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MARCO MULAZZANI, PIER PAOLO PASOLINI,
MARKUS PETER, EVA PRATS, FEDERICO
TRANFA, GUILLERMO VÁZQUEZ CONSUEGRA**

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Alison Brooks Architects Ely Court, South Kilburn, Londra

1
—prospetto principale su strada
e continuità della cortina edilizia
—the main facade on the street
and the continuity of the
frontage

2
—schizzo dell'edificio su strada
—sketch of the building on the
street



PAUL RIDGIE

Al servizio della città

Camillo Magni

Kilburn è un quartiere di Londra passato alla cronaca per i problemi sociali tipici delle periferie metropolitane: esclusione, segregazione e microcriminalità, tanto da essere stigmatizzato nel celebre bestseller di Zadie Smith *Denti bianchi*. Da oltre un decennio l'Amministrazione locale del Municipio di Brent ha promosso una politica di rigenerazione urbana finalizzata a contrastare il decadimento socio-ambientale del quartiere. L'intervento pubblico è stato in grado di porre al centro delle proprie azioni gli aspetti fisici e morfologici del contesto e la qualità dell'architettura del costruito. Il processo ha avuto origine con un *masterplan* generale capace di governare in forma flessibile e progressiva la trasformazione del quartiere e di realizzarsi per tasselli poco alla volta in un arco temporale di circa 20 anni.

Kilburn è caratterizzato da un tessuto edilizio eterogeneo in cui brani di isolati di case vittoriane si accostano a edifici in linea di oltre dieci piani realizzati nel dopoguerra. Con apparente disordine si sovrappongono due modelli insediativi differenti: l'espansione vittoriana delle "terrace houses" alla quale si è sovrapposto, dopo i bombardamenti della Seconda guerra mondiale, un sistema di edilizia residenziale pubblica di città-giardino. Questo secondo modello abitativo ha manifestato, col passare degli anni, forti criticità e fenomeni di decadimento. Per tale ragione il *masterplan* generale proposto dall'Amministrazione Pubblica ha previsto la riqualificazione e sostituzione degli edifici realizzati negli anni Cinquanta favorendo un modello urbano che sostituisse i principi della città-giardino con quelli dell'isolato e della cortina edilizia su strada. Gli edifici alti vengono sostituiti da un'edilizia bassa disposta lungo le principali strade al fine di riproporzionare gli spazi urbani. In questo processo c'è una profonda riflessione politica sui modelli residenziali sperimentati nel dopoguerra e sulle implicazioni sociali e architettoniche che hanno prodotto.

Il progetto residenziale Ely Court di Alison Brooks Architects è un tassello di questo

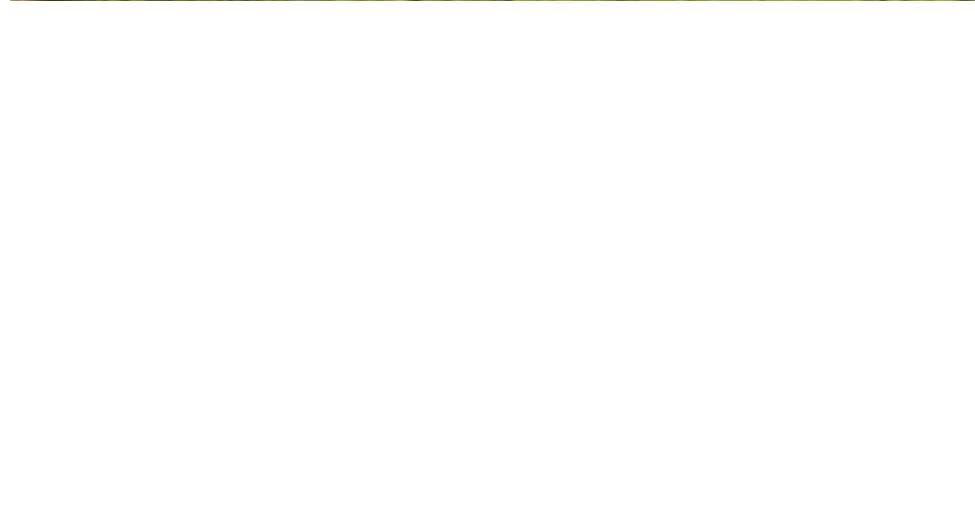
processo. Il lotto era precedentemente occupato da due edifici appartenenti a un sistema residenziale più ampio di corpi in linea di dieci piani. La strategia proposta mira a modificare i rapporti spaziali dell'intero isolato pur lavorando su una sola parte di esso. L'intervento si compone di tre nuovi edifici di tre e quattro piani con valori urbani differenti: il primo aderisce a una casa vittoriana rafforzando l'angolo acuto dell'isolato; il secondo si sviluppa lungo Chichester Road e definisce insieme alle abitazioni prospicienti una sezione stradale regolare; il terzo edificio, parallelo al secondo, si inserisce nel cuore dell'isolato e riproporziona la natura dello spazio aperto attrezzato a parco giochi che caratterizzava il piano terra dell'edificazione degli anni Cinquanta. Al centro del progetto c'è un piccolo giardino aperto su Chichester Road definito dalla cortina edilizia continua del nuovo edificato.



Nella disposizione dei nuovi volumi è evidente l'interesse quasi chirurgico di ricucire il contesto attraverso azioni che modificano la natura dell'isolato. La geometria stessa degli edifici si modifica al fine di adeguarsi all'intorno, assorbendo nelle variazioni dei corpi di fabbrica le diverse direttrici preesistenti. Per esempio il piccolo edificio d'angolo presenta una strana pianta trapezoidale che è l'esito della volontà di congiungere gli allineamenti esterni e garantire la continuità della cortina edilizia. Lo stesso può essere riscontrato nelle due testate degli edifici in linea in cui la profondità e l'orientamento variano al fine di rafforzare il nuovo percorso pedonale. Elementi semplici come muri e recinzioni vengono nobilitati dall'uso del mattone e connessi agli edifici con l'obiettivo di costruire un unico elemento architettonico capace di disegnare e contenere lo spazio pubblico.

In questi dettagli si riconosce il chiaro intento di porre la nuova architettura al servizio del quartiere e di usarla per riconfigurare l'identità del contesto. Il progetto, attraverso 43 nuove abitazioni, riproduce un'interpretazione contemporanea delle "terrace houses". L'uso del mattone è una chiara evocazione della tradizione costruttiva londinese così come i rapporti distributivi che prevedono gli accessi direttamente da strada o l'uso di piccoli giardini privati ai piani terra. In questo modo Chichester Road diventa spazialmente una tipica strada dell'epoca vittoriana in cui la separazione tra l'ambito privato e quello pubblico viene mediato dai giardini e dalle recinzioni in laterizio. Una ricca variazione tipologica degli alloggi caratterizza ogni edificio: quello d'angolo, per esempio, presenta una distribuzione tradizionale con un appartamento per piano, mentre l'edificio su Chichester Road offre un intenso mix tipologico con la sovrapposizione di duplex con accesso da strada e giardini privati sia davanti che dietro, sopra i quali si dispongono due piani di simplex di diverse dimensioni con accesso da scale condominiali. Il terzo edificio propone una schiera di triplex con giardino privato solo nella parte retrostante. In entrambi i casi le testate degli edifici presentano alloggi speciali.

