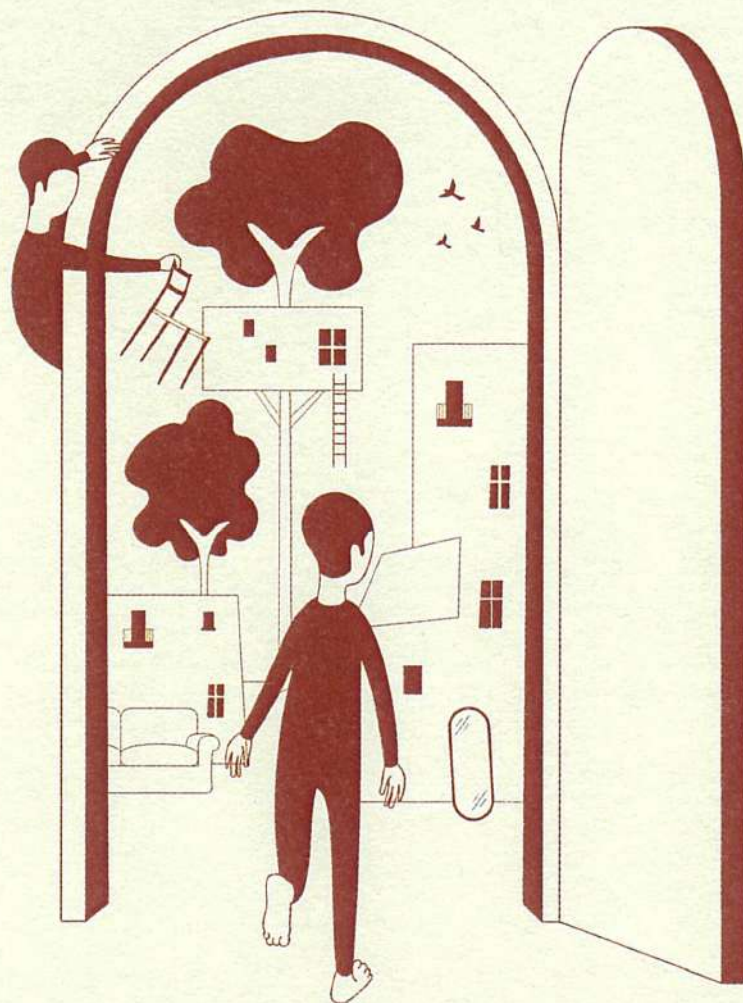


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Towards a Sustainable Post Pandemic Society



Pills

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Contents

9 Foreword

Michela Bassanelli, Pierluigi Salvadeo

13 Reflections for Sustainable Post Pandemic Living

Pierluigi Salvadeo

Transdisciplinary Perspectives

29 Can we Take the Measure of the Nature of Dwelling and Building?

Francesca La Rocca

45 Sustainability? A Philosophical Approach

Donatella Pagliacci

Architecture as a System between Ecology and Community

57 Everything Nature

Mauro Baracco, Baracco+Wright

83 Shared Housing and Collaborative Living.

An Age-Old Innovation

Stefano Guidarini

Codesign, Participation and Everyday Practices

- 103 Social Innovation Solutions in Local Neighborhoods
Davide Fassi
- 121 Everyday Theaters. A New Domestic Landscape
for the Post Pandemic City
Chiara Lionello
- 137 New Perspectives of Sustainable Living:
between Deconstructions and Reconfigurations
Michela Bassanelli
- 153 Author's biography**
- 157 Bibliography**

Foreword

Michela Bassanelli, Pierluigi Salvadeo

The Covid-19 pandemic has powerfully demonstrated the need to rethink and find new and different ways of living and inhabiting the places we usually cross in our daily lives, accelerating the necessity for a different design thinking that is also social, political, and collective. *Sustainability* conceived as a design and environmental paradigm that for years required constant debate at every scale of intervention has highlighted other meanings and practices, enhanced by the living experiences during the different lockdown phases. We have witnessed the birth of bottom-up practices, with the creation of neighborhood networks, thanks also to volunteers who try to respond to the needs of the community: food, social and psychological. The topic of *sustainability* involves not only the categories of the environment, the economy, and social aspects in general, but also humans and their lifestyles, individual or collective, or in a broader sense, the subject of “living.” Thinking about post pandemic dwelling means thinking about temporality, reuse of artifacts, regeneration of cities, and how to adapt the existing heritage to the new imperatives stood by the Covid-19. The book offers different perspectives through which to analyze the *sustainability*, trying to answer some questions such as:

- which theoretical and practical aspects lay behind the term of sustainability?
- what about its fields of application?
- what will be the impact on our society and our habitat?

