

Bárbara Ramalho Fonseca

Supervisor: Professor Bárbara dos Santos Coutinho, PhD

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

There live people I do (not) know

House, habitability and human relations

The present study analyses the capacity of the house, designed around the key concepts of *“living from the centre”* and *“house of many rooms”*, to adapt to the contemporary ways of living and meet the needs of society over time, representing a place of freedom for different uses, and being configured as a durable, adaptable, multicultural and intergenerational proposal.

To address this, we initially analyse historically the main social forms, behaviours and human relationships, in an understanding of the multiple transformations that have redefined the concepts of family, individual and collective. This contextualisation is the basis for understanding the different dimensions of built space, in relation with the evolution of domestic space and with the ideas of domesticity and habitability, privacy and intimacy, functionality and flexibility.

A phenomenological analysis of examples from houses in the West, from the sixteenth century to the present day, comes to identify the main approaches adopted, in a clarification of the house plan's capacity to embody the changes that have characterised society and family.

The analysis of a Portuguese case study by Aires Mateus, House in Melides I, shows that the exploration of solutions based on the identified key concepts results on proposals that respond to each time and circumstance, not enclosing cultural contexts or specific family typologies. Confirming the relevance of the hypothesis put forward in this dissertation, this case is compared with five contemporary international examples which reflect an idea of permanence and correspond to the different experiences of those who inhabit them.

Keywords: domesticity, habitability, house, phenomenology, privacy, spatial organisation.

Nowadays, we live in a substantially different world than recent past periods. Over time we have witnessed profound changes in various aspects, mainly regarding how we see ourselves, how we relate to others and how we inhabit space. This change is now felt exponentially, since in the twenty-first century transformations have been happening at a very fast pace. As a result, unusual challenges are constantly arising, particularly in regard to how we perceive the house as a basic cell, an expression of our personality, and a place for everyday life.

SOCIETIES AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

In a brief but necessary social-historical contextualisation of the main social types and models that existed in the past, involving human behaviour and relations, it is important to note that the human species has existed for about half a million years.

There is a range and unlimited number of types of pre-modern societies, but it is possible to recognise three main categories or groups, according to Giddens (2006) through Marvin Harris (1978): hunter-gatherers, small groups without major inequalities that rely mostly on hunting and fishing for their subsistence; agrarian or pastoral societies, based on rural communities living on agriculture and the domestication of animals, where there are distinct social inequalities; non-industrial civilisations or traditional states, where it is already possible to witness the existence of cities regulated by commercial exchanges and based largely on agriculture, with deep inequalities between social classes.

All these characteristics that distinguish pre-modern societies are "*instructive reminders that the world created by modern industrial civilization is not necessarily to be equated with 'progress'*" (Giddens, 2006, p.38). This statement has an underlying negative connotation to the concept of progress, considering that it will not always result in a better future, at least not in all aspects. It is thus interesting to understand how different the modern world is from its recent past, especially in the ways of life. Giddens (2006) presents us with the phenomenon of industrialisation as a response to the profound changes and near destruction of the ways of life of previous societies. Having brought about profound social changes, it led to a high percentage of the population moving to the city where social life became impersonal and tended to be more anonymous in comparison to previous societies and ways of life.

The family, "*departing universe for life in society*"¹ (Pereira, 2012, p.27), is a structuring entity with a strong presence in all societies and is based on the dual concepts of individual and collective. The sense of belonging to a family prepares for life in society (broad cultural community), being psychologically very significant for one's formation and individuality.

In the sixteenth century there was no notion of the nuclear family or group as a clearly differentiated unit, but rather as an entity with deeply rooted relationships within the community. With regards to both the collective and the individual, neither the conjugal family was recognised as having an independent existence, nor did individuals have responsibility for themselves. The marital family is differentiated, from the seventeenth century onwards, as a "*discrete and private social unit and with a growing emphasis on individual autonomy and rights*" (Anderson, 1980, p.44). As such, the family is reviewed as an entity where there is a clear distinction from the ties established with the local community and with any extra-nuclear sphere. It should be noted that the affirmation of the individual's rights and duties, and the consecration of one's individuality, occurs simultaneously with the affirmation of the family as the basic nuclear cell of society. In the nineteenth century, the family pattern valued personal preferences, becoming dominant in the twentieth century. This set up a romantic revolution which highlighted personal choices and preferences, and the expressive considerations

1 "(...) universo de partida da vida em sociedade" (original version)

associated with both the meanings and attitudes around family behaviour.

