Design Process and Suitability: Utzon's Courtyard Houses

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Introduction

This paper starts with an observation: in contemporary practice, a shift exists in the authorship in architecture. It proposes to analyze this shift in the light of the paradigmatic paradox between sedimentation and re-creation in any design process. As an answer, it defends the idea of space suitability oriented practice. Introducing the character of Jørn Utzon, the search for space suitability is defined as a capacity for the designer to judge, to engage and to adjust the project. Exploring the notion of decision and ethic responsibility of the designer, the body will be considered as a central feature to deploy this idea. Finally, a look to the current technologies will allow us to imagine tools that will help to implement this search for space suitability in design process, confronted with actual uses of the built object.

General terms

Design process; social sustainability; project suitability; authorship condition; building afterlife; answerability; mimesis; embodiment; urban imagery.

A paradigm shift

Today's practice conditions: Questioning the Authorship in architecture

In the last decades, the position of the architect in European countries has radically changed. Two different phenomena have induced this change.

Firstly we can stress the exponential raise of rules and regulations. In an ever more judiciarized society, the importance of urbanistic regulations and administrative processes have raised in most of Western countries. Besides, the desire for high energetic performances and so to say zero risk environments have produced an important set of new regulations.

Secondly comes the pressure of a unified architectural market. Mainstream fashion designed houses, standardized offices environment, economically profitable housing complexes and public space are supposed to follow a priori planning.

This state of affairs is clearly visible through:

•	The emergence of different project stakeholders: project managers, safety advisers, cradle to cradle experts, energetic performances controllers and facility managers, etc.

•	The emergence of specific artefacts: institutions space specification guidelines, massive communication magazines, plan-it-yourself software and 3D printers, etc.

•	The emergence of particular events: consultation moments in administrative processes, large-scale fairs dedicated to design and construction, architecture days, etc.

Paradoxically, the democratization of the process of making architecture goes hand in hand with the increase of numbers of experts and obligations in the design process.

Furthermore, different kinds of "remote practice" call into question the role of the architect. Two examples can be given:

•	The processes of international architecture competition in a professional context.

•	The processes of architect's mobility (students or professionals) in the frame of academic exchanges (overseas workshops, off-campus design-build programs, etc.).

In these two cases, architects are asked to propose solutions or strategies in a remote location, being present or not on site, sometimes without having any good knowledge of the local culture, know-how and natural configuration.

These new forces that shape the profession must be taken into account to rethink how the design process occurs and what the notion of "Authorship" means today.

In her work on the origins of delocalized architecture[1], architecture historian Beatriz Colomina identifies Le Corbusier as the main precursor character of the hyper-mobile architect. I believe that in this matter the role played by Jørn Utzon cannot be underestimated for three reasons:

- The competition and the winning project of Utzon for the Sydney Opera House is one of the major international competition processes that produced a global architectural icon. Furthermore, the personal trajectory of Utzon from that moment (Helsingør, Sydney, Hawaii, Mallorca) and his professional practice constituted by major international project in radically different contexts: the Sydney Opera House (1956-1973), the Melli Bank in Tehran (1959-1960), the Bagsvaerd church in Copenhagen(1968-1976) and the Kuwait's National Assembly (1972-1984).

- In his career, Jørn Utzon constantly searched for a general design process that could fit to the great number, adaptable to the situation in any context. This research applies principally to a series of community housing projects: the Armebrâten project (1951) developed with Progressive Arkitekters Gruppe Oslo Norge (PAGON), the courtyard houses paradigmatic project (1953, 1957 and 1959), the Espansiva house project (1969).

- Jørn Utzon was among the first western modern architects to incorporate in his work references from non-western cultures.

Apparent Paradox: re-creation and sedimentation

The forces at play in the paradigm shift are contradictory. On the one hand, the raise of local regulation and the evermore important implication of experts of different fields, on the other hand the fact to consider the architect as a professional holder of an expertise that is capable to intervene all around the globe.

