

# INHABITING THE SCHOOL

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The concept of habitation promotes and is the result of the relationships that man establishes with places. He thus connects the idea of location to the act of structuring a space as a medium for perception and interaction, which has, through its purposes of orientation and identification, the essential factors to encourage the primary phenomena of inhabiting. Knowing where and how a place is, and being able to identify it to understand how to behave in it are conditions for inhabiting a space.

According to João Amaro Correia, “identification and orientation are the foremost aspects of being-in-the-world. Identification is the cornerstone of the feeling of belonging, and the sense of orientation is what equips us to be the homo viator that is integral to our nature. Man inhabits when he is able to materialise and transform the world into buildings and things, into objects. To materialise is the role of the work of art, as opposed to the abstraction of science”<sup>1</sup> Alfonso Ponce summarises it when he writes: “*The relationship between man and the objects that contain him is without a doubt an extremely complex relationship, impossible to describe in a few lines. It is a relationship that has extreme positions, of absolute identity: «I am the space that I inhabit, the point of origin for all activity...» or in other words: «I am the space or I am»*”<sup>2</sup>.

Of this concept of absolute identity, something perhaps more conceptual than real, we wish to retain the idea that inhabiting is more complex than sheer “use” or the mere relationship between “user” and the spaces/places in which they operate. For this reason spaces that surround us are also “inhabited” and, while it is still true that we are “users” of the architectural space, we are the architectural space and object too. So, through the exercise of habitation, an active and reciprocal relationship is established between man and space.

On these different modes of use between objects, which are fostered by the architectural space, Alfonso Ponce observes: “*Man uses architectural spaces in the only possible way: inhabiting them. We are its inhabitants or its dwellers. A pencil or shoes are used. Projects are experienced and we inhabit them. This relationship goes far beyond the simple act of using. Use is often converted, through habit, into a mechanical and almost irrational act. Inhabiting conversely implies a committed, conscious and active relationship*”<sup>3</sup>.

It does not seem to make sense to describe a man who inhabits a house and the world as a user. Does he only use the space in a mechanical and acritical manner without participating or leaving a trace of his rational existence, inhabiting it solely for the purpose for which it was intended? Or is his action on the physical and social landscape the most meaningful expression of true habitation and, as such, it goes beyond any value of use? Regarding this point, we believe we have found some answers for the questions that are systematically raised when investigating the topic of habitation.

“User” is normally perceived as the subject who uses objects or utensils. However, and according to the previous idea that legitimises the committed and conscious act of habitation, in architecture we can say that “we inhabit” and “we are inhabited”. And this is the difficult and

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<sup>1</sup>. CORREIA, João Miguel A., “Transformar, Habitar – A Construção do Lugar”. In JA, n.º 203, Dec.2001, p. 9-15.

<sup>2</sup>. PONCE, Alfonso Ramírez, *Pensar Y Habitar*, op.cit., p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>. PONCE, Alfonso Ramírez, *Pensar Y Habitar*, op.cit. p. 8.

complex relationship that, through habitation, we seek to describe in this study: it has in a house, in a dwelling its most comprehensive architectural statement (we inhabit); and in its design, its project an operative component that situates the entire development and its whole framework in a disciplinary perspective, harmonising the way of designing with the way of inhabiting (we are inhabited).

From this point of view, when we are inhabited, the “house” incorporates a number of disciplines and several divergences, meaning that it is often viewed as a living process. Paradoxically it is described as the result of various factors that at some point legitimise its configuration and its possibilities for change, which are evidenced by economic, technical, social and other aspects. Thus it is not the mere translation of existing habits and ways of life. Similarly the “house” is perceived as a vehicle for memories, and a record of the valid upkeep that the evolution of civilisation incurs and creates through a consolidated (or conservative) architecture.

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