- how we can reuse our existing heritage with resilient design practices?

The contributions have been organized according to three main issues. The first *Transdisciplinary Perspectives* faces the theme of sustainability from an ethical and moral point of view, trying to identify some parameters of “measurement” that could guide sustainable design paradigms today. The second *Architecture as a System between Ecology and Community* goes into the content of some design proposals that move across different scales: from the idea of architecture as a tool able to catalyse the repair of places, including the soil, hydrology, habitat, connections, microorganisms, vegetation, to an idea of architecture able to form community through cohabitation as a new design approach responsive to the plurality of available offerings, to the articulation of spaces and, to the intergenerational relations. Finally, the third, *Codesign, Participation and Everyday Practices* focuses on the role of collaborative practices at the neighborhood scale until the uses of spaces implemented in these two years which show how these can open up new perspectives for interior design, defining a more sustainable vision of inhabited spaces. This book tries to increase the range of possible design actions, considering issues such as cohabitation, planetary hospitality, and inclusion.

Reflections for Sustainable Post Pandemic Living

Pierluigi Salvadeo

We have been talking about sustainability for many years, and the catastrophe that is the Covid-19 pandemic gives us a further opportunity to reflect on this issue, shifting our point of view at least in part. Sustainability, to keep within a general definition, is the characteristic of a process, situation or circumstance that is maintained at a certain level of equilibrium. The extent of this balance and its duration or consistency remains to be determined. Usually when we talk about sustainability we include environmental, economic and social categories. Therefore, “sustainable” is that process of change in which the exploitation of resources, investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes are all in tune, or rather, are all in balance. This means not wasting resources, but at the same time ensuring good economic and social development at the service of mankind, to satisfy its needs and aspirations. Therefore, the guiding principle of sustainability is what we could call *sustainable development*, behind which lie the great challenges of recent years: a certain attitude towards ecology, a reflection on the urban system of our cities and transport, the great issue of consumption, a certain vision of society and law—understood as the right to use land and resources—, the right to obtain and consume what we need in order to pursue the highest quality of life, technological challenges, the great issue of renewable energy, and so on. Just as a reminder, the term *sustainable development* was first introduced thirty-five

years ago, in 1987, by the *World Commission on Environment and Development's Brundtland Report*. The interesting thing about the Brundtland Report is that it speaks of sustainability without referring directly to the environment as such, but rather more directly to the well-being of people, for which a certain environmental quality must also be achieved. That is, the quality of the environment is seen as the consequence of certain virtuous human behaviour. This highlights an ethical principle linked to the concept of sustainability: the responsibility of today's generations towards future generations to preserve the Earth's resources and efficiently maintain the environmental balance of our planet, without sacrificing our development and well-being. The environmental challenge lies, as Bruno Latour argues, in the "relationship with the world' that presupposes two types of domains, nature and culture, domains that are both distinct and impossible to separate completely. [...] Which means that we are not dealing with *domains* but rather with a single *concept* divided into two parts that are linked [...]" (Latour 2020, 37). And it is interesting to note, continues Latour, that "[...] this oxymoron of geology and humanity is the product of the reflections of serious geologists who, until recently, were totally indifferent to the pros and cons of research in the humanities. No post-modern philosopher, no anthropologist, no liberal theologian, no political thinker would dare to measure the influence of humans *on the same scale* as rivers, volcanoes,

