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Master of Science in Architecture (Construction)
Honors theses

Requalification Project of Robin Hood Gardens

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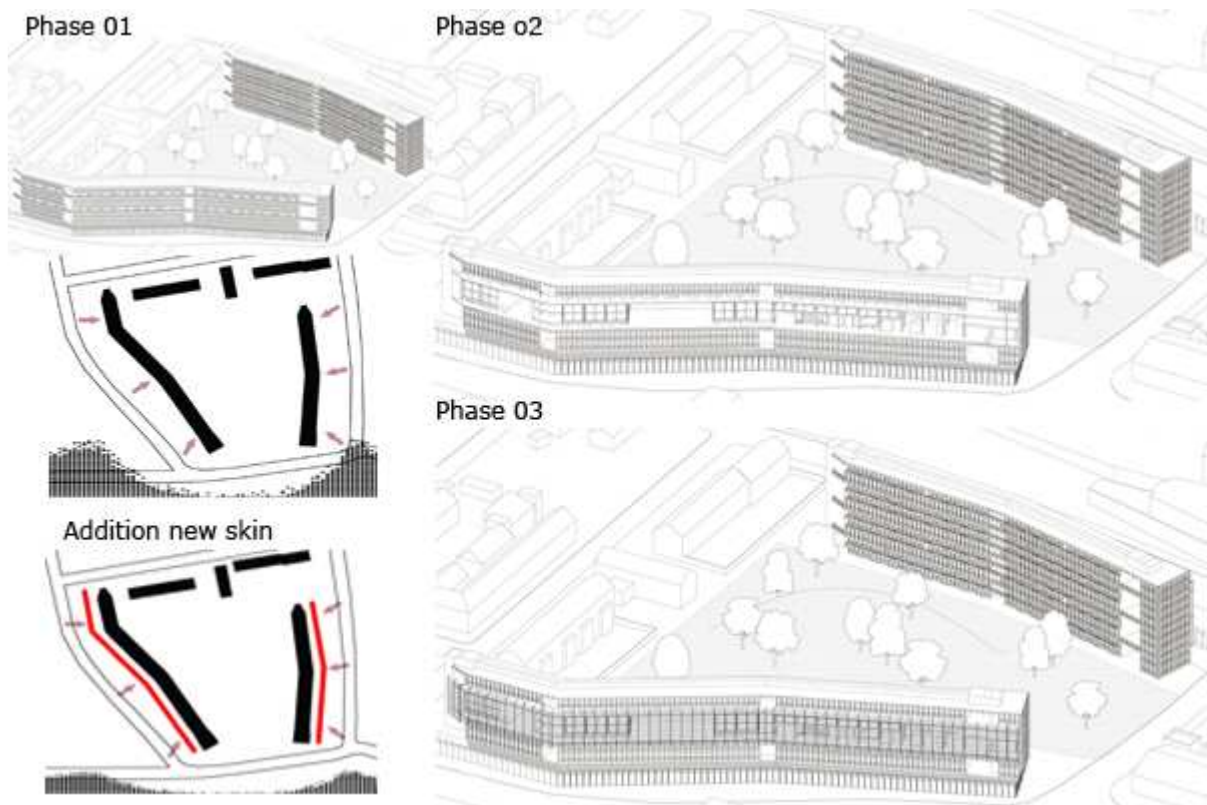
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The theme of the project involves the redevelopment of the Robin Hood Gardens. Designed by Alison and Peter Smithson in 1966 and completed in 1970, may be the most controversial work of their careers. It was made for an operation of subsidized housing in Robin Hood Lane, Tower Hamlets, London. The buildings contain a total of 210 apartments for about 700 inhabitants, on a total area of two hectares. The site is surrounded on three sides by busy roads and, therefore, was designed in order to create a central calm (stress-free zone) free of noise, pressure from the streets and protected by the same buildings. The concept that represented the project was “the streets in the sky”, explored and depth by Smithson in the first project of Golden Lane.

The concept consists of open raised roads in the elevation that give access to individual units and spread throughout the building. The idea of Smithson was not just as simple to use galleries that give direct access to homes, as well as balconies or place of encounter between the inhabitants. The attempt to translate this idea into an architectural form, however, gave negative results. This can be attributed to various reasons, or even the simple fact that, arriving at a certain height, the perception of “street” is lost. Other important reasons of the lack of success are the space of the body scale and access to walking trails. Being small and dark they give the impression of escape stairs.

R.H.G. represented Smithson’s opportunity to transform into architecture their idea worked for more than twenty years. The critical reading about R.H.G. in my opinion is very important and fascinating, both for architecture and design approach of today. The bond with their design method, the awareness of a simple but focused intervention on an important building as R.H.G., are the reflection of the components of the project.



From some interviews was derived that the dwelling spaces are small for a family that has more than two children. The need of larger space can be seen not only in dwelling spaces but also in the few public spaces, such as the access in the staircase and also the spaces that lead to the pedestrian way. So it seemed reasonable to reflect on the question of collective and private spaces. As a result it was decided to use a renovation strategy. Take the obsolete dwelling structure and reshape it according to the needs and desires of the present.



This observation combined with the lack of student housing, nearby are the University of Greenwich and East London, led to think about changing dwelling use into residences for students. In addition, there are facilities such as study halls, playgrounds and a café. The width of the "streets in the sky" are increased to make more fluid the horizontal circulation. Commercial use as exhibition spaces, rentable spaces, are raised to the level of the streets making the pedestrian ways more lively and attractive. The idea of expanding "the streets in the sky" is also associated with the removing of front facade prepared meticulously by Smithson.



In its place, is used a glass facade composed of steel columns running through the building that evokes the vertical elements of the existing facade. This leads to a good barrier-noise produced from the environment and can serve also as a ventilated facade. This poverty of using only materials as glass and steel evokes the concept "as found" that R.H.G. occurs by the use of smooth concrete throughout the building. It seemed to me logical and respectful to honor the building by covered it with the new skin only in the intermediate floors, retaining the first two floors and the top floor untouched. The new skin represent an important issue, because it comes to finding a pleasant rhythm between the old and the new facade.

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