

Architect's House

A self-analysis

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ABSTRACT

The research starts from the opportunity to explore the exceptional architectural production resulting from less usual situations in the productive activity of the architect: the design of his own house. It questions if a "home" design project "for" the architect, can generate also a theory of architecture parallel to the discipline in the act of designing. An understanding of concepts, ideas, motivations and impulses as decision-making, thus constitutes a premise of this research. From this universe of more limited and specific central character, the architect's own-house designed by himself, it is intended to reveal other "thinking mechanisms" beyond what seems to be more common in design practice. In this article, as a possibility among other examples, the Alvar Aalto's Muuratsalo Experimental House, as a case-study that tests some of the research concepts essential to, approaching what may be different in the "mechanisms of thinking" of the architect's self design from his professional activity for others, as a problem of architecture to promote reflection.

1. SUMMARY

The relationship between the architect and the client departs, almost always, from distant points of view, despite the common purpose of convergence and approximation. It is therefore from this understanding of a complex sharing that, by the act of designing, architecture as a discipline is instituted. It sums up the concrete answer, established between its interpreters: the client and the architect.

Not so common, although the vast architectural historiography examples, is the production of architecture from and for the architect's own use. The theme of the architect as author and user of the space he conceived, sets the will and impulse for a research that starts from the most exceptional and sensitive side of the discipline. This means an assumption of an apparently unidirectional relationship, by the annulment of the client, at least in its more traditional form.

Also the house program has been considered as a laboratory of architecture, where new ideas and concepts are tested and tried. Ábalos (2008), in the "Good-Life. Guided visits to the houses of modernity", establishes relationships between contemporary domestic culture, the relation of forms and ways of living,

and the several contemporary philosophical thoughts.

Combining the two interest described above the research focuses itself on the single-family housing through the *architect's home* to be carried out by the analyses of modern's 20th-century domestic architecture production. These studies-cases are recognized by the main historiographical studies supported upon authors who designed, built and inhabited their own home.

The purpose of the research is to investigate if there is a change in the design methodology, when *removing* the figure of the "client". To find out whether the design project is more or less justified and if it seeks to clarify the reasons for the options taken at each stage. Finding out in this process if there are new mental links that to be described, represented and transmitted to other peers, close the objective of the research.

- Does there exist different mechanisms of thinking in the architect's performance when he designs for himself from when he designs for others?

- Which architectural tools may identify, sort, analyze, expand upon and understand these mechanism of thought?

-Comparatively to the more conventional situations of architectural production, has the design of the architect's own house added reflection to the discipline?

2. POINT I (THE HOUSE AS A THEME)

Starting from the existing collection considered relevant by the architecture historiography of the "architect's own house", this paper intention's is to: first, become aware of the quantitative, qualitative and progressive significance of these existing experiences; secondly, to anticipate the practical and methodological progress to find resonances in the concepts and theoretical presuppositions, fundamental to the research theme.

The objectivity, in the scope of the theme, of definitions where the initial concepts, within an Abdup method came from the researcher's specific design interests, are essential so that one can find the necessary and adequate tools to be chosen and the selection criteria case-study analyses.

Rossi (1975) uses this approach when he refers that the type approach in architectural design enriches the discussion about the design method, by the possibility of integration between logical and analogical thinking, being this process adopted in this paper.

The concept of the HOUSE AS A THEME establishes the connection for action- investigation within the objective of shielding and later operationalizing the research with the support of the case studies. In this sense, the following themes (concepts) of interest are establishes:

- 1. THE HOUSE AND TERRITORY - FORM OF THOUGHT**
- 2. THE TYPOLOGICAL HOUSE - PROGRAM NUCLEARS**
- 3. THE HOME CONTEXT - REFERENCES OF THE PLACE**

4. THE HOUSE AND ABSTRACTION - PROJECT ANALYSIS MECHANISMS

5. MATERIAL HOUSE - FORMAL PERENITY ANDEXPRESSION

In this work, the first concept THE HOUSE AND TERRITORY - FORM OF THOUGHT, is explored in section II, only as an essay for a future selection of other case studies and their analysis tools.

