

Architecture at Risk (?): The Ambivalent Nature of Post-disaster Practice

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Abstract

Post-disaster reconstruction regularly materializes politically and institutionally dualistic in a spatial arena where the expediency of required re-building often threatens high standard architectural production and the appropriation of future preventive measures, and in a societal arena where the erosion of community, livelihoods and security potentially trigger social fragmentations. Complexities arise and expand in this profoundly risky process of suggestive transformative aims, as the concepts of housing and architecture compete within various conflicted operational dimensions across diverse situational landscapes. Drawing here from the ontology of Foucault and Lefebvre, a discursive context frames the current challenges and risks facing the production of post-disaster space. Neither meant as a demonstration nor a mere guide to the relevance of their philosophical apparatus, the authors' central argument suggests that an augmented perception of space would help link social and material needs while questioning the set of emblematic elements of architecture's technique and limits. The paper thus ambitiously seeks to offer a provocative lexicon and theoretical lens for addressing the potential of reconstruction as well as questioning the state and role of architecture, perhaps calling for a renewed sense of critically anthropocentric post-disaster practice.

Keywords: Architectural Theory, Post Disaster recovery, housing reconstruction, space, urban development.

1. Introduction

There is a paradoxical challenge when commenting on architecture in a post-disaster environment. Singularly, disasters stand in a specific context that is peculiar, time-bounded, spatially diverse and thus characteris-

tically unique. Collectively, they offer a homogeneous narrative on a recurring dilemma, demanding radically inclusive changes to recovery, housing delivery and architectural practice.

Still, each situation reiterates that post-disaster reconstruction is a complex process, risky because it deals with transformative claims and equity, and multiple because it unfolds across different domains. This complexity emerges and magnifies within political and institutional dimensions where various actors with often conflictive agendas, visions and mandates are involved in a tense environment characterised by the notions of speed, performance and numbers. Spatially speaking, there are massive needs for physical reconstruction of damaged structures, provision of new housing, and the conservation of heritage buildings that challenge faster responses and open up opportunities for incorporating preventive measures in relation to the occurrence of future disasters [1]. All of these issues are nested in a societal arena where restitutions, compensations and resettlement, as well as the erosion of livelihoods and security, potentially prevent social cohesion and undermine transformative development [2].

In providing an overview of the relationship between architecture and disasters, the paper takes into account different forms of spatial interventions produced in post-disaster settings while seeking to address the gaps in knowledge by investigating, through diverse spatially-defined disciplines, the interplay between space and post-disaster housing. Cannibalising the famous Lefebvre (1991: 26) [3] quote "(social) space is a (social) product", we offer theoretical assemblages and tactics in which power, architecture, and their associated agencies, alter and potentially dissolve the centrality of space in the depoliticised arena of post-disaster recovery. The imperative title serves dual parallel purpose, referring at once to the ambiguously risky role

of silently complicit architects and conventional architectural practice in the delivery of post-disaster housing, as well as to the expedient nature of recovery and provision that tends to threaten the value of architecture, which is often seen as object-centric in such contexts.

Implying a deeper existential crisis within the discipline, we consider how the idea of architecture in general and space in particular might provoke a newfound conceptualization of post-disaster practice. We do so partially by grounding the elaboration in the Foucaultian discursive practices conceived as “the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories” (Foucault, 1977:199) [5]. This is not to suggest that post-disaster practice is solely the architect’s business of materiality and physical (re)construction, but rather to examine the relationship between spatial production and recovery as a possible theoretical architectural problem that may produce different threads of inquiry. Acknowledging the danger of a pretentious claim towards developing a post-disaster architecture theory, what we intend to convey is a more imminent

framework of post-disaster housing. In constructing a philosophical lens that allows for a critical investigation of the peculiar, contested and paradoxical nature of post-disaster practice, we also aim to contribute to the recent resurgent debate over the social dimension of architecture.

Introducing a theoretical grounding into the debate on post-disaster housing delivery, an assemblage of thematic elements reveals key challenges facing architecture, calling for an enhanced critical position regarding the reasoning behind architecture’s inclusion and position within post-disaster processes. This critical reasoning seeks to lay the foundation for a possible new framework guiding post-disaster housing and the production of space in general. Utilising the arguments from an array of academics and practice, a particular focus is given to Lefebvre’s conceptual musings on the architect and space, followed by a somewhat comparative allude to a Foucaultian vision of post-disaster space. Lastly the debate surrounding architecture’s risk state is renewed and presented alongside contemporary design commentary, seeking to offer an optimistic perspective regarding the potential of establishing a profoundly anthropocentric post-disaster practice.

Table 1. Disaster damage comparison (Pakistan, Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction Agency (ERRA), October 2007 (modified by authors).

