

Toward a *borderless* architecture: a South American journey.

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2016 was maybe the year when finally it was made clear to me that changes nowadays occur at a pace never before recorded. In an increasingly unpredictable way, society's structures are affected at its core, pushing social relations to the limits of their capacity to adapt within the economical framework. Architecture is no exception.

Between July of 2015 and mid-September of 2016 I had the chance to study, work and travel throughout South America. Triggered by the *Academic Mobility for Inclusive Development of Latin America* Erasmus Mundus scholarship, I had the opportunity to collaborate, in the experimental research group *Escuela de los Grandes Espejos*, within the *Universidad Nacional del Litoral*, Santa Fe, Argentina, promoted by César Carli, the Architecture Faculty's Founder.

Within the group there were no professor nor students, but *rapporteurs and explorers*, as we were invited to face Architecture from our own social and sensorial experience, thinking housing with no prejudice neither of form nor typological models. The idea was to firstly integrate changes experienced during our lifetime as a creative booster in adaptive-housing design.

As a background to some of the concerns affecting housing today, we started situating ourselves within the current historical moment. Nevertheless, quickly we understood that the search for an adaptive dwelling condition is not a contemporary issue.

Man's actions on molding his surroundings to his needs, is part of the continuous fundamental expression of the "harsh craft of living" (Saramago, 1998). Within it, through Architecture, the passage of Time makes itself noticeable from the mutations on the original constructions, making them fit the needs of Man as life unfolds.

In that sense, as referred by Rafael Moneo, it is ultimately how the architectures surpass their own period of time without losing their identity.

Don't get me wrong, this issue is not exclusively about poverty, or lack of minimum dwelling conditions. It also refers to any situation where the relations between Man and its *habitat* – its dwelling – are being put to the test, under scarcity or even excess. The endeavor of societies on adapting to their surroundings; namely, where Architecture really starts.

The *Uru* people, for example, autochthonous from the Lake Titicaca's floating islands, between Peru and Bolivia, deal with the question of divorce/separation in a quite original way. They cut the island in half and split their portion from the other whenever one of the family members wants to separate from the other. If they ever get together again, they will reverse the procedure.

Off course the majority won't probably ever get the chance of dealing directly with the *house of our dreams*. Or better, the *house of our needs*. At the end, we are mostly complying

to the market's rules – of what is available – constrained by our economic outcome, and motivated by the real estate market to be constantly on the move, (re)adapting continually from one house to another.

The unpredictable as an operating concept

As an architect, the house's ideal should be a truthful projection of the client's future lifestyle, even though it is mainly instructed by questions of the past, compiling, within his idea of a *dream-house*, all of his *until-then* worries.

The architect's approach should interpret these needs through what might change; otherwise the design will become obsolete. Or worse, it may in the future restrict some life-making decisions, regarding the inadaptability of his house, *as time in architecture has a value of its own*.

This particular matter can be seen in a more urgent frame in the places where social structures are more fragile, and therefore more sensitive to the aggressions of contemporary capitalism's dynamics. For the majority in South America, for example, the need for constant adaptation is a matter of survival.

This kind of *adaptive-housing thinking* must be seen beyond the building itself. It points out the need to establish a new relationship between Architecture and the daily life, not in the form of simple functional correspondences, but as an overall socio-economic framework, within which life takes place, in all its divergent complexity. (Norberg-Schulz)

This being said, how can housing design better respond to these particular issues linked to contemporary household's everyday life?

The question really is: how can Architecture absorb the unpredictable?

Having in account the socio-geographical context where it's inserted – with its entire social and climatic complexity – the idea is to envisage the edges of the house as variable. By resorting to adjusted lock panels it aims to establish a deeper flexibility's logic, by necessarily implying a spatial variation.

Furthermore, this allows the user to constantly adjust the space to his evolving or cyclic needs, within its dwelling, it can ultimately allow the sharing of the house, by partial renting to another user when it isn't being totally needed, granting the opportunity of balancing the dweller's income.

By facing this collective exchange as a possibility, one can start picturing adaptive housing at a bigger extent, under the same principles

At the scale of the neighborhood, the scope of participation gets wider. In a built proposal, drafted by the research group – *the changing houses* – participation started by granting the user the possibility to choose where the house should be primarily set in order to solve their basic needs. The decisions that followed were negotiated taking into account the household's necessities.

Either way, the final result holds an unfinished characteristic which concedes openness toward the future, expanding or constricting according to life cycle fluctuations, constantly summoning the user to participate in the solving of his dwelling condition.

Toward a borderless architecture.

In synthesis, everyday life is now, more than ever, made of inconstancy and fast changeability. Architecture must be capable of keeping up with the ways of life incorporating the uncertain, absorbing the unpredictable, adjusting itself to people's needs as they come, stimulating, at the same time, the sense of community and cooperation that tends to be forgotten in modern societies. A house that adapts itself, growing or shrinking if needed, molding itself to the fortuitous unrolling of life.

“Maybe, at the end, it's all a question of limits; to rethink the concept of limit in Architecture, which is still as rigid as it was in the period of the Masters. (...) the more rigid are the limits in a work of an architect, the more finished and esthetically admirable his work might be. But life will go elsewhere. For us, the House is a project with an open ending”. (Carli, 2001)