An Integrated Inhabiting: What are we Talking About When we Talk About it.

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Abstract
Starting from the consideration of (also) verticalization processes as one of the expressions of a declining, dis-integrating way to conceive human settlements, and based on two fundamental premises - (i) the long-lasting crisis of functionalist housing, and (ii) the emerging fading of the clear distinction between town and countryside - the paper proposes instead the prospect of a re-integration and reticularization of living-production-enjoying places. Concerning the above prospect, some relevant practices are treated, which show more or less significant traces of self-sustainable developments, able to strictly relate the housing with a range of other integrated activities.

Keywords
Inhabiting, sign-object, urban, urbanity, urban bioregion

Introduction

This paper stems from the participation of the authors in the 2022 Tirana Architecture Week, in which they co-tutored the workshop "High-rise buildings vs. an integrated inhabiting", focused on (trying to) revealing the possibilities to integrate and reintegrate multifunctionality in the Tirana conurbation, where the current verticalization trend can, on the contrary, be read as one of the expressions of the monofunctional approach to human settlement, that is towards the disarticulation of the living, producing and enjoying activities occurring within a territorial context. In particular, as seen in the workshop report, the selected study area shows a co-presence of informal housing and various activities, but also increasing pressures towards 'modern' developments, according to models that tend to the complete dis-integrating of the inhabiting processes.

Design as semiurgic dissociation between subject and object

We will discuss here about an 'integrated inhabiting', to offer a minimal contribution to overcoming the reduction of the world of design/planning activities - still ongoing even post the architectural postmodernism (and what followed) - into (designed/planned) 'objects' on the one hand and 'environment' on the other, and the related dissociation and opposition not only between the two terms/concepts, but also between Human Beings and Nature in our everyday experience.

But, while we can say that this last dissociation/contraposition is deeply rooted in Western civilization since its origins, we must also point out that, according to Baudrillard, objects only begin to exist at the time of the mutation of the industrial society into our current techno-culture, i.e. from the passage out of a metallurgic into what he calls a 'semiurgic' society (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 185). That is, "the object only appears when the problem of its finality of meaning, of its status as message and as sign begins to be posed beyond its status as product and as commodity" (ibidem).

It is, therefore, a real mutation of the status of the former industrial 'product': before the advent of this object form, nothing is an object, while after that, everything is (ibidem), in the sense that every-thing signifies its function, i.e., "becomes the object of a calculus of function and of signification" (ibidem).

Baudrillard having so posed the question - in a way that evidently concerns us very closely as planners/designers - it is easy to understand why he, while tracing the embryos of the above mutation in the 19th century, attributes to the Bauhaus the responsibility of having theoretically consolidated what he calls the 'revolution of objects' (ibidem): "Before the Bauhaus, there were, properly speaking, no objects; subsequently, and according to an irreversible logic, everything potentially participates in the category of objects and will be produced as such" (ibidem).

It can therefore be traced back to the Bauhaus that universal 'semantization' of the environment, in which total functionality also means a total 'semiurgic' dissociation upsetting the traditional mode, in which objects were bound together, had no status of their own and did not form a system among themselves based on a finality coinciding with functionality (ivi, pp. 185-186). Functionality, or simply the function, that in the semiological (dis)articulation of the sign-object into a 'signifier' and a 'signified' becomes the rational, objectifiable signified of the object signifier (ivi, p. 187). The sign-object completely obeys, therefore, the linguistic schema, and in fact design emerges simultaneously with this semiotic splitting in two terms, "as the project of their ideal articulation and the aesthetics of resolution of their equation" (ibidem).

If the function is the objective signified of every object, then: i) the signified of sign-objects is denotative (not connotative); ii) the thing denoted (functional) is beautiful, the connoted (parasitical) is ugly; iii) the thing denoted (objective) is true, the connoted is false (ideological) (ivi, p. 196).

