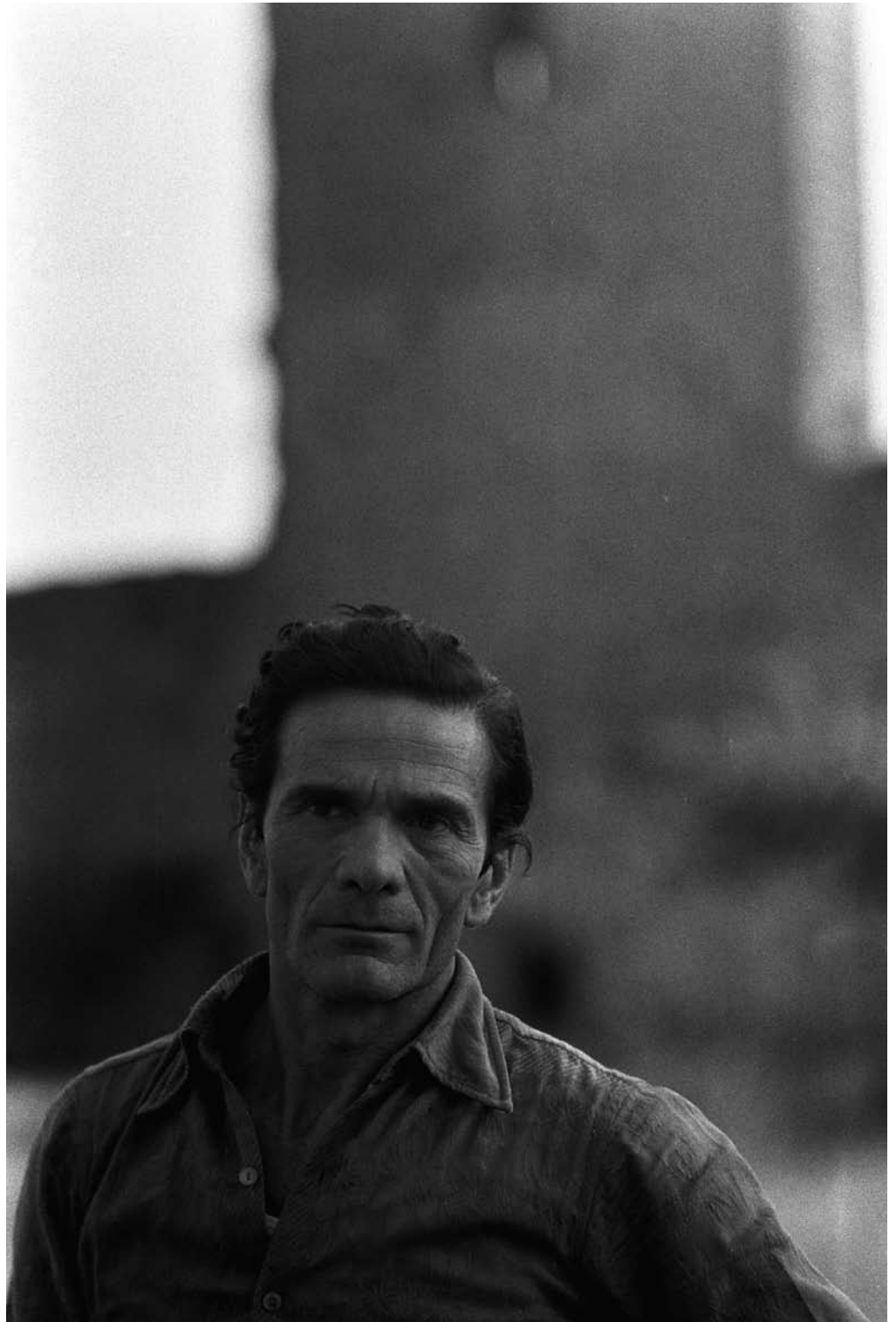


FIRENZE architettura

1.2015



costruire con poco



Periodico semestrale
Anno XIX n. 1

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Pier Paolo Pasolini a Torre di Chia, 1974
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Volpe + Sakasegawa

Sotto il vulcano Una casa italiana nel sud del Giappone

Andrea Volpe

“E così, contro la volontà del capitano della nave e dei marinai, fu giocoforza venire in Giappone. In tal modo né il demone né i suoi ministri poterono impedire la nostra venuta, e così Dio ci guidò in queste terre, dove tanto desideravamo giungere, il giorno di Nostra Signora d’Agosto dell’anno 1549. E senza poter approdare in un altro porto del Giappone, arrivammo a Kagoshima, che è la patria di Paolo di Santa Fè, e dove tutti ci ricevettero con molto amore, tanto i suoi parenti come coloro che non lo erano.”¹

San Francesco Saverio sbarca in una delle più importanti città del sud del Giappone sette anni dopo la “scoperta”² del paese del Sol Levante da parte di alcuni mercanti portoghesi fortunosamente approdati nella vicina Tanegashima, una delle principali fra le isole Ōsumi.

L’area di Kagoshima diviene dunque alla metà del XVI secolo la porta principale per l’accesso al misterioso paese di *Zipangu*, la cui esistenza fu resa nota all’occidente dalle pagine de *Il Milione* di Marco Polo.

È in questa regione del Kyushu, la più meridionale delle quattro isole maggiori che compongono l’arcipelago nipponico, che per la prima volta si introducono nell’Impero del *Tennō* sia gli archibugi portoghesi che il proselitismo militante della Compagnia di Gesù.

Da Kagoshima proviene infatti anche Bernardo. Discepolo di Francesco Saverio, egli è considerato il primo gesuita giapponese a giungere a Roma nella seconda metà del XVI secolo³.