erosion and biochemistry” (Latour 2020, 172), therefore: “Giving a totally new dimension to the notion of ‘human dimension’ itself” ((ibid., 173). Latour’s reflection is interesting because it highlights how, in the so-called Anthropocene (the human era!), the conditions dictated by man, his behaviour and his needs, are now an essential element of the major changes in the territory and the environment in general. Man is therefore given a great responsibility in determining, together with nature, the conditions of his life on Earth, going far beyond the trappings of his habitat alone, and even becoming the driving force and architect of positive events or environmental catastrophes. This is an epochal challenge that directly affects man and his lifestyles, whether individual or collective. The question therefore arises as to how we should live and above all how we can live sustainably while respecting man and the environment. I think it is safe to say that most people today, at least in the West, have come to believe that they are at the centre of a revolution in the way the world is inhabited. It is a political and social revolution, but it is certainly also a technological revolution, and there is no doubt that the latter brings with it another upheaval, which could be described as behavioural and more related to individuals’ personal sphere. Our gestures have changed, we have altered the sequence of our daily actions, we no longer relate to people and things in the same way as before. Among the consequences of all this, we have to recognise that

something has also changed in the space in which we live or in which we would like to live. A new and different attitude now connotes all our actions, even the most everyday, making us question what the nature of the spaces that might correspond to these different actions should be. By observing how we travel, how we work, how we relate to others, how we rest, how we live in our homes, we realise that our behaviour has undergone a process of transformation that challenges the classical relationship between action and space, but also between time and space. We are all faced with the image of a de-territorialised city for spectators, who, as Arjun Appadurai argues, inhabit a changing world in which residents, tourists, immigrants, refugees and guest workers act simultaneously, but also the innumerable media made up of complicated repertoires of images in which the worlds of commodities, news and politics mingle, supported by a complex repertoire of electronic screens, but also celluloid media and prints reproduced at any scale, from flyers to billboards (Appadurai 1996). It is a mental space that becomes a place, a type of space, where we are increasingly accustomed to being, which by its very nature is inclusive and capable of encompassing very different categories. We happily overlap real and virtual space, and within them we can casually perform actions that naturally complement one another or fade into one another. In a nutshell, it seems that the boundaries between different domains have been broken, where other

categories, less spatial and more experiential, less palpable and more immaterial, have been added to the simple notions of exterior and interior, inside and outside, architecture and object. With them, the roles of the designer and the user change and tend to merge into each other, which prompts the architectural project to take on a new and more comprehensive curatorial character. So here lies the responsibility borne by each of us through our behaviour, conduct, use and actions. Today, the use of the space overlaps with the space itself, as if the time of an action were moving at a different speed than the time of the space that contains it. Matter no longer has the tactile and volumetric aspect usually attributed to it, allowing us to simultaneously inhabit realities of a different nature. The perimeters within which architectural design processes are usually articulated therefore blur, allowing different disciplines to overlap one another and expand their influence beyond their usual boundaries. In short, different uses of space have emerged, each corresponding to a different idea of living. Thus, our inhabitation of the world can no longer seek to define stable configurations, but rather imagine new inhabited domains capable of accommodating compositional processes that cannot be definitively formalised. And this really seems to be the plight of our contemporary cities: "It will no longer be obsessed with the city but with the manipulation of infrastructure for endless intensifications and diversifications, shortcuts and

redistributions—the reinvention of psychological space” (Koolhaas 2021, 67). But the ability we now have to relocate new uses and actions in space makes us think that, “since it is out of control, the urban is about to become a major vector of the imagination” (ibid., 67). Imagination and concreteness seem today to coexist as never before within the same existential perimeter, coinciding as *layers* occurring simultaneously on the same perspective plane. Many of the spaces in which we are accustomed to doing things will have no (and in many cases already have no) reason to exist in the future, at least in their current conformation. This is a non-linear and complex process, which will inevitably increasingly affect all kinds of societies and places, public and private space, including domestic environments, even the most intimate ones, which we might insist on protecting from this *epochal tsunami*. Not only does the space itself change, in its geometries and perimeters, above all what changes is our own idea of space, the functional image we attach to it in relation to our actions and behaviour. This is something that pervaded our societies long before the current pandemic, and which ties in perfectly with the concept of *efficiency* that underpins *Smart Cities*, based on the close relationship between a number of important factors represented by information and communication technologies, the strategies for governing services and spaces, the genuine and responsible engagement of people in processes of use, and the qualities of the spaces

