

MECHE'S HOUSE OR "BEING IN THE WORLD": A POST-DISASTER COMMUNITY BUILDING EXPERIENCE

FERNANDO HINOJOSA¹, ENRIQUE VILLACIS¹, MARIA LORENA RODRIGUEZ², and
CYNTHIA AYARZA²

¹*School of Architecture, Design and Arts, Pontifical Catholic University, Quito, Ecuador*

²*Ensusitio Architecture, Quito, Ecuador*

On April 16, 2016, Ecuador had suffered a 7.8 earthquake. The experience designing and building of Meche's house, a post-disaster alternative building process, is analyzed in this paper applying Martin Heidegger's concepts of Dwelling, Being in the World and Being There. These allow better understanding to the idea of housing in the community where the object is built, to visualize its most symbolic space, also it enables to see how the users of the built dwelling make it their own, the construction, form and materials despite that in the beginning of the construction process they did not accept them. This article tries to explain two questions: The house of Meche reflects its habitat: Where is it built? And how Meche, who is the homeowner, and the participants make the house and experience their own, in order to replicate the appropriate construction and resilience.

Keywords: Architecture, Culture, Heidegger, Technic.

1 BUILDING IN COMMUNITY

In this article, the study approaches the experience towards what and how the object is produced. The study does not explain the construction but evaluate how the human being turns toward an authentic dwelling. The area is very rich and generates solid spatial experiences, such as the *casa montubia* (rural house on hillsides in the coastal area). These are pictured in the ceramic objects made by the ancestors and the form repeated in various spatial symbols and concepts such as the vertical relationship between heaven and earth. Duality in the dwelling space, with clearly defined active and passive keep clearly defined spaces in the local houses and seen in the built architectural object.

2 METHODOLOGY

To analyze the experience of the process of Meche's house we will use Heidegger's concept "being-in-the-world" (Heidegger 1996). The proposed architectural object, the experience of construction with and by the community, the social environment of the house and the culture it reflects are very specific conditions. These will be analyzed objectively both for the user of the house and the community of the town 10th of August. Using Heidegger's concepts and philosophy of living, allowing the study to visualize the experience from the "being", which is Heidegger's philosophy. The House and the culture it reflects are very specific conditions that

enhance in an objective manner both the users of the House and the community of the town of 10th of August.

Heidegger's philosophy, his concepts, and his philosophical vision allow the study to analyze and interpret the experience of the construction of Meche's house in through the culture of the place, its technology, space configuration and materials used.

For Heidegger, the house is a "poetic dwelling", this concept permits approaching the art of building and landscape that is space, as a generator of human life, and as a work of art. The building makes "something", which is "truth", as well as a work of art, "it preserves the truth" (Heidegger 1994a).

When talking about "dwelling", Heidegger says, "it seems that we dwell, only by means of building. The aim of the act of building is to inhabit" (Heidegger 2015), this encourages direct observation of the built environment by the human being, and in turn results in better ways to understand and solve current architectural production. When Heidegger states that "Building is not the only way to inhabit, for a building is in itself already inhabiting" (Heidegger 2015) referring directly to the art of building, and Meche's House is that, construction by and for the user.

Heidegger's philosophy, his concept, and his vision indicate a way to analyze and interpret the experience of constructing Meche's House taking into consideration the local culture and the place and so incorporate the concept of "to be in the world".

3 HOW DOES MECHE'S HOUSE REFLECT THE ENVIRONMENT WHERE IT IS BUILT?

The house is located, replacing a space of sticks with plastic, where Meche had lived. As an earthquake victim, she had expected to get government assistance for a "normal" house for the area: concrete block, cement, iron rods, among other materials, all alien to the historical culture of the area. See Figure 1. Meche was reluctant to accept a house built with bamboo, perhaps the material was associated with the poor. There was disagreement due to the materials used due to shame of using traditional materials. She fought and got angry because she was ashamed to use traditional materials. However, after living in the house, the way of living was different, and a client specific environment developed. Meche created a space of her own a space for being her own being and her presence, which generates a space for being. "Because man becomes free just to the extent that he belongs to the region of fate and in this way becomes one who listens, but not a submissive and obedient listener." (Heidegger 1994b)



Figure 1. Left: Meche's House. Right: "typical" houses. Town of August 10. Access to Pedro Carbo.

