



Le Corbusier, Unité d'habitation de Marseille, France, 1947-1952. © Montaner Muxi arquitectes, 2007.

Modern Housing: Heritage and Vitality

BY JOSEP MARIA MONTANER AND ZAIDA MUXÍ MARTÍNEZ

One of the main subjects in contemporary architecture is how to deal with the physical and intellectual requirements of transforming modern housing. Joan Busquets points out in his contribution to this issue, that the special effort made by modern architects and progressive housing politics during the 20th century must be reinterpreted and followed today. Intentionally, this issue brings a special focus on the Iberoamerican world, specifically Spain, Portugal and Latin America, with the aim of relocating it in a cultural world of predominantly Anglo-American historiography. In any case, it presents a very wide spectrum, including North America, Switzerland and Great Britain. For this reason the projects are presented as case studies, both housing politics in different countries, and paradigmatic architectural examples, either positive or negative. In the articles there are recurrent references to *Casa Bloc* in Barcelona, *Narkomfin* in Moscow, and *Robin Hood Gardens* in London. Likewise, there is a specific case study, by Bernhard Furrer, on the renewal of the *Halen Complex*, near Bern, designed by *Atelier 5*, beginning with detailed guidelines for its restoration.

The introductory text by Josep Maria Montaner presents an overview of the permanence and transformation of modern housing. The article gives examples of projects, some of which are positive, and others which have suffered progressive degradation and then been demolished. One key and decisive element is the design of exterior access corridors that gave the projects their definitive form. Another reason for the obsolescence of some of these complexes was the excessive formal, functional and material definition of both the exterior and the interior. In response to the policy of demolishing some of the *Villes Nouvelles* in France, architects such as Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, Roland Castro and Sophie Denissot, or Paul Chemetov, have defended the logic of remaking, remodeling and metamorphosing.

Among the authors there are members of different generations. There are contributions made by well-known senior professors and researchers such as Joan Busquets, Alice T. Friedman, Carmen Jordà, Josep Maria Montaner and Rui Ramos; articles written by younger teachers as Zaida Muxí, Maite Palomares or Maria Luiza Sanvitto; and articles by young architects and researchers such as Ramon Bermúdez from Colombia, Juan Pablo Rodríguez from Mexico, Soledad Armada from Argentina, Aranzazu Melon from Spain and England, and Isabel Aparici from Spain. In some contributions there are general views about the history of housing politics, as in the writings of Rui Ramos on Portugal, and Juan Pablo Rodríguez on Mexico; in others there are mono-

graphic studies such as in the work by Ramon Bermúdez about the successful experiment of *El Tunal*, by Emesé de Murcia in Bogotá; by Soledad Armada about the *Juan XXIII* Housing Complex, by architects Morea and Molinos and engineer Morea, in Buenos Aires; by Maria Luiza Sanvitto about the Housing Complex *Zeinho Magalhães Prado*, by João Vilanova Artigas, Fabio Penteadó and Paulo Mendes da Rocha, in Guarulhos, São Paulo; or the case study written by Carmen Jordà and Maite Palomares about Santiago Artal's *Santa Maria Micaela* housing project in Valencia.

There are also special contributions, such as the article by Alice T. Friedman on Modern houses and the role of women as clients. Friedman builds a new hypothesis understanding modernity: modernity is not a formal question, but an answer to programmatic needs that came from the way of life of the future inhabitants. Zaida Muxí's contribution follows, and like Alice T. Friedman's, is a feminist historical criticism that reveals the inputs made by women architects in the building of modern neighborhoods. In this sense, it is very clear that this issue of the **docomomo** Journal has a special view of interpretation from feminist thought, contributing to re-situate women architects' roles.

Finally, Isabel Aparici, anthropologist and editor, presents a proposal for the social and cultural activation of the heritage of collective housing in Barcelona, which could be useful as a model for other cities.

It is interesting and necessary to think of how to deal with the problem of housing today, how to study the evolution and transformation of specific examples, to know the reasons for their respective success or failure, and how to renew the immense existing heritage of modern housing.

In conclusion, the challenge for the present is, on one hand, to recover and upgrade existing housing, and on the other, to project and to build collective housing capable of absorbing future transformations and different users. ■