

These are - as in the case of many other artists- poetic proposals with no intention of competing with architecture, but which could be used as enriching energy on which to base our theoretical reflections.

However, in most cases, when such proposals leave the art gallery foreboding a possible interference with the territory of architecture in its utopian revision of inhabited space in terms of plastic needs, many architects can find it inconvenient, annoying, irritating...

They pretend not only to change their concepts of space, but also to criticise them by intervening in them.

It seems then as if the "real owners of space" felt jealous of some intruders who pretend to invade their sphere of influence by contradicting their architectonic truths, trying to bring back - always with more or less sharp justifications- their former "embellishing" function.

Considering this situation, we should understand the natural irritation of those plastic creators who try to investigate aspects of reality such as space and materials and find no interest for their work in the world of architecture.

How could we adopt a positive attitude towards heterogeneous activities taking place in a common space?

As Ben van Berkel reminds us, when he claims to have a working method similar to John Cage's, the question is not to seek new forms in the world of plastic arts but new ways and systems of investigation.

These plastic experiences don't try to provide a handbook that tells us if the colour to be chosen at a certain moment is pink or red. The architecture field should absorb their positive energy, their sensibility, and their suggestions about worlds that are beyond our immediate reality and face, form parallel investigations, our activity as designers of the future.

With all the logical indecision raised by this reunion at the beginning of a new era, it seems that we architects and plastic artists are trying again to melt the possible energy that emanates from our plural ideas and re-establish the spontaneity of creative associations -that had disappear for a long time- aimed at recovering an obviously necessary integration of the arts.

As long as creative proposals like Mónica Alonso are approached with a rigorous attitude, they can only lead us to the conviction that the boundaries between the worlds of the known as plastic arts, design, architecture, poetry and even philosophy will vanish the moment we face a new vision of art based on the definition or intervention of space as the scene for life in a new society.

Pedro de Llano.

To scale

Mónica Alonso

Models are one of the key elements in the work of an architect. Firstly, works made to scale are a laboratory where design, shape and arrangement of space can be tested, and at the same time they represent the first step in the communication process between the author of the project and those taking part in it. As I see it, maybe this is the most important aspect to take into consideration when we approach the work of Galician artist Mónica Alonso. Three-dimensional models allow us to see the arrangement of space at a glance, thus providing the observer with clear legible information. However, a model is not a finished product but a first trial of the author's wish and, like every trial, is prior to the final execution of the project. Alonso has decided to leave us there. Our common sense makes us think that, this being the work of an artist and not an architect, this decision is justified. If that is the answer, it would cause more serious problems and this time of a theoretical rather than practical nature, as it would take us back to the old issue of establishing the difference between art and non-art depending on the function of the object. If the original intention was to create an object with a specific purpose, then this is ruled out as "art". The objects belonging to that category are characterised by the absence of a particular aim and they also provide speculations completely different from those of architects and engineers. But the difference between the work of Mónica Alonso and the models we could find in an architecture studio doesn't lay in its expression of the frustration of not being able to make a life size replica, but in the expressed wish of seeking in those models to scale the perfect channel to communicate with the potential "customers", the public the models are aimed at.

In the mid-50s, especially in England and the USA the term "contemporary" began to be applied to those houses that had been built according to the principles and precepts of the new architecture. To be more precise, the term didn't refer to the building elements but to the interior design of space. The term contemporary meant a way of arranging and decorating an interior in which nothing either in the formal structure or the ornament was related to a past time. The new house, which also corresponds to a new social and political order, shouldn't start from any space preconception made explicit in its facade, printed in the house module from the outside. It should be an arrangement of space specifically conceived for its future inhabitants. This is the only regulating principle the architect should bear in mind. Far from seeking a symbolic architecture, the new house is specially made for the little community that will live in it. While Alberti and Palladio praised the Greco-Roman style for the advantages it offered to the spectator, Frank Lloyd Wright claimed to have destroyed the classical idea of container-house, the box, thus distancing himself completely from an architecture conceived for contemplation and in favour of an architecture conceived for life. As F.R.S. Yorke explains in *The*

Modern House (1934), what really matters is the happiness of the inhabitants of the house, happiness renamed as comfort.