Behind the equation object-function takes place, according to Baudrillard, a whole labor of dissociation and abstract restructuration "of every complex subject-object relation into simple, analytic, rational elements that can be recombined in functional ensembles and which then take on status as the environment" (ivi, p. 187). It is only on that basis that "man is separated from something he calls the environment, and confronted with the task of controlling it" (ibidem).

Unfortunately for us (designers, architects, planners, engineers, etc.), according to Baudrillard, "this split, this fundamentally broken and dissociated relationship (...) between man and his environment is the raison d'étre and the site of design" (ivi, p. 201).

City/countryside dissociation

In our opinion, splitting the sign-object in two terms, signifier and signified, evidently corresponds to (or perhaps confirm and deepen) not only the split between human being and the environment, but also many other forms of persisting dualism, beginning from the city/countryside dissociation, as well as, conversely, the complementary long-lasting association between the term 'city' and the term 'urban'.

According to Choay (1994), in today's common language, the French word ville (city) - from the Latin villa, which also means village (both in French and English), we add - continues to designate the place or static support of a triple communication involving the exchange of goods, information and affections. In other terms, it remains associated with the concept of an inseparable union of what the Romans called urbs (physical territory of the city) and civitas (community of the citizens who inhabited it), i.e., it stays anchored to the reciprocal belonging of a discrete and fixed spatial entity and a population.

But, according to Choay (1994) again, such a kind of city not only is by now dead but above all, it no longer coincides with the 'urban'. In fact: i) the interaction of individuals is now both multiplied and delocalized; ii) belonging to communities of different interests is no longer based on proximity or local population density; iii) transport and telecommunications involve us in ever more numerous and diverse relationships, as members of abstract communities or whose spatial locations no longer

coincide and no longer have stability over time (Choay, 1994). We can then define the 'current urban' as a system of references, physical and mental, constituted by material and immaterial networks as well as by technical objects, whose manipulation involves the resounding in a looped circuit of a stock of images and information, regarding the relationships that our societies have with space, time and human being. In other terms, the 'urban' can be seen by now as a kind of 'operating system', valid and developable in all places, cities and countrysides, villages and suburbs (Choay, 1994).

An urban without outside (or withoutside)

Consistently with the interpretation as mentioned above of the urban by Choay, we should also recognize that it "can no longer be understood with reference to a particular 'type' of settlement space, whether defined as a city, a city-region, a metropolis, a metropolitan region, a megalopolis, an edge city, or otherwise" (Brenner&Schmid, 2011, p. 12), and that "it is no longer plausible to characterise the differences between densely agglomerated zones and the less densely settled zones of a region, a national territory, a continent, or the globe through the inherited urban/rural (or urban/non-urban) distinction" (ibidem). Although it can still be considered true that the processes of agglomeration remain essential for also generating this new 'urban' (Soja, 2000; Scott, 1988), the current urban system can no longer be treated as if it was composed "of discrete, distinct, and universal 'types' of settlement" (Brenner&Schmid, 2011, p. 12), as opposed to the rural 'surroundings'.

The assumption that the world is divided into discrete types of settlement is at the core of the hegemonic 'urban age thesis', as is the urban/rural opposition, in turn "understood in zero-sum terms: all of settlement space must be classified as either urban or rural; the extension of the former thus entails the shrinkage of the latter." (Brenner&Schmid, 2014, p. 744).

But it is quite clear, on the contrary, that we are now experiencing a situation of 'planetary urbanization', where "even spaces that lie well beyond the traditional city cores and suburban peripheries (...) have become integral parts of the worldwide urban fabric" (Brenner&Schmid, 2011, p. 12), which by now includes "transoceanic shipping lanes, transcontinental highway and railway networks, and worldwide communications infrastructures to alpine and coastal tourist enclaves, 'nature' parks, offshore financial centers, agro-industrial catchment zones and erstwhile 'natural' spaces such as the world's oceans, deserts, jungles, mountain ranges, tundra, and atmosphere" (ibidem).

