

# THE SCHOOL AS A HOME

## SOME CONCEPTS FROM A CERTAIN VIEW ON HABITATION

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The relationship between man and architectural spaces evolves beyond mere interpretation and concepts of use or utensil, which many users and architects employ to describe, act or understand available architectural spaces. By accepting that the architectural space is something more complex than its instrumentalisation or utilitarian occupation, for it can be a vehicle for culture and civilisation where emotions and sensuality can describe subjectively held values, we acknowledge the difficult interaction of achieving the phenomenon that our habitation describes.

Nowadays the critique focuses on the theoretical aspects of important concepts, such as inhabiting and contemporary habitation, gathering a lot of its reasoning from philosophy, anthropology and sociology, in other words transforming a lot of topics that philosophy has covered and developed into the subject matter of architecture and project. The concept of habitation is, in a sense, an example of this concern and this attitude in a controversial world of contradictions about habitation, as the foundation of a place or root. This brings us to Heidegger and the wandering and movement of the body as vehicle and identity for the existence of the habitation of Levinas, or as a Being or Living Value that can sometimes be unreal and “transcend” as Bachelard poeticised.

From a more architectural stance, Adolf Loos writes that “your house will grow with you and you with your house”, reflecting an ideal of identification or overlap between content and container. Meanwhile, Le Corbusier says “I search with true longing for those houses that are «houses of men» and not houses of architects”. This reveals divergent views on the topic of formalising architecture and what architects think, design or “leave” for the inhabitant to inhabit.

It is within this issue that we can frame and accept the words of Alfonso Ponce, when he claims that “As human beings we establish a symbiosis with spaces that contain us which is hard to explain. We inhabit them and they inhabit us. We are their inhabitants and habitators”<sup>1</sup> and not just users. Merleau-Ponty had already observed that “truth does not solely «inhabit» the «interior man», better still, there is no interior man, man is in the world, it is in this world where he is known”<sup>2</sup>. And so the phenomenon of inhabiting becomes something more global and exterior to the house, to habitation and to “oneself” that the architect (re)produces and the user (re)uses.

Habitation is a global phenomenon and thus something exterior or “urbanised”. This means its study implies successive interactions in the universal, public, private and intimate realms, which are fostered by habitation in an array of activities shared with other inhabitants. It has a sense of contamination and is detached from the idyllic habitation of a metaphysical and theoretical Being in the world, which is symbolised by Adam’s mythical hut in this lost but continuously rebuilt paradise.

We can therefore accept the idea that today we inhabit work places, public routes, schools, churches and football stadiums, parking lots and the endless “jams” on the motorway, theme parks

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<sup>1</sup>. RAMÍREZ PONCE, Alfonso, *Pensar Y Habitar*, II Seminario nacional de Teoría de la Arquitectura, “La teoría, sus definiciones y contenidos”, 1997.

<sup>2</sup>. MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice, *Fenomenología de la percepción*, Barcelona, Editorial Planeta Agostini, 1993, cited in ABALOS, Iñaki, *La buena vida*, Barcelona, Ed. Gustavo Gili, S.A., 2000, p. 93.

and hotels, the Internet and the virtual house, the cinema and television. For this reason the thematic focus of this issue is transposed to daily life, to what is relational and novel as a factor for understanding or “constructing” the concept of inhabiting in the presence of man and without his “habitation”; in other words, without the modern archetypes of a house for all based on a techno-financial logic of construction entrepreneurs, in cities that reproduce an ideal of habitation for an increasingly distant ideal nuclear family.

But, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this inhabitant is no longer stable and fixed. He seems to be, in the words on Tramontano, “an individual who lives mostly alone, who is eventually grouped into a variety of family formats, who communicates from afar through networks which he belongs to, who works at home but demands public facilities for meetings, who searches for his identity via contact with information”<sup>3</sup>.

Public places and private places, a person’s privacy and intimate space or intimacy are concepts that were associated to an idea of structure and thought that inhabiting reproduced. Now, they are concepts that evolve through a wider and more diffuse framework, which has in contemporaneity the sense of cohabitation and in the city the living expression of these concepts.

In this context, the school presents itself as our ideal Home, a place for the arrival and constant departing.

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<sup>3</sup>. TRAMONTANO, Marcelo, *Habitação, hábitos e habitantes: tendências contemporâneas metropolitanas*, published on [www.eesc.scusp.br](http://www.eesc.scusp.br), 2003.