Our House, #44, 12th Floor, Apartment 136
Two Considerations on Alternative Manners of Dwelling

Rui Ramos

The practice that is earned by the teaching of architecture has allowed us to question the manner in which we inhabit, the places we inhabit and the relation between our habitat and our way of life. The discipline of studio, in this light, is an investigative lab where the images we bring forth from our house are discussed and confronted with today's possibilities for innovation in mass housing units. This scrutiny regarding the houses we live in has allowed us to explore other forms of dwelling that attempt to incorporate the signs of the urban condition that have become manifest in our changing lifestyles. In these academic works, one can not only denote a concern in responding to strictly functional aspects, but also the questioning of how architecture can influence our day-to-day domestic life.

Through the conveying of this interest, one is not merely before the hyper-valuation of other disciplinary fields of architectural production - as was the case in the sixties and seventies with sociology and anthropology - but one is placing one's self before the acceptance that the information we require to design a building does not reside in any given discipline, that is, it is not merely the providence of architecture, it is not exclusive. The comprehension of the recent questions regarding built space entail that one must speak of the convergence of various knowledges, simultaneously taking note of the fusion of knowledge that permeates our contact with architectural production in its spatial ambitions and, for that reason, constitutes an integral, albeit non-exhaustive part of it.

Through the observation of this academic experience and a reflection on the present conditions of mass housing, it would seem significant to consider two apparently central problems of the typological transformations underway: the first deals with the unit's relations with the exterior, that is with non-edified space and with the city; the second refers to the alteration of the organization of internal program of the apartments themselves.

It is worthy of note that the search for a new house increasingly involves a set of other, new factors, such as the relation established between the house and its exterior. This is reflected in the types of mass housing that, in their capacity to find various uses for exterior spaces, by expanding the space of the house that is habitually enclosed within four walls. This has not only to do with the use of known formulas of relating the building or housing unit in a more or less direct manner with the ground (garden, back-lot or patio), but also with the reconfiguration of these elements, innovating the mechanisms at the disposal of mass
housing that allow it to respond to the requirements of contemporary urban culture. The relation a building establishes with the ground is, thus, an fundamental problem in the construction of urban space and constitutes an aspect that qualifies the articulation between public and private exterior spaces, as yet un-resolved since the abandonning of the street as the prime structure of urban and architectural planning.

The extension of the house into the exterior can also be studied on the upper floors of a mass housing block, that is, those without a direct contact with the ground that introduce (in terms of domestic organization) open spaces, thereby transposing the dream of our house (with a garden) to the twelfth floor of an apartment block. These spaces extend domestic life to an open and multi-usage area, indicating the different uses required by modern lifestyles.

The offering of spaces that prolong domestic life to the exterior, imbibing a tall building with our ideal of the single-family house, constitutes an option that has always been considered, to differing degrees, in all types of habitations. Exterior space and panoramic views make up the principal factors with which we construct the collective imagination that distinguishes our house from an apartment.

The inclusion of the exterior within the home was experimented throughout the twentieth century by successive generations of architects. Its articulation with the house was one of the aspects most publicized by Le Corbusier in his promotion of a new form of living. In 1926, in his mass housing project of Les Immeubles-Villas, the innovation that most stands out is the possibility of reproducing the ambience of a garden-home within an apartment block through the introduction of a 70m² terraced garden in each apartment. The garden, or exterior space, is thus one of the identifiable elements of the pretense of whoever dreams of a house. Le Corbusier’s solution not only guarantees this possibility, but as it also offers independence and privacy in the utilization of this exterior space at an elevated level within the apartment block itself.

The expansion of the house into the exterior presents different possibilities that may include the redimensioning of normal verandas, transforming them into living spaces within the perimeter of the building, as one can see in examples of the fifties and sixties by Alvar Aalto, Pedro Ramalho and Sergio Fernandez; or, inversely, with cantilevered projections as in the projects of MVRDV that recall Moshe Safdie’s prototype at Expo ’67 in Montreal that suggest, on an elevated plane, the ideal of the patio or terrace; or then through the expansion of the view as a virtual space of the house, as seen in the legendary image of Pierre Koenig’s Case Study House #22 that extends the visual space of the house out over the horizon of Los Angeles, including it as if it were an exterior space of the house.

The production of mass housing has been subject to a stereotyping defined by the well-known two and three bedroom apartment typologies where one now registers ostensible signs of transformation. This change can be observed in two recent examples of real-estate developments that identify different lifestyles and forms of inhabiting spaces as their main selling-point: “studios”, apartments composed exclusively of a living space and a kitchen, publicized to university students; and “empty-nester” condominiums that include certain amenities for the daily life of couples that no longer have children.
L'"IMMEUBLE-VILLAS" n'est plus l'appartement de maison locative. Il apporte l'indépendance complète de chaque propriétaire. Il apporte cet élément capital nouveau : un jardin de

70° sur lequel ouvrent les pièces principales de chaque villa (voir page 124 de cet almanach, pages 150, 154, 159).