Sweet Home

The notion that both space and the objects placed in it should be adjusted to the needs of its inhabitants is relatively new. We all now that the physical dimension of space is always accompanied by a cultural dimension related to the new rules of individual, and then social, behaviour. It would be too long now to offer a detailed analysis of the political meaning of space grammar in modern architecture, suffice it to say that the controversial idea of comfort is not limited to the private sphere, but has its public expression in the liberal democracy model in the USA, or a more social democrat one marked by the will to build from the start a space that guarantees the same well-being in public life that one might expect in the private space. In order to do that, we will need a grammar that provides an agreement on what a universal community means by comfort. Structures, shapes, space regulating principles, colours, materials, everything helps to turn space into a privileged vehicle for this message: well being. And at the same time it determines the complex cognitive process by which we learn to recognise the nature of the space around us, both private and public. And last but not least, it helps to decide whether this space is suitable or not to our physical, social and political needs.

The work of Mónica Alonso can be understood in this context of special regard to personal as well as social construction of space connected with a critical conception of modernity. From *Semi-detached 3* (1997) to *Therapeutic bedrooms* (1999) and through the creation of a corporate identity, *ComfortWorld*, her work is characterised by an exploration of the emotional dimension in the construction of the room as space.

Mónica Alonso's projects present a complex investigation into the idea of total space, with a minimum distance between subject and object. Her works are aimed at establishing a series of premises by which one can access their own space and vital model. A key element in all the works by Mónica Alonso is the bedroom. A space defined and recognised as the most private in the house, used for resting, works here as a unit, the centre of her reflection. The arrangement, order and importance of the constructing elements will also set the rules for a general grammar. The fact of the bedroom unit being the centre is not accidental. This space fulfils the basic needs brought by inhabiting a space, and is defined just by its function. But from a symbolic point of view it has a psychological and emotional dimension that is vital in the approach taken by the artist in her work.

The rooms showed in the models are experiments to scale about space dimension, which, as I have already mentioned, has a personal significance that can't be dissociated from the political dimension involved in the arrangement of space. A bedroom is a delimited space whose designer exercises a certain power over it. If Mónica Alonso's bedrooms were created

to a scale of 1:1 in the exhibiting space, this operation would be somehow neutralised by the institutional dimension of that space and by the way the spectator perceives it. But these being models to scale, the space that holds the installation is important as far as it provides the scale in the relationship between the museum as container and the models as ideas that go beyond the physical limits of the spaces that hold them.

The model emphasises the fact that works such as *MAMA Capsules* (2002) or *Five Combinable Therapies 5TC* (1998-2002) are built spaces meant to explore the position of the subject they are aimed at with a therapeutic dimension. The question of where I am in relation to what I see, or where I should stay, is closely related to the tacit recognition of the inhabitability of the space delimited by the architectonic elements. The model and the intervention in space allow an immediate interpretation of the fact that the convenience of the space can only be perceived after stating the relationship between material and space. The nature of the materials, colour, resistance, etc plays a key role. To inhabit is an act of settlement, to establish a home in a certain territory. Therefore any unit designed to be inhabited represents a territory. In our modern times, the bedroom is the symbol for individual territory, for one's own space, for domestic space understood as the space that separates us from work, from production.

From my point of view, it would be a mistake to regard Mónica Alonso's works as utopian proposals just because they are not meant to be materialised. The use of prototypes to scale is a tool for dealing with questions that are important for us, not only as potential spectators but also as individuals and members of a community. I avoid the term "democratic community" because one could imagine the organisation system of that community as similar to a corporate model rather than an elective democracy. For instance, an executive committee that makes available to the members of the group a series of inhabitable products aimed at improving their standards of living, in exchange for a job. In fact, the artist creates *ComfortWorld* in 1999, a company presided by herself, with the aim of raising the well being and standards of living to unimaginable levels. To understand a supply of resources not based on the Welfare state model but on the relationship product-consumption in a company, means questioning the model in search for new parameters to articulate a social body. And this is not the only case. Joep van Lieshout, creator of the well known *Atelier van Lieshout* in 1995 has since then worked in a similar direction until he set up *ATV-Village* in Rotterdam port. In an interview recently published in *American Artforum* magazine, Joep van Lieshout pointed out the need to understand this project as a social experiment rather than a utopia, as its organisation model was more related to private business than to public administration. The *Atelier* made some land available to its members, and each of them could build their house according to their own design and following the guidelines established by

the company. Unlike Mónica Alonso's, the Atelier's projects are meant to be performed, but there are still many similarities between them and many other projects with a similar philosophy, such as N55 group in Denmark or the mobile house units of American Andrea Zittel.

