History is not just stories: a proposal for an operative use of popular architectural heritage.

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The current investigation tries to present Architectural Heritage as a source for today's practice in contemporary housing architecture. It's based on the analysis of popular architecture in the region of Alcobaça, Portugal, trough existing housing models, but also across the archives of the City Hall of Alcobaça, and previous popular housing investigations. According to these sources it was defined for the gathered information a timeline around the 1960's in order to produce a Typological Study on formal and organizational schemes of the Popular dwelling architecture in the region.

A Type is therefore set according to its formal and spacial aspects, defining two kinds of approaches in the design of contemporary dwellings: Architectural Heritage as a shape, where architectural forms produce a feeling of belonging, and Architectural Heritage as a scheme, where ancient housing solutions respond to present needs.

1 INTRODUCTION

The search for references in architecture should not be seen as an obligation. Regarding Heritage, its usefulness is not limited to historical contexts, where the new buildings look for their immediate surroundings to achieve the desired anonymity required for its physical integration. In this context, History is sometimes considered as a necessary evil needed for legal and social requirements. So, when used, Architectural Heritage is limited to a vague aesthetical appreciation, in order to not compromise the contemporary "st'architecture" search for a statement.

We must try to validate our architectural heritage as a source of knowledge where answers can be found in order to solve a range of current practical problems, not only aesthetically. Heritage isn't a shape, a date or even an image. It consists in a path over a wide time range where different solutions were used, tested, reinvented, reused and even abandoned if necessary. To interpret History is to use an encyclopedia filled with valid solutions, directly or indirectly.

1.1 A change of paradigm

In the process of designing architecture we witness a change of attitude when Heritage, as a source, is not a resource to be studied only when History is referred, but also in different circumstances where answers are required. In other words, History is not presented as a category with well-defined closed borders inside of which problems are formulated and solved. Heritage is also a source to be consulted when issues related to contemporary dwellings arouse.

2 RULE/EXCEPTION

Identifying a city, for example, cannot be done through its exceptional elements, like a church, a fire station or the city hall, but by a wider set of values that allows us to codify the elements of the urban space in two opposite meanings: the "rule" and the "exception".

The identification of a "whole" is done by a succession of "rules" that allow us to combine a set of elements under the same name. The "city" is thus an ensemble where "something" is often repeated. Housing, by its use, shape and image, can be assumed as the "rule" that is constant. Public spaces (objects or voids), used for leisure, contemplation or work, are the elements of "exception" on the "traditional city". As such, the use of different architectural languages agrees with the functional differences carried out by various programs.

The same logic can be applied in rural settings, where the "rule" is assumed, in a landscape more sparse, through Popular residential architecture (associated with other utilitarian buildings, supporting the population's economic activities), and where the "exception", even more diverse, states the existence of a "rule".

In both settlements we usually associate "rule" to a less noble architecture, rarely associated to an architect, dominated perhaps only by practical purposes, but always supporting the basic activity of urban and rural life: to dwell. As such it is undeniable that it's also our "Heritage".

3 LONG TERM MEMORY/SHORT TERM MEMORY

"Past is commonly considered as 'what it was', and, probably, 'what won't be again'. It's static, with no possibilities of change, where events are assumed as facts and not as possibilities".

This would be an ideal definition, in fact as idealistic as impossible. Past would only be static if we had an absolute knowledge of precedent events, but the truth is, in most cases, that we only know the Past and our Heritage trough fragments that we have to make sense of trough its analysis, decomposition and hypothesis confirmed or refused as we gather more fragments.

Nevertheless, Past is more static as it approaches the present time, because it stays within the spectrum of the observer's memory, but also because, as time progresses, a greater effort is made in the protection of our memory.

This is way we must distinguish between two types of historical legacy: Past as a part of our Short Term Memory, or Past as part of our Long Term Memory, a fragmented memory because distant from our present time. In Architecture the major difference between them lies within the image we have of the past, were in the Short Term Memory we still have physically present Models, while as times passes, Models become scarce making our Long Term Memory blurred.