Dominata dall’imponente profilo di uno dei vulcani più attivi del Giappone, il Sakurajima, che frequentemente la ricopre di nera polvere lavica, affacciata sulla grande e profonda baia di Kinko, l’antica

capitale del dominio di Satsuma ha ritrovato quegli antichi legami mediterranei divenendo fin dal 1960 la prima città giapponese gemellata con una città italiana.

Ambidue meridionali, ambedue con simili caratteristiche paesaggistiche e geografiche, Kagoshima condivide con Napoli non solo la presenza del profilo di un vulcano e l’affaccio su un golfo ma anche la medesima spontaneità di costumi e di carattere degli abitanti, così lontani dalla sofisticata e fredda eleganza degli abitanti di Tokyo e Kyoto. Una disponibilità al confronto con gli altri ed un culto dell’ospitalità tipici di un porto di mare del sud, o meglio, di tutti i sud del mondo.

È qui, ad una sola ora di *shinkansen*⁴ dal Palazzo costruito da Aldo Rossi a Fukuoka, che il caso ha regalato l’occasione per costruire questa piccola architettura.

Prossima alla nuova stazione ferroviaria dei treni ad alta velocità, vicinissima a Napoli-Dori, la Via Napoli⁵, il *boulevard* principale della città e posta in un lotto di alto valore immobiliare in virtù della sua posizione centrale, la casa doveva costituire per la committenza un preciso esercizio di identità architettonica italiana.

Cosa non facile, dovendo impiegare la tradizionale tecnologia del legno che offre spessori murari di appena 10 centimetri e non potendo nemmeno prevedere una corte od un patio, dato il costo del terreno e le non rare piogge di cenere. Si è dunque scelto di lavorare per opposizione dialettica.

Inserita in un tessuto edilizio di poca qualità, costituito dalle consuete abitazioni nipponiche che mai possono condividere fra loro muri o strutture per le note esigenze sismiche e di sicurezza contro gli incendi; parzialmente circondata da alti palazzi residenziali che impediscono



Casa nel Kyushu
Kagoshima, Japan
2011-2014

Progetto:
Andrea Innocenzo Volpe
Yoichi Sakasegawa

Collaboratrice:
Uema Ayaka

Committente:
Sanyo House Company Ltd

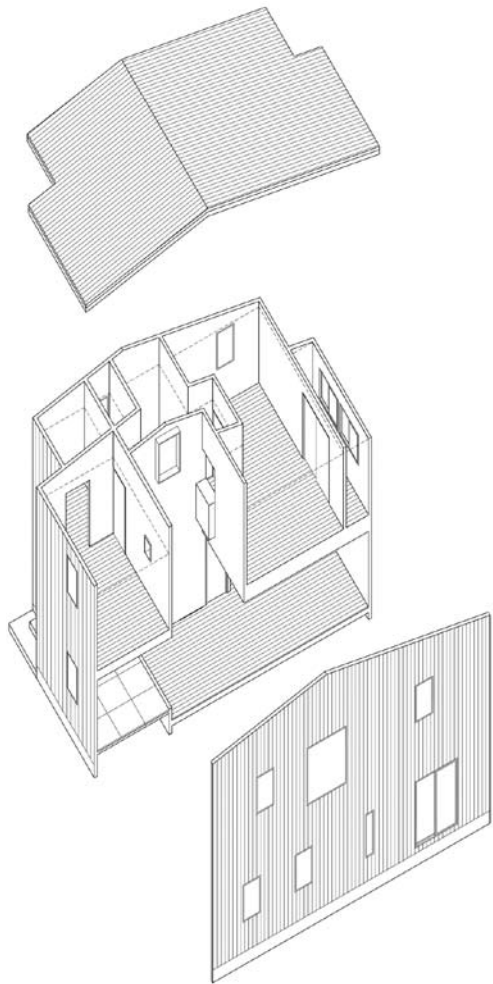
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Andrea Volpe



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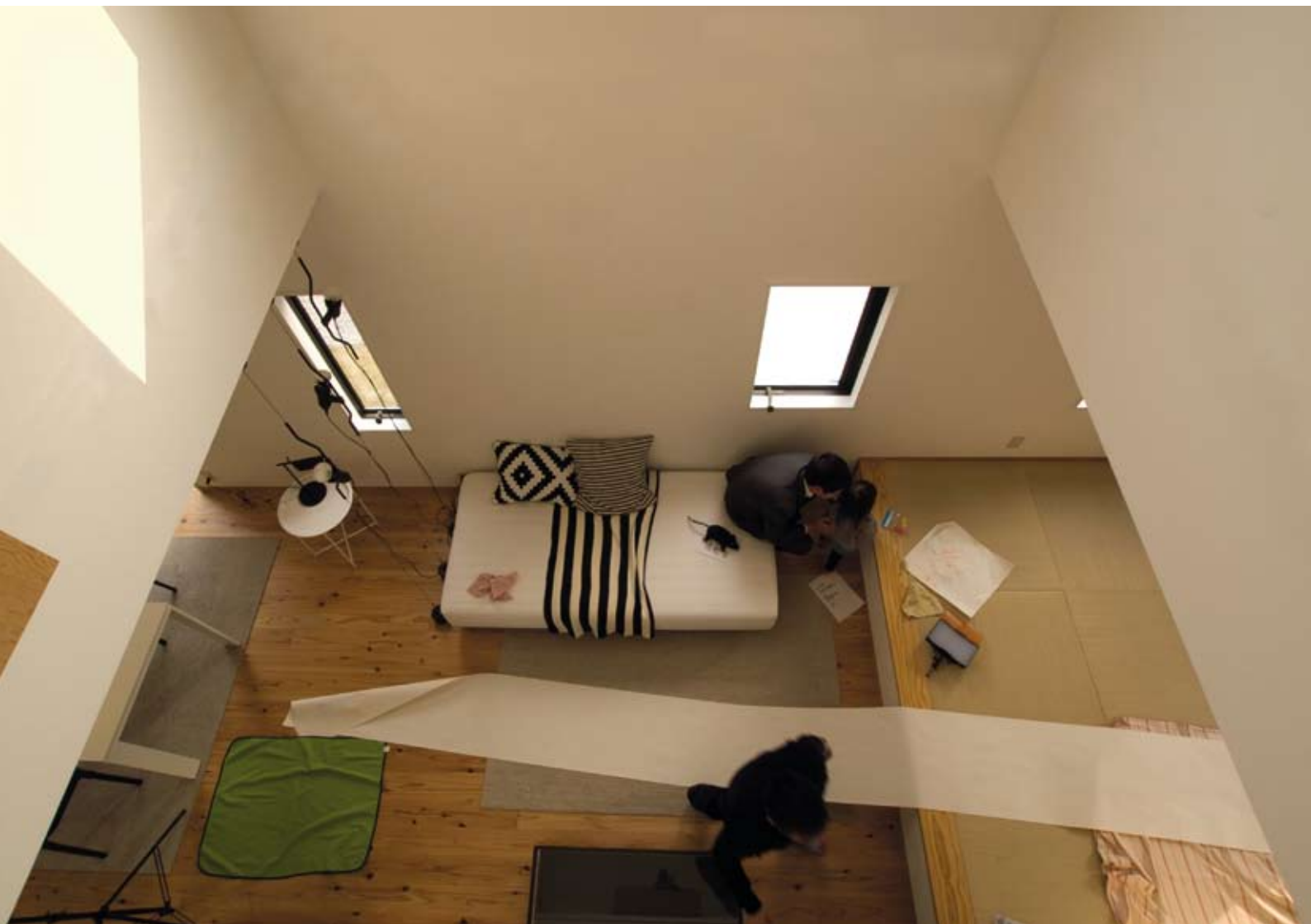