The house articulates and generates unity composed of family life, the social environment as well as the natural and built environment. The way of life and customs strengthen the world of family and people who can meet and fulfill themselves there.

Several links can be observed between the house and the human being: it activates several connections that exist between the house and ancestral memory. The ancestral memory is incorporated in the present thus reserving, reviving, what was forgotten and revert a process of loss and oblivion. The house is the truth, and the logic and is neither consumerism nor a copy. This house displays the raw materials increasing their natural value, see figure 2, it opens up a world and generates a history "the totality of the entity that changes "in time", it is understood that unlike nature, that it also moves "in time". The house follows the transformations and vicissitudes of individuals, groups and "culture". "But this would also occur in order to increase the dignity of being. For the sake of being-here that underlie human existence and not so man or civilization and culture would be valued through work." (Heidegger 2000)



Figure 2. Partially enclosed porch area is semipublic, and the back is private. All-natural materials.

This construction proposal is rooted in the historical cultural references of the place, such as the cocoa farmers, who joined into associations, have made cocoa a symbol of joint work effort and therefore an economic generator for society.

It must be stated that as cultural historical references are also a fundamental basis for fishermen who in their daily work bring back thousands of years of tradition and in their work have generated deep cultural practices that directly affect the cultural and social practices of the community.

Our question "What?" has four components. In the first place, the object makes the ancestral being present. Second, the object shapes the human destiny. Third, the object materializes a memory that is always waiting to manifest itself permanently. Finally, the object makes visible all the things of the earth: the stone, the clay, the sea, the air, the plants, the animals and even the light of day and the darkness of the night. In general, the architectural object and the technique "open a world and at the same time puts it back on the ground". In doing so, truth is put to work. "Technique is not a mere means, technique is a way out of the occult. If attention is paid to this, a totally different region will be opened for the essence of the technique. It is the region of disclosure, that is, of truth. (Heidegger 1994b)

The architectural - constructive proposal lays bridges to several traditional spaces, such as this space called Portal (porch) see Figures 2 and 3, where the inhabitants of the house meet to exchange experiences of life, it is a space that generates an opening towards the outside as a border between the public and the private, however in the architectural proposal Meche's House, this space is covered in its limits, with a mesh of chopped cane, which generates a more intimate space and is used by Meche to generate her special space, and is in an indirect relationship with the House itself.



Figure 3. Porch: beauty parlor.

Though the porch has doors to make this space more private, Meche keeps them wide open during the day, so that her work activity, the hairdressing salon, is seen, and at night closes it to use it as a private room of the house.

The natural material; bamboo and clay following a course from nature toward the identity of a woman who has unknowingly been linked to what is natural since birth and brings us closer to the memory that lies in this "seeing" and goes into the intimacy of its presence. Heidegger defines this "something" as "truth", the building therefore "preserves the truth".

As shown in figure 4, the texture and color of the bamboo, open this experience toward memory makes this space visible. It contrasts with the surrounding buildings and this makes it worthy to be there, because it fulfills its role and appears as what it is: Meche's family, space and community together are what the Greeks called *physis*, which is what establishes a human dwelling; Meche calls it her land, the *Pachamama* (mother earth in native kichwa language) that welcomes and protects us.



Figure 4. Rear Façade: opens to views.

The house opens a world, in it is found joy and security for Meche and her family, making them feel their land is their own. It is the temple, by the mere fact of rising there permanently; it is what gives things their appearance and people the vision of themselves. See figure 5. "Earth and sky, the divine and the mortal, forming a unity from themselves, belong to each other from the simplicity of the unitary Quaternity. Each of the Four reflects in its own way the essence of the others. With this, each one reflects himself in what is his and within the simplicity of the Four." (Heidegger 1994a).



