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Gleaning Past Residential Architecture as an Act of Resistance

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"Déchets" by Julie Nahon, 2019, from Jean-François Millet's "Des Glaneuses", 1857

The urgency of housing for *a significant part of the population*, capable of tackling adversity and uncertainty, of being inclusive and intergenerational, of translating cultural and participatory processes, as part of the response to the contemporary societal crisis, goes beyond the proposal of new housing models and requires the acknowledgement that these challenges have existed throughout history. Thus, the response to today's indisputably pressing problems gains depth when elaborated in the *longue durée* of the experience of housing construction in the 20th century and in the understanding of its foundations and logic.

In the early 20th century, the housing problem determined the implementation of mass construction programs from Berlin to Frankfurt, Vienna and Amsterdam, promoting access to decent housing and also to the city itself. This process also leveraged the redefinition of housing and ways of living to attain a response to the challenges of its time, implementing ideological visions such as *minimum housing* and the *Frankfurt cuisine* as spaces suited to modern life.

Simultaneously, research into the “plan libre” and the direct and indirect resources of flexibility, polyvalence, adaptation, and reversibility boosted the continuous experimentation of *adaptable types*. The possibility of organising space independently of structural constraints, conveyed in new materials and construction techniques, paved the way for housing composition and distribution strategies that would be explored by different architects throughout the following generations in the proposal of inclusive, resilient domestic spaces, adapted to the intrinsic variability of living.

In the post-war period, the main focus of research was geared towards local constructive and material resources, and above all, human resources, i.e., communities and the way they inhabit, how they use and appropriate space. The *thirty glorious years* made it possible for Western democratic states to put into practice fundamental experiments such as the involvement of citizens in the housing process through public consultations, prior investigation into their needs, and even direct participation through self-management (cooperative model) or self-construction, and these experiences underpinned the right to housing and the right to the city.

In the challenging context of the “Estado Novo” dictatorship in Portugal, some of these issues began to be addressed by architects working at the service of institutions such as the Federation of Provident Funds (“Federação das Caixas de Previdência”) and the National Laboratory of Civil Engineering, which allowed them, with some degree of autonomy, to establish solid work bases and well-prepared technical teams. However, it would only be possible to move swiftly towards alternative ways of thinking and building housing after the revolution of 25 April 1974, with the SAAL program (Local Ambulatory Support Service).

The fact that SAAL constituted an opposition to the liberal models that dictated conventional accommodation systems limited its action. Likewise, the international context of the 1980s, after the oil crisis of 1973, leveraged the dilapidation of the housing policy implemented since the founding of the FFH (Housing Development Fund/ “Fundo Fomento Habitação”, 1969), with the conviction that social/affordable housing was a task for which the State was not responsible, replacing it, solely and illusively, with the intentions of the real estate and financial market.

The contemporary discussion of the *housing problem* has been driven in Portugal by political strategies, translated into legislative changes such as the enactment of the New Generation of Public Housing Policies (2018), the Basic Housing Law (2019), and the recent approval by the government of the “Mais Habitação” (2023) package of measures.

Although political, this discussion is also eminently architectural and should incorporate the update of housing types and models (in a logic opposite to the idea of a standard project), going beyond crystallized proposals. This trivialization of collective housing is, in part, the result of a selective appropriation of utopia and the Modern Movement's project proposals for society, distorting them in the face of everyone's complacency and the interest of some. Among other aspects, this process has given rise to solutions that are not very resistant to changes in lifestyles reflected, for example, in situations of intergenerational coexistence, activities such as working from home, or general issues such as adapting to the ageing of the inhabitants or adequacy to energy efficiency criteria.

However, the results of the recent holding of numerous tenders for the creation of affordable rental housing, both at the municipal level and promoted by the Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation (IHRU, I.P.), are worrying as they point in the opposite direction. At the level of the elaboration of tender programs, conventional distribution systems are induced and limit the aforementioned typological research. Also, in the juries' evaluation of the proposals, and within the scope of competition rules, they are not aware of other proposals that may reflect the successful/failed experiences of a century of collective housing. Among others, these aspects disregard the diversity of ways of living and the transformation of living space throughout life as a necessary expression of architecture's durability and *a sine qua non* condition for sustainability.

Thus, in Portugal, the disciplinary discussion of Architecture, and particularly design practices and the analysis mechanisms of architectural design, need to incorporate today's fundamental issues such as the multiplicity of ways of living and their natural variation, together with aspects such as demographic movements, population ageing, and climate change. These factors represent a necessary and specific contribution from architects in the face of current challenges, in an inclusive, resilient, and diversified response to timeless problems such as accessibility, spatial requirements, adaptation to circumstances and ways of life over time, or the need to respond to sustainable building standards. These practices and solutions present in housing from the past are of interest today to be carefully gleaned.

Note: This abstract was prepared based on an article where the authors expand on the presented topics in more depth.