3



4







Pagine precedenti:

1

Il cantiere della casa durato solamente sei mesi (foto © Ryuji Kiguchi)

2

Dettaglio del paramento ligneo della facciata

3

La casa ed il tessuto edilizio prossimo alla linea ferroviaria che collega Kagoshima con Ibusuki

4

Esploso assometrico

5

La sala a doppia altezza e la tatami room

6 - 7

Gli affacci interni e il doppio volume della sala

8

Lo specchio orientabile che riflette gli alberi del parco nella camera matrimoniale

9

Le chiome degli alberi inquadrati dalla grande finestra aperta sul doppio volume della sala

10

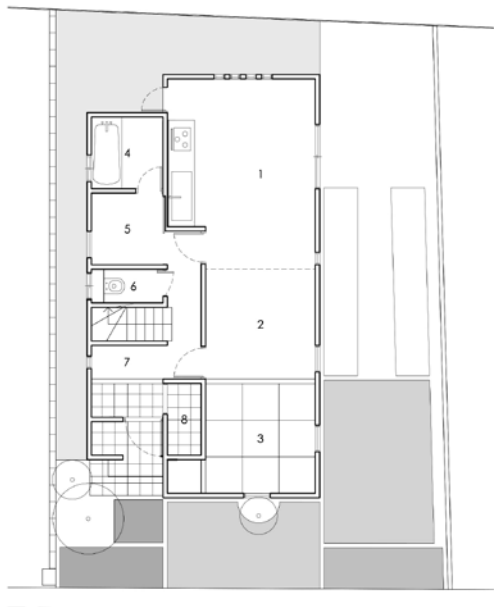
Piante del piano terreno e del primo piano



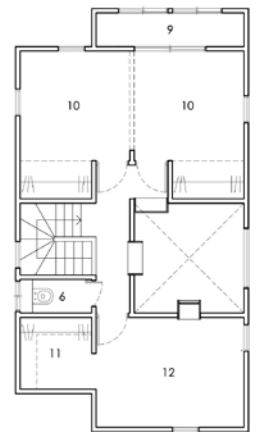
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9



ground floor plan



second floor plan

- 1 kitchen - dining room
- 2 living room
- 3 tatami room
- 4 bath room
- 5 dressing room
- 6 toilet
- 7 entrance
- 8 shoes closet
- 9 solarium
- 10 children's room
- 11 closet
- 12 master bedroom

10 0 1 5m





ogni veduta della baia e del vulcano, essa si presenta come un primo possibile nucleo di una tipologia a schiera in cui due semplici volumi accostati ospitano, l'uno gli elementi distributivi e di servizio, l'altro gli spazi principali. Compresa la *tatami room*, la stanza in stile giapponese canonicamente dotata di pavimento in paglia di riso e *tokonoma*⁶. Rivestita in legno scuro, come le tradizionali dimore di campagna o come le *kurofune*, le nere navi dei mercanti portoghesi, la casa interpreta il tema dell'oscurità delle antiche magioni descritte da Jun'ichirō Tanizaki nel *Libro d'ombra*, rovesciandola all'esterno; a guisa di scura concrezione lavica perforata dalla grande finestra aperta sul doppio volume. Occhio da cui traguardare gli unici alberi presenti nel vicino parco; l'ultimo brandello di paesaggio qui sopravvissuto al sempre mutevole scenario edilizio della città. Una laconica verde presenza, inquadra-

ta e riflessa in una sorta di mirino fotografico posto nella camera da letto matrimoniale -vera e propria camera ottica- grazie al vecchio trucco dello specchio mobile che L.C. usò nel *Cabanon*.

Un altro paesaggio è invece evocato all'interno dell'abitazione: l'immagine di un bianco villaggio mediterraneo, dove perfino l'alta sala, sagomata in negativo come una casa dentro alla casa, può diventare una piccola piazza e le pareti interne facciate di case, da cui si affacciano balconi e si ritagliano finestre. Aperte verso altre intimità o verso l'azzurro del cielo.