Queste variazioni si ripercuotono nei prospetti in cui è riconoscibile un attento equilibrio tra la ripetizione costante della struttura e quella alternata degli alloggi. Nell'impaginato delle facciate le variazioni non sono mai gratuite o mosse da sole esigenze estetiche, ma corrispondono alla diversificazione tipologica. Le abitazioni sono realizzate per il 50% in regime di "social housing" e presentano dimensioni e qualità spaziali interne di grande generosità con finestre a tutta altezza e un interpiano, eccezionale per la cultura anglosassone, di 2,60 metri. Ely Court, selezionato tra i cinque finalisti del Mies van der Rohe Award, cosa non scontata per un edificio residenziale, è il primo di tre interventi di Alison Brooks Architects a Kilburn. Rimaniamo in attesa di scoprire se i futuri progetti riusciranno a proseguire il percorso di riqualificazione urbana intrapreso nell'ormai non più problematico quartiere Kilburn a Londra.



- 3
—vista da Chichester Road del nuovo intervento in rapporto alle prospicienti case vittoriane
—view from Chichester Road of the new project in relation to the nearby Victorian houses
- 4
—vista del giardino pubblico e delle testate dei due edifici in linea
—view of the public garden and the ends of the two linear buildings
- 5
—particolare dell'edificio su strada. In primo piano il portico di ingresso ai duplex
—detail of the building on the street. In the foreground, the entrance portico of the duplexes
- 6
—vista dell'edificio su strada con i giardini privati al piano terra
—view of the building on the street with private gardens on the ground floor
- 7
—vista frontale dell'edificio retrostante
—frontal view of the back building



Rigenerazione urbana a Kilburn

Camillo Magni

Londra negli ultimi decenni ha avviato un pionieristico programma di rigenerazione urbana diventando un campo di sperimentazione significativo per tutta la cultura europea. Ampie porzioni di territorio sono state oggetto di riqualificazione sia nelle parti di spazio pubblico sia nelle parti costruite, prevedendo anche operazioni di demolizione e sostituzione di interi edifici, fatto sorprendente se paragonato al contesto italiano.

Queste trasformazioni hanno evidenziato luci e ombre di un processo in cui l'Amministrazione Pubblica ha accettato la sfida a cooperare insieme al settore privato in una città che è uno dei mercati immobiliari più appetibili del pianeta. All'innegabile miglioramento ambientale e sociale corrispondono anche fenomeni di *gentrification* e di speculazione edilizia che evidenziano le oggettive difficoltà a gestire trasformazioni urbane garantendo sia la fattibilità economica in un contesto di vigorosi tagli statali, sia la democrazia dei processi e la tutela delle fasce più deboli. Indipendentemente da ogni giudizio, la cui ardua sentenza spetta solo ai lettori, l'elemento di maggiore rilevanza è riscoprire l'interesse e la capacità del settore pubblico a rivestire un ruolo da protagonista nel governo della città e nella costruzione del territorio attraverso inedite sperimentazioni di processi attuativi e politiche urbane.

Il quartiere di Kilburn è un esempio di tutto questo. Nel 2007 è stato avviato un processo di rigenerazione urbana che ha previsto la realizzazione di 2.400 nuovi alloggi di cui il 50% in edilizia convenzionata e il restante 50% rivolto al mercato libero. Gli abitanti sono stati tutelati garantendo loro una prelazione verso le case in regime agevolato. Come strumento attuativo è stato redatto un *masterplan* generale con l'obiettivo di definire un disegno urbano unitario da realizzarsi in più episodi autonomi tra loro dal punto di vista temporale, economico e procedurale. È stata prevista la demolizione di circa 45 edifici realizzati prevalentemente del dopoguerra per far spazio a nuove costruzioni che fossero in grado di ridefinire l'identità del quartiere. In

questo senso è evidente la feroce critica ai modelli abitativi della città del Movimento Moderno, sostituiti da un'edilizia connessa alla figura dell'isolato e della strada. Prevedendo 12 interventi in aree distinte è stata sistematicamente ribadita la volontà di costruire la cortina edilizia a filo strada attraverso edifici che reinterpretassero in chiave contemporanea la tipologia della corte. L'interesse del *masterplan* risiede nell'attenzione con cui sono stati inseriti interventi puntuali di piccole e medie dimensioni all'interno di un tessuto esistente più ampio che, come tessere mancanti di un mosaico, ne hanno modificato l'immagine. Il *masterplan* non ha l'ambizione di imporre geometrie e nuovi assetti urbani, ma, più modestamente, ricuce fratture generate da un precedente modello di città non più condiviso. È in questa modestia che si rivela una straordinaria e intelligente ricchezza progettuale. I 12 interventi promossi sono:

lotto 1 – Cambridge Court & Wells Court di Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands, 101 unità di cui 40 *social housing* e 61 libero mercato; lotto 2 – Ely Court di Alison Brooks Architects, 43 unità di cui 18 *affordable social housing* e 25 libero mercato; lotto 3 – Gloucester House & Durham Court, di Rick Mather Architects, 236 unità di cui 102 *social housing* in locazione e 134 libero mercato; lotto 4 – Bourne Place di Rick Mather Architects, 133 unità di cui 75 *social housing* e 58 libero mercato; lotto 5 – Bronte & Fielding House di Alison Brooks Architects con Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands, 229 unità di cui 113 *social housing* in locazione e 126 libero mercato; lotto 6 – Chippenham Park Gardens di PRP Architects, 52 unità di cui 22 *affordable social housing* e 30 libero mercato; lotto 7 – Peel Precinct, di Penoyre & Prasad, 226 unità di cui 42 *affordable social housing* in locazione e 184 libero mercato; lotto 8 – Hicks Bolton House di Rick Mather Architects, 64 unità; lotto 9 – Woodhouse Urban Park, di Erect Architecture; lotto 10 – Queen's Park Cullen House di MaccreanorLavington, 137 unità di cui 39 *social housing*; lotto 11 – Queen's Park Place di Ian Simpson Architects, 144 unità di cui 28 *affordable social housing* e 480 mq spazi commerciali; lotto 12 – Watling Place di PRP Architects, 153 unità di cui 113 *affordable social housing*.

8 9

— confronto tra lo stato di fatto e il nuovo *masterplan* di rigenerazione urbana del quartiere Kilburn. In nero sono evidenziati gli edifici oggetto di demolizione e sostituzione

— comparison between the present condition and the new master plan of urban regeneration of the Kilburn district. In black, buildings slated for demolition and replacement