The criterion at this stage for the selection of the house of Alvar Aalto (1952-54) - (Muuratsalon koetalo) corresponds to a first experience, which covers not only the first concept named above, but also as fitting other of the investigator interests and reflected upon this case-study. The choice of Alvar Aalto's house between others explorations (local, configuration, etc) meets the investigator interest strongly in the use of the author own house as an laboratory to test different, materials, materiality and constructive details

This first concept, although related to the author's own-house geographic site based on more generic constraints (see **Point III**), is chosen at the same time a starting point that justifies the type of configurations of the researcher's design interests. In fact the selection of the cases-study houses, present as a common factor interventions in isolated lots, and therefore a dispersed and free relation with the landscape.

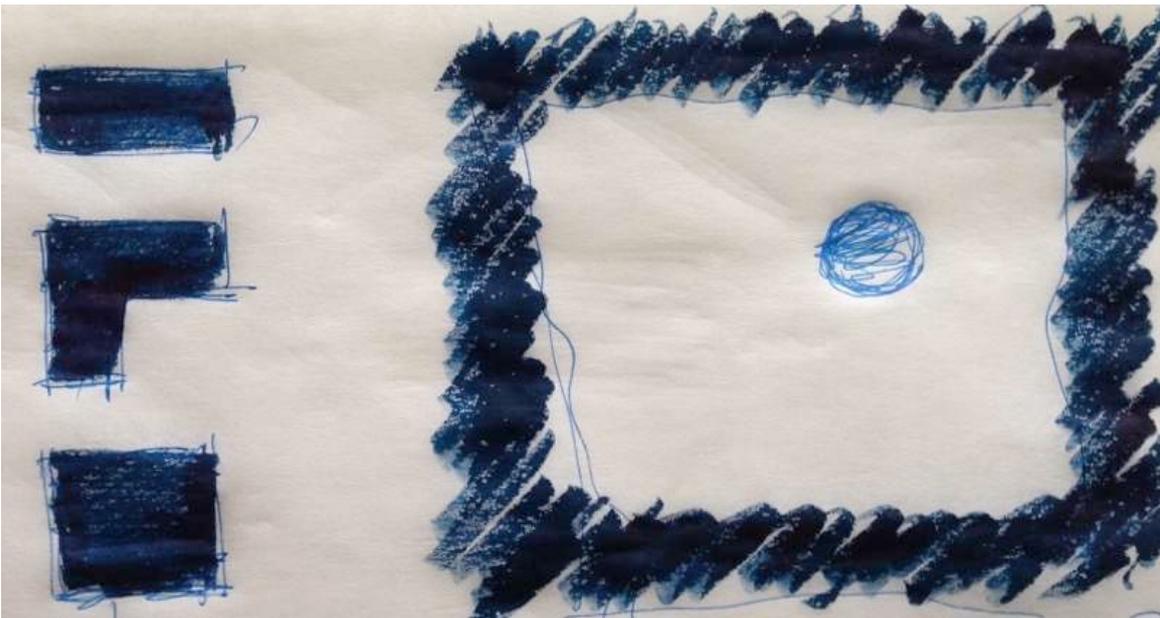


Figure 1

A flexible place. He fits an experimental sphere making it more intense due to the multiplicity of hypotheses of orientation of buildings in a given territory. - Author's drawing, Ricardo Senos

Vacchini (2009), reinforces the abstract character of the pyramid of Giza configuration, which in itself represents a solid oriented and isolated. For him, it is important to focus on the overall character, not only of the pyramid as an isolated element, but the group of pyramid as "(...) the truly extraordinary form of arranging the pyramids on the ground that unifies the implantation."

