

**Giovanna Borasi (Ed.), *A Section of Now: Social Norms and Rituals as Sites for Architectural Intervention*, Leipzig, CCA/Spector Books, 368 pp. – 2022. Softcover: € 35,00 – ISBN 3959055072**



The exhibition *A Section of Now: Social Norms and Rituals as Sites for Architectural Intervention*, conceived as part of the CCA's one-year investigation *Catching Up with Life*, took place at the Main Galleries of the *Canadian Centre for Architecture* in Montreal between November 2021 and May 2022, and was then followed by a co-publication by the CCA and Spector Books. Giovanna Borasi, architect and curator, entitles the introduction to the catalogue *Attention to New Sites for Architecture*, explaining: "the relation between society and architecture has always existed. Societal transformations have inspired architectural interventions to house our rituals, norms, and cultural patterns, architecture mirrors our collective values" (pp. 7). Starting consideration of

the volume is that portions of contemporary life are misaligned with the spaces they occupy. The book stresses that artificial landscape conditions our lives, inducing everyone to witness how society moves on constantly. For instance, radical changes in society, economy, environment, and technology introduce new forms of living and aggregation and "constitute a call from society to architects and designers to devise spatial arrangements and strategies that could support these new and diverse conceptions of living". The influence of growing individualism and the increasing number of one-person households continues to rise, while the housing environment of the western world cities is characterized by large scale apartments, a recurring pattern conceived to respond to large family demands of the past. Even though the structural response of architecture is, in most cases, deferred over time, creative responses by the dwellers can act as a medium between the designers' gaps. Purpose of the exhibition is precisely to show possibilities to fill these gaps: throughout six main issues each of them subdivided in several examples, the catalogue explores how the built environment conditions emerging forms of contemporary living. For instance, the unaffordability of housing, the cost of living in large urban areas, and the widespread inability to build equally through real estate have created non-traditional forms of cohabitation such as *Nesterly* (pp. 332), a tool that uses an algorithm, like the ones used by dating apps, to help initiate living arrangements across

generations. Design and social transformations foster the collaborative use and management of space by non-nuclear groups such as *Yoshino Cedar House* (pp. 28), designed by the Japanese architect Go Hasegawa in partnership with Airbnb; the project is a hybrid community space and homestay, planned to be a shared experience for guests and residents alike, where "the village is the host." Likewise, in Los Angeles, *PodShare* creates a connection with the backpacker lifestyle, providing bunk beds, branded as a capsule, in an open environment, "designed to maximize social collision" (pp. 219). Several minds are trying to solve this issue by creating more inclusive environments and typologies. In Basel, for instance, Jack Self aims to promote democracy, inclusion, and space equality with alternative ownership models. In his project *Ingot* (pp. 222), the tower, often seen as a symbol of western capitalism, becomes a tool conceived to house low-income workers. The project imagines a long-term bond financing structure and, it would allow the developer to charge tenants extraordinarily reduced rent, thereby offering them a highly secure home. On the same line *La hauteur pour tous* (pp. 220), where the apartments in the tower are made by different rooms "vertically dispersed through the building" (one at the lower level coupled with a terrace at the top) to reach new equality of light and views between tenants. Architectural practice Dogma states that the task of architects is to answer in a strategic manner to alternative forms of ownership with new arrangements to

reinforce confidence and solidarity between the inhabitants. Furthermore, projects such as *Promised Land* (pp. 224), use various sites (London, Brussels, and Helsinki) and the unique opportunities each context and governance offers to bring about a different housing model. The project *Naked House*, (pp. 20) designed by the architecture office OMMX in 2017, is an example of an effort to create a new housing type that provides a financially accessible threshold to home ownership. Another interesting example is Heinrich Degelo's and his *Homebase Cooperative's Artists' Studios* (pp. 21) in Basel, where people can rent square meters for 10 CHF/month, depending on their needs without contributing to what could be called consumerist bulimia of space. The Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012), thrilled with the social media platform *TikTok*, has spurred the latest iteration of content houses, the most notable of which being *Hype House*, a McMansion home (once a middle-class house of the suburbs) where some of the platform's most prominent young stars have formed a cohabitation group (pp. 118). "Technologies can change our set of values, values are frequently articulated through rituals, and rituals have a way of finding support in specific architectural form" (pp. 270). This interrelationship is evident in the *Crematorium* by Office KGDVS (pp. 270): a redesign of the conventional ritual space with the *treatment* in the most climactic point in the architecture. In addition, the intervention *Constellation Park* (pp. 272), designed by DeathLAB, creates a network of suspended memorial

shrines composed of illuminated vessels that use the biomass of the deceased to generate light. With music streaming services, auto-sharing, and other new models of access, we are already moving past the idea of owning many of the things that we use and enjoy daily. "Might we not own a house, but instead subscribe to one?" asks the curator herself. The sociological remarks impacting society should guide architectural design. We live in an increasingly subscription-based society, in which the concept of individual property has been erased: centuries of struggle for affordable public housing might be swept away like ashes through the click of a subscription. "When housing becomes a commodity, constructed for profit rather than community, it is urgent for architects to contribute not only to the building of houses but also to the conception of new forms of ownership" states Giovanna Borasi. The volume can be considered as a compendium of strategies belonging to different areas united by a high rate of innovation. The take-home message emerging from the emotional photo reportages and from the selected projects is that architecture has lost the foresight necessary to provide the world with spaces in step with the times conducted. New doesn't always mean up to date: architecture should serve as a medium for transforming theoretical thinking into designed spaces for humans.

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