	Gujarat (India) earthquake (2001)	Sri Lanka earthquake /tsunami (2004)	Indonesia (Aceh and Nias) earthquake / tsunami (2004)	Katrina (USA) hurricane (2005)	Pakistan earthquake (2005)	Haiti earthquake (2010)
Scale of disaster	25,000 people dead and 200,000 injured, 600,000 displaced or homeless and 348,000 houses destroyed and 844,000 damaged as per initial survey.	35,322 people dead and 21,441 injured, 500,000 displaced and 114,069 houses damaged or destroyed.	167,900 people dead or missing, 513,500 displaced and 113,500 houses damaged or destroyed as per initial survey.	1,836 dead and 705 missing, 0.6 Million displaced and 70,000 houses damaged or destroyed as per initial survey.	73,338 people dead and 128,304 injured , 3.5 million people homeless, 462,363 houses destroyed and 109,956 damaged.	112.405 people dead and more, the 197.000 injured, around 4 million people affected, with almost 1.000.000 of homeless.

2. Post-disaster Spatial Practice Assemblages

Whether disasters are in fact growing in numbers, or whether increasing vulnerability and insufficient preparedness has heightened devastation, what rings consistently true is the central determining role that the built environment plays in society, especially in the wake of a disaster. Furthermore, it could be argued that our dependency on the built environment alone enhances vulnerability.

Regarding this insecure connexion, post-disaster (re)construction practices and outcomes, and the policy-making processes that surround them, depend on many contextual factors: the relations between local governments, civil organizations and international agencies; the dynamics between public and private sectors; the amount and source of reconstruction funding and the ability of people and communities to voice their needs and demands.

International agencies and governments alike have long agreed that in the wake of disaster [4] stands the opportunity to rebuild better while enhancing community resilience. To this degree, an excess of manuals, policy frameworks and guidelines highlight a growing consensus regarding the significance of participation, of linking reconstruction to long-term development and livelihood promotion, of encouraging local building techniques and of avoiding displacement (Lyon, et al 2010 [6]; Da Silva, 2010[7]; Jha et al 2009[8]; OCHA, 2008[9]).

However, despite the wide adoption of principles, there still exists a profound disparity between practice, implementation and policy declarations. Many practitioners and especially scholars contend that post-disaster reconstruction is one of the least successful arenas of international cooperation. And though there is not much legitimate evidence pointing to the fact that gaps between intentions and outcomes are caused by deficient policies, international agencies continue to respond to these problems by investing greatly in refining their policy instruments (Duyne Barenstein, 2010)[10].

In order to process even a slice of the debate in the short amount of space available, the following collection of spatial practices should be conceived not as distinct, self-contained and self-sufficient cases, but rather as an assemblage, a whole “whose property emerge from the interaction between parts” (De Landa, 2006:5)[11]. Drawing particular attention to the action of assembling and reassembling socio-material practices that are diffused, tangled and contingent (McFarlane, 2009)[62], the assemblage emphasises spatiality and temporality. Juxtaposed at a particular conjuncture, these elements form a sort of “state of affairs” (Dovey, 2010: 16) [12]

which seeks to make evident some conceptual challenges facing the semantics, rhetoric and practical application within the production of post-disaster housing.

2.1 A Profoundly semantic confusion. Housing reconstruction practices, which generally commence with immediate shelter provision after emergency, entail a semantic confusion. Furthermore, juxtaposing shelter with displacement activates contradictory meanings. One is associated with the grounding and finitude of buildings, the constitution of space and place. The other represents the act of uprooting, forced mobility and transience. Adding to such contradiction and confusion within the sector, there is considerable variation in the terms used to describe shelter in humanitarian crises and these vary across geographies. These discrepancies also pervade settlement vocabulary: camps, dispersed settlements, reception and transit centres, self-settled camps, planned camps and tent cities. Here exists legitimate solutions, yet defining them is not an academic game. However, deciphering their nuances should be a necessity as the consequences of conceptual confusion may create unwelcome results.

2.2 Inherent complexity as practice and discipline. It seems there is a dominance of a somewhat ill-defined sector model predicated on short term emergency provision (of shelter as well as staff and resources). This model is driven by the top-down “implementation push” of result-driven solutions and is characterized by a limited variety of interventions, a fragmentation of donors and agencies, and the political imperatives of managing forcibly displaced populations. Also, a limited presence of shelter experts has often led to decisions increasingly being made by ill-equipped generalists, despite the rich and praised homogenization and support capacity offered by specialised organisations (e.g. Shelter Centre).

2.3 The materiality of houses and the problematic of spaces. For decades, most approaches driving post-disaster reconstruction have defined the house in a reductively materialistic manner- a building. However, cultural specificity of home and space aside, it is important to recognise that the everyday practices, material cultures and social relations that shape the home on a domestic scale resonate far beyond the household. Disaster displacement and destruction are temporary, yet often protracted forms of homelessness. Yet, the relationship between home and homelessness is more complex than the simple presence or absence of home and the physical adequacy of the shelter (Kellet & Moore, 2003)[13]. For many people, home can mean the location where one ‘dwells’ and which provides opportunities to claim a sense of belonging and a con-

text (as Heidegger (1954) long ago suggested). The loss of place has potentially devastating psychological implications for individual and collective identity, memory and history. To be without a place of one's own is to be almost non-existent. For those permanently forced from their homes and places by conflict or disasters, the challenge of making new homes and places in relocation projects is far more complicated (Porteous & Smith, 2001) [14].