This apparent contradiction can be considered as being part of the contemporary debate about Critical Regionalism. We certainly have to keep in mind the 50's origins of this debate. In his text on the apparent conflict between civilization and culture [2] Kenneth Frampton refers to Jørn Utzon and the Bagsværd church to illustrate the idea of Critical Regionalism and the necessity to achieve self-conscious synthesis between universal civilization and world culture. As theoretical basis, Frampton's text refers to a writing of French philosopher Paul Ricœur: *History and Truth*[3] . In this text, written in 1955, Paul Ricœur proposes an accurate study of temporality in cultural phenomena. Through the question - how to become modern and to return to sources? - He notes the fundamental contradiction in temporality between the sedimentation nature of production tooling (universal civilization) and the necessary re-creation of values and cultural traditions (local culture). According to Frampton, Utzon shows the capacity to synthesize this contradiction. This capacity is rooted in both an extensive knowledge of cultural and building traditions throughout the world and a strong sense of building technology. Both were acquired by Utzon thanks to extensive reading and traveling. Developing his idea of Critical Regionalism, Frampton recalls the necessity to consider a site as a bounded domain in order to create architecture of resistance against the general placelessness, result of the massive production of the modern environment. This idea of bounded domain refers to Heidegger's writing *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*[4] . In this essay, true to his idea of "changing in one's origins"[5] , the philosopher opposes the German term for space, or place, Raum to the antique abstract terms spatium and extensio.

This experience based notion of Raum implies clearly defined boundaries and is closely linked to concepts such as being, cultivating and dwelling. This phenomenological approach to a place asks for an engagement in the act of cultivating the site.

Further, Frampton adds

"It is possible to say that […] the specific culture of the region – that is to say, its history in both a geological and agricultural sense – becomes inscribed into the form and realization of the work."[6]

Today, transformed by these forces of multiplication of ultra-specific specialization and increasing necessity of exportable expertise, the status of the architect as a designer is changing. The project does not appear as the execution of a determined plan and the authorship can rather be understood as a dynamic process continuously adjusted by the stakeholders embedded in a context. The designer appears as an operator working on different fluxes of forces. How can this new condition answer to the need of resistance, the need of a bounded domain encouraged by Frampton?

Utzon's courtyard houses: One project, several engagements

As an example of a project in search of space suitability, the project of the Courtyard houses of Jørn Utzon is relevant.

In 1953 Jørn Utzon and Ib Møgelvang participated together to an architectural ideas competition called "Private Life". The competition was organized by a Swedish architecture journal and invited architects and designers to imagine affordable solutions for family houses in Scania, south of Sweden.

The team Utzon / Møgelvang won the first prize with a proposal of courtyard houses. Hardly based on the Armebrâten project developed with Progressive Arkitekters Gruppe Oslo Norge (PAGON), the winning entry consists of a nonhierarchical assembly of housing cells.

The 20x20m cells are delimited by a continuous 3 meters high wall. Inside these cells- the walls provide protection against the intensive winds of Scania- each family can organize and configure the space following basic spatial principles:

- Building in a depth of 4.5 m, which provide a central yard of minimum 9 meters wide

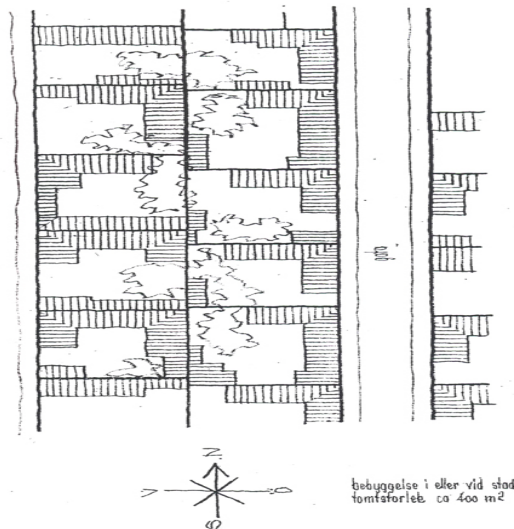- Roof with determined slope towards the patio

Fig. 1. Skanska Husetiper competition layout.   © Jørn Utzon's Archives

- A one meter wide entrance to the house

- A three meters wide entrance to the courtyard

The layout of the cells and the continuous wall enclosing the units define the sense of community and the interplay between individuals and family, families and community, community and society and between society and nature.

The wining proposal will never be built nor even published.

Subsequently Jørn Utzon conceived several projects based on the competition idea and actually built two of them: a 60 houses complex in Helsingør and a 63 houses complex in Fredensborg (DK). Two other complexes were made by Erik and Henri Andersson, occasional collaborators of Utzon in Sweden at that time.

From a detailed generic idea different projects are realized. Each one has its own characteristics and differences regarding several aspects and at different scales. The principle of walled cells is maintained, the principle of the assembly as well. Still the projects are radically different in their definition of the space of intimacy, the communal space, the relation to society and to nature.