10

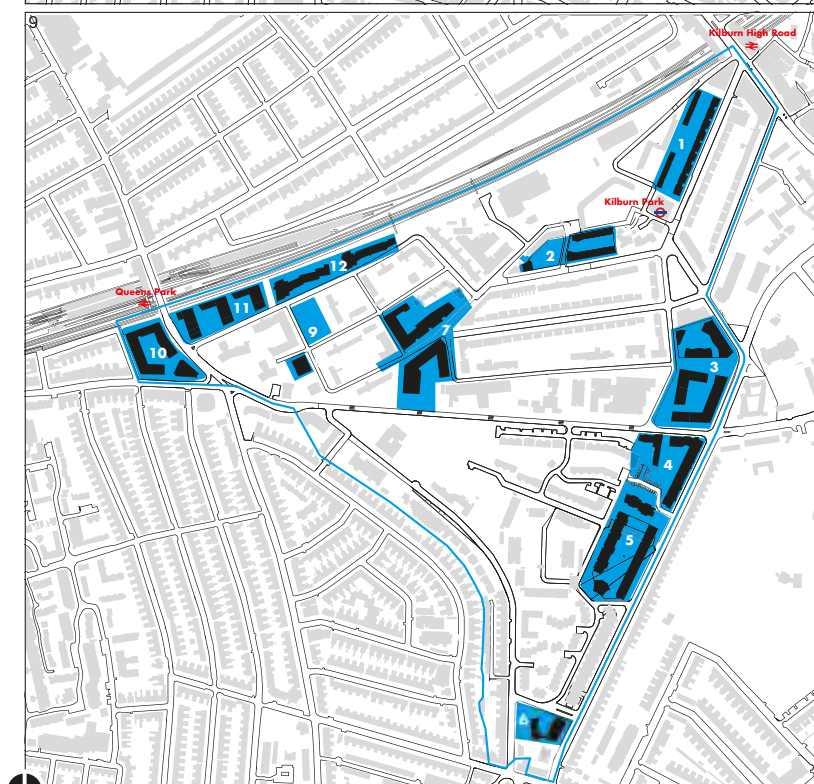
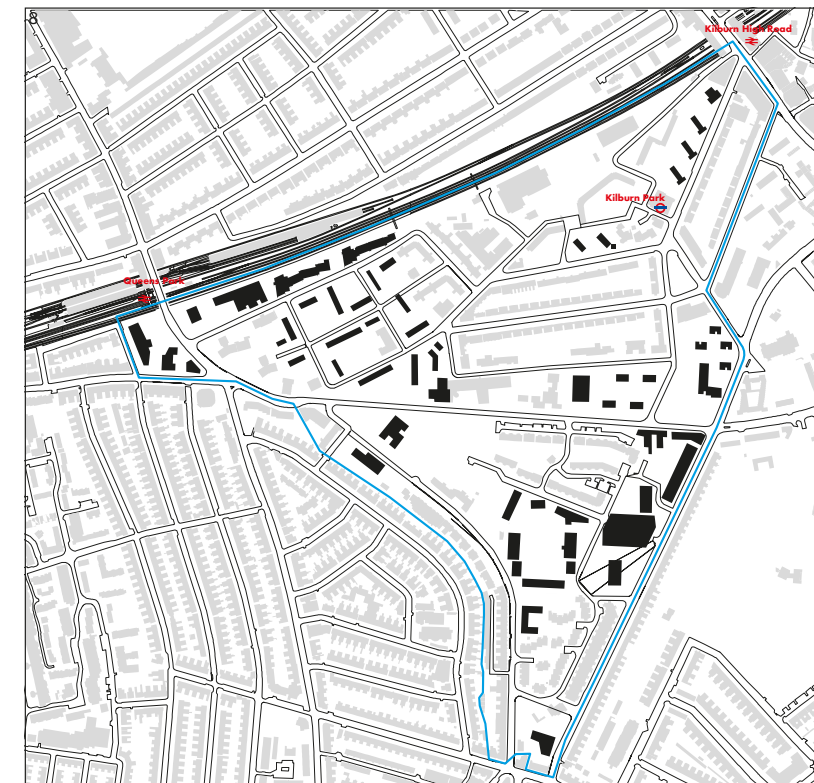
— planimetria generale del comparto residenziale. L'intervento rafforza in forma puntuale il rapporto con la strada e costruisce un nuovo giardino pubblico

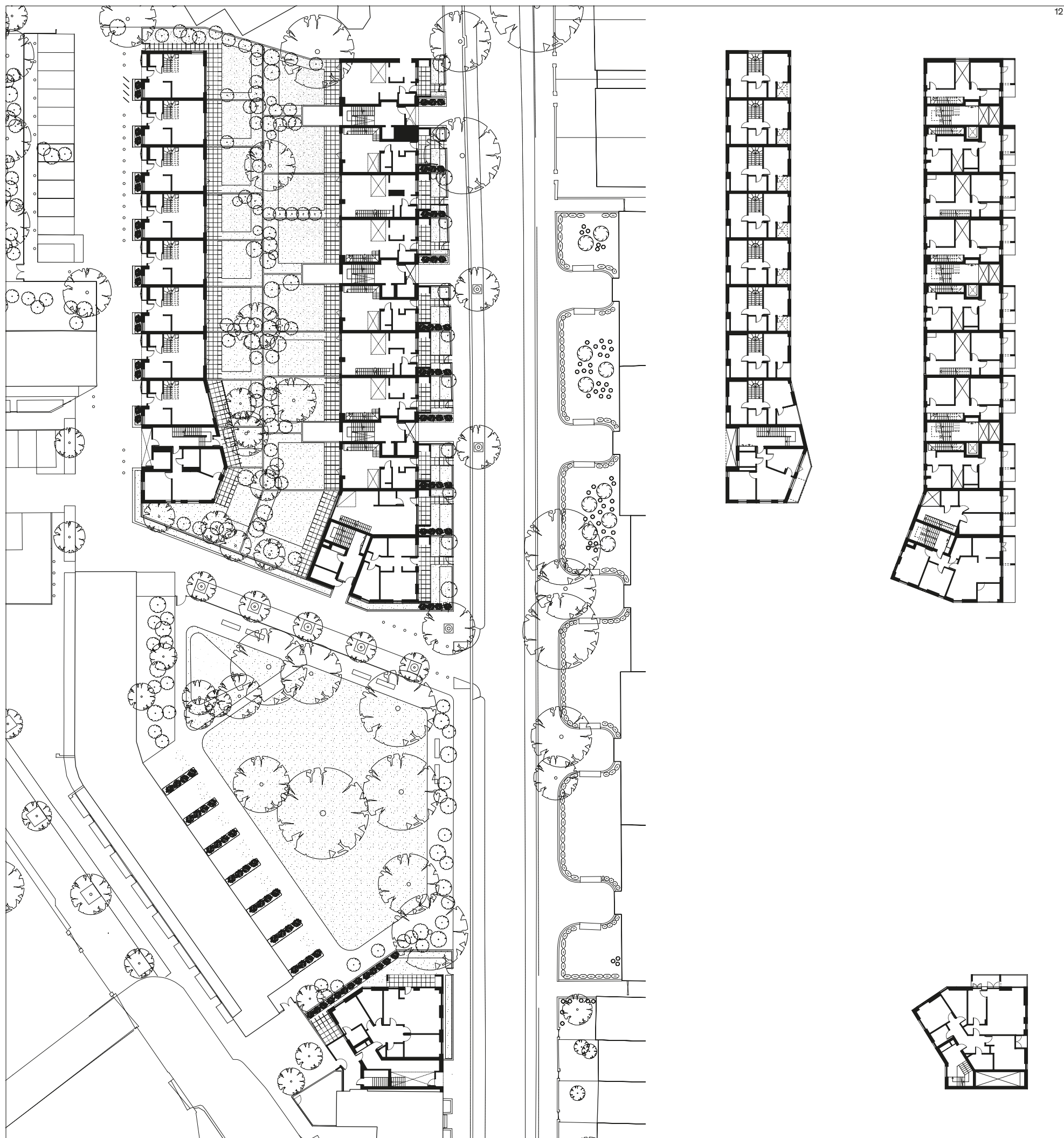
— siteplan of the residential settlement. The project reinforces the relationship with the street and provides a new public garden