As it is possible to understand from the previous reflections and expositions, we live and have always lived in constant change. The successive adaptation to change is associated with constant individual evolution, "*an ongoing process of creating and re-creating our self-identities*" (Giddens, 2006, p.67) which, along the way, meets the paradox of simultaneous anonymity. At the base of almost all the changes, we can identify and feel the effect of globalisation which, at the same time as it influences the macro-systems, also affects the private domain equally or more intensely. Themes such as the family, gender roles, sexuality, personal identity, interaction with others - both in the private sphere and in work relationships - are today undergoing constant mutations, with obvious effects on the redesign and organisation of spaces. The growth of a new individualism lies in the need for an active and intense construction of one's own identity.

Today there is an increasing number of people living alone and households with fewer members. At the same time, the collectivist and congregational nature of the individual is emerging and people are seeking solutions for a life shared with others who are not necessarily part of their blood family, while at the same time tending to value their more individual character, in a search for their privacy and intimacy. It is time, now more than ever, to evaluate the correlations between the social and the spatial, in order to understand how the house, the domestic space of encounter, of routines and circumstances, can mirror and embody the mentioned mutability characteristic of our times.

THE HOUSE IN WESTERN SOCIETY

"*The house was a fundamental element generator of urbanity as it represents the passage from nomadic life to sedentary life, the creation of urban agglomerations and of life in society*"² (Oliveira, 2015, p.21). Precisely because of this the house is considered the central element in the matter of domesticity as a condition or quality of that which is domestic. Wilson (1988) suggests that the domestication process happens precisely with the first cultural movement that physically alters the landscape, a movement of protection against nature through the projected construction of a permanent shelter as opposed to the temporary use of provisional shelters.

Consequently, regarding domestic space, it becomes relevant to address the idea of dwelling and the relationship of the body with space, since the notion of domesticity emerged and evolved alongside the evolution of the family itself and the set of meanings embodied in the domestic space. Heidegger, in *Building Dwelling Thinking*, dedicates himself intensively to the exploration of the origins of dwelling and its meaning, resorting to etymology seen as "*It is language that tells us about the nature of a thing, provided that we respect language's own nature*" (Heidegger, 1975, p.146). By inhabiting, humans necessarily are on the earth, relate to and are part of a place through their own nature as beings.

The notion of *habitus*, related to the verbs *habere* and *habitare*, means condition, state (of a thing or of the

2 "A casa foi um elemento fundamental gerador de urbanidade pois representa a passagem da vida nómada para a vida sedentária, a criação de aglomerados urbanos e da vida em sociedade." (original version)

body itself), circumstance, or briefly, way of being, and allows for constant reactivation and updating of social life, of individual and collective practices, of the ways of inhabiting and appropriating, and of architectural practice itself, assuming a determining role of change in history.

Still according to Wilson (1988), domesticity always implies different ways of being together and apart. Based on this statement it is immediately possible to associate the concepts of privacy and intimacy with domesticity and, consequently, with the domestic space. The idea of privacy emerges and begins to gain shape in relation to the consecration of public life. From the notion of ritualisation of life, there arises the need to manage not only one's own life, but also the integrity of property and contact between inhabitants. The origin of the idea of privacy as a condition of the house emerged in the ancient Greek polis and subsequently, the fluidity in the organisation of domestic space reflected the character of the Roman family – *“whose only defining limit was the idea of the family as private property”* (Aureli and Giudici, 2016, p.114). However, the condition of privacy begins more concretely and recognisably, as Ariès (1990) suggests, in the nineteenth century, at the moment when there is a clear separation between the individual and the idea of citizen: the distinction between life and public existence, work and collective socialisation.

For being associated with the private sphere and incorporating the notion of privacy (whether it be in relation to the public space or in relation to the other individuals with whom we share it), the house allows precisely for this progressive conquest of each one's intimacy. We may therefore conclude that, in a certain way, intimacy (in a sphere of greater interiority) derives from the more or less inherent condition of privacy of the house.