¹ Da "Ai compagni residenti in Goa (Kagoshima, 5 novembre 1549)", prima lettera di San Francesco Saverio ai Fratelli Gesuiti del Collegio di Santa Fé di Goa, India; traduzione dallo spagnolo secondo la trascrizione dell'originale avvenuta in Malacca nel 1550, in Francesco Saverio, *Dalle terre dove sorge il sole. Lettere e documenti dall'oriente*, introduzione e cura del volume di Adriana Carboni, Roma, Città Nuova Editore, 2002, p. 323.

² Difficile parlare di "scoperta" del Giappone. Secolari difatti i rapporti, culturali, commerciali e gli inevitabili conflitti che legarono ben prima dello sbarco dei portoghesi la terra del Sol Levante a Cina e Corea.

³ Bernardo da Kagoshima è uno dei primi convertiti al cristianesimo al di fuori del nucleo familiare di Paolo di Santa Fé, il laico sodale di Francesco Saverio noto come Hanjirō. Ex- samurai, annoverato come il primo giapponese a raggiungere l'India, Hanjirō entrò nella missione gesuita del Collegio di Goa dove conobbe Francisco Xavier divenendone successivamente uomo di fiducia e suo interprete personale una volta raggiunto il Giappone. Bernardo da Kagoshima, anch'esso un samurai, accompagnerà invece sulla via del ritorno in India Francisco Xavier e da qui proseguirà per Lisbona dove sbarcherà nel Settembre 1552. A Roma arriverà invece nel Gennaio 1555, rimanendovi fino all'Ottobre del medesimo anno incontrandovi Ignazio di Loyola. Sempre dal Kyushu, ed esattamente dal porto di Nagasaki, partirono invece nel 1582 i quattro giovani ambasciatori che raggiunsero l'Europa in un epico viaggio che li riportò in Giappone dopo ben otto anni. Sbarcati a Lisbona nel 1584, i quattro legati raggiunsero Livorno il primo marzo 1585 proseguendo poi per Pisa, Firenze, Siena, Roma (dove parteciparono alla cerimonia di elezione al soglio pontificio di Sisto V) e poi per Assisi, Bologna, Ferrara, Venezia, Padova, Milano e Genova da dove salparono in direzione di Barcellona sulla via del ritorno per Lisbona. Il passaggio da Vicenza e la loro visita al Teatro Olimpico di Palladio inaugurarono quello



stesso anno è ivi ricordato da un affresco monocromo del Maganza del 1596. Per un'esautiva ricostruzione storica dell'impresa si veda Michael Cooper, *The Japanese mission to Europe 1582-1590 The journey of four samurai boys through Portugal, Spain and Italy*, Global Oriental, United Kingdom, 2005.

⁴ L'apertura della linea ad alta velocità (la traduzione letterale di *shinkansen* è *nuovo tronco ferroviario* ma il termine indica oramai per estensione i convogli super espressi della Japanese Railway, la cosiddetta JR) che collega Hakata-Fukuoka con Kagoshima dal 2011 ha di fatto rilanciato la città, in passato tagliata fuori dallo sviluppo economico del Kyushu, trasformandola in meta privilegiata per il crescente turismo interno.

⁵ Parimenti a Napoli, come omaggio a quel patto di gemellaggio stipulato 55 anni fa, troviamo nell'elegante quartiere del Vomero una Via Kagoshima.

⁶ Il *tokonoma* è la nicchia ricavata nella *washitsu*, la stanza in stile tradizionale in cui si conservano generalmente un'iscrizione calligrafica ornamentale, il *kakemono*, e un *ikebana*, una raffinata composizione floreale.

11 - 12

Le finestre interne e la libreria integrata in uno dei due parapetti

13

Il quartiere di Take e la tatami room dall'osservatorio interno

14

La camera matrimoniale come camera ottica

The atmosphere of the “descent to the sea”, with its spare assortment of utensils on the sand, the lightness which derives from rigorous work, from memory, from knowing how to do well with little resources, seems to migrate – in an era characterised by doing too much, and badly – from Venice’s Lagoon to the Alentejo. Enchantment and disenchantment on a strip of land wedged between the estuary of river Sado and the ocean, a natural park where new constructions are apparently not allowed. Four fishermen’s cabins with the traditional straw roofs – two built with bricks and two with wood and reeds – become the “CASAS” of COMPORTA, through the restoration-transformation by the Mateus brothers. The idea of the project, the dialectic criteria of the issues pertinent to re-usage, is already a part of the interpretation of the four buildings: disposed in a semi-circle in such a way as to form a sandy courtyard open on the sea, they are intended as the various rooms of a single dwelling [for inhabiting the summer]. Their division/distinction, caused perhaps by the analytic attribution of destinations – three of them, in fact, become rooms – is exhibited yet at the same time recomposed by wooden boardwalks which spread over the scorching sand, almost as if stressing the unifying morphology of the courtyard. All the openings that face the courtyard become doors, expressing the role of IMPLUVIUM, which is defined by a virtual in-existent portico.

If the restoration of the two brick houses – a bed and a bathroom in each – consists in a thermal adjustment through the doubling of the walls, transfigured by the priceless white plaster which gives back the oceanic light, the adaptation of the two wooden houses, a more complex endeavour, seems to be at the origin of the idea of the project itself. The two wooden houses/rooms were disassembled and reassembled following a careful interpretation of old local construction techniques, which result in a wooden structure that is the same both on the interior and the exterior, thus becoming space and decoration at the same time. The reeds, which are placed alternately and supported by horizontal wooden strips, characterise the elegant texture of all the walls. But the new interpretation of the place has its vertex in the house/room of the last cabin: it is the sand, which continued in the interior, constitutes the flooring. Thus walking barefoot on the beach continues inside the cabin, on the sand which also houses comfortable sofas draped in white cloths.

