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AMPLORA NOB GRAMR DE RIOSPLENDOR PVDICIT

Lenko Plestina

Split: from a different Lookout



Quite a radical change in the organization of space has occurred with the industrial revolution. Both the way of living and architecture have been transformed quite suddenly. This process has taken place in Yugoslavia mainly during this century. Once an agricultural country (in the 1930's 75% of the population lived on agriculture, nowadays about 40%), it changed enormously in its urban aspect. The growing working class, recruited mostly from the rural areas, now populates the industrial towns. In many of these towns, the population has multiplied dramatically: Split, for example, grew up to five times its original number of 40,000 inhabitants in the 1940's, to reach more than 200,000 in 1980. On the other hand, many rural settlements, if not restructured, with a depleted population are now bound to die. The neighbourhood where I was born is just one of these areas. Located at the outskirts of the area of Split, after three hundred years it is now on the point of being abandoned. Considering the case of my family and relatives as a typical Yugoslav case, I will try to explain the process of transformation of a rural way of life into an industrial one, and its consequences on the environment.

Place and people

Split, the largest town on the Yugoslav coast, grew around the Roman emperor Diocletian's palace, built in 295-305 a.D. For many centuries, the palace, re-used and added to during

the Middle Ages, served the spatial needs of its inhabitants, until the huge pressure of the incoming new population during this century. Split began to accommodate new industries, and the further growth of the town was very much determined by the rules of the industrial revolution. Near Split, less than ten kilometers to the north, another historic town, Klis, was founded in 852 a.D. around a fortress dominating the whole area. As it was set on a border line, it had a great military importance, even during the last war; this banned dense settlements and allowed only for small scattered neighbourhoods all around. My family's was one of these. The Plestina neighbourhood was founded around 1700 a.D., when one of my



ancestors left his parents who lived below the fortress and moved just one kilometer away. He started his own household, the core of a future new settlement with its own identity. Life, centered on agriculture, hardly changed for a long time – until 1909, when a cement factory was built and caused a big transformation in the country life of the people of Klis. Our neighbourhood, from a population of 80 people in 15 households in 1940, is now reduced to only two resident families. A great loss for the small community was the killing of 10 partisans, aged from 18 to 32. The two remaining families lost their village, but became part of a "global village". While once it took years for the baroque style to travel from Rome to Urbino, in our times, the "international style" from Bunshaft's "Lever House" reached our neighbourhood in less than fifteen years. The set of TV antennas symbolizes this new situation of instant circulation of world information.

Emotions

Back in the agricultural period, the cultural pattern of life was based on the Catholic religion. Both devotion and fulfilment of artistic needs, could be found in the pictures of the saints and in biblical stories.

Besides producing cement, the new factory produced also a class consciousness. Biblical subjects were replaced by new ones. The "Execution of Gubec" (the leader of a peasant revolt in Croatia in 1573) portrayed by



an artist, could become a new decoration for the house, but it would also express a political yearning for a new justice. Even recently, artistic feeling found an outlet in small kitsch figurines. As a child I used to like them; later, "purified" by official art education, I lost my affection. Now, with a bit more experience – thinking about some pieces of dada, pop or conceptual art pretending to be nihilistic, disintegrating, pointless jokes or mere provocation, that are so remote from common people – I sympathize again with the sweet stupid taste of those who enjoy more simple, realistic pieces.

As a matter of fact, people expect art to be a bit in advance of their present taste, but will ignore remote

speculations and irrelevances. At least the people of Klis react in this way.

Exodus

The passage from a rural to an industrial society occurred in four steps:

1. rural = country-village life
2. rural-industrial = prevalence of agriculture as the economic basis
3. industrial-agricultural = prevalence of industry as the economic basis
4. industrial = urbanization.

