

Enabling: On the dispersion of the nuclear family model

New parameters of the boundary of living.

custodia compartida
habitar
flexibilidad
infancia
vivienda
shared custody
inhabiting
scattering
flexibility
childhood
housing

Habilitando es una investigación sobre la ruptura de las tradicionales fronteras del habitar. El campo de la vivienda, aún sumergido en los cánones de familia nuclear y repleto de reglas jurídicas, técnicas y económicas, se replantea bajo la óptica de Carmen, una niña que, bajo el régimen de custodia compartida, transita constantemente entre dos modelos de convivencia, entre dos casas.

Desde esta visión primera, desde esta experiencia, la frontera de la casa natal se diluye, el programa de la vivienda se dispersa y el uso de ciertos elementos se resignifica. Existe una ambigüedad válida en la utilización de espacios, mobiliario y objetos que chocan con los estrictos límites de diseño de la vivienda. Existen nuevas necesidades familiares y de relación y, por tanto, esta nueva dimensión de lo doméstico, que ha sobrepasado el límite conceptual de la casa familiar (esa “casa para toda la vida”) nos exige la integración de un diseño más versátil, más humano, en el campo de la vivienda.

Enabling (Habilitar) is an investigation into the breaking of the traditional boundaries of living. The study area of housing, still driven by the norms of a nuclear family and full of legal, technical, and economic rules, is rethought under Carmen’s perspective, a girl who, under the regime of shared custody, constantly moves between two ways of living, between two houses.

From this first vision, from this experience, the boundary of the birthplace is diluted, the housing programme is dispersed and the use of certain elements is reinterpreted. There is a valid ambiguity in the use of spaces, furniture and objects that clash with the strict design limits of the house. There are new family and relationship needs and, therefore, this new dimension of the domestic, which has exceeded the conceptual limit of the family home (the “home for life”) requires a more flexible and versatile, more human based housing design.

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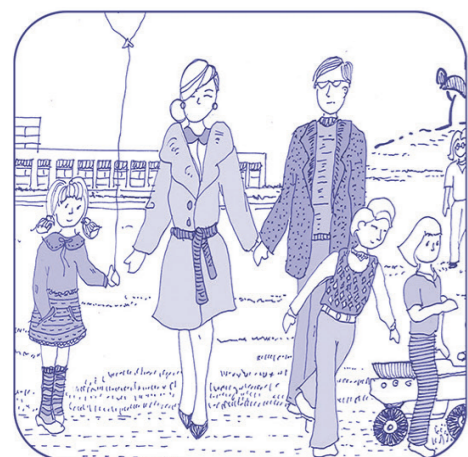


Fig.1 - Traditional depiction of the family.

INTRODUCTION

Our family is the primary context from which we take basic social interaction tools and initiate the process of continuous learning that comprises any human experience. From this, our first palpable experiential framework we record, as children, the characters of a personality in continuous evolution and we are assimilating the basic rules of coexistence (Fig.1).

In this family setting, home does not only represent an architectural space, but follows through and gives a meaning to our family bonds. The house is surrounded by a set of images, memories and experiences, the same way as a sculptor moulds work, and it leaves a mark on us.

Living entails a series of rhythms and, whatever the family context, the primary environment continues to determine the way in which we relate with others, even when the profound social, economic and technological transformations of recent decades destroys the hegemonic concept of traditional nuclear family.

Events such as the increase in life expectancy, the integration of women into work, the increasingly late emancipation of young people, the increase in the number of single-parent and homoparental families, the growing number of marital breakdowns, as well as the increase of technology as a means through which affective-sexual bonds are developed, have led to the rethinking of the traditional family framework.

From this reflection on the models of coexistence caused by the growing number of new family models and the variety of affective relationships, is born, in turn, the reflection of its physical container: the house, the room.

And in recent decades, architects, historians and academics have discussed this question in search of that new physical container, that new frontier.