2.4. Technocracy and participatory rhetoric.

Increasing amounts of study have aimed to repopulate and reinvigorate a people-centred vision of development and post-disaster practice. This vision is labelled differently from “owner-driven” to “community-based”, “participatory” or simply “alternative” (Duyne Barenstain, 2007 [15] ; 2008[16]; Davidson et al 2007[17]). While strong in its convictions and sensible in comprehension, the view of participation tends to lose momentum when moved about so freely from context to context. Interpreting exactly what ‘participation’ means and to whom, renders it “the most ambiguous of terms and the most powerful of concepts” (Habraken, 1981:viii)[18]. Though such flexibility can be appreciated, in this case the term itself requires a commonly accepted and applicable definition. Carrying the allure of optimism and, as Cornwall and Brock (2005) [19] argue, a considerable normative power, participatory neologisms have completely permeated the terrain of housing and post-disaster practice. But do they make a difference or is it mere rhetoric? Participatory neologisms being radically contextualised as “owner-driven” in the purist Indian practice, or in the proto-developmental version of “self-help”, or the derived and scaled-up as in “community-driven” or “community participation”, facilitate a multiplicity of heavily dependent, situational meanings, which continue to be contested as they are put to use, and naively replicated as they reveal visible contextual results.

2.5 The “control paradigm”. This seems to be embedded in the aid industry culture where organizations struggle against the resistance of conservative supporters unwilling to invest in anything different from what they have funded before, and where regulators are reluctant to approve anything they may lose control over. In addition, the private sector often flags its interests in the reconstruction process by lobbying for prefabricated interventions and solutions, or introducing unfamiliar technologies that limit the level of participation and prove to be unsustainable. Similarly, a clear dichotomy emerges between rural and urban settings where, in the latter, “owner driven” has proven to be difficult for the technological and structural limitations of certain building typologies and construc-

tion mechanisms. Moreover, many cases reveal further difficulties of scaling up “owner driven” reconstruction, especially when large resettlement plans pose a real challenge in terms of infrastructure, land tenure and the overall inclusion of host communities in planning especially for disrupted social structures (Lyon et al. 2010[6]; Da Silva, 2010 [7]; Lyon, 2009[20]).

2.6 Normality and (a) normality of disasters. It is important to remember that inadequate housing or shortages constitute a severe problem for many societies, not merely those formally affected by disaster. Statistics explicitly illustrate a certain disconnect between programmes addressing post-disaster housing and the “normal” production of housing for low-income communities (Lyon et al. 2010 [6], Lizarralde & Rooth 2008 [21]). This implies the paradox that apart from emergencies, relief agencies rarely pay attention to the way in which housing is delivered, often assuming that developing countries have no experience in low-cost social housing schemes, no finance mechanisms, nor do they sometimes possess a profoundly rich and established informal housing sector. The burning question then is why, despite its worth, is the considerable literature on self-help and other housing alternatives (Abrams, 1966 [22]; Fiori & Ramirez, 1992 [23]; Turner, 1981 [24]; Ward, 1974 [25]), slum upgrading, and grassroots urban movements (Schurman & van Naerseen 1989)[26] lost on the disaster practitioners’ mind? And this when all conventional or normative (Kreimer, 1980) [27] housing processes in development have reiterated the fact that shelter is the most basic need in society.

Acknowledging a greater wealth of challenges facing the broad topic of post-disaster housing, this brief assemblage has sought to reveal what are considered to be fundamental elements affecting the methodology and delivery of housing. These issues further suggest the need for a fundamental critical re-thinking of post-disaster housing, one stressing the importance of reflective learning and promoting conscious people-centred processes, and identifying the role of architecture as a discipline in this process.

3. A Critical Reasoning of Post-disaster Housing: locating architecture.

As mentioned, housing is often conceived as a one-dimensional and standardised physical artefact, constructed as a reactive, top-down, technology-driven and “end state” product [1,2]. A fundamental shift from ‘bricks and mortar’ solutions should usher a broader social and economic dimension of housing and its mode of production. Understanding the home as a significant type of space and place, no longer limiting it to a

dichotomy of ‘house’ as a physical structure and ‘home’ as a social, cultural and emotive construct, helps us to unite the physical components with the social, cultural and emotive ones (Zetter & Boano 2009) [28]. This critically serves to re-qualify and re-position space – its physical manifestations and processes of production – in the agenda of post disaster interventions that often disregard the values of architectural design process and outcomes (at different scales).