used to accommodate the actions of the actors involved. These themes produce ideas of space that do not fit into precise definitions and which are no longer recognisable in the idea of a compact and physically perimeterised community. Under these different conditions, space has a physical identity that is less and less stable and finite, and its features are rather described by the dynamics of the material and immaterial flows that pass through it, whether they are made up of people, things, finance, information, technology or something else. A new composite reality with no predominant hierarchies has now been generated before our eyes, which has made us partly forget the idea of space as a place in which to establish relations of proximity. In essence, we have almost lost the sense of physical space, but the conceptual contiguity between different locations, which may be represented by other kinds of space, environments, services, information, images, scenes, brands, advertisements and more, remains intact. So the city can be considered everywhere and in everything (Amin, Thift 2001), in exteriors as in interiors, in actions as in things, in the urban as in the non-urban and probably in the real as in the unreal. What seems most interesting about contemporary space is the fact that since it is no longer possible to precisely define its character, we are now increasingly forced to imagine it (Amendola 2020), i.e. our way of perceiving it has changed along with the way we use it, an issue that will inevitably increasingly transform the way it is

actually realised. New connections in meaning profoundly change the way we look at and classify any environment and the freedom we have to use any space leads us, and sometimes forces us, to inhabit it from within our imagination. It is as if we have found a way to “dissolve the traffic between the world and the otherworld by dissolving the psychological frontier that still divided those two regions of existence in the previous era” (Baricco 2018, 205). It is a game everyone is playing, like a new and widespread opportunity for personal creativity, where everyone is now able to act within his or her own proposed space before it actually exists. In the spaces of our personal spheres we are all called upon to be designers, as a kind of horizontal redistribution of design responsibilities. Merging the role of the designer with that of the user, which has now subverted the way we live, now increasingly expanded and open, increasingly heterogeneous and inclusive. Therefore, if the pandemic has had any merit, and it is paradoxical to speak of merits for such a catastrophic event, it has certainly made us reflect anew on the theme of how to live, making us question, first of all, the more personal and private characteristics of this practice. I am talking about characteristics belonging to the individual’s most intimate sphere, which, however, now inevitably impact on the community and have a strong reflection on the built environment and landscape. One gets the impression that we have adopted a different cultural and civic attitude that inevitably

marks a change of epoch, and the positions that the current health emergency is forcing us into today definitively enshrine these practices, which, even after the current crisis, will probably remain ordinary habits in our daily lives.

As I write, Oscar Zelensky, after the House of Commons, Congress, the Bundestag, and the Canadian and Israeli parliaments, is giving his speech in the Italian government's Chamber of Deputies, and beyond the horror that this unjustifiable war arouses in each of us, I am struck by the fact that we are simultaneously experiencing the Ukrainian president's dramatic and real experience, which is unfolding under the blows of Russian attacks, and his virtual image that concurrently enters all our homes. It should also be noted that the two different states described take place simultaneously on completely different and even divergent parallel planes: the first dramatic and real, the second depicting a former actor capable of inhabiting social media; imaginative, athletic and I would even say positive. As in the *Metaverse* whose reality could increasingly pervade our existences, Zelensky sends the *avatar* of himself around the world, inhabiting parliaments, government buildings and squares all over Europe, and the two different realities seamlessly coincide in time and merge into each other in different places. *Never has a war been documented so closely in real time, never has it been so directly experienced by such a vast and widespread world population.*

The spaces of war scenes enter our homes and merge with the spaces of our cities, like new domains inhabited by different populations: places seen as virtual maps defined by significant interconnected scenarios belonging to different geographical realms. As early as the late 1980s, Peter Jackson had coined the term “Maps of Meaning,” describing spaces whose intelligibility was defined by the message they were able to carry (Jackson 1989). He does not speak of mere systems of meaning, but of experiences that are capable of becoming concrete places structured in physical and spatial form. The idea of “landscape” as “cultural geography” describes the synthesis of all ways of being, living and seeing, more than any physical thing, as is the case with classical spatial geography. Paraphrasing Jackson’s “Maps of meaning,” the interconnected experiential spaces of our existences now have a new state of being in which each individual has his or her own way of seeing and imagining many different spatial forms or metaphors that accommodate his or her actions, understood as *spaces that change* in use and meaning, always capable of accommodating new possibilities for action. Obviously, online digital information technology is largely responsible for this new state of affairs and is now the main mode through which we experience everyday life: “[...] by tailoring its depiction of the environment to their behaviour, the smartphone presents each individual user with a different map. We can no longer even pretend that what we see on the

