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Editorial

The purest definition of architecture suggests that the possibility of dwelling is the characteristic that distinguishes it from the other arts and, as a result, becomes part of its most basic definition. This is, however, a characteristic that escapes architecture's control since it depends solely on users' abilities to appropriate space –something that can't be scientifically measured or known ahead of time. This contradiction is particularly expressed within the condition of domestic dwelling.

In the nineteen thirties, Walter Benjamin reflected on the interior space of private individuals at the turn of the century: "The interior is not just the universe but also the *etui* of the private individual. To dwell means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated... the traces of the inhabitant are imprinted in the interior." Now, in a context where globalization directly affects the local scale and private life validates itself in its own spectacularization, our lifestyle has changed dramatically, it has diversified the challenges to the concept of the family, it has engendered new roles, and it has changed the needs of human beings which, in turn, have affected our

ways of living. What is the new interior, the *etui* or container of today's private individual? If at the dawn of modernity, the private room characterized the individual –"every individual carries an interior," Kafka noted, while Virginia Woolf made that space into one of female equity and emancipation–, what domestic space would serve as the metaphor to describe today's human?

After orthodox modernism, where works were conceived to be read as transparent objects, our times seek an opacity similar to the opaque modern condition described by Marshall Berman, related to the loss of confidence in rationality as the basis for understanding. Nowadays, the objects of domestic dwelling are considered from the point of view of the subject and from the impossibility of unidirectionally reading the object. There have also been interesting philosophical essays in the physical house which have made the logical positivist its best inhabitant: they imagined an inhabitant who understood the limits of language and lived without social and aesthetic pretensions; this being, however, does not exist. Neither does its way of dwelling, based on pure reason –precisely because dwelling overwhelms language. As a practice, it may be only possible, however, to address it through art or architecture.

The first individuals that dared to live in the Pedregal de San Ángel and who built their houses there amongst the rocks considered that dwelling occurred before building and that to dwell meant to "be satisfied on the earth and under the sky." But this concept has changed since the nineteen-fifties when Heidegger noted that the great tragedy of modernity wasn't the shortage of housing but rather we didn't know how to dwell.

We have to question the contemporary meaning and possibility –or impossibility– of dwelling in a world where to reside is not limited to having a street address, where one spends more time commuting than at one's own home, where thousands of people migrate to other lands because of political or economic reasons, and where our relationships with other people take place in the virtual space of social networks. Today, the complex characteristics of modern urban life at the turn of the twentieth century described by thinkers like Benjamin –who referred to Baudelaire and his obsession of constantly moving as the paradigmatic example– have been transferred to the domestic space in many ways. The traces have become even more diffuse.

In our present, domestic dwelling within Latin American contexts inevitably seems to be related to the great problem of social housing. Before philosophically addressing the meaning of dwelling, considerations turn to the real problems of our cities. This shouldn't surprise us, after all, about half of the population –at least in Mexico– lives in squatter settlements; "homes," but of substandard conditions.

From the earliest experiments centered on the development of workers housing, we have faced failure: we have been unable to offer an effective solution to the people who need it most. The large mid-century housing developments sought to fix the problem of housing based on a standardized notion

of dwelling. They were incapable of adapting or of considering that the needs of individuals change not only throughout their lives but also according to the geographical region that they inhabit or the cultural group that they belong to. The user was understood as a passive subject that needed to be instructed in the ways of modern living. There was no dialogue, just a long and boring monologue.

At present, housing choices are only available to a few. Also, some cultural constructions, such as the idea of home ownership, obscure possible solutions since they rule out simpler solutions, such as that of home rental, for instance. The totalitarian initiatives of the government in the nineteen-fifties that pretended to decide how modern cities would be and how modern individuals would live in them have now been substituted by projects resulting from land speculation and are intended only to increase the rate of return within the housing market. The entire responsibility for social housing is given over to the changing laws of the free market.

Based on experiences that emerged in the sixties, we have seen new creative ways to understand the endowment of social housing in the last few years. These are characterized by the fact that architect's interventions are more limited in a process which increasingly seeks the involvement of the very inhabitants in the decisions, designs, and construction; where time's passing and the sense of flexibility are considered as part of the project. This is what has been referred to as the so-called incrementalism. Despite this, many of these cases lack a critical evaluation. It would be appropriate to ask if the State is shirking out of half of its responsibility and if the construction by the users is being idealized as a desirable practice in order to adapt housing to their personal needs while, surely, favoring their sense of appropriation.

In any case, the increasingly obvious insertion of the subject that experiences domestic space as a way to evaluate the architectural work; the careful study of that experience as raw material for design; in addition to the participation of the user in the design and construction process are strategies to disarm architecture as an artistic practice –to leave its very traces in the very matter that makes up the home. These appear to us as possibilities for dwelling in the present.

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