In the twenty-first century, the term nomad (characteristic of lifestyles so different from ours) is interestingly used to characterise the contemporary individual who *“enjoys a growing autonomy to the extent that he is freed from the means to which he belongs”*³ (Filipe, 2014, p.9). The question is to consider how the house can respond to this condition of detachment and to an attitude of conscious transitoriness in face of the world and the space one inhabits, at the same time as, almost paradoxically, there is a constant search for feelings of belonging and isolation, a desire for the personal space that the house may have the ability to provide, as a container of values of privacy, intimacy, community and communion.

We are recurrently confronted with a dynamic in which space is constantly created and recreated, a dynamic that defines, per se, the phenomenon of dwelling. Amos Rapoport (2003) defines this process of appropriation as a process of conception by those who dwell, based on decision-making, certain preferences and the development of different alternatives from specific cultural models. This process responds, in each case, to preferences of both individual and collective nature.

The problem of form and the question of function mainly in domestic space evolved from an organicist principle to a structuralist basis and, from the 1930s onwards, *“function will constitute the main term through which the polemic on modern architecture will be conducted internationally”*⁴ (Tostões, 2002, p.88). The functionalist

3 “(...) goza de uma crescente autonomia na medida em que se liberta dos meios a que pertence” (original version)

4 “(...) a função constituirá o principal termo através do qual a polémica sobre a arquitectura moderna será conduzida internacionalmente” (original version)

currents have been criticised precisely because they developed models that have proved to be ineffective in regard to social change. These models developed within the modern movement corresponded, as Hertzberger (2005, p.146) denotes, to extreme specifications of requirements and types of usage "*which inevitably resulted in more fragmentation than integration, and if there was anything to which these concepts were not resistant, it was time*". These solutions, often too specific, lead to the abovementioned inefficiency and to a more significant and paradoxical dysfunctionality.

Flexibility appears in this context, according to Hertzberger, as an appearance: achieving flexibility from neutrality in the design of the house could, it was believed, serve different uses and absorb and accommodate the influences of changing times. The point is that flexibility of appropriation or interpretation of space does not necessarily correspond to a total flexibility and fluidity of space, but to a form that admits this change as a permanent factor and is therefore a polyvalent form "*that can be put to different uses without having to undergo changes itself, so that a minimal flexibility can still produce an optimal solution*" (Hertzberger, 2005, p.147).

The notion of limit will prove to be crucial in the subsequent exploration, namely in the formal devices through which this notion may be materialised - as is the case of the door. This type of element thus becomes important to reflect upon as it becomes a mediator not only between physical spaces but also in terms of human relationships.

THE PLAN AND THE WAYS OF DWELLING IT - A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

In general, our time of excessive specialisation avoids or eliminates the oneiric image of the house explored by Bachelard (1996), an image that reflects the human mind, which simultaneously refers to a past and a future, allowing for the exploration of the individual and of everyday life.

The key concepts "*living from the center*" and "*house of many rooms*" value the way in which the different spaces and rooms that make up the house can structure, relate, interact and hierarchise, and also the possibilities that these configurations bring in regard to certain patterns or ways of life, reflecting distinct visions of those who dwell. On one hand, we defend the possibility of the existence of a space or of a central room, a hall not only of arrival but also of distribution and spatial articulation, which is developed in a distinctive way, moving away from the so deeply rooted solution of the corridor; on the other hand, the exploration of the open plan of rooms which translates into an interconnection of rooms with more than one door that structures the plan and allows for different ways of going through and occupying the domestic space, directly confronting the body and the existential experience of each person.

In exploring the possibilities of the central space, Bates (2016) mentions that this room has been at the heart of the house since the earliest civilisations, giving as an example the plan of a house in the ancient city of Ur - modern Iran - in prehistoric Mesopotamia and recognises its potential when describing a house he visited in Porto, by aNC architects.

In the same way that Bates (2016) stimulates us with the description of his visit to his friends' house in Porto,

director Danny Boyle teases us in *Shallow Grave* (1994) with the portrayal of a specific way of life that we recognise today, and which raises the pertinent and topical question of how we will live together in the future. The director uses the intimate connection between the lives of the protagonists, as individuals and as a group, and the physical space of the house to emphasise both tension and mystery as the story develops.

Evans (1997) resorts to literature and painting to highlight certain social patterns, perhaps because he shares with Pallasmaa the idea that the description of the house seems to belong more to the realms of poetry, literature, film and painting than to architecture. He recognises that the plan is a form that inscribes social patterns and describes the nature of human relationships, but he associates it with contemporary literature and painting in order to substantiate this relationship between architectural organisation and socio-cultural principles. Raphael's *Madonna dell'Impannata* is a good example of a model where "*personal relationships were translated into a compositional principal transcending subject-matter*" (Evans, 1997, p.59).