Traditional domesticity has been questioned from different points of view. Of special interest is, *Architecture and politics: Essays for alternative worlds* by Zaida Muxi and Josep María Montaner where the contemporary vulnerabilities of architecture are analysed from sustainability, participation or gender equality viewpoints. Also of interest is the work of Beatriz Colomina in *Domesticity at War*, as an analysis and critique of domestic parameters and family models prevailing after the Second World War: *"The domestic has always been at war. The battle of the family, the battle of sexuality, the battle for cleanliness, for hygiene..."* (Colomina 2006, p.5).

Toyo Ito, in the book *Tarzans in the Media Forest: Architectural Words 8*, also tells us about this new domestic architecture. In a domestic context surrounded by technological devices and in which the individuality of each human being prevails, Toyo Ito speaks of architecture as a membrane: *"the membrane needs to be soft and flexible, rather than being rigid and dense like a Wall, architecture as*

epidermis must be pliant and supple like our skin and be able to Exchange information with the world outside". (Ito 1997, p.123).

From these words, it seems clear that the dilution of the traditional family concept gives rise to a new experiential frontier. This concept, in the context of the Spanish family, is constituted as the starting point of the research that is then developed further.

Starting from the idea, as Amman asserts, *"that any architecture is a scenario that allows certain behaviours, executory and moral habits individual and in groups"* (Amman 2011, p.53). Led by the word *"habilitar"* - the main title of the project from which this essay is born - the reproduction of the old codes in the field of housing is questioned. *"Habilitar"* means enabling, training and preparing. With this word we wonder if architecture is enabling the development of these social changes.

The stability of housing design codes during the recent decades is linked to economic profitability and the maintenance of its attractiveness as an investment good without considering the experience of the inhabitant.

However, the citizen, in the context of the more recent significant social changes has surpassed the social limits in which traditional family models were founded, transiting in a space to which he demands new ways of thinking and designing.

BACKGROUND

Housing as an investment, has taken the lead role over interest in housing as a living space. Traditionally property price have been a perennial fascination, with rising markets habitually treated as a proxy for a successful economy (Jacobs 2019, p.5).

In recent decades in Spain, and especially during the years of real estate growth that preceded the economic crisis, housing has been considered a trading object at the service of those interested in speculation. The changes introduced in design have been scarce and the housing models have continued to opt for mass production.

From the recovery of the real estate sector that began in 2014 to the present day, we can notice a growing interest in the rental model compared to the purchase model especially among young Spanish people aged 16 to 29, who are precisely those who, to a greater extent, have suffered the impact that the recession has had on labour market conditions. It should be recalled that for workers between 16 and 29 years the unemployment rate reached the maximum of 42.4% in 2013 and a temporary employment ratio of 57.4%, (Alves, Urtaun, 2019).

Moving back to an economic question; while it is possible that

nowadays there is a preference for renting over ownership, this tendency is based mostly on issues of economic power. The analysis of data that considers the Spanish real estate market leads us to think that housing continues to produce an inflexible model and does not allow for the necessary changes to adapt to new social ways of living.

Faced with the rigidity of the construction market which establishes a series of legal and fiscal boundaries, ending in a set of political and social decisions, this research presents several starting points in order to question them. On one hand, a experience to reflect on the family changes that have occurred in recent decades and on the other hand, a set of diverse references of experimentation in the housing sector that question the real way of living, and that explore new forms of creating that personal background - a dispersed and diluted boundary.

CASE STUDY. SHARE CUSTODY

The personal starting point of this research leads us to a social question. At present marriage, free of its symbolic value, becomes a mode of affective conjugality through which spouses - homosexual, transsexual or heterosexual - protect themselves from the outside world to live together for a period of time. More

than a third of these will end in divorce (Amann 2011, p.108). In Spain, in 2021 there were 86,851 divorces, 12.5% more than in the previous year and joint custody was granted in 43.1% of divorce and separation cases of couples with children (INE, 2023). This regime of joint custody is, in the opinion of the current legislation, the desirable scenario. It encourages a responsible exercise of parent-child duties by both parents.