L'"IMMEUBLE-VILLAS" est une nouvelle formule de l'habitation de grande ville.
We believe that the conventional models of mass housing tend to wear out, creating the need for a questioning and exploration of different alternatives for housing. In an attempt to try to better answer the issues raised by modern lifestyles. Thus, the current typification of the domestic programs of mass housing may give way to a few questions. To further exemplify this, we could ask some of the following questions:

- Does the segmentation of sleeping and living spaces correspond to the only solution for their separation? Are there no alternative, more permeable solutions that could allow for different forms of appropriating and using domestic space?
- Does the enclosure of the kitchen in a small compartment, occasionally with a door that links it to the dining room, satisfy the modern forms of sharing domestic work and the new culinary habits that arise along with it? (pre-prepared meals, for example)
- Should the common room (increasingly less common) continue to concentrate forms of occupation while the bedroom continues to assume an important role as an alternative space?
- Must the circulation spaces of corridors and halls be maintained as the only form of separating spaces in a domestic environment that is more and more hybrid in terms of use that changes over time? (the cycles of use provoked by the growth of children, for example)

- Or then should the whole domestic program be contained within the space of the house? Is there no possibility of offering its extension into collective zones, as seen in the example of party halls or the centralization of certain services, used as an opportunity to reformulate the concepts of habitable space?

As these themes are non-exhaustive, one could also take note of questions regarding the phenomenon of the home workplace, as a permanent or exclusively night-time function, or of the microwave syndrome that allows us to eat at different times, individually or in group, formally or informally. And what about new technologies? Home theater complete with DVD, the information and services of the internet and the countless offering of TV channels!

Little by little, these new signs enter our day-to-day lives as small changes in our habitational structures, in our domestic behavior and in the expectations we bestow on our house. One can verify three examples of this discreet transformation of our habits and the space we inhabit: the location of telephone jacks, once present only in the vestibule, now found in each compartment; the mechanization of the pre-equipped kitchen as the paradigm of speed and efficiency in the assembly-line of food preparation — a new factor of our domestic imagination that cannot easily be ignored; or then the growing number of bathrooms, occasionally superior to the number of bedrooms, thus indicating our expectation for their individual use and reinforcing the ideal of privacy as an aspect fundamentally linked to an increase in living comfort.

The consideration of these aspects, in terms of the interior of the apartment as well as its relation with the exterior, point towards the necessity of rethinking the current norms characterized as they are by their absolute rigidity and incapacity to adapt to new conditions.

At present, one of the principal regulations in Portugal regarding the construction of habitational space is the Regulamento Geral das Edificações Urbanas (General Code of Urban
Edifications) or RGEU, first published in August of 1951 (and updated on several occasions) superseding a number of disperse laws and having at its origin the concept of controlling the sphere of public and private life of past eras. Some of the current typification of our domestic lifestyle and houses are founded on ideals of operation, comfort and hygiene as rigidly defined by these norms. The general organization of an apartment, the constitution of its bedrooms, the dimensioning of a kitchen, the number and functioning of bathrooms and the width of corridors are the variables of our house, regulated according to a set of habitual conditions of a tradition of hygiene and social control inherited from the nineteenth century, that today should be questioned in order to live up to the contemporary requirements of housing, living and working.

These norms, in spite of their discreet actualizations, do not easily accept architectural interventions that attempt to respond to new lifestyles. Take, for example, the difficulty of designing a house without traditional partitions (a loft) and the incorporation of modern systems within, such as ventilation and illumination, not to mention the use of building processes with evermore efficient construction materials.

It is, thus, pertinent to raise the questions regarding the obsolescence of this model as well as the conditions we desire for our house, now possibly located at nº4, 12th floor, apartment 136 of a mass housing complex which incorporates our aspirations for a house with a garden, certainly more in tune to our current standards of living.

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2. No número de compartimentos acima referidos não se incluem vestiários, instalações sanitárias, arruços e outros compartimentos de função similar.

3. O suplemento de área obrigatório referido no nº 1 não pode dar origem a um espaço autónomo e encerrado, deve distribuir-se pela cozinha e sala, e terá uma sua parcela afectada ao tratamento de espaços; na proporção que estiver mais de acordo com os objectivos da solução do projecto. V. o nº 4.

4. Quando o tratamento de espaços se fizer em espaço delimitado, a parcela do suplemento de área referida no nº 3, destinada a essa função, não deve ser inferior a 2 m².

5. O tipo de fogo é definido pelo número de quartos de dormir, e para a sua identificação utiliza-se o símbolo Tx, em que x representa o número de quartos de dormir. (*)

Art. 67.º - 1. As áreas brutas dos fogos terão os seguintes valores mínimos:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tipo de fogo</th>
<th>T0</th>
<th>T1</th>
<th>T2</th>
<th>T3</th>
<th>T4</th>
<th>T5</th>
<th>T6+X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Área bruta</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2. Para os fins do disposto neste Regulamento, considera-se:

a) Área bruta (Ab) é a superfície total do fogo, medida pelo perímetro exterior das paredes exteriores e eixos das paredes separadoras dos fogos, e inclui varandas privativas, locais acessórios e a quota-parte que lhe corresponda nas circulações comuns do edifício.

(*) Redação dada ao art. 66.º pelo Decreto Lei n.º 650/75, de 18-11.