3.1 Inexistent past/fake memories

Figure 1. Hostel of Santa Maria do Bouro (1989-1997), Eduardo Souto Moura

Eduardo Souto Moura, in the Hostel of Santa Maria do Bouro (1989-1997) built over an old and ruined convent, made use of a memory that is still "ours", precisely the one of a ruin. The building in its proper shape no longer belonged to our mind or even to the idea that we carry of its image: excavations made around the ruin revealed blood-red fragments of stucco and 1.20m green glazed tiles, very different from the pale walls and red roofs that, in Portugal, we are used to associate to our architectural heritage. So, the architect had three hypotheses: the Long Term Memory, strange to our reality; an Imaginary Memory, faked to correspond to our expectations; or the Short Term Memory, used in this case to create a new usable "ruin" from the old one, an attitude that has nothing in common with a restoration.

It's undeniable that the landscape, rural or urban, is largely defined by the Rule and not the Exception (like a Convent or a Hostel). And the Rule, in a rural context, does not consist in an exceptional use/program (like a church) or in "signature" architecture (again, like most religious buildings). The Rule is, by definition, the most common thing that we can observe: the landscape. More common and perhaps more trivial than the human need of religiosity or culture: the simple need of a shelter. Therefore the House is what defines our landscape, also the more common house from the more common architecture: the Popular one.

Popular architecture belongs mainly to our Short Term Memory, because, as every manifestation of popular culture, it's performed by an anonymous author, based on orally transmitted communal knowledge. The only record that we have of Popular Architecture, housing included, is in most cases the Model, or the actual building. It is more volatile than the Exceptional or Erudite Building, because it's built with less durable materials, but also because people think less of it, precisely because it's more common and simpler in appearance. With the disappearance of the Model, the Type also gets lost, as the memory that we have of it.

Popular Housing can't be considered useless, as a memory, just because it dilutes itself in the landscape. Any project born of a desire of integration searches the Type that identifies its surroundings, and when conceiving a new house we must keep in mind the ones that define it.

4PRIOR STUDIES

Decades ago, aware of the volatility of Popular Architecture, a whole generation of architects offered to record for posterity its Models, preventing our memory from the oblivion that would occur with their disappearance. The book "Arquitectura Popular em Portugal" ("Popular Architecture in Portugal"[1]) was conceived in the aftermath of the Modern Movement, born under the intention of proving to the Portuguese fascist regime that popular architecture was not all the same in Portugal, but as diversified as its climate, topography, culture and materials.

The collected items in the book, at the time of its completion (the 1960's), corresponded to the Short Term Memory of those in charge of the investigation: the physically existing models in that date that corresponded to their idea of Past. But, at the same time the 1960's ancient models were being collected, other contemporary Popular Architecture Models was being built. Their Architectural Type was another, already replacing the one collected in "Arquitectura Popular em Portugal", making more urgent its need for documentation. The fact is that the Type and its Models, "new" 50 years ago, are nowadays part of the past and our Short Term Memory. So, the preceding Type, then close in time and shape, would be entirely forgotten if not collected and documented as part of our Long Term Memory.

This is even more relevant if we remember, as it was predicted by the authors of "Arquitectura Popular em Portugal", that most of its Models (and their Types) are at the moment missing, which is also true in the region where the present investigation is based.

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[1]AAVV, 2004 (reprint), *"Arquitectura Popular em Portugal"*, Lisboa, Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos.

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Figure 2. Models of the Type present in "Arquitectura Popular em Portugal"

4.1 *Pre-1960's type*

The ancient Type was characterized by a small porch at the entrance, , with a small entrance between two lower walls, surrounded by the house. This would be its most striking feature, being the rest of the house a cluster of volumes with no apparent order, added individually according to the dweller needs and possibilities. Therefore, the resulting shape was not essential for the classification of the Type in question.

In present days this house is practically nonexistent, and its memory will only survive in the records done in the meantime. This does not mean the disappearance of Popular Architecture since, as was said, a Type generally replaces another.