This requires a more profound conceptual understanding of housing as a complex functional resource, as a cultural symbol and social artefact, as an element of economic value and as part of a wider community expressed through the spatial design of settlements. In essence, a far a more coordinated and integrated approach is required which links the art of designing space and place to the wider needs which housing fulfils in terms of the social, cultural and rights-based aspirations of disaster-displaced populations (ibid.). Architecture, specifically, has long lived with the tension of being “the most social of arts and the most aesthetic as profession” as Dovey (2010:41) [12] posits. As art it carries the obligation to imagine transformations and changes, while as a profession it carries the obligation to adhere to the public interest, practiced in conjunction with the collective will and voices of individuals, and the shouts of larger societal needs. So what exactly are the transformative potentials of architecture? In response, two opposing simplified visions of design and architecture can be recorded.

One is that architecture and design are conceived and practiced through a retreat to notions of order, beauty and cleanliness. This stance can be traced from the first principles of Vitruvius, with his simplistic, but pervasive call for coherence, to Le Corbusier, with his cry for architecture to be rid of contingent presences. The triad of *commodity, firmness and delight* remains on the architectural rosary (Till, 2007: 120) [29], even if the beads have been updated to reflect contemporary concerns with use/function, technology/tectonics and aesthetics/beauty. Le Corbusier constantly evoked the cancerous metaphor for a sickness of the city, architecture, and the academy. This stigma of sickness must be eradicated, cancerous elements cut out, if a fresh start is to be made. Such conception draws attention to the failure of architects to subject their own critical reflections and move away from their obsession with the object.

The second vision stresses the role of architecture as instrumental, thus marginal in its manifestation, especially when dealing with the semantics of ‘participation’. Such vision is built on the work of Healy (2005) [30] and Habermas (1984) [31] and seems to trust that

“just processes, would generate just outputs.” However, experiences in the field of development practice shows that this is not necessarily the case. After participation and grassroots agents are secured, there is still a need to develop mechanisms that support, facilitate and expand wellbeing. Various discourses have aimed in different degrees to open the debate towards an approach that can distance itself from a conventional aesthetic and materialistic significance towards design that can be transformative, adaptable, and inclusive and thus relevant to today’s increasing urban complexities.

Despite a reality that goes beyond such oversimplistic dichotomy, this division elicits a deep existential crisis of architecture. Architectural objects are politically charged devices whether they intend to be or not. However, as Bevan (2006:12) [32] argues, “buildings do not contain any political essence in themselves; rather they become meaningful due to their physical relation with specific social processes”. Thus architecture should be conceived as an alternative to the physical determinism embedded in a particular definition of design that challenges the supremacy of the discipline- the materiality of space as societal healing machine. The risk that exists in a simplistic reading of contextual narratives from distracted and busy practitioners can be avoided through a useful and innovative focus on understanding of how materiality can partly drive these social processes. The result calls for a practice that is “a dynamic multiplicity, organized as an inclusive and responsive process” (Mandanipour, 2010) [33].

Harking back to Le Corbusier’s vision of the world, Philippe Boudon [65], in his meticulous documentation of the inhabitation of Pessac, argues that the combination of Le Corbusier’s initial design and the inhabitants’ irrepressible DIY tendencies, led to certain inevitability that the purity of the original would be overwhelmed by the urges of everyday life. ‘The fact of the matter,’ writes Henri Lefebvre, in his introduction to Boudon’s book, ‘is that in Pessac Le Corbusier produced a kind of architecture that lent itself to conversion and sculptural ornamentation [...] And what did the occupants add? Their needs’.

It is necessary to comment with full philosophical force in order to acknowledge that architecture can never fully control the actions of users. In Architecture, needs are cajoled into functions and thus subjected to normalising control. Producing space and built form are inherently elite practices as they insist on who controls resources at different scales. Since architecture though involves transformations in the way we frame life and because design imagines a production of the future, the field cannot claim autonomy from the politics of social

change (Dovey 1999, 1)[34]. In this dilemma, the distance between functions and needs is just one of the many rifts that contribute to the gap between architecture as it wants to be and architecture as it is (Till 2007, 131)[29].

A vision that might favour what King (2009:42) [59] calls a critical distinction between “dwelling on the one hand, and housing policy on the other”. For the author, dwelling is about being “settled on the earth [...] and [to] use dwellings to meet our ends and fulfil our interests, to such an extent that this singular dwelling becomes meaningful to us”, while housing “is the concern for the production, consumption, management and maintenance of a stock of dwellings”. Such distinction between a rigid and formal provision of structures and their consumption in general (policy) and the very specificity engendered singular object (dwelling) reinforces the idea that design for post-disaster reconstruction involves satisfying material needs and resolving competing social requirements through a process of active participation by the occupants and the mediation of “professionals” (Boano, 2009 [1]; Zetter & Boano 2009 [28]). Such an enabled approach, fundamentally repositions the role of the architect. They are not, in Roy’s pointed phrase, the “innocent professionals” (Roy, 2006:21)[60], but rather involved in a process, which requires them to reflect upon what they produce through both material and discursive practices.