Maybe it is the archetypal form of the buildings, an air both ancestral and contemporary at the same time – together with evocations of illuminist theorems on the cabin as ordinary model – that gives the four structures such a surprising depth. In building two CABANAS not far from there, the Mateus’ seem to want to continue the precious landscape of the Reserva Natural do Estuário do Sado. A landscape of water and stilts: a lagoon/estuary that the ocean tides constantly mutate, alternating to the splendour of the blues of sky and water the sandy grey of the sea-beds of intricate and invisible canals from which rises a forest of stilts. A world of wood for walking on water, for mooring small vessels and inhabited by cabins and fishermen.

Two small parallelepipeds built with recycled wooden planks disposed vertically. The two structures acquire sureness in the landscape declining their own individuality through almost invisible gestures: a misalignment between the two which at the same time underlines the affinity and diversity of the geometry of the roofs, determined by the necessary inclinations for the disposal of rain water. It is once again the case of a functional hendiadys: the two small rooms – measuring around 10 sqm each – are in fact complementary, a cabin contains the bed and the services which, surprisingly, also constitute the entrance and can be opened towards the landscape; the second cabin is devoted to the day activities. Wooden planks placed on the beach unite the temporal dimensions – day and night – while a boardwalk communicates it with an old jetty, the true border between land and water. The material unity (old wood) and the modality of its realisation – the sincerity of the structure characterises both the interior and exterior spaces – gives the whole a chromatic unity which surprisingly blends in with the almost invisible horizon.

I have build a castle on the sea, of 3,66 x 3,66 meters, *for my wife*, said LC about his well-known Cabanon, pre-fabricated in Corsica and carried by ship to Cap Martin, not far from the house of his friends Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici. In Roquebrune, on a path that almost reached the sea where everything was small: the door, the stairway and the access to the cabin through the vineyards. Only the site was grand: a splendid bay with steep cliffs.

Translation by Luis Gatt

Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo

Dream house by Alberto Pireddu

(page 44)



In 1942, Ernesto Nathan Rogers relies on *Confessions of an anonymous* among the pages of “Domus” the description of his dream house, a beautiful house, “warm” and worthy dwelling place of human life:

This is my ideal home: away from you, enough for singing out of tune and being not heard, yet so close so I can greet you by waving hands and you could answer me.

It grows from the ground like a plant and is yet sovereign of the nature, assertive man trace. A piece of land at the bottom and a piece of sky at the top: among countless flowers, someone perfumes just for me and, in the night, a square of stars – among the infinite – lights up only for me.

My house changes face at the turn of the seasons; changes fronds rejuvenating itself every spring, in summer it has the coolness of the woods; colored in autumn, wrapped by the winter snow, underneath, my family germinates waiting for the sun. Let the walls be limits to the outside world, not obstacles: may they open all outside, may they close, half-close: eyes with eyelids and eyelashes or, perhaps, pores that could breathe the universe and bleed harmful moods.

My house is a body, as my body, holder of sorrows and joys, next to your border.

In penetrable bodies¹.

Rogers seems to materialize his dream not far from Noto, Sicily, in a small holiday house designed by Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo².

Here, among the almond and olive trees in a gentle slope towards the sea, two volumes functionally and formally distinct, interpenetrate under the same roof: the “manor house”, with its solid structure of reinforced concrete, and the iron body of the “guest’s residence”.

Equipped with a mechanism that determines movement on metal rails, animates the life of the house, protecting it during the winter and allowing it to unfold for the arrival of spring when, with the first sun, the walls finally open to illuminate the interior. In the changing size loggia, the large living room and the manor bedroom meet the *enfilade* of the guest’s accoutrements.

The lodge is a rarefied space, a room facing the sea, suspended on a metal grid. The building, in fact - by seeking a continuity of quotas with some existing buildings and trying to reach the sea horizon, over the treetops - does not touch the ground, but stands on concrete beams firmly anchored to the hill, while a steel structure supports the metal cage of the sliding volume and its relative staircase. And yet the house has “its own roots”³, encloses a private world taken away from indiscreet glances, so that no one can reveal the secret.

The project summarizes some key points of the poetry of Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo. Among them, it calls into question the Vitruvian *firmitas* through movement, the contraction and expansion of the architectural body and the idea that this may not last forever, but endowed with an “own life, that at a certain point turns off”⁴, a belief that seems to find echo in the words of Rogers “I do not ask my house to be eternal, but enclosed like an embrace”⁵. The same materials used denounce the acceptance of an impossible eternity – the concrete, which is now produced depending on the expected lifetime for a building, gas concrete of the partitions, the okumè of the ventilated walls – as well as the mechanical apparatus intended for an inevitable technological obsolescence.

‘Poor’ or at least ‘ordinary’ materials, commercially available and sometimes reminiscent of an industrial world, which architect experiments on numerous occasions, by placing them together poetically. It happens, for example, in the control tower in Marina di Ragusa⁶, in which a glass box is suspended on two opaque volumes externally defined by a coating of wooden planks and zinc-titanium panels; in the Scoglitti holiday house⁷ whose body of reinforced concrete confuses its own imperfections with those of the surrounding abusive landscape while portions of reinforcement not included in the cast support containers of the suspended beds; in the family house in Ragusa⁸, where selecting the steel for the platform and outside stairs reveals the wish to make addition parts recognizable compared to the work of removal on the main volume and reuse of the ruins to create a new, direct, relationship with the garden.

Then, the deep care for human life and transformations that it produces in architecture that, in a continuous changing of rules, cannot reach a final arrangement. This is, after all, the big idea behind the editorial project of the book *Loose Ends*, recently published, with its endlessly decomposable storyline and his papers impossible to be ordered, in a total abolition of all code structure.