5 PAST/ PRESENT

5.1 *Another sources*

The first way to get in contact to more recent Models is watching the landscape. Our curiosity is aroused by those apparent Types (since we still have no ground/information to define one) who emerge from the scenery. Here we watch history repeating: our present Rule is somehow ignored since it is well known, constantly in our background and even inhabited by "us". We favor the Exception that was our previous Rule: our current Short Term Memory Models, absent in "Arquitectura Popular em Portugal", because, for their authors, they were the Models of their Present. As before, their recollection was possible through a camera and a measuring tape.
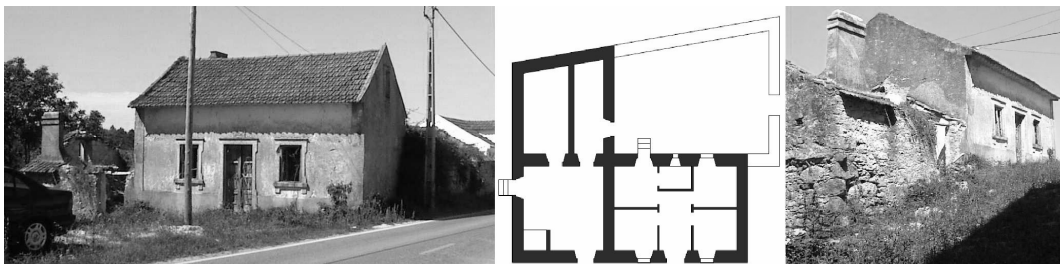

Figure 3. Model from the 1960's collected by the author "in loco" in 2000
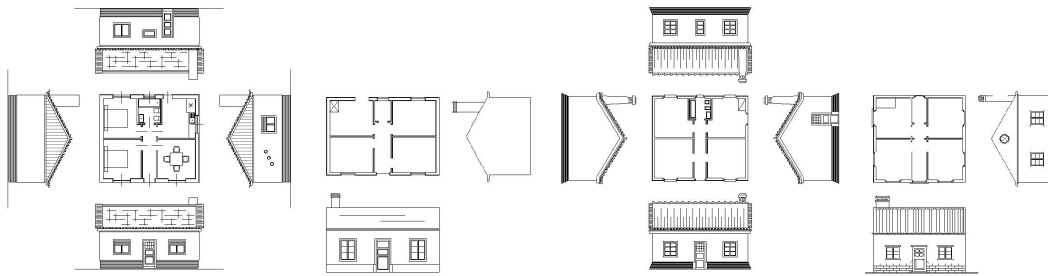
Figure 4. Models from 1961 collected from the archives of the City Hall of Alcobaça in 2005

Another way to get to know these Models was to use the existing records of the time in question (the 1960's). The City Hall of Alcobaça revealed itself as an essential source, since all buildings already needed a license to be built, with an application accompanied by drawings of the house. By coincidence, the oldest examples relate to the same period: the 1960's.

The information requested at that time was very different from now, where the drawings, all from an unidentified authors, were limited to plans and elevations of the house. No reference whatsoever was made to the building site, which we can observe "in loco" (only in the still existing Models), like the relations among house, roads, the site contours and annexes, very important to consider, since the main house worked has an initial module meant to be added.

However it was enough to confirm that the 1960's Present time was very different from its Past, being their Types complete opposites.

5.2 *Our present past*

The Popular House gained notoriety by adding some urban influences like a more regular shape of the building, symmetrical façade, ornate stonework, etc. Inside it was added regularity in the different spaces, with a symmetrical plan where there is no disparity in shape or size among areas. In fact only the kitchen can be identified trough the presence of a chimney.

And this is the house that presently builds the rural landscape of Alcobaça, and that consists in "our present Past". Although the application processes only mention one single volume, this house belongs to a structure that involves additional buildings, more organic and simpler in their materials and building process, grouped around a patio with a an utilitarian function. Also important, maybe this Type is no longer restricted to a small defined region, but spread over a wider space, as we can conclude by looking at a broader scope.

This is our "new Past" because it defines our landscape but also because it differs from the Popular Architecture that is produced presently. In Portugal, Popular Architecture still exists since architecture, by law, is not an exclusive of architects, but also from other technicians like engineers, who lack the necessary training to create architecture projects. And these are the circumstances that will define our "future Past" in times to come.

We can ask ourselves: formerly the author of Popular Architecture was also "anonymous", and models were also designed by people without "training". But, as a counter-argument, we can defended that the social situation as mostly changed. With three Types of rural housing identified (the first present in "Arquitectura Popular em Portugal", the second licensed in the 1960's, and the third being currently built) we can also identify three specific moments in Popular Culture. For the first Type we can still refer a Vernacular Architecture, as its influences are almost exclusively local, without any outer references: a shape defined by function and local materials and techniques.