Brenner calls these pieces of the new urban fabric 'operational landscapes', intending them as non-city spaces of high intensity, large scale industrial infrastructure (Brenner, 2016, p. 125), as for example: the desert agro-industrial infrastructures in Saudi Arabia, supported for several decades by subterranean water wells causing the depletion of aquifers; the swathes of the Amazon cleared since the 1990s to facilitate industrial agriculture and expanded long-distance logistics infrastructures; the regional landscapes in Central Florida infrastructuralized by the large mines of phosphate used as fertilizers in industrial agriculture; the industrialized agriculture in Minnesota, where the widespread adoption of precision farming techniques, industrial planting, fertilization and harvesting technologies have been customized to locational conditions at the scale of individual fields; the colossal, high-technology industrial infrastructure of the Chuquicamata copper mine in Northern Chile, that supplies essential materials and minerals to the world's megacities; the soya-bean production in the Cordoba Province (Argentina), that contributed to an infrastructural standardization of the landscape (Brenner, 2016, pp. 119-127).

Integrated inhabiting as a new form of urbanity

The reason why, according to us, it is essential to recognize the emerging forms of the 'urban fabric' lies in its relationship with 'urbanity'. Although urban fabric and urbanity are evidently interconnected, they do not automatically coincide with each other. According to Choay (1994), urbanity has to be seen as a reciprocal adjustment of a form of the urban fabric and a form of conviviality. In the absence of some form of conviviality, there is then no urbanity, even in the presence of an urban fabric. And on the other hand, the urban fabric with which to interact convivially can no longer be sought exclusively in the historic and modern city; if we don't want very large portions of the terrestrial globe to be covered, as it has already been happening for some time, with 'operational landscapes' (see above examples) devoid of any urbanity embryo.

But, many other and different urbanizations are possible (Brenner, 2016, p. 127) that, "insofar (...) challenge the dogma of the hypertrophic city (...) they also open up a horizon for imagining an alter-urbanisation" (Brenner, 2016, p. 126-127). Or rather, many alter-urbanizations, unlike operational landscapes oriented to capital accumulation, can constitute the outcome of processes of reorganizing non-city urban spaces for collective uses and the common good (Brenner, 2016, p. 126). In order not to leave the term landscape exclusively to the 'operational' dimension, and keeping in mind the almost poetic definition of urbanity by Choay (1994), we would suggest here to conceive such alter-urbanizations, or more generally all the possible new convivial urbanizations, as 'relational urban landscapes': neither regressively nostalgic, nor progressively escaping from 'actuality' - to paraphrase Choay herself (1965) - but 'virtually' (Lévy, 1995) capable of integrating cities and countryside, as well as overcoming several other dualisms, such as Human Being/Nature, Nature/Society, City/Countryside, Urban/Rural, Internal/External, Citizens/Foreigners, etc.

But what could be the role of designers/planners within such kinds of 'alter-urbanization' or 'relational urban landscaping' processes? To avoid any neo-demiurgic temptation, we think it is better to follow again the suggestion of Brenner to "constructing new cognitive maps of the planet's unevenly woven urban fabric", to "provide much-needed orientation for all who aspire to redesign that fabric in more socially progressive, politically inclusive, egalitarian and ecological ways" (Brenner, 2016, p. 126).

In this regard, Brenner obviously introduces the political dimension of the question, affirming that "urbanisation projects are collective political choices" (Brenner, 2016, 127).

We do not have enough space here to deal exhaustively with this question. We will therefore limit ourselves to referring to Magnaghi (2020), who, recalling the 'territorial principle' of Adriano Olivetti, identifies the first level of political decision with the concrete community of inhabitants-producers in a synergistic relationship with a reference territory for the local closure of the cycles of food, water, waste, energy; concrete community, therefore, as a community committed to enhancing the heritage of that same territory ('territorial heritage'), consisting of the set of values produced, through the different civilizations that have occurred over time, by the processes of co-evolutionary inter-relationship between human settlement and nature.