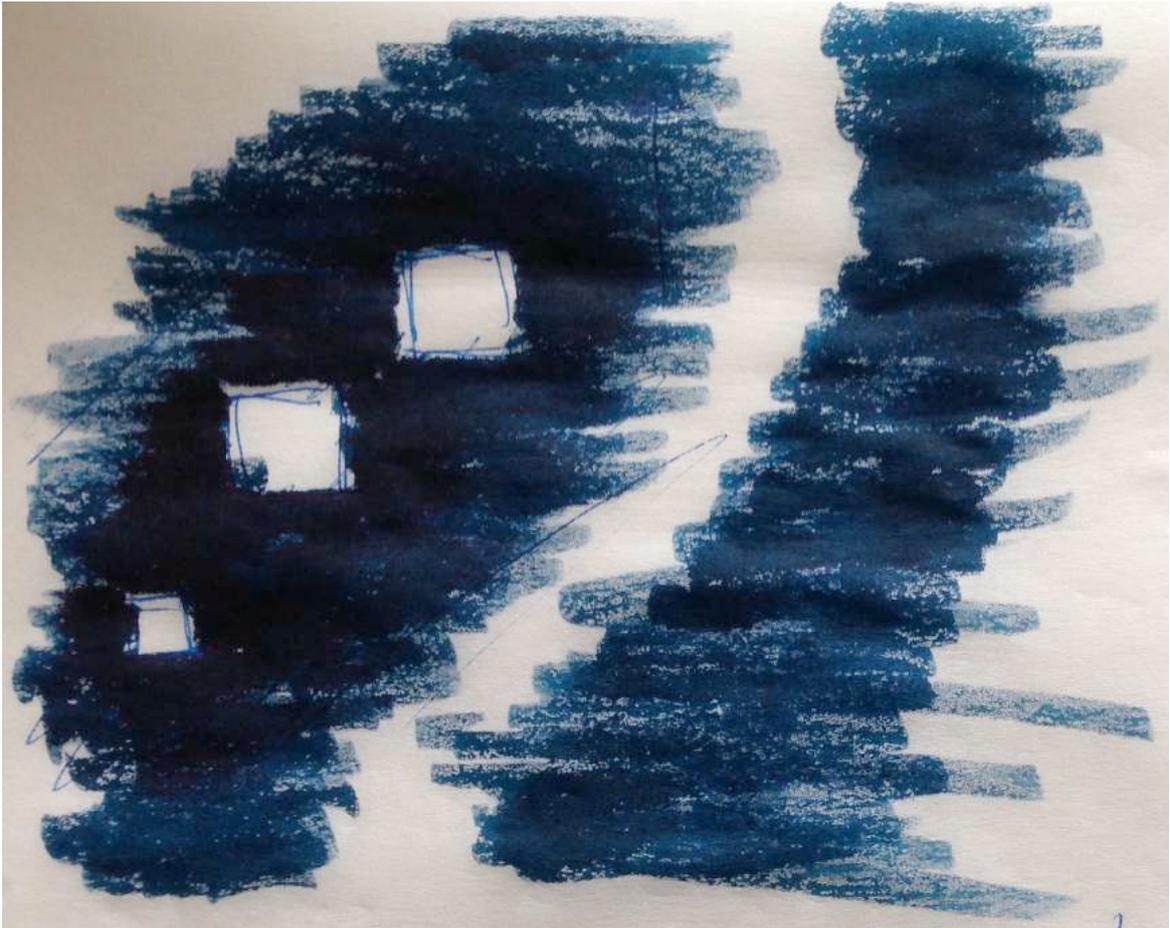


Figure 2

Orientation as a way of thinking. Layout of the Pyramids of Giza. - Author's drawing, Ricardo Senos

Vacchini defines the whole reason for the need to guide a set as consisting of elements that in themselves are organized in a simple intuitive and objective way, if we have as reference the river Nile. The impulse that determines the disposition of each object in the territory and stipulates its formal rhythms is therefore the differentiating element. It is in this sense that for Vacchini (2009), thinking architecture is nothing more than a logical gesture of thought.