The book itself is an architecture of “measures, rules, notes, wishes, requests ...”⁹, a house of cards, blank or pre-written, never equal to itself. Moreover, while quoting Gaston Bachelard, the dream house may not be definitive, because if it were so, the soul could not “find his vast life”¹⁰:

Perhaps it is good to keep a reserve of dreams towards a house that we will live later, later and later, so much later that we will not have time to realize it¹¹.

Translation by Arba Baxhaku

¹ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *Confessioni di un anonimo del XX secolo*. 9° *La casa dell'Anonimo*, in “Domus” n. 176, agosto 1942, p. 333.

² Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, Lars Müller Publishers, 2014, FCN.2009.

³ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *cit*.

⁴ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Sulla lingua*, in *donn'Architettura*, by Maria Grazia Echeli, Mina Tamborrino, Milano, FrancoAngeli 2014, p. 269.

⁵ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *cit*.

⁶ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., PMR2.2008.

⁷ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., GNS.2002.

⁸ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., SPR.2001.

⁹ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Sul processo*, in Id., *Loose Ends*, cit.

¹⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *La poetica dello spazio*, Bari, Edizioni Dedalo 2006, pp. 87-88.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

ELEMENTAL

From Quinta Monroy to Conjunto habitacional Violeta Parra
by Francesca Privitera

(page 52)



Quinta Monroy is the name of an unauthorised settlement by 97 families, which grew up in the 1960s in the centre of Iquique, a town in the desert of Atacama in northern Chile. In late 2001 the government tasked the practice Elemental, led by the architect Alejandro Aravena, with planning a settlement for the families of *Quinta Monroy*.

This project was developed in the context of the programme *Vivienda Social Dinámica sin Deuda*, addressed to the poorest sectors of the population. The programme calls for spending 7500 US dollars for each residential unit, including purchase of land and basic infrastructures. An amount sufficient for setting up about 30 square metres per dwelling on land having near-zero market value. This has brought about the flight of social residence from town centres, overcrowding, lowering of architectural and urban quality and physical and social degradation of settlements.

Aravena's proposal is based on reversing these premises. Families are relocated onto the same land they have been illegally occupying for some thirty years. The layout consists of residential blocks set up around common, open courts. Future inhabitants are supposed to be actively involved through shared planning workshops and self-building. The dwellings, measuring about 36 square metres each, are intended to be *half-houses*, awaiting future completion.

In 2004, residents of *Quinta Monroy* received the keys to their homes. On the day it was inaugurated, the settlement was still under construction. The structure was not a finished solution, but an *open worksite*, a promise of space and life, suspended between the present and the future, between the substance of what had been built and uncertainty about what was to come. The part handed over to the families, of an *elementary* – in an etymological sense – composition, made using prefabrication, was the palimpsest upon which the settlement was to grow. It established the orientation for future developments of homes self-built by their inhabitants. Standardisation integrated with spontaneous urban forms and with participated planning workshops will give rise to an urban form shared by the community, not imposed from above but the outcome of fertile integration between public initiative and citizens.

Standardisation of industrial elements regenerated by the creative human element of self-building, instead of generating monotony and alienation will lay – as in Walter Gropius' American experimentation with *serial incremental houses*¹ – the foundations for community ethics and a possible human dimension to industry. Use of prefabrication in the *Quinta Monroy* project does not set down strict residential patterns, but provides the necessary rules on which to graft the vital transgression of self-building, giving rise to a model for expansion which will set the example for later experimentation calling for integration of informal residential interventions.

Extensions, which reflect the individual needs of families, fill in the gaps of a *porous building*² and affect both the architectural image of each residence and the spatial image of shared courts, areas of interaction between the individual and the collective dimension.

As in a healthy biological organism, flexibility variables – as Gregory Bateson calls them³ – provided for within the settlement of Iquique allow growth of the system, preventing it from collapsing, unlike what happens in other South American outskirts, where self-building brings about a pathological urban growth which tends to saturate available space. On the contrary, in Iquique, individual building becomes collective construction of a redeemed urban and social identity, and the space arising from it mirrors the society which makes it and avoids any mystification, bringing back to mind the ethical principle of *obedience, invoked by Ruskin and so often forgotten today.

The project of Elemental is not just the immediate answer to a housing problem. Its DNA is urban, it is the construction of shared values, liberty, equality, democracy. From the root of *Quinta Monroy*, in a time negotiated between today and tomorrow, there springs forth the *sense of the city*, sealed by the dedication of the residential complex to the intellectual and artist who gave

voice to the rights of the people of Chile and who helped to understand their identity through a quest for their deepest roots.

From then on, *Quinta Monroy* will be known as *Conjunto habitacional Violeta Parra*.

¹ Cfr. G. C. Argan, «L'architettura di Gropius in Inghilterra e in America», in *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus*, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Turin, 1988.

² Cfr. A. Aravena, A. Iacobelli, *Elemental: manual de vivienda incremental y diseño participativo*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2012

³ Cfr. G. Bateson, «Ecology and Flexibility in Urban Civilization», in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chandler Publishing Company, 1972.

Volpe+Sakasegawa

Under the volcano. An Italian house in Southern Japan
by Andrea Volpe

(page 60)



"Then, against the will of the captain and of his sailors, we reached Japan. Neither the devil nor his ministers could have stopped us. Finally Almighty God led us to these lands which we desperately wanted to reach on the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in August 1549.

*Without any possibility to enter any other port, we went ashore in Kagoshima: the homeland of Paulo de Santa Fé, where we were welcomed, as much by his relatives as by everyone else, with great love and affection."*¹

Thus, Saint Francis Xavier came ashore in one of the most important cities of southern Japan, seven years after the "discovery" of the Land of the Rising Sun reported by Portuguese adventurers who had fortuitously reached Tanegashima, the main island in the Osumi archipelago. From that moment, Kagoshima became the main entry-point for any westerner willing to explore the mysterious land of *Zipangu*, the mythical country whose existence was first introduced to Europeans by Marco Polo's well known travel chronicle.