There is a long tradition of philosophers using the figure of the architect to denote rational authority. Aristotle uses the ‘architekton’ to illustrate the commanding relationship of theory and practice, while Plato ‘discovered a figure who under the aegis of “making” is able to withstand “becoming” (Till 2007: 132) [29]. Descartes argues ‘that buildings undertaken and completed by a single architect are usually more attractive and better planned than those which several have tried to patch up by adapting old walls built for different purposes [...] the latter of which [...] you would say it is chance rather than the will of man using reason that placed them so’. He identified the banishment of chance, the authority of the individual, the triumph of the rational, and the building of the new on cleared ground as the defining attributes of the architect. This is not to suggest that architects are well versed and thus deluded in their own sense of importance as mirrors of rational thought. It does however imply that the

metaphor of architecture as a stable authority so powerful makes one believe that this is also the reality of architecture. We have already seen what happens when one starts to confuse the metaphorical for the real: the deluded belief that architecture can be autonomous; the resulting self-referentiality; the actual will to order; the concomitant suppression of the contingent (Till, 2007, 132) [29].

4. Fashioning an Epistemological Framework: the Production of Space

Stemming from this critical reasoning and the prior assemblages is the idea that post-disaster housing is in need of a theory- not only a system of ideas intended to produce reflections but rather to speculate and contemplate upon so to develop a new practice that acknowledges a transformative role of space and design. Paying particular attention to Henri Lefebvre’s prosecutions, we position here a collection of thematic arguments in order to construct an alternative framework concerning the production of space.

Alexander (1964) [35] argued that a building is not a “thing” and that what we call form is the product of a pattern of forces. Cities and built environments could be seen as a pattern or diagram that becomes an “abstracted form of a real situation”. Here, a possible set of forces influencing the “space of reconstruction” aims to offer cognitive, flexible and incremental tools to “mediate and create,” enabling practitioners to “invent” and “imagine” a future of sophisticated and just post-disaster housing practice.

This diagrammatic mapping embodies a dialectic methodology claiming that space is both a concrete object to be experienced, perceived and appropriated, as well as a conceptual ideology, symbolic of conflict. Taking into account the surface-oriented aspects alongside those of a categorically more discursive, non-spatial character, this image initially seeks to necessitate a further understanding of the complexities that are companion to any post-disaster reconstruction process. Elements overlap, reflect and often repel one another. In many cases there is a direct correlation determining the emerging intensity of each element, though the purpose of such a diagram is to reveal the concurrent existence of each force and the importance of recognizing their individual and collective impact during reconstruction.

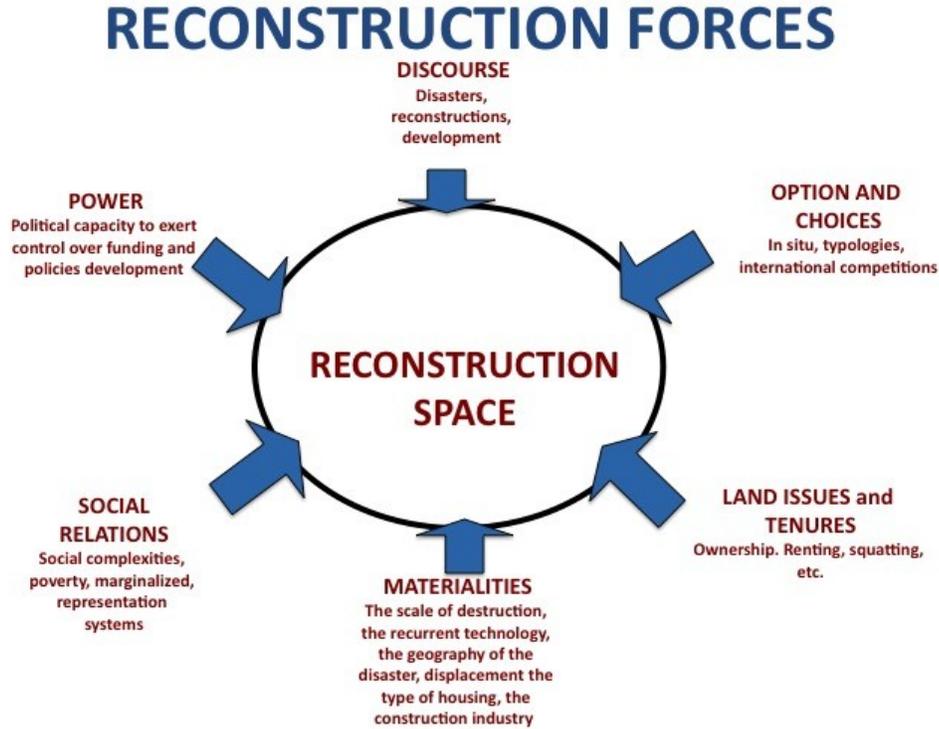


Figure 1. Reconstruction spaces and reconstruction forces (authors)

Framing post-disaster housing in this sense aims to reinforce the nature of reconstruction essentially as spaces and places in a rapid state of abstraction and integration into instances of the everyday life. This type of activity makes explicit reference to Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* with the risk that treating space as an abstract manifestation has "nothing innocent about it: it answers to particular strategies and tactics; it is, quite simply, the space of the dominant mode of production, and hence the space of capitalism" (1991: 360) [3]. According to Lefebvre we can no longer view space and social processes separately. Claiming that "(social) space is a (social) product" (1991: 26) [3], he considers space beyond an intrinsic physicality, thus hinting towards its philosophical meaning as real and mental space. He defines space in three ways: as a spatial practice (perceived space), as representations of space (conceived space) and as representational spaces (lived spaces) (Lefebvre, 1991)[3]. For Lefebvre this triad is understood by its interconnections, "so that the subject (...) may move from one to another without confusion" (p. 40). The perception of this triad as a coherent whole would be achieved when there is a common language between the perceived, conceived and lived space (Lefebvre, 1991)[3].