In the 1960's we can identify several references that don't belong to a specific site, much less the place where the house stands. The Erudite leaves some marks, in regularity and ornament, in order to create an allusion of a lifestyle that probably had no place in its context.

Figure 5. Present day Models, collected by the author in 2000

5.3 *Our future past*

So, where can we fit today's Popular Architecture? How is it different from the previous examples? We are presently living in a time where a Symbol is more worthy than a Fact. The released image, real or imagined, dominates current attentions and determines choices, and in Architecture this is no different, since the House is the main vehicle of an alleged image.

Today's Popular House is an agglomerate of decorative signs juxtaposed over an architectural model otherwise trivial, which brings together eaves, porches, masonry, shutters, colors and other elements that never existed in local architecture from Alcobaça, even from Portugal. All these elements are put together according to the intention of creating an "old style Portuguese house", a designation that is doubly wrong.

In one hand, we can't consider Portuguese Architecture like a succession of similar models, repeated endlessly to the brink of political boundaries, since each region, unique in its climate and resources, always determines specificity in its architecture. On the other hand it is also wrong to create an idealized past based on the sum of decorative excesses over harmless Models, merely to correspond to one's expectations, like in the "Imaginary Past" solution mentioned above.

The 1960's rural Portugal's precarious living was reflected in their modest homes, in size and aspect, now "forgotten" in benefit of a well succeeded Past that's not ours or anyone else's, but built upon idealized references from more rich and noble environments.

This is also the genesis of the Portuguese Emigrant House, in which is tried to create an alternative reality through references to a substitute background (mainly France), where there was no poverty as the one left behind in Portugal.

Nevertheless, if the Emigrant's house shares with the today's popular house the will to become part of an Alternative History and an Imaginary Past, it remains an Exception in the landscape, and doesn't overlap the contemporary Popular House as a Rule.

Nowadays, with most of the recent Popular Buildings resorting to an "imaginary historical model", we can assume that in a not too distant future our landscape will be composed of those models made of false memories and delirious imagination.

At that point that house will be recognized as "typical", and even worse, it will be assumed that the model, as presented, was based in a real existing house, the "former Portuguese house". Given the volatility of Popular Architecture, can we trust the surviving models to testify its "real" existence? And even our Short Term Memory, based on those existing Models, can it be trusted to reconstruct a past that left no physical marks?

In the 1960's the survey done in "Arquitectura Popular em Portugal" was justified given the eminence of the physical disappearance of the collected models, which would undoubtedly lead to the disappearance of the Memory of the pre-1960's Popular House Type. Today, thanks to that work, memory is the only thing that remains from those homes, destroyed by time, neglect, but also inadequacy to modern living standards.

There is a place for a new survey, nowadays, since the 1960's Popular House is starting to erode, but mainly because the Type that will replace it consists in an imaginary fantasy that will materialize in our "new past".

6MODEL/TYPE

So far this Typological Study has been done without any specific purpose than knowledge itself. Even if part of a wider investigation (a Bachelor and a Master thesis) the Model survey and corresponding Type definition was linked to mere curiosity (in fact, the driving force behind all knowledge).

This might be considered somehow controversial, considering the most recent studies on the subject. Fernandes (1999) defends that "a Type, in architecture, is the conceptual framework, the matrix behind spatial organization that is present, even with different formal solutions, in a set of cases selected for a specific purpose"[2].

In the present study we can observe the absence of a specific purpose (beyond knowledge), while extending the meaning of Type to cases (Models) grouped under the same shape. Formal aspects are also capable of organizing outdoor spaces, and its study might be themed under "formal integration phenomena in the surroundings", without involving the "matrix of spacial organization" of the Model. This definition is especially important if the typological study is unbiased with a precise purpose and intended as source for future applications.

7CONTEMPORARY DWELLING ISSUES

Although we are still living in the Modern Movement aftermath, contemporary architecture has been questioning the dogmas on which modernism was based. Today's housing, whether in the city or in a more rarefied urban environment, has evolved slowly in its internal spacial organization, mainly because there is a preconception of a typified inhabitant family. Nowadays the family is being considered as part of a wider category, the Domestic Household, which still considers people united by family ties, but ads other actors.

