



OBSOLESCENCE and RENOVATION

20th Century Housing in the New Millennium

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Abstract / Initial Proposal Form:

1. Paper / Proposal Title: Beyond contingency. Sustainable design versus obsolescence

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3. Author(s) Name: Gérald Ledent

4. Email contact details: gerald.ledent@uclouvain.be

5. University or Company Affiliation:

Université catholique de Louvain.

Faculté d'architecture, d'ingénierie architecturale, d'urbanisme (LOCI)

6. Abstract (300 words):

Nowadays, inhabited spaces become obsolete at an increasingly rapid pace. This obsolescence is mainly due to three factors: changing ways of life, evolving construction techniques and ever-changing aesthetic codes. Those factors reflect each term of the traditional architecture triad, utilitas, firmitas, venustas. Sustainable design is meant to address this issue of swift obsolescence. Yet, it often only addresses one of those factors, firmitas, depicting obsolescence as a mere technological problem trying to solve energetic matters. Hence, changing lifestyles or formal expressions are often left aside, disrupting the architecture's triad equilibrium.

Social conventions, techniques and forms are the reflections of a specific time and cultural environment. As such, they are digested and interpreted by architects. There are several ways to handle their rapid changes. Architects could start anew time and time again, cynically tearing superseded building down. Yet, in order to deal with social/technical/formal evolution in a sustainable way, architects could focus on the essentials. Simplicity in this matter is a key. It allows to think and plan beyond

contingency. A design based beyond contingency allows to maximize its future uses, technical evolutions and formal expressions.

Through history, architecture has produced such minimal designs. Traditional building types for instance, through their constant improvement process, allow inner variations on a formal, use or technical level. Even some modernist buildings through their generic – yet generous – design allow such evolution. In this issue, the work of contemporary architects is analyzed in their quest for essentials. In their work, designing beyond contingency is a promise of future development.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words maximum for all authors):

Gérald Ledent is an architectural engineer graduated from Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium and Oklahoma State University, USA.

He holds a Ph.D. in architecture with a thesis named "Potentiels Relationnels". Through a study of collective modernist housing in Brussels, this work explores the relations between spatial and social structures. Over 10 000 housing units are analyzed, bringing to light the recurrence of a finite number of spatial properties in all human dwellings.

Ledent's research interests focus on the relation between architecture and social relationships, housing typologies as well as research by design.

Ledent is a lecturer at the Université Catholique de Louvain in Brussels where he teaches in various studios.

Ledent's practicing experience includes design and project management at Charles Vandenhove as an associated partner. He has an extensive experience in the fields of public buildings and collective housing developments in Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

Gerald Ledent is also the co-founder of KIS studio (Keep It Simple studio), an architecture office that aims to avoid any unnecessary complexity to focus on the essentials.

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