screen is a shared, consistent representation of the same, relatively stable underlying reality. A map that interpellates us in this way ensures, in a strikingly literal sense, that we can only ever occupy and move through our own separate lifeworlds [...] Another map then superimposes itself on the one before your eyes: the map of your wanderings in the world, [...]” (Greenfield 2017, 26-28). It is as if we have now introjected technology by making it a part of our body, but also of our mind. This was prophesied as early as 1993 by Paul Virilio, who wrote an interesting article for *Domus* in which he tried to bring the subject of virtualisation and the corresponding technology back to the physical plane. For Virilio, the unstoppable “decline of real space” due to the “immediacy of ‘real time technologies’” would “inevitably lead to the inter-organic intrusion of technology” (Virilio 1993, 17). In continuity with what Virilio predicted at the time, today we have indeed established an uninhibited and spontaneous relationship with technology, which allows us to use it as if the actions it enables us to perform were an extension of our normal human faculties. It is largely for this reason that it now seems quite natural to overlap virtual space and real space, distant actions and near actions, being in person and being at a distance, placing all these different states of living on the same plane. This gives rise to another idea of space, which in the continuous transition between form and use, between material and immaterial, between spatial and anti-spatial, breaks

out of its own limits to address a broader and more complex relationship with people's lives. It is a type of space that becomes a place where perceptive, emotional and communicative experiences evolve, within which, on the one hand, all possible technological sophistication is contained, and on the other, an increasingly representative image of possible new realities is legitimised, transforming the space itself into a spectacular and self-referential object of consumption. So-called *influencers* use the backdrop against which they appear to represent themselves and portray what they are or what they want to pretend to be, and aside from any judgement that can be made of this phenomenon, one of its consequences is surely that the living space of those who appear online migrates from one place to another, from one home to another, often going viral, but also becoming our space. It is like a different kind of process underlying architecture, one that goes beyond the classical concept of *building*, in which the unreal and the represented, the illuminated or projected surface, the prepared plan or model, are substituted for the substantial way of being of things. We inhabit an architecture not only for its spatial and material qualities, but also for its ability to attract a multitude of techniques, networks, and immaterial platforms to it. This results in overlapping and co-present spaces around which it is possible to build a new order and a different system of logical connections that allow us to expand our experiences beyond

the usual physical limits. Today, the inhabited space has been transformed into a fluid geography made up of interpenetrating, overlapping or side-by-side subsystems, each of which fades into the previous one or the next, while claiming its own specific identity. It is an inhabited space that has ceased to be simply an architectural space, to become a complex usable surface, a kind of spatial extension where actions are freely distributed as if on a kind of uniform and continuous plane. This is a subversion of the way we live, ever more dilated and open, ever more heterogeneous and inclusive, in which a new creative state of mind invades individuals' personal spheres, and a new *widespread form of planning* confronts us all with an unprecedented personal responsibility. It could be argued that living today is tantamount to being a responsible participant in a continuous creative process of space regeneration, and this is where I believe an advanced reflection on the meaning of a new "sustainable post-pandemic living" could start.

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The complex meanings and design practices related to “sustainability” are the topics of this book. What opportunities, problems, challenges, and matters do sustainability have to confront? The different contributions offer a broad and interdisciplinary reflection of this idea from an ethical, social, and design point of view. They involve, at different scales, the new social and cultural models induced by the post-pandemic society and the possible forms of living that derive from it.

With texts by: Mauro Baracco, Michela Bassanelli, Davide Fassi, Stefano Guidarini, Francesca La Rocca, Chiara Lionello, Donatella Pagliacci, Pierluigi Salvadeo.

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