11

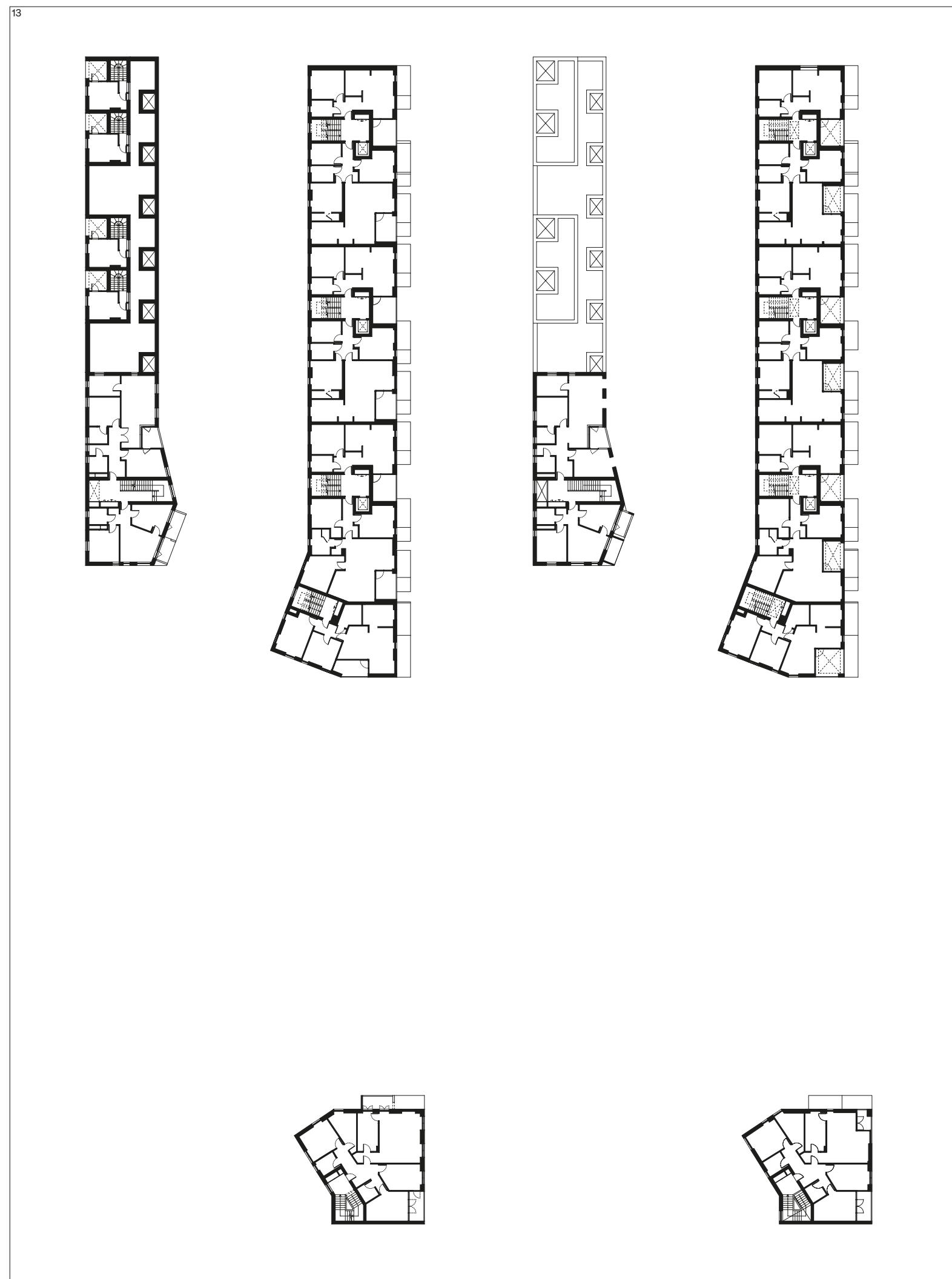
— assonometria generale dell'intervento

— overall axonometric of the project





12



13

12 13

—l'intervento si compone di un innesto, dentro la cortina edilizia esistente, di due edifici in linea e di un piccolo parco pubblico. Nelle piante del piano terra, primo, secondo e terzo si può riconoscere l'uso di 19 tipologie di alloggi differenti

—the project is grafted into the existing frontage, inserting two linear buildings and a small public park. The ground, first, second and third floor plans show the use of 19 different types of residential units

progetto

Alison Brooks Architects

team di progetto

Alison Brooks, Nelson Carvalho, Chris Small, Ceri Edmunds

architetto esecutivo

Hester Architects

masterplan e progetto urbano

Alison Brooks Architects, Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands

concept strutture

WSP

ingegnere strutture

Tully DeAth

impianti

Norman Disney & Young

committente

London Borough of Brent/Catalyst Housing Group

cronologia

settembre 2012-dicembre 2015: realizzazione

localizzazione

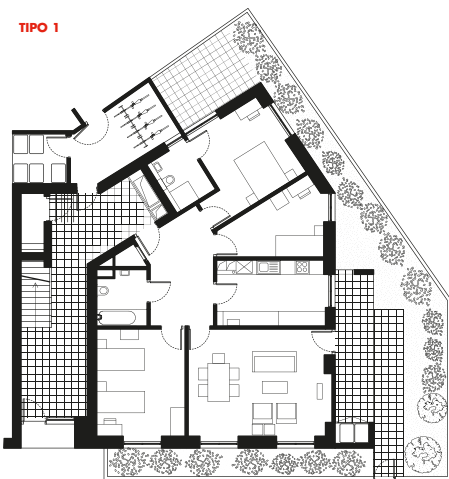
Chichester Rd, Kilburn, Londra, Regno Unito

fotografie

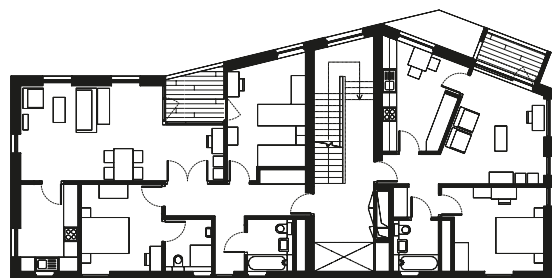
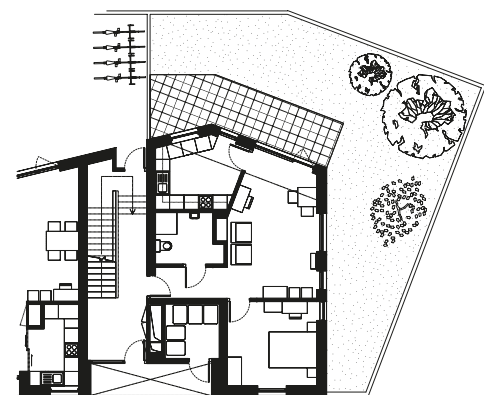
Nelson Carvalho,

Paul Riddle

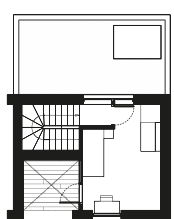
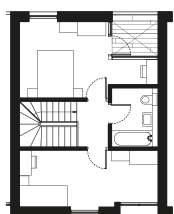
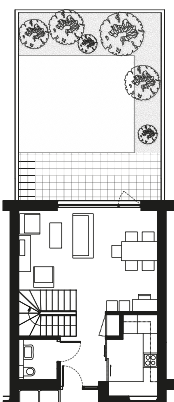
TIPO 1



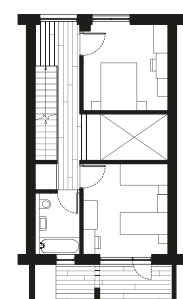
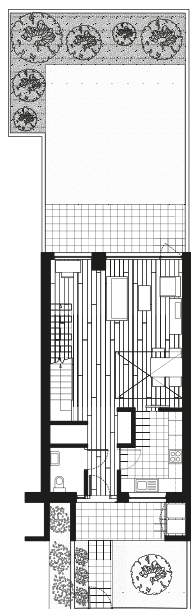
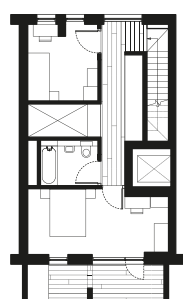
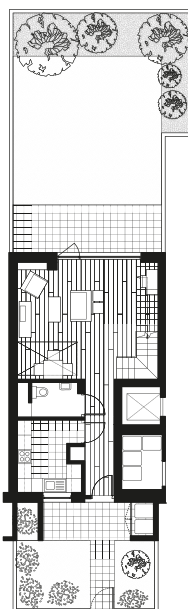
TIPO 2