Transformation of the family

The rural dwelling had a constant problem of growth and division. The most important part of the house is the yard, around which all other spaces are gathered in an organic structure. If

there is not enough space, some activities can be located a bit further away. The main feature of the interior spaces, is their communication with the outside. Because of the scarcity of space, internal communication is avoided as much as possible. Bad weather, rain or snow were never considered an obstacle. Through permanent growth, the dwelling would eventually be expressed in an organic spatial structure. But, after some time, the large family would split into separate households, and the process of building a new organic structure had to begin again. An almost permanent building activity was required. Sometimes it was impossible to create a completely independent spatial unit, especially in the oldest part, that had





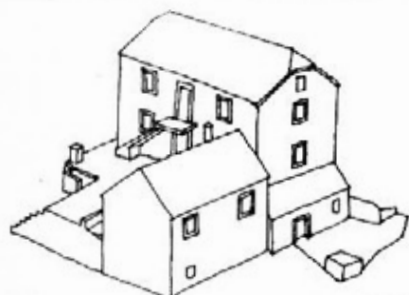
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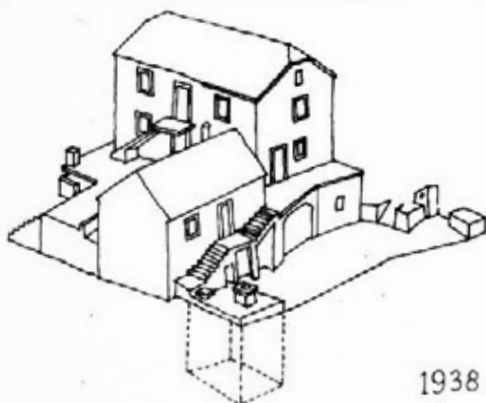
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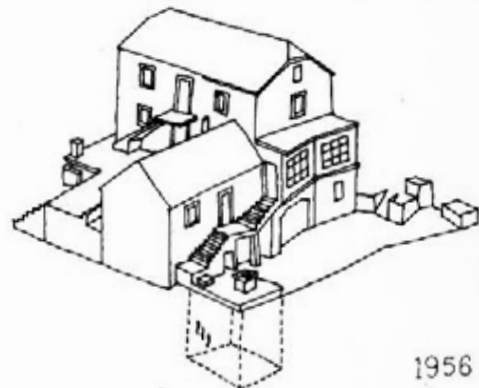
1930



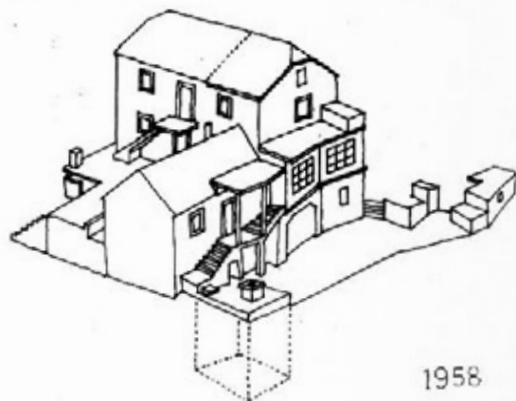
1938

already undergone many divisions. During this century the local type of stone house has been replaced by the present one. There are now two house types: the vernacular one made of local material – stone, even for the roof-tiles, and wood, pine and poplar – and built by the users themselves; and the contemporary one made of stronger material, such as reinforced concrete, which makes for a total change of scale. Many more different functions may now be accommodated; which was impossible with the former poor and simple technology. Until a few years ago, the building process was a part of life. At times, there would be enough economic means to start building a new house: at others, only additions to a pre-existing building could be made. The growth of my family's house, that has been carried on throughout one century, from 1870 to 1980, shows these metamorphoses. The last things my father and I did were a spiral staircase and a greenhouse on the roof. It was by then only a vacation house, and everything we did was just for the fun of it, not for any particular need. The idea was to create an internal communication, and a spiral staircase was the best solution we could find.

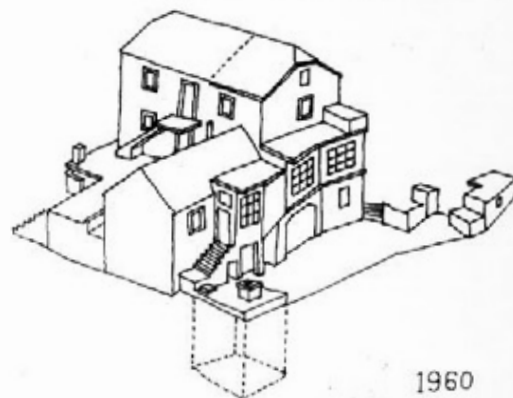
These old houses have a certain emotional meaning, and many of the people who left would rather let them fall apart than sell them. At present, single family detached houses are very popular in Yugoslavia and account for almost half of the overall building activity. Industrial production of materials (no longer natural), sometimes of kit-parts, the use of simple machinery, are still supporting self-building. Many of my relatives recently built their new houses in this way, and the results are not encouraging. As an illustrative example, I would like to quote an unsuccessful attempt of mine to convert a "widely accepted common type" of single family house into a contemporary "architectural form". I tried to improve a very rationalistic concrete box, adding or cutting some parts of it: I reshaped some walls to make them "more friendly", changed the long, narrow balcony into a spacious semicircular one, juxtaposed some diagonal directions in order to get nice views, capsized the roof to get light into the centre of the house, etc. Unfortunately, it was too weird, and mimicked a role of non-professional work, and the project failed. Later, for my personal amusement, I kept playing the architectural game: I tried to swing everything by 90 degrees, and got a