The notion of judging what happens in the site notion is deeply rooted in the idea of the Critical Regionalism, where the idea of reading of traces of the time embedded in space is central. This deployment of several building strategies coming from one initial concept is highly instructive. It highlights what Clausewitz called "engagement", that is to say the capacity to switch from absolute war - the essence of the war - to real war - strategy applied through a Hegelian dialectic to the harsh battlefield realities. This engagement is a dynamic process in which the architect continuously adjust de project, here the disposition of

the cells inside the general layout designed for the community. Furthermore, in Utzon initial idea, the cell is a blank layout adjusted by every user according to his needs.

Utzon: The architect as a community specialist?

These projects of the early career of Utzon show his great capacity to develop community projects. In the idea of a suitable space oriented practice, is the architect a kind of community specialist, a sort of local social advisor for a determined group of people? The answer he gives is more complex. For Utzon, the architect is clearly not a mediator between people. He defines architect's role as a mediator between a community and the more general contemporary issues as discussed within the society. According to him, the architect is a mediator between society and people through technical debate on living.

In his text "art between science and instinct"[7] he specifies his ideas of the architect's role: on all the project's stakeholders the architect is the only one who cares for the wellbeing of the users. All the others have another aim. Engineers care for structure and efficiency, lawyers and economists for economic aspects, clients for the program.

Through this definition, Utzon signals a distance between people (client, community, society) and the architect. This distance, or detour, is of prime importance, particularly when we deal with public space. The variety of contemporary public space has been studied in different works[8] (public use on public property ground, private ground with public access, etc.). Rather than the status of the public space, the relevant aspect here is the status of the user in the space we consider. And the common feature of the user among all this variety of public space is anonymity. The designer works for a user that he doesn't know. His client can be identified, his final interlocutor is undefined. This condition of anonymity is of essential. How can we adjust our action to someone we do not know? How can we imagine a suitable space without having direct interlocutor?

I had the chance to discuss this topic with the brilliant professor Michael Holquist from Yale University and he replied as follows:

"Designing a suitable space is designing a space to talk about suitability". [9]

This answer, with all its wisdom, leads to question the limit of the model of a direct conversation between the architect and the user. In other words, how can an architect use the tool of the narrative, or the dialogue, when the main feature of the user of his work is anonymity? Part of the answer to this question is in the necessity, as in sociological sciences, to move the cursor from individuality to society. To be able to develop a transversal coordination of action that ensures a good understanding continuously from the

level of the individual to the plurality. This also applies to space production.

Sustainability and suitability

We make the hypothesis that a new kind of practice emerge as a response to the paradigmatic shift within our profession. This new form of practice tends to what is named here "space suitability". This idea of space suitability lies in an intimate relation between the development of the project and the afterlife of the built object, between design process and users response. In today's epistemological framework of social sustainability the necessity to investigate this idea of suitability of the space we produce is needed. We cannot understate the importance of such a suitability, particularly in terms of individual and social responses from the user to the designed environment.

The practice of space suitability is defined[10] by the following:

1. The capacity of the architect to judge what happens in the site

2. His capacity to engage the site

3. His capacity to adjust action to what happens in the site

The designer and the body

The designer and the voluntary

Building, Dwelling, Thinking is the central subject of an article of Paul Ricœur written in 1998 for journal "Urbanisme"[11] . In this text, Paul Ricœur makes a decisive parallel between the treatment of time through narrative and the treatment of space trough building. He introduces the notion of configuration, based on the idea of creative imitation, or mimesis, borrowed from Aristotle's philosophy. The central assumption of the configuration-based model is the following:

"Le temps devient humain dans la mesure où il est articulé sur un mode narratif, et que le récit atteint sa signification plénière quand il devient une condition de l'existence temporelle ».[12]

Paul Ricœur develops the idea of configuration in three different components: Prefiguration, configuration and refiguration. It provides a clear understanding of the structure in time and space of a human work, and of an architectural work in particular. The Aristotle's concept of *representation of an action* leads to the notion of intentionality embedded in the configuration of the space. The intentionality embedded in the work of art has been brilliantly developed by Russian semiologist Mikhail Bakhtine in its a*rchitectonics[13]*, which is the aesthetical relation between material, content and form in every human work. At the heart of the aesthetical structure of the work is the artistic statement (the intentionality) that gives the completion

to the work and allows its consummation by the user. This artistic statement gives the ethic dimension in the esthetical act and found the *answerability* of work of art. Intentionality and answerability are major features of suitability.

