

**TU YOUR HOUSE, YOUR MUSEUM, YOUR MAUSOLEUM.MY HOUSE, NEITHER
MUSEUM NOR MAUSOLEUM**

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CAVE, CABIN, HOUSE.

First there was the cave. Man, an animal with a clear rationality, though still undeveloped and little used, took refuge in the cave to protect himself from the cold and rain and to defend himself from attack by other, irrational, animals. The stereotomic, earth, rock, - the stony, the heavy and the dark- took man within its core. And that rationality, with all its capacity for creation, left the marks of his imagination and his memory on those walls, painting them.

Afterwards came the cabin. Man thought he could construct the tectonic. The bird built its nest and the bee its hive with certain hardwired laws that are difficult to describe but have a perfect and blind exactness. Though still unconsciously, man understood the laws of gravity and built his cabin with tree trunks and branches or with stones or with blocks of ice. And always with the reason that, also unconsciously, uses geometric mechanisms. And though it was still only to take shelter and defend himself, he could now, with more freedom than with the cave, choose the site and decide on the place and form of his dwelling. And his capacity for creation, which in the cave was manifested through painting, here, or so I would like to understand it, was manifested through architecture, the most primitive architecture.

Man could already choose the place in which to settle and the form of architecture that would shelter him.

And in the end came the house. Sheltering and defending himself were transformed into inhabiting. And once space was dominated, shaped with its corresponding planes, man conceived of the possibility of controlling it. Proportioning it. And he saw that it could be drawn with light. And so, by dominating gravity and light more consciously, he perfected Architecture. And Architecture was thus another manifestation, perhaps the most human, of culture. Of that culture which man's thought develops over time.

While man as an animal found refuge in the cave and as a rational being constructed the cabin, as a cultivated being, creative man conceived the house as a dwelling to be inhabited. And that is what we're working on.

HOUSE, MUSEUM, MAUSOLEUM

How can you explain to people without hurting their feelings that their houses are horrible; that they are museums of all horrors; that they are horrible mausoleums in which to bury the unconfessable? Both inside and out. Though it is also true that, in the immense majority of cases, it is the fault of the architects.

Today, the interiors of houses are like temples presided over by the eye of the Cyclops, the television. Enthroned on an altar with wheels that is never moved (it's so loaded with new accessories) the boob tube becomes the focus of a space (if it can be called a space) that tends to be the accumulation of sofas and arm chairs. Around it, filling it entirely, are lots of little tables and shelves full of ashtrays and knickknacks and little boxes and figurines and a multitude of objects that are never used. Like a homotecia of those museums that are an obligatory visit on package tours. And all of this, mixed up with a multitude of houseplants in pots, in which there is always a Corn Plant (also known as the Brazilian Trunk) giving the room a tropical feel.

And since natural light, Architecture's great ally and indispensable material, is a "persona non grata" for good television viewing, curtain shades tend to cover the large glass doors that the architect one day decided to place on the terrace, because the terrace, or its caricature, tends to be the element with which these rooms are always finished.

If this description of the reality of many houses makes us think that, more than a home to inhabit, they are spaces to adorn the television (I wish I were wrong in this), one could find a parallel in how the Architecture in which these spaces are immersed is often conceived. (If it can be called Architecture.) Much of the architecture of the houses and apartments around us has been conceived and produced with the same superficiality as everything I've described just now. Like museums of the whims harvested by the superficiality of architects in the frivolity of magazines. Like mausoleums in which the inhabitants and the architects bury their most unconfessable passions. Like a universal exaltation of what the classics called *horror vacui* (fear of emptiness). Anything, as long as one doesn't think. Because thinking is always the solution, it is always man's most logical response. For the architect, when conceiving the spaces. For the inhabitants when enjoying them.

FACTORS OF CHANGE

After the process by which man takes refuge in the cave, constructs the cabin and conceives the house, new factors appear that have again produced qualitative changes in this home he's created: sociological and technological factors.

Sociologically, the connection among inhabitants has opened. The disappearance of servants, or the understanding of them as another member of the family, opens up areas of habitable space. The relationship among the members of the family has changed a lot, with trust increasing to the detriment of hierarchy. And also, the relation with members from the outside, who no longer have closed areas in the space of the house. All of this means a reduction of privacy and also a greater opening of the space. An underlying factor may be added to all of this: the reduction of the surface of the homes, to the point that it has reached the ridiculous and impossible limits of what was called "minimal housing".