Carmen is a 7 years old girl whose parents have a shared custody regime by mutual agreement. Following the model that most often occurs in this type of agreement, the child has to move from home to home in the periods in which each parent exercises custody - otherwise known as the *'child-suitcase modality'* approach. The week is divided into two or three periods. Normally on Mondays she starts the week at mum's house and on Wednesdays she moves to dad's house. On transfer days, it is usually one of the parents who takes her to school, and the other parent who picks her up. Weekends are usually alternate. The border drawn by the birthplace in Carmen's case is scattered. Although parent's homes are separated by a few tens of kilometres and are in neighbouring towns, our analysis revolves around the child's point of view, and aims to investigate the duplicity produced by a constant pilgrimage between two ways of living (Fig.2).

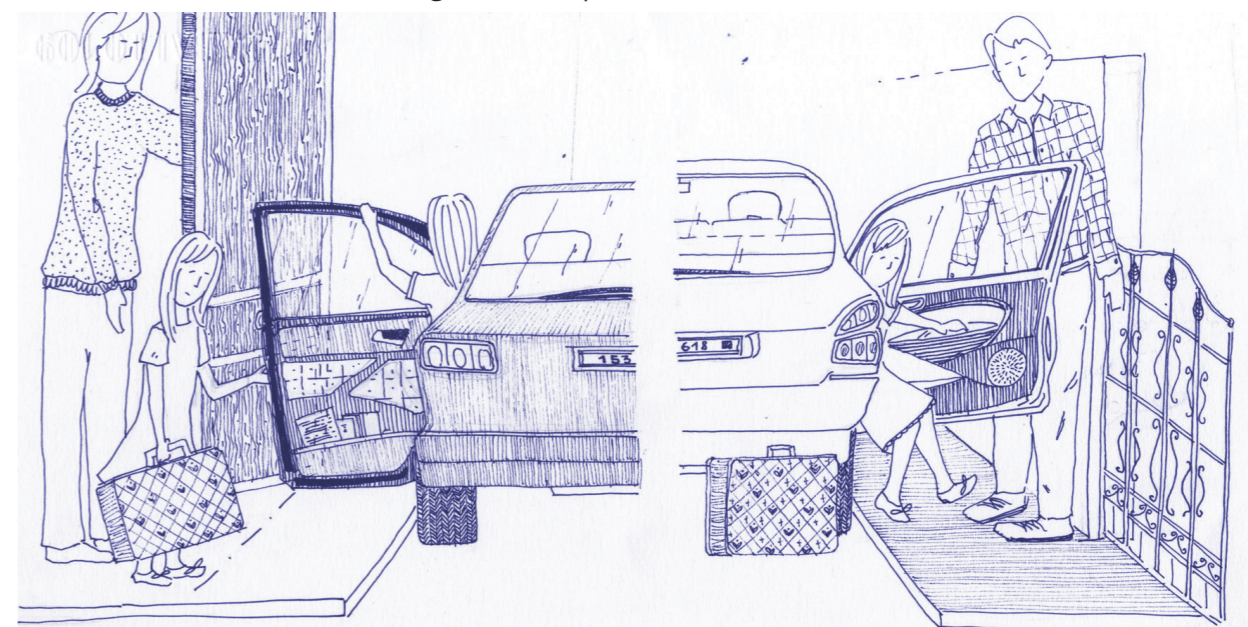
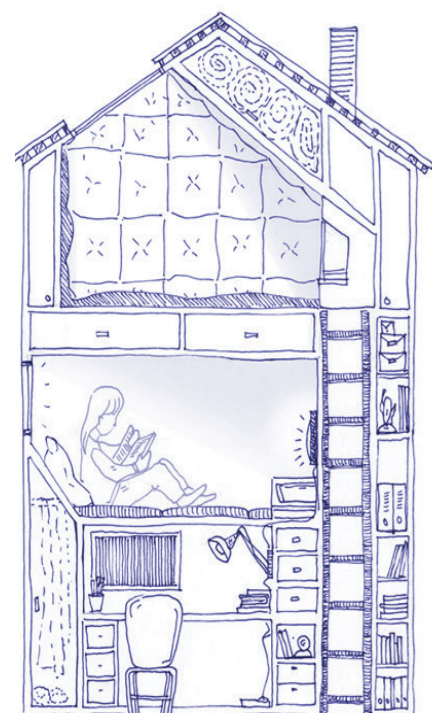