Figure 5. Meche and her family: in their new home.

Through the analysis of the How, Meche's house generates boundaries between the town's architectural works, forms with lack of both technical and climatic coherence, and the work itself that generates a place that approaches the self. The built place appropriates a hidden meaning that is revealed due to the built object, the place no longer is the same and the destiny of the town 10th of August, is already intimately linked to the created dwelling.

It is important to state that, the building site relates with the surrounding land. Erected in the sky, off the ground, this gesture allows to fully display the constructed object, which leads to the origin that, "meaning here from where and why a thing is what it is and as it is. What is something and how it is, is what is called its essence. "In the thinking of being, we never represent only something real and we do not give as true what we have represented. To think "being" means to correspond to the interpellation of its essence " (Heidegger 1994a).

The origin of something is the source of its essence. It creates its own world. World and thing are, therefore, "Thinking the thing as a thing, we take care of the essence of the thing taking it to the region from which this essence. Making something is bringing the world closer. Approaching is the essence of closeness. To the extent that we take care of the thing as a thing, we inhabit the proximity" (Heidegger 1994a).

4 CONCLUSIONS

Meche's house is the clear example of Heidegger's ideas applied in the present. Meche speaks of changing attitudes toward the project soon after its completion. Now it is admired by the people of the town and is visited by local people. Tourists also visit it giving the house a prestige that becomes part of it. The truth manifested in spatial distribution, through the use of materials and their relationship to the environment. The initial reaction has been reversed. The local people rejected the house at first, now they accept it and so it is "in the world" completely.

Thus, the shape of the house, the handling of solid and open walls and the use of materials, give this building its own characteristics, some create more or less intimacy and others are linked to the land and landscape. Meche's life is generated in the earth and her house demonstrates this fact. The landscape is enriched by the natural materials of the house. The house contributes to the regeneration and destiny of this damaged environment. The utilitarian work, even books, has their "destinies"; while architectural works and institutions have their history.

Nature is also historical, although not precisely in the sense of "natural history", "History here does not mean the succession of certain events within time, however important they may be.

The house is a unit and unveils a world of combinations and it also expresses the unconcealment of being. Memory is the source of the strength of Meche's house, it is a reminder to

live fully, and it relates to Heidegger`s poetic dwelling, because the house is already an image and possesses the quality of dwelling.

Meche`s beauty parlor, part of the house, is her main source of income. It is named *Las Oyeritas* (clay pots or from the *oyerita*, a local bird that makes mud nests), according to Heidegger`s thoughts, man lives between work and the word. The word opens the world, the work makes the world present. Human beings are alive in the word and are reflected in the essential Being that inhabits it and belongs to the dwelling.

Design work and construction requires technicians to have the absolute sensitivity in order to express the real needs of the user-owner, and the community. This almost causes the technician to disappear, so the human being appears in this process. This enables the construction process to be replicable and requires the efficient use of materials. Every nail counts; one must build houses of the XXI century out of local materials using ancestral techniques and meaning that challenges current architecture.

Meche`s House is of great importance for the family that inhabits it. It is maintained in a special way both in its form and in its essence, according to this philosophy. The space is built not only by the owner, Meche, but also by the team of architects and the community, that in their labor, transform and are transformed. Constructions, architectural objects, are those things built, that brings together a world in themselves and allow the full inhabitation of the human being.

References

- Heidegger, M., *The Thing*, (E. Barjau, Trad.) Editorial Del Serbal, Spanish Translation, 1994a.
Heidegger, M., *The Question by Technique*. Barcelona, Editorial Del Serbal Spanish Translation. 1994b.
Heidegger, M., *Being and Time* (R. Editorial, Editor), Philosophia.cl: 1996. Retrieved from <http://www.philosophia.cl>. on December 2017.
Heidegger, M., *Letter on Humanism*. Alliance. 2000.
Heidegger, M., *Build Habitat Think*, In T. J. Escudero, & R. Editorial (Ed.), (J. Eduardo, Trad., Page 85). Madrid, Spain: Office of Art and Publishing. 2015.