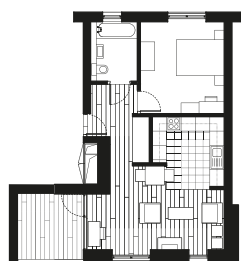
TIPO 3



TIPO 4



TIPO 5

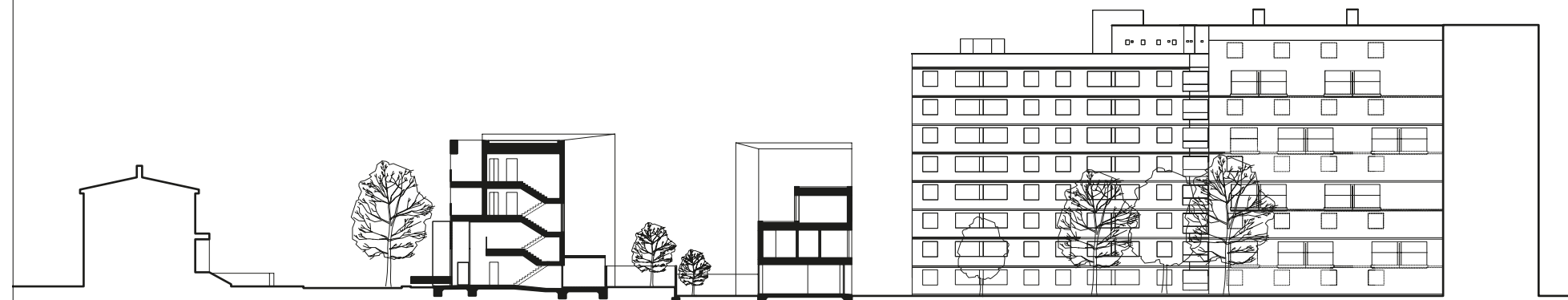
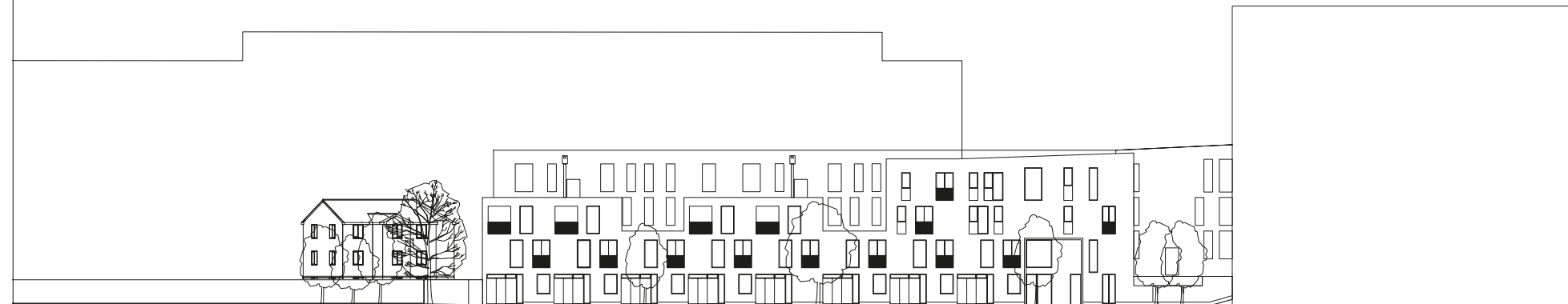


—tipologie abitative 1 pianta piano terra e piano tipo dell'edificio connesso all'esistente 2 pianta piano terra e piano tipo della testata dell'edificio retrostante 3 pianta piano terra, primo e secondo del triplex 4 pianta piano terra e primo del duplex 5 pianta piano tipo dell'edificio su strada

—residential types 1 ground floor plan and standard floor of building connected to the existing structure 2 ground floor plan and standard floor of the end of the back building 3 ground, first and second floor plans of the triplex 4 ground and first floor plans of the duplex 5 standard floor plan of the building on the street

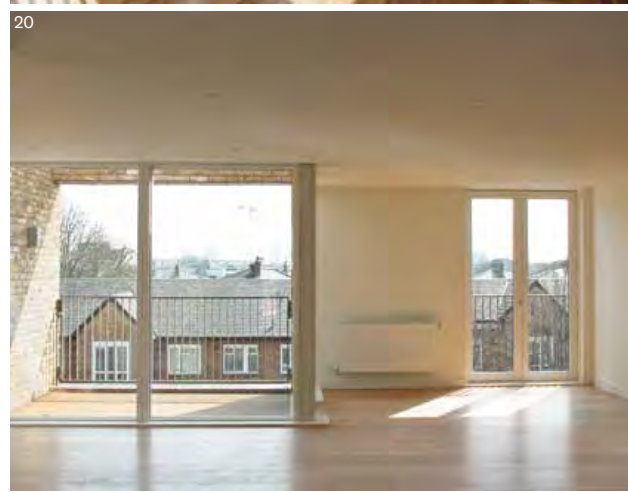
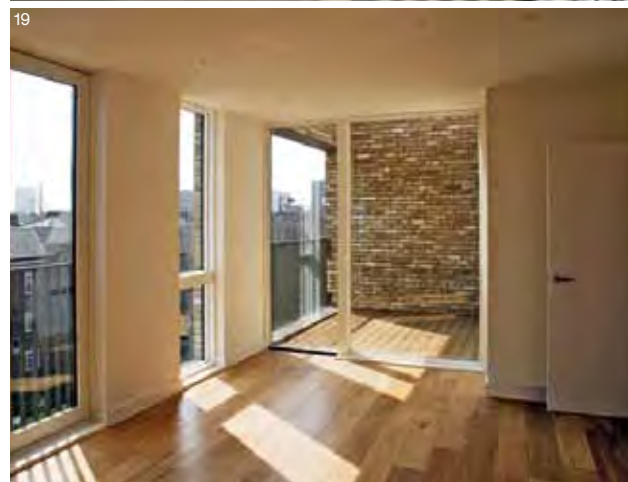
—prospetti longitudinali e sezioni trasversali

—longitudinal elevations and cross-sections





16
—vista del muro di collegamento
tra le due testate degli edifici
in linea
—view of the wall connecting
the two ends of the linear
buildings
17
—vista del parco e dell'edificio
connesso all'esistente
—view of the park and the building
connected to the existing context
18–20
—interno dell'alloggio
con vista della loggia
—interior of the apartment
with view of the loggia
21
—vista frontale dell'edificio
su strada
—frontal view of the building
on the street



ures that have afflicted urban peripheries. Though the problems were often the result of the governing and not the design of these places, today there is a very severe judgment of the high-density habitat models that pursued the utopia of the garden city, and we are seeing a return to the more reassuring figures of the historical city. In this process the ground floor becomes the most significant point of contact. Never before has such design effort been lavished on the definition of the ground seam of residential buildings. While buildings are measured in meters, the ground floor as become a design device of such precision that it demands the scale of the centimeter. Two opposing processes emerge on this theme: on the one hand, at times the ground floor is the place capable of attracting the functions that round out the residence, functions aimed at the city, that bring complexity to the zone. In other cases, the ground floor is used for residential purposes, encouraging original experimentation with ways of dwelling and reinforcing the domestic character of the public space it faces. These two apparently opposing figures represent the dichotomy with which to control the different nuances of distinct urban characters. Nevertheless, both have one side in common: the maniacal precision of the design of the section of the ground floor connected to the design of the ground: steps, enclosures, glazings, level shifts, landings, sidewalks and window sills are precise elements for the definition of separation, or overlapping, between the public and private spheres.