Consequently this region of Kyushu, the southernmost of the four primary islands forming the *Tennō's* empire, saw for almost a century both the militant proselytism of the Society of Jesus and the growing profit of the Portuguese arquebus trade. It was from Kagoshima, too, where Bernardo, the Japanese disciple of Francis Xavier, came. Historians believe Bernardo to be the first Japanese to set foot in Europe, in 1553 on his way to Rome, where he arrived two years later to meet Ignatius of Loyola and supposedly Pope Marcellus II.² Kagoshima, facing the broad, deep bay of Kinko, is dominated by the imposing profile of one of Japan's most active volcanoes, Sakurajima, which frequently covered the city with its black dust. The ancient capital of the Satsuma Domain has recovered only recently its historical links with the Mediterranean, having become the first Japanese city to forge a cultural relationship with an Italian city since 1960. The bay and the hyperactive volcano, endlessly spreading black powders over the city, are the strongest features of Kagoshima's landscape and link it to Naples, its sister city.

Both are southern towns, both possessing a similar morphology, these two cities seem to share also the temper of their inhabitants. Kagoshima people are flamboyant indeed and quite different from the cold elegance of Tokyo's or Kyoto's sophisticated residents. There exists a sort of Kyushu version of southern hospitality one can find in other Japanese port towns like Nagasaki or Fukuoka, for example, or maybe it would be better to say, which one can find in every other southern place in the world.

Located just one hour away by bullet train from Fukuoka, the city where Aldo Rossi built his notorious Palazzo, Kagoshima offered us the chance to build a small architectural exercise in Take. In this fast-developing central neighborhood property prices are constantly rising because of its proximity to both the new *Shinkansen* railway station and to the main avenue of the town (named *Napoli-dori*). As such, Sanyo House Company asked us to design a model house especially tailored for this burgeoning area and conceived like a sort of manifesto of the Italian architectural identity. This was no easy task, though, since the technology we were obliged to use was local and had to be standardized and cheap, matching the kinds generally used by the contractor themselves; namely, a traditional anti-seismic wood structure walled with wood sandwich panels, a combination offering a thickness of only ten centimeters. Moreover no Mediterranean spatial typologies like patios or courtyards could be included in the design layout, in order to maximise the high value of the ground. Last but not least a pitched roof was considered mandatory so that the volcanic black rain could be easily washed away.

To solve this conundrum, we therefore chose a dialectical approach, in an at-

tempt to merge both the technical constraints and the conceptual possibilities. Despite being surrounded by anonymous single-family detached houses which cannot share party walls in order to respect the strict Japanese seismic and fire-protection codes, and being partly overshadowed by high apartment buildings which hide any view of the bay and the volcano, this house introduces to the Take neighborhood an interpretation of a well-known architectural typology. Two built spaces are placed one beside the other, sharing a wall and forming a possible first nucleus for a design for a row house development: the smaller space contains the hallways, the staircase, the toilets and bathroom; the bigger one hosts the main rooms including the *tatami* room (or Japanese-style room) with the usual straw mat floor and the traditional *tokonoma* (a built-in recessed space in which pictorial scrolls *-kake-mono-* or artistic arrangements of flowers *-ikebana-* are usually displayed).

Conceptually blurring the uncertain territory where Japanese and European identities meet, the house and its blackened-timber facade could be read on one hand like an homage to the traditional Japanese art of preserving wood by charring it, called *shou sugi ban* or *yakisugi*; on the other hand as an enigmatic reminder of the arrival of the *Kurofune*, the black vessels used by the first Portuguese merchants. But there is another inevitable reference for such blackness. It is the precious obscurity kept in the traditional Japanese houses, as described by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's in his *In praise of shadows*. We chose to overturn that deep interior obscurity, using it to form the exteriors of the house, now transformed in a sort of lava rock pierced by the big window of the double-height living room; a squared *oculus* which frames a view of the trees in the nearby park.

The sole green fragment of the landscape surviving in Take, placed between the Ibusuki railway line and the Nakasu Dori bridge, generates another moment in the house. The old trick Le Corbusier conceived for the *cabanon* is directly quoted in the mirrored shutter of the master bedroom interior window which works like a life-size viewfinder of a livable *camera obscura* pointed toward the trees.

We brought the darkness of traditional Japanese houses outside and placed it on the house facades. This move allowed us to work with other powerful analogies in the interiors: the memories of the whitewashed houses of the Mediterranean villages and their little piazzas. Images that form a reversed landscape can be found especially in the living room, an house-like negative space theatrically surrounded by counter-facades with balconies and windows. These open onto secret intimacies, or "the blue of the sky".³

Translation by Justin P. Walsh

¹ From "Ai compagni residenti in Goa (Kagoshima, 5 novembre 1549)" ("To the members resident in Goa (Kagoshima, 5 November 1549)", the first letter written by Saint Francis Xavier to his Jesuit brothers living in the monastery of Santa Fé in Goa, India. Translated from Spanish according to the original version composed in Malacca in 1550. In Francis Xavier, *Dalle terre dove sorge il sole. Lettere e documenti dall'oriente*, foreword and editing by Adriana Carboni, Nuova Città Editore, Rome, 2002, p. 323.

² Bernardo the Japanese was one of the very first Christian converts in Kagoshima who had no genetic relationship with the clan of Paulo de Santa Fé, the official translator of Francis Xavier (considered the first Japanese to set foot in India). Formerly known as Hanjirō, Paulo, like Bernardo, was a samurai. Bernardo would join Francis Xavier in his journey back to India. From Goa he would then reach Lisbon in September 1522. He would not arrive in Rome until January 1555, remaining there until October of the same year, and meeting Ignatius of Loyola. Thirty years later, four young ambassadors from Nagasaki would also leave for Europe. This epic journey to Portugal, Spain and Italy, managed by Alessandro Valignano, the successor of Francis Xavier in Japan, has been reconstructed in the terrific book written by Michael Cooper, *The Japanese mission to Europe 1582-1590 The journey of four samurai boys through Portugal, Spain and Italy*, Global Oriental, United Kingdom, 2005.