The project of Villa Madama (1525) – designed by Raphael – should be observed, especially its plan, as a portrait of social relations. When addressing Villa Madama, two characteristics can be distinguished: on one hand, the rooms generally have more than one door; on the other, there is no distinction between the path through the house and the spaces inhabited within it. Raphael's plan incorporates these features and represents what, at the time, was common practice. The existence of more than one door per room radically reshaped the pattern of domestic life: where there was an adjoining space, a door appeared accentuating the creation of a matrix of completely interconnected rooms. Thus, Villa Madama can be described, in terms of occupation, as an open plan permeable to the numerous members of the family, of which guests and visitors were also part of; strangers but always welcome to the daily context that was experienced.

Also in the sixteenth century, the internal organisation of Andrea Palladio's Palazzo Antonini (Udine, 1556) largely contributed to the establishment of the tendency that validates the house as a set of interconnected rooms promoting the non-distinction of the character of each room. Here it is important to bring into discussion Villa Foscari (1558) and the elaboration of this idea of the central space. The interest for this room lies in the fact that it invites a multiplicity of uses that allows the meeting of a larger number of people - a habit characteristic of the society of that time. In addition, the nooks and corners identified in Palladio's plans are elements of great relevance to the way we apprehend the house. They transport us into the world of individuality, allowing those who inhabit it to explore their own existence and the possibility of reverie.

The transition from sixteenth century Italy to late sixteenth/early seventeenth century England can be characterised through Palladio's influence – an example of which is the work of John Thorpe. According to Evans (1997) and from the little evidence he has so far been able to gather, the first appearance of the independent passage is recorded precisely in England, in John Thorpe's Beaufort House (1597). The influence of this passage is at this time becoming recognised, although it is still something simply curious and unusual.

The example of Coleshill, Berkshire, by Sir Roger Pratt, is the most complete model of a new system characterised by changes in internal organisation and layout that became very evident, particularly after 1630, and specifically in houses built for the upper classes of society. An independent passage runs along the entire length of the building on each floor and each room has a door connecting it to this passage, witnessing the

beginning of a more accentuated separation between the server and the served – not only in functional terms of spatial organisation but also in social terms. The novelty of this approach is that architecture is consciously used here to dissipate contact and any less desirable interrelationships.

There is a balance in the use of the two types of circulation as exemplified in the plan for John Webb's Amesbury House, 1661. The central passage serves the whole house at the same time that the rooms themselves, at least on the main floor, are also interconnected. We realise that the gathering character and taste for company is recognised and the relatively central and larger space and the interconnectedness of the rooms illustrate precisely that. However, a certain risk of the self in the presence of others is also recognised; others who are foreign to the more restricted family. The passage, as John Webb himself defines it, mediates the entrance to the house and allows those who inhabit it to regulate access to the different spaces by strangers to the family, guests or servants.

Through distinct approaches, the houses designed by Thorpe, Pratt and Webb amplify the question of reciprocal interference, giving way to the topic – from the architect's point of view – that all the occupants of a house, whatever their social position, had become nothing but a potential source of disturbance for each other.

Only on the verge of the nineteenth century does one detect what might be considered a setback towards greater systematisation of access. Early on in the century, the work of John Soane emerges with particular relevance in relation to the themes addressed here - both the path through the house and the question of integration and separation in domestic space. In Lincoln's Inn Fields in London, 1825, Soane's approach emerges as the evolution towards a less geometric approach to space with multiple accesses through each room, carefully planned views and an idiosyncratic combination of rooms, each with its own character. As in Johann Erdmann Hummel's painting *The Berlin Room* (1820), in Lincoln's Inn Fields there is a dynamic through the succession and the overlap of spaces with ambiguous boundaries as well as new physical, visual and mental relationships occurring at every moment.

In the nineteenth century, the pattern derived from the already described romantic revolution branched out across different classes and societies, and it is here precisely that the issue we have been discussing seems to be somewhat resolved: "*the corridor and the universal requirement of privacy were firmly established and principles of planning could be advanced with more or less equal application to all dwellings in all circumstances*" (Evans, 1997, p.77). Robert Kerr appears as a strong critic of pass-through rooms and, consequently, the matrix of interconnected rooms, having defended the thesis that these features made domesticity unattainable (*The Gentleman's House*, 1864). Kerr mobilises architecture against the possibility of distraction or commotion, silencing the inconveniences of domestic life by segregating the floor plan into categories of circulation and permanence. It was this later approach that dominated domestic planning of this period, through the use of meticulous techniques that aimed towards a universal strategy of compartmentalisation.