Today we can observe that is common for friends, or even strangers, to share the same flat as a way to meet the expenses of the apartment, or just to have some company, in the absence of the family, alongside with the desire of independence from them. Afonso[3] (2004) prefers to refer a nuclear, extended or composed Domestic Household, instead of designating a family. In practice, this 'new' type of use needs different domestic spaces from those proposed to the nuclear family (couple plus two children), since there are new requirements of privacy: a bedroom is a more individualized space, since the intimacy among household members is sometimes limited to meals. Even among family members, computers, stereos and televisions on each room have turned outdated the hierarchy between social and private areas in the common house. It's therefore urgent to create new housing models in order to respond to new types of use.

New proposals have made more versatile the different rooms of a house, with expansion or interconnecting possibilities or even attempts to make space more 'anonymous', without assigning spaces with a specific function. The pre-Modern house offered already some of these solutions, shaped like an 'enfilade' of rooms with no specific function attached (later connected by a corridor). But we can also find even more suited Types, in rural housing, as in the Type described above.

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[2] Fernandes, Francisco Barata. 1999. *"Transformação e Permanência na Habitação Portuense: as formas da casa na forma da cidade"*. Porto. FAUP Publicações

[3] Afonso, Ana Isabel. 2004. "*Grupo Doméstico e Mudança Social: abordagens quantitativas e qualitativas"*. Centro de Estu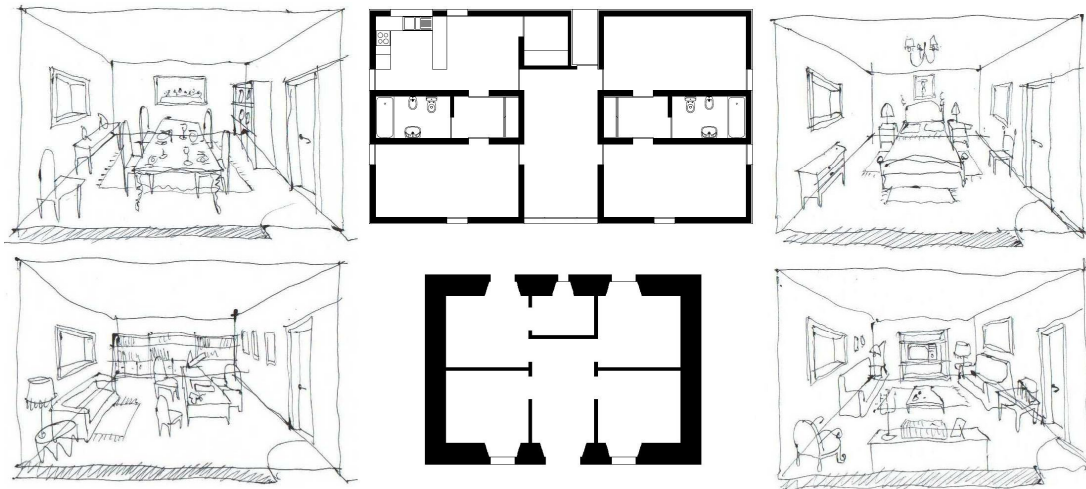dos de Antropologia Social. ISCTE. Viewed 10.2008. <http://ceas.iscte.pt/etnografica/docs/vol_04/N1/Vol_iv_N1_153-182.pdf>.

Figure 6. Proposed Model, using as a scheme the rural house from the 1960's, 2003

7.1 *Heritage as a scheme*

In this concept we make a reference to the *"matrix of spacial organization"* referred by Fernandes. From the observed 1960's Rural Type it was possible to conceive a contemporary housing proposal that meets the Domestic Household's different needs.

Even if the proportions of the new scheme don't match the original ones (for obvious area needs), the double symmetry of the floor plan creates a series of identical spaces than can absorb a large number of activities, made easy by the multiple entrances connecting the different rooms. Intentionally the external appearance of the house is not based in the same Rural Type in order to make more obvious its real influence. The intention was never to produce a gratuitous revival, but to answer a question formulated in the context of contemporary dwelling where the previous typological study gave the solution: the ambiguity of areas and spaces.

7.2 *Heritage as a scheme and a shape*

Aside from the previous referred Domestic Household groups, there is still a type of occupation that can't be inserted in this category: the single dweller. A common phenomenon in the city, where the new adult pursues privacy rather than a new family. The variety of typologies offered by apartments makes easier to find the right one for the single dweller, but the single house suffers from the preconceived idea of a static object for a predetermined nuclear family. Wanting to live alone and wanting a house it's the challenge, and the answer can once more be found in the Rural House.