3. POINT II (CASE STUDY)

Alvar Aalto (1952-54) – The Muuratsalo Experimental House

This project of Alvar Aalto expose, as mentioned, as a pre-essay for the paradigmatic cases- study selection of the first concept: THE HOUSE AND TERRITORY - FORM OF THOUGHT. However, in this paper this case study, Alvar Aalto's house, will also work as an short essay for the other themes (concepts) due to the fact that they are also present, although with much less relevance. In fact in the final thesis probably to each concept will correspond mainly one case-study, the most paradigmatic architect's own-house for each concept/theme.

The Alvar Aalto's own-summer house represents an example of extreme importance as its design

process turned into an experimental study for the author himself. The understanding of the place, the constructive aspects, the resistance and aesthetics of materials and ideological and formal factors, draw some of the main reasons that motivated the design options.

THE HOUSE AND TERRITORY - FORM OF THOUGHT

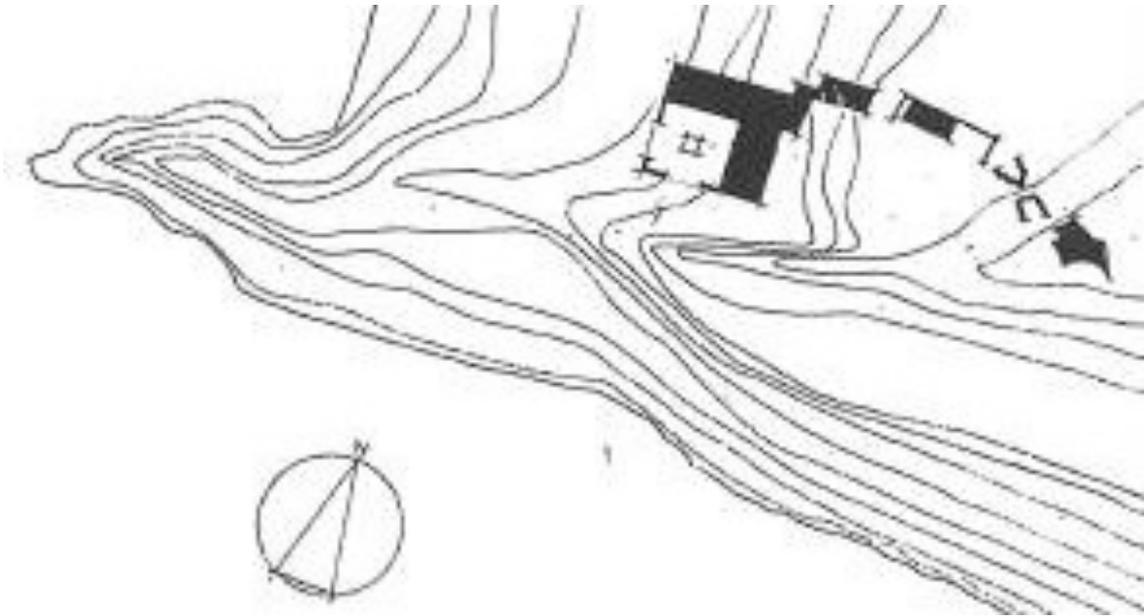


Figure 3

The House implantation on sloping terrain. It evidences the exploratory design sense, closer to nature as a form of inspiration. The graphic movement of the set commits itself to the topography by turning the house and its patio to the lake Päijänne.