But what is the 'reference territory' of the 'concrete communities' of 'inhabitants-producers'? In this regard, Magnaghi (2014) first of all recognizes that the expansion of the spatial dimension of contemporary urbanizations and the dominant role of telematic hyperspace imply an anthropological mutation of the relationship between human settlement and the environment and that, consequently, it is not today a question of returning to the historic city, nor the rural village, nor to the historical concepts of polis and civitas, but to seek a new form of urbanity starting from the new geographical dimension of inhabiting and from its multi-scalar relationships, as well as the different possibilities of interaction between physical space and space or networks, or space of the flows in general. According to Magnaghi (2014), this new geographical dimension has to be identified with the 'urban bioregion', whose governance should be, however, translated into an interpretative and project tool at the level of the minimum units of territorial and landscape planning of a large area of a region, where to integrate the aspects of housing, productive, infrastructural, environmental, and landscape.

Searching for integrated inhabiting practices

It is precisely by thinking of Magnaghi's minimal but transscalar bioregional planning units that we searched for some relevant practices in which it can be found, at least in the embryo, an effort to develop self-sustainable cycles that strictly relate the housing with a wide range of integrated activities (f.e. food supply and other agro-forestry-pastoral activities, etc.) as well as embedded forms of adaptation to climate change effects.

The first experience that we think of interest is the creation, in 2005 in France, of a planning tool called "Perimeters of protection and enhancement of peri-urban agricultural and natural spaces", with the primary objective of overcoming the simple environmental protection provided by the Sensitive Natural Areas. In the urban area of Bordeaux, an historic green corridor became one of these 'Perimeters'. It establishes some parts of the peri-urban territory for agricultural and farming purposes, in integration with environmental protection, avoiding construction processes. The main positive factors of the tool are that it: integrates productive uses in the metropolitan area, synthesizes environmental protection, open-air leisure and primary production, contributes to the preservation of short food chains in the metropolitan area, and supports the active creation of valuable landscapes. On the other hand, it considers a limited multi-functionality, as the only productive uses are agriculture and farming. It also does not allow direct integration between housing and productive use of the territory. Furthermore, only coercive tools are provided to reach the objectives, and there are no processes for the participation of people in designing the shape of the area.

Another experience in France that deserves attention is the system of urban farmers' markets developed in Marseille through the years. The first step of its implementation was the match between an association of small local producers and the association of residents/storekeepers of a square, which led to the rise of the first market. It produced the rebirth of the area, both in a material and relational sense, as it created relational spaces in a high-density urban area. In a broader sense, as the system of urban farmers' markets reduces the length of food chains, it also reduces the environmental impact of food production. It contributes to the food resilience of the city/region, also allowing direct involvement of people (producers and consumers) in the reactivation of urban spaces. The limiting factors are the small impact on the main food chains, the persisting separation between the places of production and the places of consumption (and living), and the lack of integration in a broader strategy of the institutional frameworks.

The latter is, conversely, the main focus of the experience of the Stuttgart Region Landscape Park. In the context of a metropolitan area characterized by high pressure from the market for densification, scarce spaces, fast-growing low(er)-density settlements in the suburban area and environmental issues (also related to climate change), from 2006 the Verband Region Stuttgart developed the 'Landschaftspark' ('Landscape park'), to connect the still existing open areas in a general framework of multifunctional spaces. The municipalities in that Region developed six masterplans to implement, in detail, the general provisions of the Landscape Park. In the framework of the masterplans, the municipalities realized 120 small-scale interventions. We can observe that the Landscape Park is conceived as a multilevel and multiscale approach to planning the regional area, in which the process can be developed voluntarily by the municipalities. The project forecasts the multifunctionality of the spaces at a regional scale, "from parks, fields, vineyards, orchards, meadows, ravines and river banks to forests and valleys. Panoramic viewpoints, leisure areas and sights". The more critical aspects of the processes are that both the definition of the Landscape Park project and the master plans are basically expressions of a top-down approach, even if the stakeholders are involved, and that the general framework of the Landscape Park is conceived as a 'green counterbalance' to the 'gray' part of the territory, without overcoming the dichotomy between them.