Co-creation by the user

Through these different approaches the status of the user appears as taking integrally part of the process of creation in the very use of the space. According to Bakhtine the esthetical value of the space, his poetic, comes from the interplay between the author (and the design), the built object (and its intelligibility with its potential hero) and the users (spectators of themselves, reflected in the built object). We can refer here to Bergson and his *"droit à l'inventaire"* which introduces the ability of the user of both reading the intentional use embedded in space and to invent his own.

Fig. 2. A potential hero embedded in the work: Benches at Jan Arp Museum Remagen-Rolandseck, Germany. © Jan Arp Museum

The use before the design: the "who" of the action

Utzon gives a good explanation of the idea of the daily life of the user as material for the architect. About the design of the Skanska Houses, he talks about imagining the use of the space before starting the design of the project. He gives the description of different families, one with unorganized parents, with an unfinished boat in the garden, a little plantation destroyed by the kids, another one with three generations in the house,

having a specific local for the grandfather, an open garage to allow him to steal the food in the kitchen. A third house tells the story of a woman and her young lover, one bedroom, one living room and a kitchen. After he leaves her, she built a flourmill because she was good at baking. An inhabitant who keeps bees planted plants to prevent people entering his garden; another family wants the car at the end of the garden.

This working method reveals an intersubjective approach of the conception of space. Utzon starts the design with the actual movement of the imagined user: people seated on chairs around a table, with a specific natural light and determined views. This is the core of the architect's responsibility.

He gives an interesting example of this user-architect relation[14]. The best architect he has ever known is not a professional architect but a client: Maria, a woman in the Balearics. She owned a restaurant, together with her husband, a sculptor. Astonished by her houses and little restaurant, Utzon asks her architect how he made the project. The architect answered that he wasn't the author of the project but she was.

"She made [the project], as she was telling it: I'm standing on a balcony, I see a light falling from a high window on a table with some yellow flowers, and at the end of the wall is a door where the stairs goes down, and on the stairs are some almond trees in flower" [15]

This example stresses again the importance for Utzon of the capacity to imagine space and to project oneself in a projected situation. This phase of pre-definition of the space is buried in everyday life. This is the first step of a narrative, the prefiguration of Paul Ricoeur. Hanna Arendt has shown that the main function of the narrative is to define the "who" of the action[16] , the hero embedded in the work. This implicit hero is the support of the intentionality of the project. This designation of the "who" is also the foundation of the responsibility. To be responsible, this is to be aware and to assume one's actions among and vis-à-vis others.

Italian philosopher Rita Messori has stressed the fact that the first step of the project – the prefiguration- is situated in the Husserlian Lebenswelt (the lived world)[17] . Through this Lebenswelt, she enriches the notion of spatiality with a complementary dimension. This dimension is the corporeality, the dimension of space occupied by a body that moves, lives, experiences and suffers. Afterwards, she develops the double condition of the body as made of flesh and the body as body among others bodies and showing that the relation of the body to architecture is chronotopical (Bakhtine). Here the coordination between individual and plurality takes on its full meaning.

The body and the involuntary

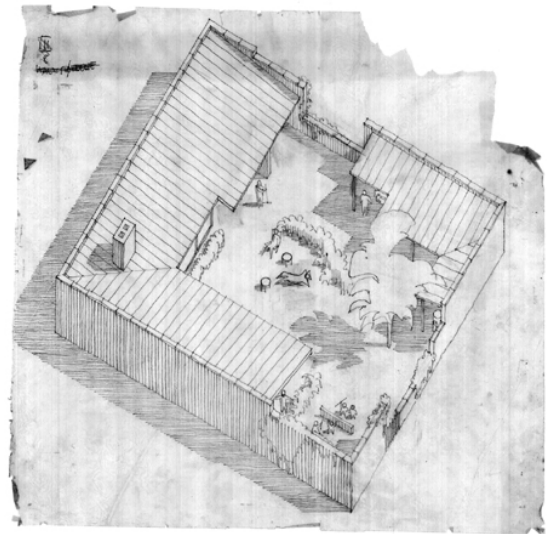In his *Philosophy of the Will*, Paul Ricœur divides the voluntary act in a triple deployment.

Fig. 3. Utzon's sketch of a possible courtyard house. © Jørn Utzon's Archives

To say « I will » means: 1. to decide, 2. to move your body and 3. to consent. It is interesting to draw a parallel with his configuration model: 1. Prefiguration (I am planning), 2. Configuration (I am building) and 3. Refiguration (I consent to the historical context). Ricoeur stresses the simultaneity of these three states in time and the impossibility to distinguish them chronologically. This parallel is the central engine of our confrontation between design process and actual use of the built object. He stresses that the dimension of corporeality is fundamental because it involves the dimension of the involuntary. He writes:

« Avec l'involontaire entre en scène le corps et son cortège de difficultés »[18]

The level of the daily life, which is the level of the use of the built object, but which is also the first level of development of a project, is at the limit of the involuntary. It belongs to the world of the habits, the reflexes. The sharpness of this notion of an artistic statement lying at the heart of the project and giving his completion appears as blurred by the involuntary dimension of the body.