Technologically, the change and its consequences have been enormous. Steel and reinforced concrete have granted the structure a hitherto unimaginable freedom, both

horizontally and vertically. The elevator makes access to the vertical superimposition of planes possible. Plate glass offers transparency, continuity, and total light. And air conditioning joins in wherever needed. In short, almost everything is possible.

That is to say, today we find man, creator of the house, architect, with nearly all the possibilities in his hands. And paradoxically at this crucial moment of open relations and effective technology, when upon conceiving and using these habitable spaces, we return to the most primitive element of our being, in the most pejorative sense of the word "primitive".

THINK, THINK, THINK

Of course the solution would be and is to think, as best regards man. Architects need to think about what they are doing. Perhaps the problem with architects would be solved if they dedicated time, more time, to their work, so as to be able to conceive, precisely, those spaces to be inhabited. Inhabitants need to think about how to use those spaces to do so appropriately and to be able enjoy them. And perhaps too, in order to start thinking again, talking with one another, reading, living and inhabiting.

SOCIALIZE, BURN, DEMAND

The mere mention of these three verbs would seem to be a call to revolution. And in a way, it is.

Burning the current regulations for designing state subsidized housing would be a direct way of making this revolution. Instead of neurotic architects struggling to fit the glass slipper on Cinderella's stepsisters, an impossible task, we would have liberated architects willing to think and to create logically.

Socializing the building ground for once and for all would eliminate in the stroke of a pen all of the speculators and the architects yoked to their cart and make housing worth what it costs. The real price is sufficiently lower than what this repugnant current market imposes.

Demanding the best architects. Or all those architects who give the best of themselves, the best of their creativity, for housing. Freed from the strictures of regulations and the ties of a false economy, one must demand that architects, dedicating the necessary time, create housing in which it is a pleasure to live.

And so many things. And in this same conclusive line, I would like to propose a few specific points that in my opinion are a valid solution for this – possibly new -- way human beings may inhabit a space.

FREEDOM, DIMENSION, PROPORTION

These three concepts may seem excessively abstract, but nothing could be further from my intention.

Freedom. Free space that is concretized in spaces of a simple, basic geometry. Recognizable spaces, without nooks and crannies and that make any kind of life possible. Understanding that when an architect unleashes his creative freedom in a space, he makes his whim a form and limits the freedom of the future inhabitant. When he renounces his own “creative expression” he allows the other’s freedom. A space by Gaudí may be amazing, and it is, but it constricts the freedom of the person who uses it.

Dimension. It is preferable to renounce the best finishes or a greater “ornamental expression” if they come at the expense of a larger size. It’s that simple. A larger size is an unrepeatable, but attainable luxury. “Savings must not be made that can’t be rectified in the future” said an old professor when I was an architecture student. Everything can be improved and changed except size. That “minimal housing” from the 1930’s was a big mistake that can’t be corrected. And the same discourse could be applied to the vertical dimension of habitable space.

Light. The architect’s obsessive obsession at the drafting board, as he resolves the “floor plans” of homes in which the façades and the sections are taken for granted, has made him forget too many things. Providing homes adequate light must be one of his first objectives. The sun that enters gives life to houses and apartments. This seems to be a platitude, but nowadays, gripped by norms and absurd economies, it seems to have been forgotten. Light that, through proportion, makes these living spaces a pleasure for man. Proportion that through Light brings Beauty inside. Intelligent Beauty in the life of man.

“IL CIELO IN UNA STANZA”

That is what Mina sang in a memorable song that always comes to mind when I’m speaking about homes. Because attaining heaven in the house, making it, as the castizos say “como en la gloria” (as the Spanish purists say, like heaven), is what architects should do. Using the same skill with which the architects of the Alhambra make “the birds fly in the water and the fish swim in the air” in the pools of Granada’s waters.

The homes that some of us dream of and wish to make reality, far from being museums or mausoleums, will be free, ample spaces, full of light. They will be erected on accessible soil and the best architects will construct them, since, the regulations now gone, they will make wonderful logic their primary instrument. They will be lovely homes. Designed for thinking, for conversing, for loving, for inhabiting, for living. Like a heaven on earth.