

FRIDAY, APRIL 12
SESSION 3
11:15 - 12:15

ROOM B - SALÓN DE GRADOS

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Caracas, Departure City.
Practices of cares in the
aftermath of emigration and
collapse

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Introduction

For the last two decades, Venezuela has been immersed in a conflict marked by economic instability, political turmoil, social upheaval, and breakdown of infrastructure and services. The accelerated decline of living conditions since 2014 has triggered an unprecedented migratory crisis that cuts across the entire social spectrum. Nearly eight million people, about 26 percent of the population, have left the country.¹

Within Venezuelan cities, migration has left behind a vast material legacy accumulated during decades of economic growth and upward social mobility, when an oil-backed economy underpinned rapid urban expansion and a thriving middle class. This material accumulation includes everything from houses and apartments to cars, books, furniture, artwork, pets, and plants. However, after emigration, these physical remnants are not abandoned or left to ruin. Instead, they are at the center of **caretaking practices** that revolve around preserving, salvaging, or transforming migrants' belongings and domestic spaces. Caretaking sits at the intersection of emigration and collapse, supported on the one hand by transnational networks, migrants' evolving needs, and the possibility of return, and on the other hand relying on local networks of informal trade, cooperation and solidarity that help face daily challenges. Through caretaking, ordinary actions like maintaining or repairing left-behind spaces transcend their practical dimension, prompting a critical exploration of what is being preserved, whether the 'things' themselves or a "larger" underlying order.²

Research framework

The research argues that Caracas has entered a post-collapse phase. This phase is essentially an aftermath, a state *beyond* crisis where mutually exclusive categories such as progress / decline, legal / illegal, formal / informal, ethical / unethical, are irrelevant as conceptual or operative frameworks. Drawing on Janet Roitman's notion of "Anti-Crisis"³ and Steven J. Jackson's proposition of taking breakdown and collapse as a starting points,⁴ the research examines the figure of the caretaker from a socio-spatial perspective. The research contends that caretakers' entanglement with collapse complicates our understanding of care as both ethics and practice, and questions collapse narratives and their associated imaginary of ruin and decay.

Methodology: a routine of overexposure.

The research employs an evolving and experimental fieldwork methodology, combining documentation techniques spanning architecture and ethnography. It introduces the concept of a **routine of overexposure**, where 'data saturation' -regarded in qualitative research as the point where the fieldwork should stop- is instead taken as a point of departure. In Caracas, the systematic and repetitive engagement with the residues of departure gradually uncovered the vastness and diversity of the material accumulation produced by the emigration and demise of the city's middle class. It also exposed its ambiguous relationship with the city, ubiquitous but hidden from view. As a routine of overexposure, the fieldwork operated as a form of friction, a rubbing-against-reality that gradually eroded the layer of protection that conceals material residues and shields practices, opening doors into private worlds and personal stories.

Finally, the fieldwork itself produced its own form of accumulation, a collection of distinct yet individually incomplete **episodes** that varied in duration, intensity, and relation. Episodes could be fleeting images caught on camera from the driver's seat or anecdotes relayed by others; they could extend over several visits to a specific place, they could be concatenated, recurrent, or contained within other episodes. Episodes are fragmentary in nature, like pieces or slices a reality containing just enough (spatial, material) information so that they may be used to assemble a larger story. In their (re)assembly, the field journal becomes a "recursive" tool that not only records chronological entries but also juxtaposes and opens them to other readings.⁵

Conference contribution

The research is inscribed within a PhD project in its intermediate stage. The presentation at CA²RE: Experimentation will focus on methodological aspects of the research and the methodology's transformative potential. The presentation aims to elucidate how a 'routine of overexposure' serves as more than just a descriptive tool and becomes an instrument for actively producing a specific reality.

Episodes from two successive fieldtrips will be presented as narratives weaving together architectural, photographic, and written elements. The episodic nature of the fieldwork, where distinct moments are captured and presented as fragments, offers a unique narrative structure. This

approach, far from constructing a linear story, allows the audience to engage with the material in a way that mirrors the lived experience of the researcher.

By presenting episodes that are individually incomplete yet collectively comprehensive, the presentation will open the possibility of multiple readings, demonstrating how experimentation can lead to insights into the complexities of emigration, collapse, and caretaking practices. This interdisciplinary approach exemplifies the potential of experimentation to reshape conventional narratives and offer a fresh perspective on challenging socio-spatial phenomena, underscoring its role in shaping perspectives and generating knowledge.