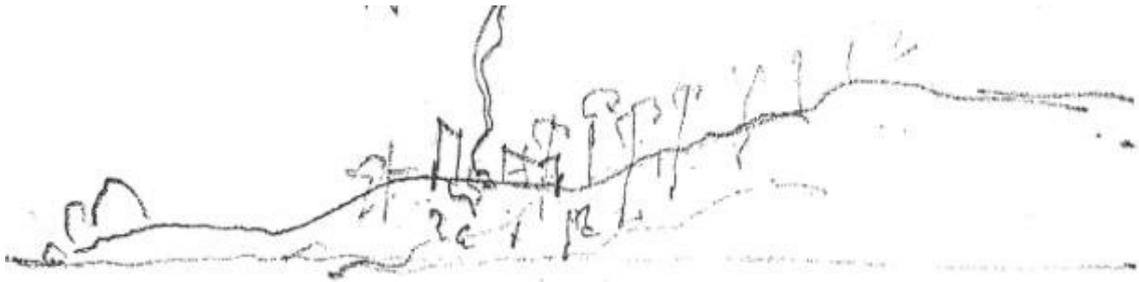


Figure 4

The grand opening of this patio organizes itself according to the views, framing the lake, analogically referring to Vacchini's thoughts (2009). The landscapes as an essential point for architecture, such as the relationship of the pyramids with the river, regardless the notion of a free territory with immense possibilities of orientation.

THE TYPOLOGICAL HOUSE - PROGRAM NUCLEARS



Figure 5

Aalto, does not fail to have a functionalist view of architecture when it articulates typological and volumetric sectors. According to Montaner (2013), it is a rationalism based on the reasoning and accumulation of experience, but it is essentially based on a design point of view of the concrete and of the detail, not so much as an ideological model. The volumes and the plan also show the spaces organization of programmatic nucleus distinguished by function.

THE HOME CONTEXT - REFERENCES OF THE PLACE



Figure 6

Affinity with the climate and surroundings. The House is receptiveness to light and climate with particular attention to the natural character of the environment. Architecture and spatial atmosphere is more experimental, less focused on the image.

THE HOUSE AND ABSTRACTION - PROJECT ANALYSIS MECHANISMS

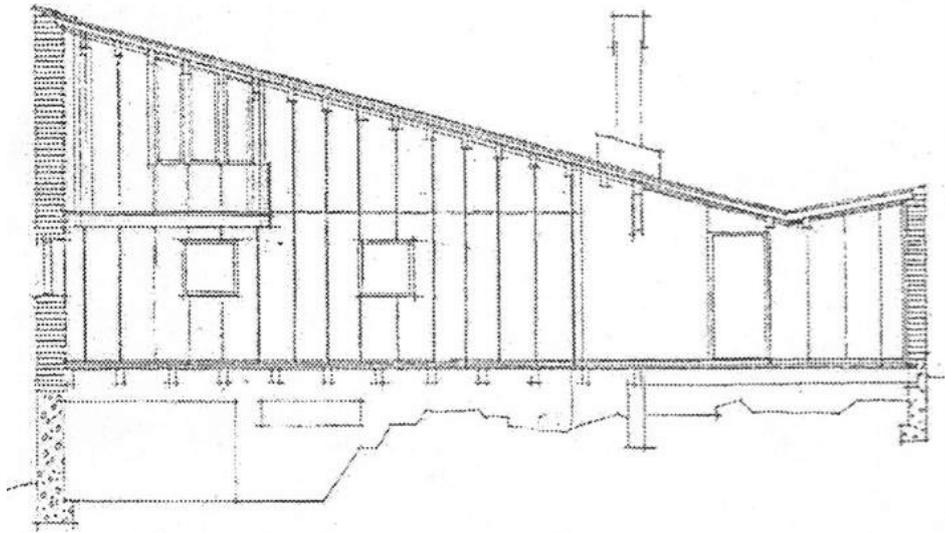


Figure 7

Implantation essay of the house on the sloping terrain. The constructive section evidences systematization of detail and rules criteria, although the structural character is based on local techniques such as the use of wood. Therefore, it is rational in its schematic sense and its rule systematization.