Towards a suitable practice

Inventing new tool for designing: What would Utzon do now?

To capitalise this idea of suitability and to seize it in architect's practice, a methodology has to be built. It must connect on the one hand the work of the designer and on the other hand the afterlife of the project. It must confront the intention of the architect with the actual use of the object. It must seize these imperceptible and quasi involuntary moves of the user.

Given that our ambition is to focus on spaces where the user is anonymous, the traditional tools linked to the narrative model such as user's interviews, community surveys and opinion investigations present a

limit that must be overcome. Here again the attitude of Jørn Utzon will be helpful.

Like him, we must draw in the variety of new tools that the current technology can offer. We have to revive this ability to work with both the necessary re-creation of value and cultural tradition (the use) and the sedimentation nature of production tooling (universal technology).

Recognize & Pursue[19]

New technologies provide tools that allow to observe the behaviour of a user in given place, both as a subject co-creating the aesthetic of the object and as member of a plurality whom behaviour answers to the behaviour of other users. They provide tools that could help us to grasp the intimate dialogue between the user and the intentionality embedded in the object.

In his different works such as "Counter – Music" or "War at distance" the Berlin based artist Harun Farocki shows the contemporary city as a producer of an important amount of images: surveillance images from public or private spaces, infrared images analysing building thermal performances, raising of images produced by private cellular phones, etc…

The use of military, scientific and commercial imagery is rising. In parallel, the notion of individual and collective engagement in space is at the centre of many industries, such as the video games industry and the defence industry.

Let's deepen the example of military imagery. As Farocki notes, imagery from the city have a specific value since the contemporary battlefield is mostly urban. The major part of armed conflicts is guerrilla combat in urban context. From the beginning of the 90's and in particular since the first Gulf War (1990-1991), military doctrines consider information and imagery from the battlefield. The most famous of these doctrines is named C4I: « Command, Control, Communication, Computers and Intelligence ». Developed by the US army chief of staff, C4I is designed to conduct complex military missions in urban context where the behaviour of the forces involved is not evident, generally asymmetric conflict or guerrilla. Pictures are processed through recognition software that interprets actions and intentions of the subject observed in order to detect and anticipate aggressive behaviours or other type of threat.
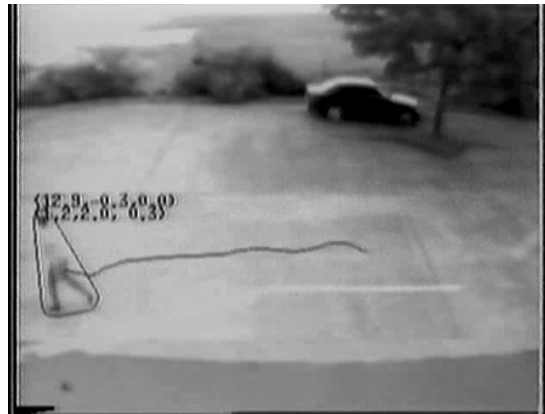

Fig. 4. Harun Farocki, War at distance, 2003.   © Harun Farocki

Diverting these technologies, we can imagine tools that can help to read and understand afterlife use of an architectural object. Such tools should help us to seize the intimate and social behaviour of an anonymous user, his creative activity and why not his aesthetic pleasure.

The knowledge constituted can be confronted to the design process. It will lead to a better understanding of the user response to design intention

Conclusion

Behind the importance of keeping alive the debate on critical regionalism, the major issue of space suitability is the displacing or, better said, the enlargement of the pairing sedimentation / re-creation from the traditional field of construction to the field of production of knowledge. This enlargement is necessary to tackle the shift faced by our profession. By having this reflexion about the forces and values engaged in the act of designing, we can help to re-deploy the notion of authorship in architecture. By offering tangible results and feed-back enriched thinking processes, we can defend the fundamental necessities of a strong authorship although under new forms of collaboration. We can imagine new propositions to keep producing high aesthetic values – in all its dimensions - in our ever faster changing world.

Notes

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19 Farocki, Harun. « Reconnaitre & Poursuivre », éditions THTY, Paris. 2002.