Jeremy Till further acknowledges the contributions of Lefebvre's work concerning the perception of space seen "through a complex set of overlapping societal agencies: the representational, the economical, the phenomenological, the conceptual, the spatial practice of the individual, the collective practices of the political and so on" (2009: 126) [36]. For Lefebvre (1991: 361)[3], the architect places himself in his 'own' space and has a "representation of this space", in a 'subjective' space limited to graphical representations. He criticizes the idea that 'objective reality' can be attained by those methods of representation, as in Le Corbusier's plans, stating that "this discourse no longer has any frame of reference" (p.361). This abstractly conceived space is meant to be 'true'; that is to say "any plan, to merit consideration, must be quantifiable, profitable, communicable and realistic" (Lefebvre, 1997: 144)[3]. However, he claims, what actually happens is that planned or 'idealistic' space might be dominated by other forces such as capitalism. The 'expert' either works for himself or responds to the interest of "bureaucratic, financial, or political forces" (p. 365).

Under this investigation, the production of space has to be understood in terms of the tensions, interactions and co-determinations. Such spatial consideration could

definitively contribute to the current conceptual and practical debate surrounding housing reconstruction which often leads to diffused ‘reconstruction discontents’, a recurrent pessimism in disaster studies evidenced since the seventies by Cuny (1978)[37], in the nineties with Aysan (1990) [38] and more recently reinvigorated through Sanderson and Sharma (2008:185)[63], among countless others far too abundant to mention here.

In order to depict how reconstruction spaces are constructed and manifested, it is necessary to reinforce a dichotomist vision of space as physical and static with social dynamics. Never neutral, space is structurally layered in natural and man-made settings, both historical and contemporary. In addition to the inherent ‘locus’ of landscape and topographical space, it consists of complex, multi-layered translations of different ideologies that can be understood as an accumulation of different patrimonies and assets. It is the task and power of design to unravel, clarify and negotiate these contradictions (Loeckx & Shannon, 2004) [39].

First, referring to Turner’s (1972) [40] contention of “housing as a verb”, Davis’s (1978:33) [41] assertion that “shelter must be considered as a process, not as an object” opens the call for more culturally sensitive approaches to home-making or re-making in the aftermath of disasters endorsed in the most recent comparative collections of disaster housing literature (Lyon, et al 2010 [6]; OCHA, 2008 [9]; Da Silva, 2009 [42]).

Second, the debate over the semantics of ‘participatory neologisms’ in the production of space repositions the discourse as a question of power and ideology of control in which architects, designers and practitioners cannot simply be ‘innocent’. This idea of ‘production’ including overlapping agencies— economic, societal, conceptual, individual and collective – renders visible the position of the architect and the practitioner as exposed “to winds that comes from every which way” (Till, 2009:126) [39] and thus beyond control.

As the Lefebvrian concept of spatial production provides many relevant associations to current debates, a Foucaultian ideology further seeks to facilitate lateral thinking on the discipline of architecture regarding gaps between disciplinary paradigms of post-disaster housing provision.

5. A Foucaultian vision of post-disaster space

According to Foucault (2003) [43] the tendency to see time as dynamic and developmental, and space as relatively fixed, arose in Western thought during the second half of nineteenth century. He however cautioned

that there is no reason to presuppose that our existence as social and historical beings is axiomatically more important than our spatial one. Without aiming to dismiss a historical-genealogical or social imagination, three fundamental qualities of human existence can be envisioned: the societal/social, the temporal/historical and the spatial/geographical.

These couplings reveal a clearer perception of power relations, reinforcing what Foucault (1977: 70) [5] meant by space not being “dead, fixed and immobile” but rather “fundamental to every form of public life” (1984a: 253) [49]. Here his “spatial obsessions” need to be located in the shift from an emphasis on genealogy to an emphasis on the productive nature of power/knowledge becoming spatial techniques.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault centred the debate around his critique of historicism using the body as spatial metaphor, where genealogy is defined as “a history of physical bodies and the spaces they occupy, not mentalities or ideologies, controlled and anarchical bodies as well as the spaces that enable them to appear as such, not inert matter or abstract” (Flynn, 1991:172) [44]. Later he shifted from genealogy to the power-knowledge emphasis (*Discipline and Punish*) where spatial techniques and praxis become more evident in the well-known “Panopticon” (Foucault, 1979) [45] which, through spatial ordering, combines power, body control and knowledge, thus revealing the principles of disciplinary powers. The Panopticon cannot simply be a building, yet is more than just a metaphor, becoming what Foucault suggests is “a description of institution in terms of architecture” (1976:71) [61].