In any case, we are faced with a very specific reflection on the concepts of self-sufficiency, individual freedom and community. And for this reason it is not accidental that the meeting point should be architecture. What these works bring up is not only the degree of political freedom in our society but also the level of homogeneity we are submitted to in order to achieve it. Alonso's projects act as a laboratory that calls into question not the fact that we can choose but the choices we have and to what extent we can organise and reinvent the inhabited space according to our needs. 5TC would work that way. There is a number of options for achieving well being, the co-ordinates that put into place the potential needs of the customer are set to allow them to decide on the best choice for them, but this decision is free only within certain parameters that haven't been decided by them.

Pain

Jeremy Bentham is considered to be the father of utilitarianism. He thought he had found the principles for a new science of mankind which, after managing to educate them according to empirical principles would keep the new generations safe from ignorance and superstition, thus achieving the ultimate goal in life: happiness. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill thought that this goal would be achieved through the introduction of law and education. However, had they found a quicker and more effective method they would have accepted it.

Aching Points is a fundamental piece in the discourse established by the artist in her former works. It refers explicitly to the juggling acts between truth and lie done in any utopian exercise, and also to the rightful need to attain an integrating system in which the forces between context and individual are in harmony. The question posed by the works of Mónica Alonso is the aim of such harmony. Happiness, as in the case of utilitarianism could be regarded as an aim in itself, but if understood as an absence of pain it rather becomes a formal parameter, a framework useful maybe for the construction of a common project or the strengthening of the potential in each individual. In this sense, this piece in particular helps to understand the underlying criticism we find in other works for the emptiness of the promises suggested by those dwellings for personal use, that happiness adjusted to the consumer's wish with no commitment other than bringing happiness to each user in particular.

Aching Points presents the other side of things, an antithetic moment. The artist consciously decides to boycott that project of eudemonia both personalised and corporate. She reverses the terms, though she dares to make use of the same resour-

ces for space construction, this time with a completely different aim. From my particular point of view this work is both a culmination and a door to new questions. It is the culmination of a process because it demonstrates the limits of any search for a grammar free from constructive elements, at the service of an objective universally possible, regardless of the social, political or cultural context where it means to operate, thus creating a bubble. But it is also a turning point in the work of this artist, as it suggest the incorporation of antagonistic forces and the need to resolve their assumption, both personal and artistic. The level of individual subjectivity has always been dealt with in the works of Mónica Alonso, by considering it to be the best reflection of the political situation in which such subjectivity develops and makes possible for us to speak in those terms. But this work seems to be specially focused on this issue. Pain is obviously related to our finite nature and the fear the human being feels at the impossibility of escaping their own end, and it also establishes a level of conscience, a sharpening of the sensibility qualitatively different from the that suggested by the ataractic happiness of the therapeutic units. The question is not the presentation of this curious product to the spectator or potential customer. The aim here is to raise doubt about the concept of product itself and specially the concept of consumption. Pain is the antithesis of desire. In contrast with happiness, an abstract concept we all aim at in a conscious or unconscious way, the dimension of pain is a private one, different in each case and always relevant to conform our own history and the history of those around us. It is not surprising then that this work should be accompanied -as an exceptional case- by a self-portrait of the artist.

Notwithstanding this, instead of stressing the experiencing dimension that the Pain room adds to the other works by Mónica Alonso, I think we should keep in mind the question raised by her work: where does pain fit in ComfortWorld? We'll have to wait for the next delivery to find the answer.

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ComfortWorld: Therapeutic Products is the title of the lecture given by Mónica Alonso within the framework of the postgraduate programme "Advanced Architecture and digital cities" organised by Fundació Politècnica de Catalunya and Metàpolis Institute (Barcelona 2001). The result of that programme was media House, Prototype of Informational House, a model made to scale 1:1 and presented at Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona, in October 2001.

ComfortWorld: Therapeutic Products is the title I have chosen for my lecture. Sophisticated as it may sound, it's actually very explicit

ComfortWorld is the name of the company I created in 1999 to