Another comprehensive institutional action that is worth noting is that of the City of Barcelona, whose City Council devel-

oped strategies to make the city more liveable, also in adverse climate conditions: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Plan 2020; Tree Master Plan; Nature Plan 2030; Superblock Plan; Superilla project. The plans have the general common purpose of increasing the urban green infrastructure, also through a part of farming and gardening plots, and they paid specific attention to reducing the risk of green gentrification and social injustice. The Barcelona Green Strategy is composed of several different plans that draw a relevant retrofitting operation on the built environment, even in the very core of the city, also enabling a large participatory process through the involvement of the Citizen Council for Sustainability. The main weaknesses of the strategy, however, are that the relationship between the city and its region is not clearly taken into account, and the role of the productive plots is mainly for leisure and social cohesion, without significantly addressing the patterns of food production-consuming.

On the contrary, an experience ongoing in Porto aims to reactivate (part of) the productive landscapes of the city. Fontinha and Doze Casas are two of the largest city blocks, and have vast inner open spaces. The City Plan defines them as areas for 'urban development', that is, building sites. Research revealed that they are an expression of the 19th century city structure, in which each block had inner plots used for food production for the inhabitants. Pilot projects ('Quinta da Fontinha' and 'FARM') arose in the two blocks for reactivating (part of) productive urban landscapes, for a total surface area of about 11500 m2, resulting in a way to reintroduce the 'original' integrated inhabiting of the city. The plots are directly created and managed by the inhabitants, allowing active participation in the continuous reproduction of the urban (productive) landscape, partially reducing the dependence of the blocks from the main food chains. As the scale of the case study is relatively small and the projects are not integrated into a broader public policy to preserve and restore productive urban landscapes, the impact is quite limited. Moreover, the 'integration of inhabiting' is only related to food production.

The last example is the restoration of the San Pedro Tláhuac settlement in Xochimilco, an area recognized as a UNESCO site (World Heritage) and an example of a landscape created through a very long interactive adaptation between man and (water) environment in the context of the metropolitan area of Mexico City. The project aimed at improving the water management for inhabiting and agriculture, through interventions regarding water supply, wastewater treatment and control of extreme climatic events, with extensive use of nature-based solutions (NbS). The project considers both the innovative approach of NbS and the traditional way of managing the territory, integrating them with gray infrastructures. It combines the prosecution of agriculture with improved resilience to climate change effects, resulting in a way to overcome the separation between the built environment and the natural environment.

Conclusions

Although in the 'urban studies' and the so-called 'sciences of design', as well in the associated techniques, the 'modern' and 'modernism' have been subjected to intense criticism for a long time now, the design/planning activities, at the various scales to which they apply, seem not yet able to escape from a sort of impasse, probably a symptom of what F. Choay (2006) defines a progressive loss of the ability to build and inhabit of our current culture (in an anthropological sense).

However, it is also probable that one of the aspects of this incapacity is connected to what J. Baudrillard (1981) considered a kind of universal 'semantization' of the environment, i.e. the reduction to a purely linguistic scheme of the fundamental interaction between human beings and their physical environment (De Bonis, 2002). A reduction in the separation between signifier and (semantic) signified seems to correspond to a series of other hindering separations, starting from that between city and countryside.

It is, therefore, more than ever necessary to finally access a new conception of the 'urban', capable of acknowledging the 'death of the city' (Choay, 1994) and the new, emerging forms of 'non-city urban' (Brenner, 2016).

With respect to the latter, it is equally urgent to make design skills available in the direction of unprecedented forms of conjugation between new urban fabrics and possible forms of conviviality integrable with them, capable of reconstituting a real new 'urbanity'.

It is our opinion that the integration of these possible forms of conviviality in the new urban fabrics must necessarily involve, in turn, some form of integration between housing and other co-evolutionary interrelationship activities between human beings and the natural environment.

In this sense, some interesting experiences can already be traced, but certainly, they are only the embryos of a new urbanity still far from a consolidated and pervasive affirmation.

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