Foucault had suggested that “space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (1976:24)[61], and found it inconceivable that we “leave people in the slums, thinking that they can simply exercise their rights there”. He believed that architecture, although an inherently political act, cannot by itself liberate or oppress and that in order to realise liberation, technicians of space, including architects, must align their “liberating intentions [...] with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom” (Foucault 2003) [43]. In the same line of thoughts, Cowen and Gilbert (2008) [46] suggest “being political is always a matter of becoming in place and though space”.

Such contestations evoke certain post-colonial paradigm shifts offered by Said (1994) [47] as an “invigorated sense of looking at the struggle over geography in interesting and imaginative ways”. Said developed his imaginative geographies drawing on Foucault’s enquiries into micro-technologies of power and social control both as a mode of dominating and

governing the political subject and as a pathway for enabling and encouraging resistances reminiscent of the starkly ambivalent relation between coloniser and colonised. With the case in point, post-disaster space is ambivalent where this duality is produced by both oppressed and liberating qualities.

Moreover, the Foucaultian notion of *heterotopias* (1984a) [49], or ‘other spaces’, is an appropriate representation of post disaster space. In society, these locales reside amongst the contradictions they produce but are unable to resolve invisibility and recognition. In essence heterotopias are spaces that accommodate the deviant and house the “other”, segregating them and allowing mechanisms “of control distribution and places in a society” (Allweil & Kallus 2008:191) [48].

Indeed Foucault (1984a) [49] argued that heterotopias are places of ‘deviation’, capable of containing within themselves a diversity of spaces. Heterotopia is real space, distinct from the idealised space of utopia, whose reality is likely to be intense and overwhelming. Camps provided in a humanitarian setting are heterotopias of unusual complexity and impenetrability as is any relocation site which accommodates disaster affected persons that cannot return again to their houses. This vision serves to frame reconstruction spaces as “spaces apart, open but isolated” (Foucault 1984a, p.180) [49].

While we are quite aware that projecting philosophical thoughts alone into post-disaster housing would be futile, they can yield an analysis of errors that might be gauged after any disaster. A critical history of thought would question the conditions under which certain relations of subject vs. object are formed or modified, insofar as those relations constitute a possible knowledge [*savoir*] (Foucault, 1984b) [50]. On the contrary, it is a matter of reverting back to the study of concrete practices by which the subject (post-disaster housing) is constituted in the immanent domain of knowledge (architecture). Pure abstraction aside, the aim is to elicit the processes that are peculiar to an experience in which the subject and the object “are formed and transformed” in relation to and in terms of one another (Foucault, 1984b) [50].

Sustaining such action of formation and transformation would accomplish the adoption of complex spatial interaction between “cognitive, moral and aesthetic spaces and products”. This framework enables a deeper perception of the power relations embedded in post-disaster discourses and practices as a way of “acting and thinking at once, that provides the intelligibility key for the correlative constitution of the subject and the object” (Foucault, 1984b) [50]. The discovery and appropriation of such discourses in the case of post-disaster reconstruction, which in the Foucaultian sense, refers to the

‘controlling, positioning, and productive capacities of signifying practices’ (Threadgold, 1997:58) [64], draws attention to the failure of architects to subject their own critical reflections and move away from their obsession with the object.

The heterotopian adoption of such space makes explicit the fragmented, mobile and conflictive nature of its production. If discursive practices are characterized by a field of objects as is post-disaster housing, then the definition of legitimate perspectives for the agent of architectural knowledge and the elaboration of concepts and theories (Foucault, 1977:199) [5] within post-disaster housing practice implies a prescription that designates exclusions and choices that inevitably produce tensions. When these stances are combined, a critical attitude emerges for which the diagnosis of the status quo (reconstruction and post-disaster housing) is inseparable for the means to alter this condition through “refusal, curiosity and innovation”. This triad strategically supports the long lasting debate of understanding architecture as a practice with potential to truly transform reality, which would mean redefining *architecture* “as architecture” (Ceferin, 2010:10) [51], its knowledge and practice not only capable of imaging and inventing the new but tying to intervene in the broader field of society.

6. Architecture risks and design tensions

As we have sought to suggest, architecture, when critically reflecting back on itself and looking away from the objective design and provision of space, has a potential in offering “repertoires of changes”, which, in the word of Friedman (1975) [52], enables individuals to intervene within the building process with their own set of ideas, aspirations and articulation of spatial values. If such basic belief and recognition is cast aside, then its own identity as a profession and discipline is put at risk.