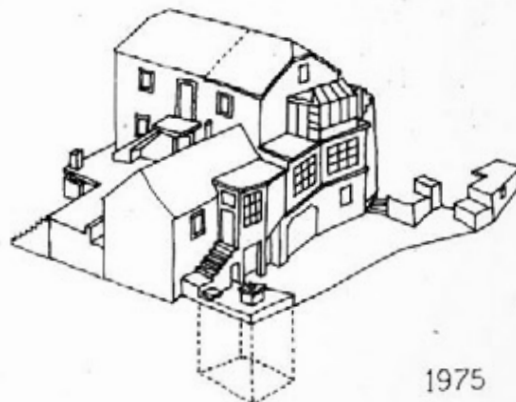
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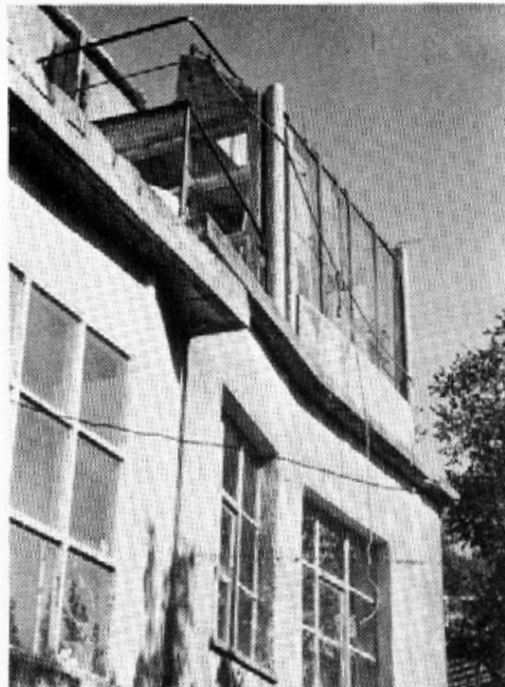
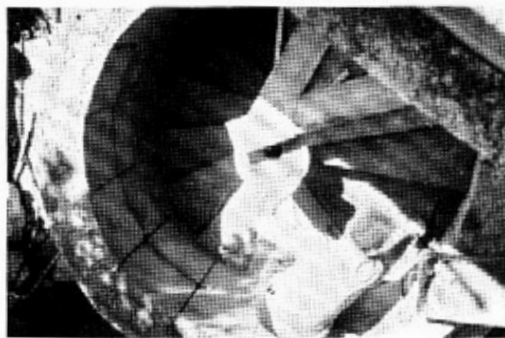
1958



1960



1975



gimmick "architecton", in which it would be possible to organize a good space for living: especially if there was no pressure for rough functional treatment of each part of the space. I learnt from this that there is a "lighthouse architecture" which can easily be noticed in the rough sea of modern architecture. The lighthouse helps our ships to sail more safely, but also warns them not to steer towards the cliffs.

Example of a participatory house project: the proposal to build one's own house being involved in its design and building, carried on in several phases throughout time, as needs and possibilities arise. On the same spatial concept, it is possible to obtain diversity through so-called "functional