The last aspect to examine is the relationship between the parts and the whole. As for cities, also for buildings variation has become a recurring theme. The city, Aldo Rossi said, is constituted of parts, and their juxtaposition generates processes of identity. Likewise, today the leaning towards the variation and the exceptional found in residential zones represents an explicit reference to the stratification of the historical city and compliance with its underlying urban values. The modifications of certain parts of a residence establish a relationship with the whole just as a neighborhood relates to the rest of the city: with frank indifference. Differences are the symbol of a neatly chaotic metropolis. Heights, volumes, relationship between full and empty zones, between green space and construction, express the different characters of a single residential project. The desire to diversify the parts in order to construct a whole charged with multiple identities is clear. Many different design strategies are called into play: the use of multiple types suggests an idea of residence built on subjective needs that respond to an overall redefinition of the relations between the individual and the society. The use of different heights makes it possible to recognize the distinct parts of the project, concentrating volume –for example– towards the corners, or towards the most exposed sides of the lots. Strategic use of the context and existing features makes it possible to bring out exceptional situations, just as the involvement of multiple designers in a single master plan encourages diversification of models and building types. At times these processes border on caricature, but they express a clear ideological will to draw on different formal repertoires with the aim of creating a complex image of architecture as a new expression of urban character. The city is made to a great extent of residential buildings. Houses are the urban material that characterizes the image of the metropolis in the most pervasive way, defining its spatial hierarchies. Today residential

design is back, as in the past, in a leading role, becoming a tool for urban design and the formulation of the *forma urbis*. In this process, the forms of dwelling are free from ideologies and historical revisions. We can glimpse expressions of new lifestyles that reveal a renewed focus on the community, of which the collective house is the loftiest manifestation. Urban regeneration and new forms of dwelling are dual factors of a single process that involves cities, economies and societies. This is why we can look with optimism and faith at the evolution of residential design and of the cities that contain it.

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Marcel Meili, Markus Peter Architekten.
195 x 56
Federico Tranfa

For a better understanding of the direction of evolution of the European residential real estate sector, the city of Zurich offers an ideal observatory. The metropolitan area is one of the main poles of attraction for public and private developers, often operating in synergy, starting with precise analysis of potential demand. Zurich also reflects a trend (see the article in no. 861/2016 of «Casabella») that is quite widespread in the economically advanced countries towards growing demand for housing inside the urban perimeter, where the transport network offers capillary coverage and the quality of life is higher. This demand has gradually saturated the existing low-density zones and has contributed in a decisive way to change the purpose of land previously considered unappealing. Freilager Zürich, a new district created in the abandoned area of a former freight rail yard, represents one of the many interventions that have recently transformed the urban panorama outside the historical center. The result of a commission assigned to the studio Meili & Peter, which designed the master plan, this district formed by nine linear buildings and three towers also contains projects by Rolf Mühlethaler (Bern), Office Haratori with Office Winhov (Amsterdam), and projects for outdoor spaces by Vogt Landschaftsarchitekten (Zurich) and Müller Illien Landschaftsarchitekten (Zurich). One of the distinctive characteristics of Freilager is its significant existing architectural context: two long parallel volumes, originally for the warehousing of foodstuffs, which the architects and clients decided to conserve and convert. Far from a banal operation if we consider the proximity of the volumes and their depth, apparently unsuitable for residential use. Built in 1925, the two warehouses have a structural grid based on the use of mushroom pillars, ideal to limit the thickness of the slabs without compromising load-bearing capacity. Having realized that the existing spans were too large to be absorbed into the partition walls, the designers decided that they should remain visible inside the apartments. The form and material character of the pillars and slabs in reinforced concrete have thus become –in addition to the depth of the buildings– the circumstances (what the Smithsons would define with the term "as found") around which to organize the renovation project. The apartments, with the exception of those at the ends, extend from one facade to the other, crossed by a central zone without openings, forcing the designers to place a series of functions of low or zero occupancy on the part of persons in this band. The proximity of the two buildings and the presence of deep canopies for the shipping and receiving of the foodstuffs under

a shelter contribute to generate an unusual atmosphere. On the ground level, protected from the weather, shops alternate with residential spaces in a situation similar to the historical city (a sensation amplified by the absence of cars, which cannot cross the area but can only be isolated in special underground parking facilities). The reuse of the buildings required substantial modification of the facades, which to improve quality of life are now punctuated by large balconies. These are objects with their own formal character, capable of hosting a table of reasonable size, or a generous supply of plants and outdoor furnishings, as pleasant outdoor extensions of the apartment interiors. Further up, three newly constructed levels act as *immeubles-villas*, in a range of types marked by large openings, terraces and setbacks. Shared staircases and elevators, created by demolishing certain portions of the structural framework to create the required openings, are located at the center of the two buildings. The numbers 195 and 56 respectively indicate the overall number of housing units and that of their sizes, an unusual case of great variety if we consider the rigidity of the constructed enclosure. Meili & Peter have addressed the issue of density through a sophisticated typological interlock that paradoxically winds up acting to the advantage of the apparently less appealing apartments, thanks to a brilliant, unusual solution. Inside the apartments the sculptural presence of the mushroom pillars and the fair-face concrete ceilings suggests the industrial origin of the spaces, without any concessions to the rhetoric of the loft. This kind of balance between the existing enclosure and the new functions falls short, on the other hand, where there is greater freedom in the shaping of the volumes, running up against a transparency that is even excessive, or perhaps seems to be, due to the contrast with the compact mass below. The project also includes a restaurant, partially contained inside the existing perimeter and partially extending towards the street, with the aim of also visually communicating the functional transformation of the buildings. All these characteristics bring us back to the initial premises, i.e. the numerical growth of a new social category, formed by highly educated residents with substantial income interested in having a radical, austere lifestyle. These are young people capable of understanding the advantages of life in a densely populated community. This also explains the harmony between the designers and the users, a phenomenon that is less evident but can already be glimpsed in the south of Europe. This virtuous circuit that involves local administrations, investors and designers seems to be the best response to the cultural resistance that is still widespread in the residential sector, which is historically more conservative, if we exclude projects of a social character that during the last century represented the most advanced phase of architectural research applied to the theme of the residential habitat.

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Alison Brooks Architects: Ely Court,
London. Urban regeneration in Kilburn
Camillo Magni

Kilburn is a neighborhood in London that has made news due to the typical social problems of metropolitan peripheries –exclusion, segregation and petty crime– so much so that it has been stigmatized in the famous bestseller by Zadie Smith *White*

Teeth. For over a decade the local administration of the borough of Brent has promoted a policy of urban regeneration aimed at combatting social decay in the zone. Public intervention has managed to make the physical and morphological aspects of the context and the quality of constructed architecture the focus of its actions. The process has its origin in a master plan capable of governing, in a flexible, progressive way, the transformation of the neighborhood, done segment by segment, one bit at a time, over a span of about 20 years.

Kilburn has a heterogeneous urban fabric in which groups of blocks with Victorian buildings are juxtaposed with linear buildings over ten stories high built after World War II. These two different settlement models overlap in apparent disorder: the Victorian expansion of the “terrace houses” on which a system of public garden city residential housing was superimposed after wartime bombing. This second habitat model has revealed serious critical points and phenomena of decay over the years. For this reason, the master plan proposed by the public administration called for the renewal and replacement of buildings made in the 1950s, favoring an urban model that would replace the principles of the garden city with those of the block with streetfronts. The tall buildings were replaced by lower structures along the main streets to repropotion the urban spaces. This process involved in-depth policy reflections on the residential models implemented in the postwar era and the social and architectural implications they have produced.