As suggested, in these situations, architecture in its most creatively-defined expression can be generally seen as physically objective and superficial: a merely service oriented practice inescapably located in the disaster relief industry paradoxes of speed, numbers and turn-key typologies. Of perhaps greater concern and possibly receiving more attention here is the ambiguous role of architects and paradigms of mainstream architectural practice and the scepticism of their involvement in disaster-stricken environments. Positioning this risk, our philosophical framework sought to highlight what we believe is a deep existential crisis of architecture.

Admittedly, it seems to us that the same pompous, or at best naïve, architectural practitioner that presump-

tuously claims architects are a necessary priority in a disaster situation is the same person that would go in and build (hopefully) genuinely but inappropriately, and then reap some form of notoriety for his or her actions. This however should not signal a complete removal of architects and technical design/building experts from any such situation. What seems fundamental for us is not a total dismissal of the discipline, but rather a calling for a reengagement of architecture with social practice. In other words, Architects might be the last persons needed, but *Architecture* is surely fundamental. It requires a necessary change in the traditional identity and approach of architects - meaning that if they understand the complexity of community and have an attitude of 'people first', if the context and situation deemed it, they would shift their role to what is needed in that given situation. This is not meant to resolve an inherent architectural problem, but rather calls for a radical rethinking of how architecture and the production of spaces becomes a kind of barometer by which to gauge the relation of self and world, a medium for facilitating collective assertion not as a finished product, but as a process in constant development and evolution.

Whether focusing on cities, villages, camps or other settlements, architects are expected to possess a rigorous understanding of how to structure human habitat. The 'separate' but integrated strata of economic, cultural, political, and social elements in the city bring the risk or architecture's marginalization. If not considered, disconnections between the buildings and the wider functioning of urban system are likely to occur.

Many post-disaster visions are not imagined nor invented as creative transformative spaces, a development that would not only tie into the goals of participation but also the potential of design as an agent of change. Arguably this prevents the sustaining of equality and justice, unfortunately ensuring the recreation of possibly vulnerabilities. Disasters generally reveal the downsides of civilization and the contradictions that they produce but are unable to address or resolve. By only reproducing the status quo and not dealing directly with reality, the practice becomes a continuous fluctuation between a contradiction and acceptance of the notions of invisibility and recognition. In this case we mean the invisible nature of mistakes and errors and the recognition of the possibilities within the discipline. What puts architecture at risk here is the profoundly heterotopian nature of inventions and methods. However Foucault (1979: 101) [45] suggests that "there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy... they

can circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy".

Despite the negative tone of much of post-disaster literature cited in this paper, some experiences and examples could be considered positive in their intentions and effective in their outcomes such as UpLink's work in Aceh (World Habitat Awards, 2007) [53], Practical Action's work in post tsunami Sri Lanka (Practical Action, 2010 [54], Hidellage & Usoof, 2009) [55], the works of Hunnarshala in Aceh (Hunnarshala 2010) [56], and different "owner driven initiatives in Gujarat (Duyne Barenstein, 2007 [15] , 2008[16]). Albeit not necessarily positioned within a disaster context, it would be a shame not to mention Elemental's innovative housing projects in Chile (Aravena, 2008a [57]; 2008b [58]). All of them have, in one degree or another, been able to challenge the conventional paradigm of 'delivery', and have rendered evident a gap in what could be referred to as a level of mistrust or miscommunication between professions, social networks and the ability for action in general.

Disasters can reduce the checks and balances imposed on a government's power, resulting in the already dominant socio-political power in a space becoming 'hyper-dominant'. The lack of rational procedure and rigorous critique to arrive at such immediate tactics is often defended by the dominant power by the fact that a 'state of emergency' (which ironically the government itself declares) warrants new rules. The resultant tabula rasa planning policy mirrors the blank slate of the destroyed post-disaster city and landscape. Whenever the time period for action is significantly reduced as it is in post-disaster situations and the policy gap is filled with quickly devised plans, the procedural power balance tips away from the general populace or affected peoples. Simply put, there is less time for the participatory process to take root and thrive, and since this process is often highly contested, it requires time to build the momentum necessary to enact meaningful change.

The intensity of a disaster and the limited window of opportunity that immediately follows it must be addressed from multiple angles concurrently to reconstruct the livelihood and spatial networks of an affected area. Writing off the spatial element as something separate and unrelated severely limits the transformative potential of reconstruction and rehabilitation in the post-disaster context. Architecture as a discipline and practice will continue to be at risk as long as it fails to subject its own critical reflections and distance itself from the obsession of the object and recognise its dependency on outside forces and influences. Re-thinking the limits of the discipline by

the inclusion of others in the practice, could be especially significant in re-attaching its worth to post-disaster reconstruction. As Till argues the urgent move is “from a reliance on the impulsive imagination of the lone genius to that of the collaborative ethical imagination; from clinging to notions of total control to a relaxed acceptance of letting go” (2009: 151) [36]. If this critical separation can be achieved then space will be opened for more culturally sensitive approaches to home making and remaking. If Architecture can strip itself from an ambivalent tendency and locate its capacity for resistant affirmations, we can reduce the risk of its inclusion in post-disaster practice resulting in a mere deliverable service-oriented producing autonomous subject.

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