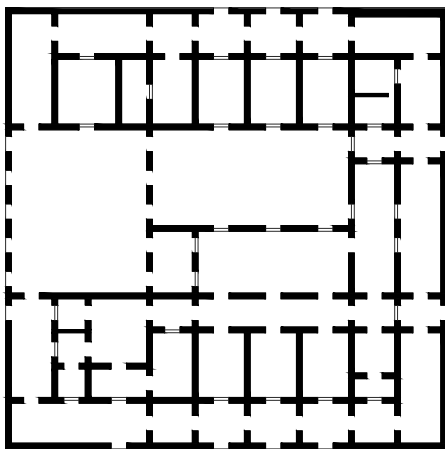
William Morris and Philip Webb reach the culmination of what was the nineteenth century approach with Red House in Bexley Heath of 1859, illustrating the principles laid down by Robert Kerr perhaps better than he himself did. The Red House, initiated shortly after William Morris completed *La Belle Iseult*, appears as the setting for the action depicted in the painting, with a layout with rooms that never interconnect, never have

more than one door and configure the circulation space to an entirely distinct unit.

From the first half of the twentieth century we recognise the exploration of the private, individual cell as the basic building block for entire cities, where at the same time the remaining facilities or infrastructures played the role of collectivisation. Alexander Klein, in his 1928 theoretical study, *The Functional House for Frictionless Living*, explores how a functional conception of the house, with a focus on the movement through it results, in his view, in frictionless daily life, without the accidental crossing or encounters that were believed to threaten the smooth running of the domestic machine.

Although the functionalist plan has dominated the twentieth century, there are in fact projects and approaches that challenge and propose an alternative to the functionalist logics presented here. At its base is the desire to explore and achieve greater cultural significance by increasing spatial opportunities at the level of the house plan. The Oller House by Francesc Mitjans (1941-43), the Hammerstrasse flats by Roger Diener (1981) and Peter Märkli's Sargans building (1986) are three examples in which, through the organisation of the interior space of the house and the exploration of the key concepts identified, irreplaceable existential meanings and emotional impacts are recognised and are able to remain in time.

A CASE STUDY



01 Plan, House in Melides I

The House in Melides I [01] by the portuguese architects Aires Mateus, a project that began in 2010 and ended in 2019, appears as a defined set of rules that gives rise to a resistant infrastructural grid, recognised in plan as a square, which organises in itself spaces of different dimensions, scales and proportions, which establish various relationships between them. It represents the idea of permanence, a structure that responds to the eternal because it is clearly defined by a set of rules that remain over time, by its constructive and cultural durability. Besides this search for the eternal, this capacity to respond and accompany the constant mutability of circumstances, there is the need for a response to the present time, in a certain way to the ephemeral. For the present time and within this infrastructural grid, various patios of different characters, scales, dimensions and relationships with the interior space have been defined.

One lives from the centre. The search for spaces or moments of individuality takes on a centrifugal and gradual movement from there: all the spaces that touch the external limits of the plan are also patios, now associated with the rooms, with which they establish a relationship of scale, similar proportion and, as such, greater intimacy.

The House in Melides I translates the reading of architecture as a real, phenomenological experience, in which

the potential for life in spaces increases to the extent that as many relationships and affinities as possible are established with memory, with existential images, with the past and the present. Transforming functional issues or mere needs into moments of beauty *“is the work that made the world resist, that made architecture valid as art”*⁵ (Manuel Aires Mateus, 2021). In the infinite spaces of the House in Melides I, a house of many rooms, the architects explore the clarity of the structure and the quality and comprehensibility of the spaces. At the same time, they guarantee the idea of permanence, ensuring new and different uses at any moment, promoting (and not restricting) freedom. This idea also relates to the thought of Aldo Rossi (1982) who argues that architecture is more significant for the city the more its form can contain various functions over time. Thus, the clearer the form is in its definition, the more open it is to different readings and interpretations and is predisposed to different evolutions.