The residential project Ely Court by Alison Brooks Architects is one facet of this process. The lot was previously occupied by two buildings that were part of a larger housing system of linear 10-story volumes. The strategy aims at modifying the spatial relationships of the entire block, though by working on just one part of it. The project is composed of three new buildings with three or four levels, having different urban values: the first clings to a Victorian house, reinforcing the acute angle of the block; the second extends along Chichester Road and defines a set of dwellings facing a street with a regular section; the third, parallel to the second, is inserted in the core of the block and re-proportions the nature of the outdoor space set up as a playground that accompanied the ground level of the development from the 1950s. At the center of the project there is a small garden open to Chichester Road, bordered by the continuous frontage of the new constructions.

The arrangement of the new volumes reveals an almost surgical interest in mending the context through actions that alter the nature of the block itself. The geometry of the buildings varies to adapt to their surroundings, absorbing the various existing axes in the variations of the volumes. For example, the small corner building has a strange trapezoidal plan that is the result of the desire to match the external alignments and to ensure the continuity of the frontage. The same could be said of the two ends of the linear buildings, in which the depth and orientation varies in order to reinforce the new pedestrian route. Simple elements like walls and enclosures are ennobled by the use of brick and connected to the buildings with the aim of constructing a single architectural element capable of designing and containing public space. These details reflect a clear intention to put the new architecture at the service of the neighborhood, and to use it to reconfigure the identity of the context.

Through 43 new homes, the project reproduces a contemporary interpretation of the “terrace houses.” The use of brick is a clear reference to the London construction tradition, like the relationships of circulation that call for access directly from the street, or the use of small private gardens on the ground floor. In this way, Chichester Road becomes a typical street of the Victorian era, in spatial terms, in which the separation between private and public areas is mediated by gardens and brick enclosures.

Each building has a wide range of housing types: the corner building, for example, has a traditional arrangement of one flat per floor, while the building on Chichester Road offers an intense typological mixture with the stacking of duplexes with access from the street and private gardens, in front and behind, over which two floors of simplex units are placed, of different sizes, with access from shared staircases. The third building provides an array of triplex flats with a private garden only to the rear. In both cases, the ends of the buildings feature special apartments.

These variations have repercussions on the elevations, where we can see a careful balance between the constant repetition of the structure and the alternating structure of the houses. In the composition of the facade, the variations are never indulgent or driven only by aesthetic requirements, but correspond to the typological diversification. The apartments have been organized with 50% earmarked as “social housing,” and have sizes and internal spatial qualities of great generosity, with full-height windows and an exceptional height between levels, for English housing, of 2.6 meters.

Ely Court, selected as one of the five finalists in the Mies van der Rohe Award, something not to be taken for granted for a residential building, is the first of three projects by Alison Brooks Architects in Kilburn. We will wait to see if the future works will be able to continue the path of urban regeneration implemented in what by now is no longer the problematic district of Kilburn, in London.

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Alison Brooks Architects: Ely Court,
London. Urban regeneration in Kilburn
Camillo Magni

Over the last few decades London has launched a pioneering program of urban regeneration, becoming a meaningful field of experimentation for the entire urban culture of Europe. Large portions of territory have been earmarked for renewal in terms of public spaces and constructed parts, also involving operations of demolition and replacement of entire buildings, a surprising fact if we compare it to the Italian context. These transformations have revealed the light and dark sides of a process in which the public administration has accepted the challenge of cooperating with the private sector in a city that is one of the planet’s most appealing real estate markets. The undeniable improvement in environmental and social terms has been accompanied by phenomena of gentrification and speculation that point to the objective difficulty of controlling urban transformations, guaranteeing economic feasibility in a context of sweeping cuts in state funding, and ensuring democratic process of choice and safeguarding of the weaker classes.

Without any assessments, since the judgment can be left up to our readers, the most pertinent factor here is to rediscover the interest and ability of the public sector to play

a leading role in the management of the city and the construction of the territory, through original experiments with processes of implementation and urban policy.

The Kilburn area is a good example of all this. In 2007 a process of urban regeneration was launched here that called for the creation of 2400 new housing units, of which 50% would be subsidized, with the other 50% aimed at the open market. The inhabitants were protected by granting them priority options on the subsidized housing units. The tool of implementation was a general master plan prepared with the goal of defining a unified urban design to be assembled in multiple, independent episodes, in terms of timing, economics and procedures. The program called for demolition of about 45 buildings, mostly constructed after World War II, to make room for new constructions that would be able to redefine the identity of the neighborhood. In this sense there has been a clear, fierce critique of the residential models of the city of the Modern Movement, replaced by edification connected with the figure of the block and the street. In the planning of 12 interventions in separate areas, there has been a systematic emphasis on the desire to construct the street frontage with buildings that would reinterpret the courtyard typology in a contemporary way. The interesting part of this master plan lies in the care with which the individual projects of small and medium size have been inserted inside the existing urban fabric, like the missing parts of a mosaic that modify its image. The master plan does not set out to impose new urban arrangements and geometries, but more modestly tries to mend the fractures caused by a previous model of the city that is no longer shared. This humility becomes an extraordinary, intelligent resource of the project. The 12 projects are: Lot 1: Cambridge Court & Wells Court by Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands, 101 units of which 40 for social housing and 61 for the free market; Lot 2: Ely Court by Alison Brooks Architects, 43 units of which 18 for affordable social housing and 25 for the free market; Lot 3: Gloucester House & Durham Court by Rick Mather Architects, 236 units of which 102 for social rental housing and 134 for the free market; Lot 4: Bourne Place by Rick Mather Architects, 133 units of which 75 for social housing and 58 for the free market; Lot 5: Bronte & Fielding House by Alison Brooks Architects with Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands, 229 units of which 113 for social rental housing and 126 for the free market; Lot 6: Chippenham Gardens by PRP Architects, 52 units of which 22 for affordable social housing and 30 for the free market; Lot 7: Peel Precinct by Penoyre & Prasad, 226 units of which 42 for affordable social rental housing and 184 for the free market; Lot 8: HicksBolton House by Rick Mather Architects, 64 units; Lot 9: Woodhouse Urban Park, by Erect Architecture; Lot 10: Queen’s Park Cullen House by MaccrenorLavington, 137 units of which 39 for social housing; Lot 11: Queen’s Park Place by Ian Simpson Architects, 144 units of which 28 for affordable social housing and 480 m2 for commercial spaces; Lot 12: Watling Place by PRP Architects, 153 units of which 113 for affordable social housing.

like a premonition, considering the way Flores & Prats have operated in (and not designed) the new headquarters of this fantastic theater in Barcelona known as Sala Beckett. The Latin term detritus means consumed, eroded; in science it refers to parts separated from a body or sediments of earth and stone; in general use it indicates what is left over, what remains. And as if to come full circle, the detritus is residual, a leftover. But the residue also has to do with the work of the alchemists. In fact Residua is an adaptation of the original French title Têtes-mortes (Dead Heads), which Beckett used to make reference to the excess in alchemical processes, the remains that could not be utilized. I don’t know if Flores & Prats or Toni Casares, director of the theater, had these references in mind when they decided how to intervene in the ruined sheds of the site of the new Sala Beckett. Certainly, from the outset, they thought about working with debris and leftovers, though assigning them a value that has nothing to do with the idea of the useless leftovers of the alchemists. Instead, they decided to raise them to a higher status, transforming them into protagonists, inverting processes of sedimentation and shifting layers of debris upward, to the top of the pile: in tune with the spirit of Beckett, detritus and residuals become an indispensable requirement of the work.