Fig.2 - Drawing. The journey of the child-suitcase..

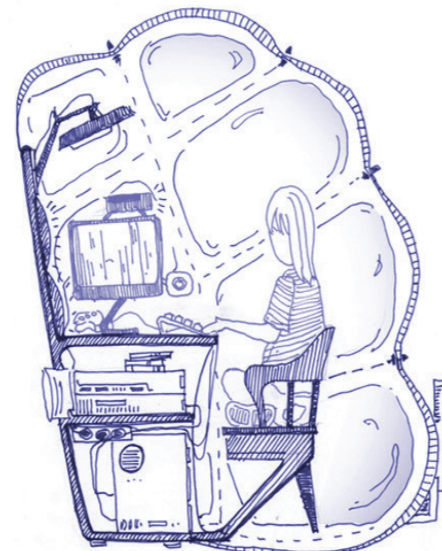


SHELTER-ROOM



CUPBOARD-SUITCASE

COMPUTER-CAPSULE



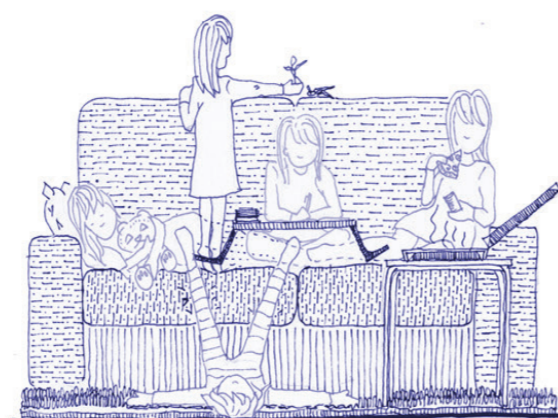
CIRCUS-BED



DESSERT-TRIP



BED-CAR



SOFA-HOUSE

Fig.3 - Carmen's experiences-series of drawings. Own elaboration.

Carmen follows two schedules, inhabits two environments and moves between two models of coexistence. Like any child, play is a primary means of communication and the way in which she uses the different daily items, raises the question about the 'usual' interaction with spaces and objects. What elements form this new experiential boundary? What are the new possible meanings for these items?

In order to represent the way in which the girl experiences the environment around her, a series of images emerge that subvert the sense of certain elements. This re-imagines functions, sometimes basic, on non-normative bases; for example, the car in which the father takes the girl to school every morning has adopted a new use, or the dimension that is given to certain pieces of furniture and also objects changes.

Suddenly, Carmen's backpack is her foundation stone, and every time she changes house, a small trip. The sofa is her most precious property, and her own room an intermittent shelter (Fig.3).

The different rules of father-mother coexistence can provide relaxation in the normative use of certain elements. In addition, there is an uninhibited attitude typical of play. These images arise, then, as an opportunity to establish a new boundary of dispersed domesticity present in this case of shared custody.

VERSATILITY, DISINTEGRATION AND INDETERMINACY

This new domestic boundary is ambiguous, changing and constantly transits between two family models. Housing is no longer a spatial unit, but a mental one (Amann 2011, p.127). The environment experienced by the girl does not follow the same guidelines as the stable environment of a traditional family framework and the search for these new guidelines

leads us to delimit three concepts that sum up the character of this new domesticity of the girl, being *Versatility*, *Disintegration* and *Indeterminacy*.

