know each other, knew to share them. In the *Teoria* this relationship becomes residual, because the «means of locomotion allow the poorest families and individuals, previously condemned to vegetate in the region in which they were born, to move».³⁷ An intuition that lets us see how the conditions are created for the first forms of temporary cohabitation; how they are outlining scenarios such that it is no longer a certainty to remain in the same territory for a long period of time or, at the limit, for all one's life; how the chance that living is synonymous with permanence is being reduced. The urbe starts to become an agglomeration of strangers. It is a place of flux; also of people. And the fact that «the dwelling [is] treated like a commodity»³⁸ should be a logical consequence, considering that those who move need to find accommodation to rent or buy. For Cerda, however, it is a difficult reality to accept, one which will lead to a paradoxical result: to propose solutions that contained, in a nutshell, the possibility of being circumvented by those who in the *Teoria* are considered the first threats to fight-off: «the great speculators [who] took possession of the urban property by taking it away from the small owners».³⁹

The space between intuition and paradox has not been solved. Indeed, it has expanded. «In many ways, what we experienced was the story of a progressive saturation of the terrestrial space»⁴⁰ of an occupation of the land that has passed every frontier, of a dilation of the urban

³⁴ Cerda, *Teoria...*, 132.

³⁵ Cerda, *Teoria...*, 142.

³⁶ Maurizio Vitta, *Dell'abitare* (Torino: Einaudi, 2008), 11.

³⁷ Cerda, *Teoria...*, 169.

³⁸ Cerda, *Teoria...*, 139.

³⁹ Cerda, *Teoria...*, 138.

⁴⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Essere singolare plurale*, trans. Davide Tarizzo (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), X.

towards everywhere. Without having fully understood the many implications of the fact that «the essence of building is “to dwell” [and] only if we have the ability to dwell, we can build».⁴¹ In the absence of this premise, the territory has become a grouping of multiform constructive expressions; of filamentous plots that thicken now in small building lumps, now in endless extensions. And without purpose, considering that in the New Climatic Regime⁴² «everyone finds himself at the source of a universal lack of space to share and habitable land».⁴³

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⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, *Saggi e discorsi*, trans. Gianni Vattimo (Milano: Mursia, 1976), 107.

⁴² Bruno Latour, *Face à Gaïa: Huit conférences sur le Nouveau Régime Climatique*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2015).

⁴³ Bruno Latour, *Tracciare la rotta. Come orientarsi in politica*, trans. Rossella Prezzo (Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2018), 17.

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