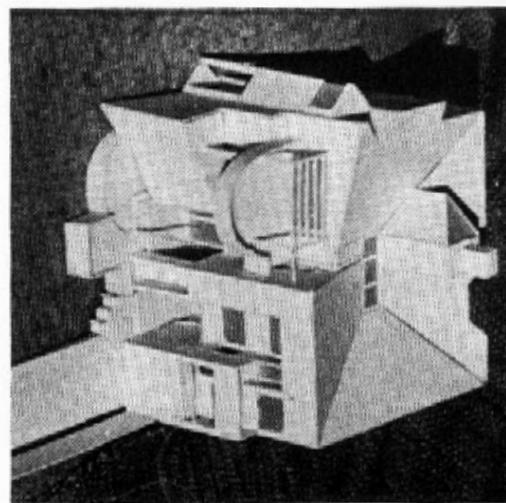
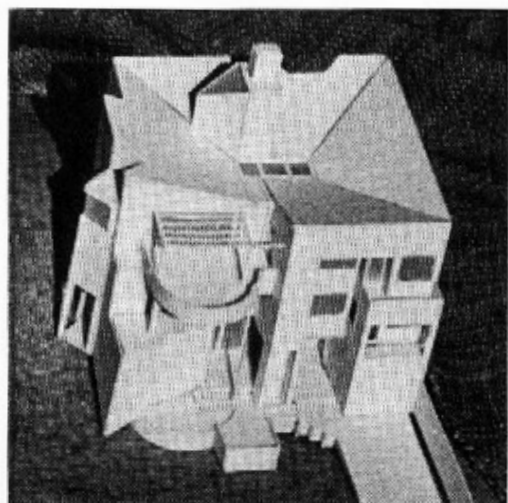
cosmetics": fireplace, garage, shape of the windows, etc., that can be assembled in different ways, according to the site, orientation, and the very personal taste of the user. I thought about Lenin's application of an old maxime: "Ethics are the esthetics of the future", and of how the social role of architecture becomes important: supply every family with the space it needs according to a common social agreement. Since the major investment is at the beginning (site, taxes, infrastructures, etc.) if people start to run the process, they are most likely to prefer doing the construction at once, and to leave the finishing to successive phases. This neglect weakens the project.

Holocaust

During World War Two 1,700,000 Yugoslavs were killed out of a population of 14,000,000. The fate of the people was followed by the fate of the houses. The neighbourhood near mine, that had been growing for a couple of centuries, was burnt down by the fascists in a couple of hours. If anything was built during the war, it was a hidden earth cave of a few square meters, and occupaters' bunkers. The experience of large devastation of both people and buildings, left a psychological mark on future spatial behaviour. The idea that we may be designing for some future bombers and destroyers certainly does not evoke images of eternal platonic beauty.

Postwar city

The industrial concept best fits the urban life of the city. Although they were living only ten kilometers away, my family and relatives moved to Split, which is no longer a town, but a city, and have seen a second - from the 50's to the 70's - and a third - "Split 3" - phase in its growth. Housing built after World War Two in Split are in the international style based on technology and high productivity, that produces "statistic esthetics" in circumstances of very serious housing shortage and need for a fast supply. House types of the period 50's-70's are mainly three: four storey "siedlung" all alike, eight to ten storey slabs and towers, assembled in a kind of "ville radieuse". We often find formal





plainness, even schematism, bad traffic solutions (our urban planners of the 50's did not foresee the car boom of the 70's), 1,2,3 room flats with typical Bauhaus-functionalistic plans.

My mother's nostalgic look at Klis is not so much dissatisfaction with urban life, but rather a memory of a romantic past. What annoys her most are the graffiti on the building's entrance, which I view quite differently, as a vibration of life. (A nice picture of the same entrance with plants in blossom taken only a few meters farther shows how photo-architects may easily distort reality). What bothers me, more than the graffiti, are the basement flats which have no privacy, and the badly organised play-area for children, that makes them end up by using the parking lots.

As opposite to the anonymity of the 50's-70's, Split 3 (a name which engenders identification) has a strong urban identity and an architecture full of diversity. Instead of scattering masses in the void, streets are revived, though of course on a different scale from the traditional Dalmatian street. Inside the clusters, the streets are pedestrians only. Small squares – memory of piazzas – are always full of life. Previous mistakes made in the ground floor flats are avoided: all of them have small gardens – a pleasant

transition from public to private. Unfortunately, there still are high-rise buildings, which is bad for the very young, and for the elderly. Anyway, people like Split 3, and so do my relatives who live there. At the beginning Split 3 had comparatively low building costs – but not any longer. The recent ideas of reverting back to purity, maybe to simplification, are partly due to the awareness that the gap between present needs and actual resources cannot be bridged in other ways. A crucial architectural and social alternative is at stake: to build less and better, or the opposite. On this matter different social participants will probably have different views.