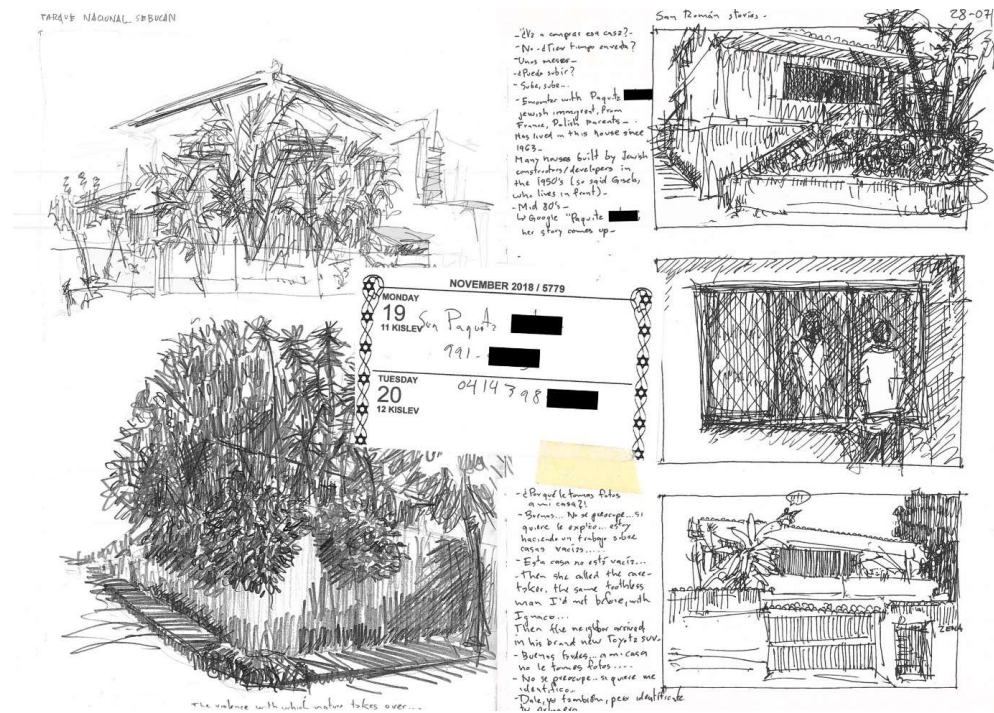


Fig.1. Excerpt from field journal. Facades of vacant houses in gated community and encounter with residents. July 2023

Reflection. Experimentation in the research project.

Dealing with an evolving and multi-faceted problem taking place in a volatile and uncertain context entails a singular research challenge, one in which the work can easily, and perhaps inadvertently, slip back towards a space from which control can be exerted. What if instead of reducing, simplifying, codifying, one acknowledges and embraces the messiness and the elusiveness of the problem? What are the methodological and representation tools that we have, as architect-researchers, to contend with these conditions?

With these questions in mind, experimentation requires not only speculation, reflection, evaluation, and interface, but also and firstly, renunciation of control and an openness to chance. In other words, experimentation is about disposition before anything else.

The conference opens up a diverse interpretation of experimentation. It invites participants to demonstrate its validity as a design-driven methodology beyond mere validation and as a method of knowledge creation. In my relationship between city and fieldwork, the city became field through the work, that is, a specific and systematic mode of engagement with one's surroundings created the conditions for the object of study to emerge and be seen under a specific light. The methodology evolved out of a specific relationship with the city, and the city became a dynamic testing ground for it. Out of this interchange, a new reality can emerge and be shared.

References:

- ¹ Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants. "Home." R4V, 2023. <https://www.r4v.info/>.
- ² Graham, Stephen, and Nigel Thrift. "Out of Order: Understanding Repair and Maintenance." *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 3 (May 2007): 1-25.
- ³ Roitman, Janet. *Anti-Crisis*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- ⁴ Jackson, Steven. "Rethinking Repair." In *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, edited by Gillespie Tarleton, Pablo Boczkowski, and Kirsten Foot, MIT Press., 221-39. Cambridge, 2014.
- ⁵ Taussig, Michael. *I Swear I Saw This. Drawings in Fieldwork Notebooks, Namely My Own*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.