³ One of the Aldo Rossi's most iconic competition projects was entered under the title 'the blue of the sky'. This was a direct homage to Georges Bataille's book, *Le Blue du Ciel*. Immodestly, this house lies under the Kyushu sky, pretending to imitate Aldo Rossi's Palazzo in Fukuoka. Both buildings call out a miraculous analogy, the Mediterranean blue hour.

Arrigoni Architeti

Bāmiyān Cultural Centre - Afghanistan by Fabrizio Arrigoni

(page 68)



The starting concept of the project has been to generate form and orientation of the building from the surrounding landscape itself; hence, the fundamental orthogonal footprint aligns to the course of the Foladi river while getting a slight deviation to focus on the perspective of the western Buddha. While the southern part of the building remains committed to this pattern, the side overlooking the valley unfolds like a fan to embrace the whole length

of the cliffs, reaching to the opposite landmark of the eastern Buddha. In this way the horizontal layout integrates the different views, transforming them in architectural elements: whereas the complete panorama of the cliffs can be enjoyed from the outside promenade unrolling in front of the new cultural centre, a sequence of arches on the inside accompanies and guides the visitor in the dynamic perception of partial views, stimulating a deeper, individual experience and suggesting different levels of confrontation between human scale and monumental dimension. On the other way, the building aims at encouraging a reflection on its cultural mission through the architectural medium: the southern front welcomes the visitor with the familiar and recognizable image of a walled compound, like the dwelling form of the *Qala*, typical of rural Afghanistan; at the same time the presence of decorative features like interlaced geometric fretwork and a lapis lazuli coloured wooden screen denies the traditional defensive character of the *Qala*, reminding of the singularity of the building and the public spirit of its function. Surprisingly, once stepped beyond the wall, instead of finding us in a withdrawn space, we discover the unexpected, unique character of the cultural centre, opening itself to the surrounding landscape. It is easy then to catch the message that the cultural centre wishes to share with its guests: although we can feel the contentment granted by accustomed forms and materials as we stroll through the public parts of the building, their disposition does induce us to literally see beyond, showing up different perspectives and symbolically inviting us to greet them not as a threat but as a peaceful chance. Yet, should we look for more privacy, that's possible, too: we can find retreat in more secluded spaces, like in the smaller ones on the south, facing the quiet linear garden beyond the wall, or in the library, with its own secret courtyard, or even enjoy the almost meditative atmosphere of the round domed, light-flooded schoolrooms. The northern front displays an array of oblique transversal walls in an ever-changing sequence of light and shadow, mirroring the alternation of glimmering rock surfaces and darkish caves on the other side of the valley. As the building stretches out onto the slope, its short transversal façade takes the form of a monumentally powerful architectural statement, gathering different volumes both horizontally and vertically and thus formally corresponding to the complex commitment of achieving harmony between different peoples and cultures. Consequently, this is the where the expected expansion will be found: instead of weakening the purity of the building with the addition of further constructions the area is going to be carved underneath the cultural centre itself, reproducing the coexistence of additive and subtractive architecture typical of nearby cave dwellings (in this regard a partial reinforced concrete structure beneath the centre can be arranged beforehand by the first construction phase).

Materials and techniques

The goal is to keep a low profile, taking advantage of local resources in terms of knowledge and materials. Wide use of bricks, provided in their full range of variations depending on their role: from *khesht-i-kham*, sun-dried bricks, to the stronger, baked *khesht-i-pukhta*, suitable for arches and higher load-bearing walls (a concealed, reinforced concrete inner structure might be provided). Furthermore mud cladding, like in the classrooms domes (*gunbad*), and *pakhsa* can increase diversity and general quality: the idea underneath is to establish a fruitful interchange with local enterprises and determine together single formal and technical aspects. Although the structure is mainly based on simple flat-roof construction, some more challenging elements (like domes and wide-spanning arches) are present: one is not supposed to underestimate the capabilities of the afghan constructors, so astoundingly showed in many monumental buildings of the past (among others the *Qalae-Bost* arch...). Precious particulars, on the entrance side and in indoor details, can underline the prestige of the building: we think about the use of lapis lazuli, to be found in the nearby mountains, to stain wood and glaze tiles, the latter ones hidden like a treasure in the linear garden beyond the wall.

Landscaping

In order to achieve a non-artificial, site-oriented appearance and make maintenance easier, the arrangement of external garden-like areas is reduced to clearly marked beds, slightly rising from the soil to serve as perimeter benches. The rest is deliberately left as untilled flat terrain, which represents the natural surroundings of most afghan architectures. The botanical choice implies a selection of species according to aesthetical and practical principles; they all provide the benefits of lower water needs and, what's more, have been traditionally grown for centuries and acquired over the years a symbolic value, too. Five beds of Damask rose (*Rosa damascena*) greet the visitor with their soul-stirring fragrance. On the lower eastern level again a flowerbed, this time filled with ornamental *Nigella damascena* and valuable saffron (*Crocus sativus*); beyond that a small shady plantation of pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) offers shelter for relaxation and walks.

Sustainability

Known construction methods applied to traditional materials, albeit focusing on constructive challenges and sensible experimentations, assure consistency and feasibility of the project. Integration means involvement of local workers in the project development, rejection of formal fashionable gestures artificially superimposed to the context, revitalization of an available technical knowledge that should not get lost. We can take advantage of traditional indoor climate controlling solutions (like thickness and composition of walls) integrating them with contemporary systems like solar panels and borehole thermal energy storage. In addition to that a rainwater reservoir is placed under the building.