As Manuel Aires Mateus underlines, functionalism came, redundantly enough, to functionalise our way of living and inhabiting, specifically dimensioning everyday activities and allocating them to predetermined spaces. The work of Aires Mateus, not only through the House in Melides I, but also through many other projected houses, opens the way to the search for the creation of liberties within the sphere of dwelling, by recognising that life is not made only of the daily and primary tasks that functionalism tried to organise, but of many others.

The House in Melides I incorporates the key concepts and presents itself as an example in the national panorama of special value, for being capable not only of responding to our time – characterised by a constant mutability of circumstances –, but also of projecting itself as a blank canvas for future times.

In the international context, more precisely in twenty-first century Europe, it is important to bring some examples that we consider relevant for a comparative analysis with the House in Melides I.

In 2014, the British studio Sergison Bates explored the key concepts that this research builds upon in the Mansion Block project, in London. Although typologically different from the House in Melides I, similarities are recognised in terms of the thinking and concepts underlying the spatial organisation, with options that privilege the user, whatever their context, circumstances or needs and how often they change and develop.

The following year, in 2015, a project by the Italian studio Dogma and the Realism Working Group, developed in Berlin, proposes an alternative to the double synthesis between the individual and the collective and between life and work. Communal Villa goes beyond the distinction between living and working, proposing a space that is somewhat generic and challenges certain visions of domesticity, in which the collective space is maximised and adaptable to any activity.

Also in Berlin, a project was developed in 2016 by E2A Architects – a residential building in Werkbundstadt of which’s floor plan organises several flats, each of which follows a logic of spatial equivalence through a set of interconnected rooms of similar size. The main aim of this organisation of the domestic interior space is, like the House in Melides I, to establish an infrastructural grid, with the wall also as the main theme. Materialised as something permanent and defining clear boundaries, this grid suggests different types of crossings, both physical and visual.

5 “(...) é o trabalho que fez resistir o mundo, que fez valer a arquitectura como arte” (original version)

Both the space that combines the workplace of the editorial team of ARCH+ magazine with the home of the editor and his partner – Methodearchitektur's project, Arno Löbbecke/ Ahn-Linh Ngo (2018) – and Jack Self's Mean Home project (2019), result in clear and objective plans, which do not hinder future uses but are extremely adaptable, which draw and provoke indeterminacy, resulting in a non-impediment to appropriation. This idea relates directly to the position that both van Reeth and Aires Mateus advocate that "*all designs should be timely and timeless*" (Self, 2021), appropriate to their time and simultaneously thought out for future times.

CONCLUSION

The singularity of the human condition lies in the fact that at every moment in history we live in worlds full of possibilities, each one as different from the previous one as from the next. The chronological analysis cast a phenomenological perspective on the relationship between the form of the house and the ways of dwelling and allowed us to recognise that history hides many clues and possible paths for integrated solutions for our time. It was possible for us to conclude, from the historical analysis since the sixteenth century, that the house plan has been embodying the changes that characterise western society over time, in an interaction process that we consider symmetrical.

Bridging the gap to the present day and to the necessary reformulation of domestic space – derived from the radical changes that have been witnessed in terms of how we relate to each other, how we see ourselves and the world, how we live – we conclude that the cultural exchanges, the legacies that the past successively leaves us with, must be revisited constantly, consciously and in depth.

The way in which the house plan adapts and transforms itself to social change is the key to the survival of the house as an element that has the capacity to allow and incorporate the mutability of circumstances, alongside the diversity and multiculturalism that are now our common experience. It is thus concluded that the house, designed on the key concepts "*living from the center*" and "*house of many rooms*" can indeed accommodate contemporary ways of life and simultaneously adapt to the needs of any time, representing a place of freedom.

The model of house that has been developed since the Modern Movement, mostly thought out and designed with a specific type of family and way of life in mind, proves to be oblivious to the speed with which circumstances change nowadays. The study of a case developed in the twenty-first century, House in Melides I, by the Portuguese studio Aires Mateus, in comparative analysis with other contemporary cases, has shown that the exploration of solutions based on the identified key concepts is happening and is representative of this approach.

The house has gained a new importance, a new protagonism; it is up to architecture and the design of domestic space to follow and react to this change and to counteract the recent dilution of images or architectural elements that stimulate dwelling – as the door or the window – by seeking solutions that resonate with the body and place it at the centre of the space; that respond and correspond to life.

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