MATERIAL HOUSE - FORMAL PERENITY AND EXPRESSION



Figure 8

The local as an essayistic space for material character (textures, weathering, aesthetic and compositional testing), in its formal expression and durability with particular attention to the detail of experimental character. The several design compositions in the house reacting to the climate configuring the notion of a Place.

4. POINT III (Design of: the author's own house)

The design research is led through the development of the **author's own house** as an experimental opportunity between design thinking and its research methodologies, logical in the discovering of the reasons of design and analogical in the case-study comparison. This nevertheless require tools (tools of analysis) to identify, classify, analyze, expand and understand each discovery and that is why the theoretical concepts combined with the understanding of the reasons underneath the design and its drawings described in the case-study above are so important, although there is of course still some ambiguity in defining the whole methodology at this stage. Montaner (2013) emphasizes the importance of abstraction as a mechanism of projectual analysis, provided it has to do with life, as a vehicle for interpreting reality and improving it.

Thus, the use of diagrams (as graphic thoughts and analyses) may also in the thesis process make sense, as it may be able to incorporate the data of the experience. However always taking in account Frayling (1993), question: What is research in architecture? For the author, designing a building does not necessarily mean adding knowledge. For that, it is necessary to understand the process itself and to question the role of the produced object, after being designed and constructed, in a much more justified and comprehensive way.



Figure 9

The site for the design of the author's own house. A terrain as an idea of a flexible place with multiplicities of orientations for a house in its territory. It refers itself to the concept of: THE HOUSE AND TERRITORY - FORM OF THOUGHT. - Author photography, Ricardo Senos

5. EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

From the case studies analysis, we expect to investigate beyond the designs and images of the projects themselves, trying to understand also the circumstances of the design of the houses executed by their authors. An investigation that is necessary in order to find the reasons inherent in the social, mental or philosophical states and contexts that led architects to fix their ideas during the challenge of designing their own home.

Personal inputs: to improve and add awareness to the options that professional practice is making available. To promote greater comprehensiveness and flexibility in the architecture experience that must be inherent to the practice, by allowing calling into question criteria apparently acquired and sometimes unconsciously reproduced.

Discipline inputs: It is hoped that, through a careful and systematized methodology, it can be transformed into a concrete research, due to its experimental nature and understanding of the "design mechanisms of thinking" and trying to make it interesting to also peers. To centre the architecture discipline also as science, by the possibility of rational and plausible explanation of the facts in the various moments of the invention. Thus, it is hoped to add other consciences to the profession, approaching what is the research of the architect as a self-analysis, and what is his professional activity at the service of others.

By consider as an exception the elimination of the relation between client and architect, the deontological values of the profession are believed not diminish, but constituting themselves as the differentiating starting point in the study of what is architectural practice. In the author / researcher subconscious are present such questions: -"is the architect's own house really without a client?" Do architects live alone? What is the role of my own experience in this work? How can we frame the author's design change over time? How to learn from such "inconstancy"? What changes and what stays in the process, and why? How to choose, adequate or deny the analysis of the case-studies?

The jury's criticism were essential and very constructive due to the have pointed out two facts:

Firstly that the "study of the "architects own house" can certainly be fruitful to broaden the understanding of the "mechanisms of thinking" but needing also necessary tools to identify, sort, analyse, expand upon and understand the findings.

Secondly by advising that although the architect / author can represent "the more informed user" being "(the architect himself)" it is also to also be re-evaluated if this is as a way of gaining understanding of oneself or also of our discipline educational constraints or sensibilities. In this sense a finding might also be what kind of self-discipline "mechanisms of thinking" to handle with care, meaning with a critical consciousness.

Therefore, the architect's own-house is seen as a problem of architecture itself, where the process itself promotes the reflection of the invention process. It seems to us in this way the final results will not be confined only to the final result of the architect's own-house design, but rather the problematic from the themes introduced and raised by the practice itself during the design of his house.

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