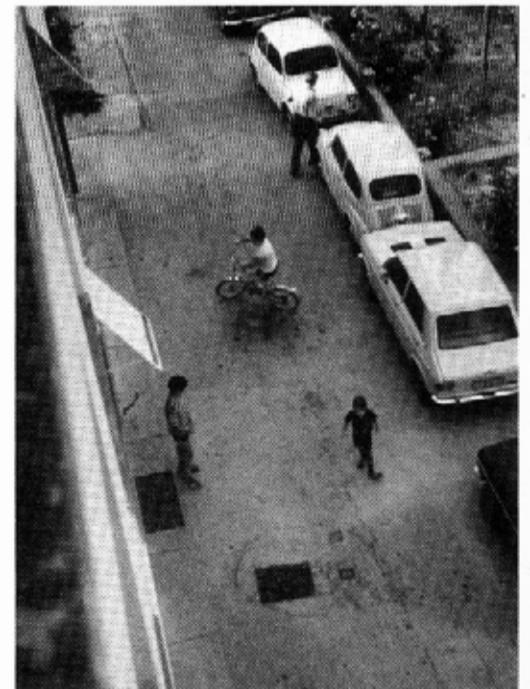
Gap

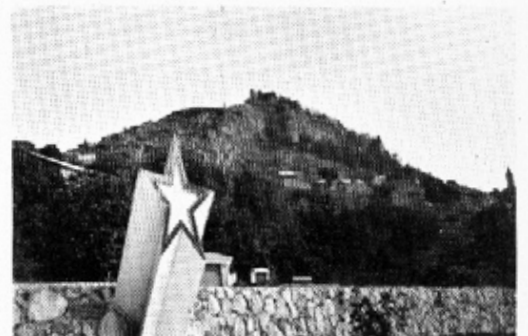
The basic differences between the rural way of life at the beginning of the century, and life in the industrial city towards the end of it lie in the ways of production, in the notion of culture and in the feeling of space. Autonomy of rural activity was by necessity very diversified. Since the State did not assist them in any way, people had to rely entirely on themselves. All the work was carried out in cycles throughout the process, and this helped to bear the hardness of the work. Daily as well as annual life was stimulating because of the different

activities in the different periods. On the contrary, in an industrial society most people are involved only in a very narrow part of the process. So, it is very hard for them to find any enjoyment in their work. Only the illusion of a multiplicity of choices, though in an always similar activity, may relieve the monotony of specialized work. Even the old friendship with nature, is now threatened.

The village of the past was integrated in the local culture, based on a communal spirit. The total knowledge about everything and everyone, the common social life (christenings, weddings, funerals), sometimes also common tools and work, gave everyone a feeling of assurance, but also a limited privacy.

The modern city is based on an international cultural pattern. Very abstract collectivism and real individualism bring full privacy, but often also alienation. It is possible to know a lot about a famous movie star,





but nothing about the next door neighbour.

Self-management as a way of living tries to promote a cultural pattern that will overcome the monotony and loneliness of industrial production and urban life. We hope that this is the way to the future. Open space in the village does not have the importance it has in the city: no boulevards, institutions, parks, neither choice nor comfort; it is work and living space. Life in the city is mostly indoors, and tremendous need for open space that the former country-dweller brought with him into the city will never be eradicated. Building activity is another suppressed need: once, it was a constant part of life. The modern city does not give this opportunity. Maybe it should? Differences surely create tensions and conflicts, which everybody tries to solve on their own. But nobody goes back, believing or still feeling that, as Aristotle once said: "People go to towns to enjoy a good life". And I am thinking of what Engels wrote about abolishing differences between town and country.



Epilogue

Even when the process of urbanization is completed, people remain attached to their roots: they go back to be buried where they come from. For the first generation, the exodus to the city is more a rational affair than an emotional one.

The idea of passing, or maybe the idea of eternity is commonly figured in the spaces of emotions. Everybody's grave is built with a lot of care and meaning. The star that comes from the wall symbolizes a permanent struggle to break the walls that surround us and restrain us: that expresses the life and the struggle of a worker, as my father was. The dialectical principle of change says that everything that exists is in a state of permanent change according to the law of development: birth-growth-death. It is so with people and buildings.