In the new Sala Beckett the ruins found by Flores & Prats are assigned civil and moral values that through the redemption of usage value have been transformed into truth. Let’s remember one very important aspect here: the building of the old Cooperativa Pau i Justícia that has become Sala Beckett was not listed as protected heritage. The architects could have demolished it to have an empty lot on which to build a totally new theater. Neither the architects nor the theater management were obliged to conserve anything, not even the memory of the place. Yet they have done just that, making an important design decision in ideological terms: this extraordinary project begins with that decision, and the architectural approach of Flores & Prats is thus linked to one of the more provocative ideas formulated by Samuel Beckett. In a conversation with Georges Duthuit, speaking of the possibilities of art, the Irish writer said he would prefer a condition in which “there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express .” Flores & Prats could have made tabula rasa of the sheds of the old cooperative and built their own invention on the freed-up land, without obstacles. Instead, they sensed another type of obligation. In effect, in this project obligation opposes invention. Faced with crumbling walls, collapsing ceilings, cracked floors, the overlapping of countless restorations accumulated over time, the remains of doors, partitions, windows, railings, moldings, plaster, ceramics – in short, rubble of little value

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The fact that certain Spanish editions of the works of Samuel Beckett have titles like Detritus or Residua seems al-

most like a premonition, considering the way Flores & Prats have operated in (and not designed) the new headquarters of this fantastic theater in Barcelona known as Sala Beckett. The Latin term detritus means consumed, eroded; in science it refers to parts separated from a body or sediments of earth and stone; in general use it indicates what is left over, what remains. And as if to come full circle, the detritus is residual, a leftover. But the residue also has to do with the work of the alchemists. In fact Residua is an adaptation of the original French title Têtes-mortes (Dead Heads), which Beckett used to make reference to the excess in alchemical processes, the remains that could not be utilized. I don’t know if Flores & Prats or Toni Casares, director of the theater, had these references in mind when they decided how to intervene in the ruined sheds of the site of the new Sala Beckett. Certainly, from the outset, they thought about working with debris and leftovers, though assigning them a value that has nothing to do with the idea of the useless leftovers of the alchemists. Instead, they decided to raise them to a higher status, transforming them into protagonists, inverting processes of sedimentation and shifting layers of debris upward, to the top of the pile: in tune with the spirit of Beckett, detritus and residuals become an indispensable requirement of the work.

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from pater, it cannot be imposed from above, but arises like a formless, headless mist from time and experience, from what is radically collective, from below, even from the deepest strata. The sheds were not even a ruin as such – since ruins have the prestige of time and thus become timeless – but just a pile of rubble, so ordinary, so worthless as to be able to vanish without any regrets. But for Flores & Prats that rubble imposed the “obligation to express”: it represented the bond with the deepest roots of living memory of a working-class neighborhood like Poblenou. The broken floors, crumbling walls, sinking roofs, the fragments of ceramic and glass, the pieces of plastic were all quite worthless in terms of trade value, but very dear – in the affective sense – from the standpoint of usage value, accumulated in an infinite number of layers, latent in every detail, ready to reawaken in collective memory. In short, the (a)patrimonial aspect of the old dilapidated building was defined by its many resident phantoms: the gentel but solid ghosts of the collective identity, which as in old yellowed photographs could not be left homeless. The new Sala Beckett – a theater, precisely so – would become the home of those marvellous phantoms and the voices that do not want to *take their leave and help us to survive – to continue to be the owners of the city, in spite of it all – in the midst of all these leftovers, allowing us in the end to impose the collective on the subjective, the place on the space, memory on invention, truth of things that have usage value over the simulacra of trade value, hands and tools over statistics, in the new but old converted building*.

Faced with the old structure, Flores & Prats decided to take two complementary paths. One for the whole, and one for the parts, or more precisely the pieces, even the smallest ones: colored glass, tiles, wooden moldings, plaster ceilings, handles... The first path implied clarification of the situation: restoring the building to its original form, based on a system of parallel and cross-wise sheds, which had to be reconfigured from top to bottom, in the circulation and the roofing. But clarifying– i.e. restoring typological clarity – does not mean demolition. Flores & Prats do not make space, they do not empty, or cut, open or remove. They undo and redo, untangling a tangle or a complicated knot, tracing back – to better understand it – through the steps and gestures of the person who created it: they find the threads, unthreading them and threading them again; they undo stitches and restitch them, unlace and re-lace. Clarifying means putting things back where they belong, without eliminating anything: in the end, the sheds, the circulation routes, the roofs present themselves to the gaze, the touch, experience. But there is also the other path, the one that assigns importance not to the container but the content, not to the large but to the very small: true detritus and leftovers, the little pieces. As soon as they entered the building and saw the spectacle of the rubble, Flores & Prats decided to make an inventory of all the materials, all the elements – glass, wood, ceramic, plastic, etc. – still in place or scattered amidst the ruins. The drawings in which they show all the frames of the building – doors, windows, claddings, glazings, etc. – convey the form and size of each,

in simultaneous sequences, all on the same scale, and are of particular interest to help us understand the quantities and typological conditions of what seemed like chaos. But besides the annotated drawings, Flores & Prats have also made small-scale models of these objects. The same criterion of cataloguing and reassembly has been applied to the hydraulic tiles and the plaster suspended ceilings. The systematic quality of the panels with the pieces drawn in a scientific way – as in old carpentry manuals or flooring catalogues – is balanced by the flair of the small models – like the pieces in construction games for kids – in an alternation typical of Flores & Prats that has to do – as I have already emphasized in the introduction to their book Pensado a mano – with the physical and mental paradigms of the bricoleur as defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss in The Savage Mind. By this I mean that Flores & Prats have not catalogued all the elements of the old building, from the doors to the floors to the handles, because they had already thought about the place these things would occupy in a rational process of design of the already known; they have done so for the elements themselves, to care for them, to conserve them, to be able to ask them: “What would you like to be in the new but old building, our building?” Doors and windows, glazings and screens, ceiling roses and plaster, tiles of all kinds, cheerfully respond to the query of the architects, immediately indicating the place they want to have in a building that is still theirs and therefore ours, of the neighborhood, of living memory and the theater. The abstract project invents the materials that will be used to achieve pre-set objectives: it transforms means into ends and therefore simplifies, empties and destroys. The work of Flores & Prats, on the other hand, whose first question is addressed to what already exists and which finds all of its pertinence in what already exists, can only spring from the sincere question asked in the field, under the ultimate condition of being “definitively unfinished.”

One final consideration: do not imagine that what we are saying can lead to deduction of a link between the work of Flores & Prats and collage seen as a technique of the avant-gardes: in no moment, in my view, do the two architects set out to juxtapose opposite realities, forcing paradoxes; in fact, what they do is to reveal the affinities that still exist among those things that time the destroyer and human use have separated, broken, snapped apart. Detritus and residues are revived in their inner harmony, without being simplified in any way, but instead in all their complexity full of questions. The Parthenon, the conclusive myth and epitome of the idea of harmony in our culture, was partially built with fragments from the temples the Persians had destroyed at the Acropolis even before they had been completed. The architects of the Parthenon who took advantage of existing metopes and foundations, which even prior to their placement had been violently scattered by the invaders, did not suffer – to be honest – from the complex of Kant’s dove. Neither do Flores & Prats: in an era in which emptiness is rewarded, going against the current, they require and demand density of the air, friction and resistance, to be able to fly.



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