Figure 7. Proposed Model, using as an example the evolutionary rural house from the 1960's, 2003
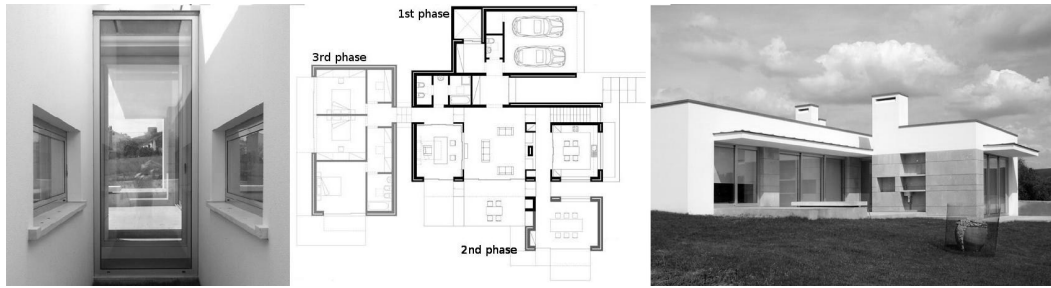
Figure 8. House in 'Cruz de Oliveira', Alcobaça, a three-phased evolutionary house, 2005

The *"spatial matrix"* used is now another, and concerns the evolving nature of the rural house, born as a parallelepiped volume (with the above mentioned floor plan) to which were attached more irregular volumes according to the dweller's needs. The adopted scheme is now the idea of an organic growth of the house (a possibility that the flat can't offer) where the distinct volumes (with different construction methods) of the popular house are used as a symbol of its phased growth.

The proposal present in Figure 8 was used to respond to a precise commission from a single man who wanted a house. The above evolutionary house was therefore suggested, proposing in a first phase the fundamental elements of 'life support': kitchen, living room, bedroom and toilet. The second phase was a dining room (already built) and finally the third were extra bedrooms for a hypothetical family. Although there were no formal references to the traditional house (even if interpreted in a contemporary way, as in Figure 7, a prototype), all the three phases have their own volumes to highlight the evolutionary house concept.

7.3 *Heritage as a shape*

When talking about shape we are referring to a practical and even emotional factor that searches their solutions in existing references. According to the built and natural surroundings there are questions of scale, proportion and shape that are far from being solved though decorative items like eaves, columns or colored stripes.

If we conceive, in architecture, the integration of the new in the old as succession of scales, where the volume connects with the past, and detail assumes the contemporaneity of the object, then we must refer in our new proposals the growth process of the Popular House.

In the presented examples its modular conception is certainly a reference, but is primarily a mean of designing outdoor spaces endowed with privacy: the former initial parallelepiped module plays the role as a limit between public and private, and the remaining volumes involve organically the outside intimate space. Also the designing of the house as single volume with all the desired area would result in an out scale object, strange to its surroundings.

Figure 9. House in 'Figueiral', 2004, and house in 'Taveiro, 2007, both near Alcobaça,

8 CONCLUSION

The use of Architectural Heritage as a decorative element, or a mere formal excuse for assimilation and respect for Historical Contexts, is consequently denied. History isn't epidermal. The use of Heritage/History doesn't have to be obvious, because, as a source, it can influence form, space, even the creative designing process or the appropriation of space. Getting to know our Architectural Heritage is therefore a way to produce real solutions for real problems that, by its quality, might become our future Heritage.

A Typological Study can thus have mere encyclopedic assumptions, as a structure of recollecting and organizing knowledge, besides pursuing a very specific purpose, like a pre-established particular question. In this paper the debate – contemporary domestic life – is conducted in a different context of Architectural Housing History, but it's in its background that we can find solutions for the contemporary dweller that does not have a typical and automated life.

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10 FIGURE REFERENCES

Figure 1: PhotoS by G. Schmoll, 2008, viewed 10.2009, used with the author's consent <http://www.flickr.com/photos/gschmoll/2195934633/in/photostream/>

Figures 2 – 9: author's architectural projects, drawings and pictures