Talking about *Versatility*, first of all, such as the ability to adapt easily and quickly to various functions, we look for transformable boundary references. In this context, we focus on proposals that integrate interior elements of housing that can be modified according to the needs of the inhabitant, such as the apartments in Fukuoka by Steven Holl (VV.AA, El Croquis, 1996, p.146) or the proposal of social housing for Carabanchel by the architecture firm Aranguren Gallegos (VV. AA, El Croquis, 2004, p.232-247). The design allows adaptability to situations such as the increase or decrease of visitors or tenants in the house or the approach of day-night or winter-summer programmes.

Disintegration, on the other hand, means separating. A dispersed boundary, such as that which characterises the environment of our specific case, externalises certain functions that, in a traditional family model, were all contained within the limits of the house. The house, or one of the two houses that the girl inhabits may not, in fact, contain all the domestic functions, and under this perspective we draw in the experimental proposal of the *Nomad Woman* by Toyo Ito. This proposal shows a displacement from the house to the object. Adding the domestic artifacts, a new experiential boundary is built into the inhabitant: a dispersed border. The inhabitant does not inhabit the house, s/he inhabits the city

and this concept reminds us of the way Carmen lives her day to day, moving between different spaces with, as a central point, the objects that always accompany her. On that trip, dad's car can suddenly be a comfortable bed and the ice cream shop on the corner, the makeshift dining room before going to class.

Moriyama House is another example of disintegration. Disintegration, in this proposal, is not so much translated into artifacts as translated into spatial pieces that serve as support for the different functions of living. This work of Ryue Nishizawa's office consists of 10 independent volumes scattered along a plot. The result is a community space and different partial houses depending on each family situation. In this context, Japanese architecture has led research in the reprogramming of housing for decades and we can find interesting examples that reinterpret western limits, as forceful as the exterior-interior and the private or the public.

Are we facing a fracture of these limits or does the inhabitant prefer that they disappear? Montenys and Fuster (2001, p.46) pointed out "We could ensure that, the greater the specialisation of the pieces of the house and the more indefinite pieces have disappeared, the greater has been the loss of flexibility of this".

In terms of *Indeterminacy* architecture has moved away from ambiguity as the years make people move away from childhood. It is curious to see how the game of any child, as is the case of Carmen's study, follows expansionist rules (Fig.4), handling the indeterminacy

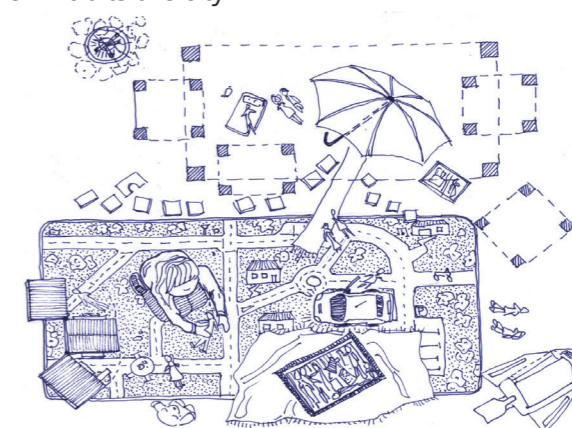


Fig.4 - Carmen's experiences-series of drawings. The game explosion.

of space with much more ease than any adult.

The child builds with fantastic imagination stories without having to guide the space it occupies. To recover that condition of play in the building and apply a valid ambiguity to the domestic is to find humanity in the architecture that surrounds us. From this point of view, we can collect examples such as the student housing of Harquitectes in Sant Cugat del Vallés (2009-2011) or the social housing proposal of *Nemausus* in Nîmes by Jean Nouvel (1985-1987).

The idea of an unfinished building is present in both cases, both from the constructive point of view and from the housing unit's traditional uses and it is useful to consider it in a joint custody case. Could you consider satellite spaces that take on the transitory situation of a family change? Its inhabitants can complete each space and in a situation of change they have room for action. Indeterminacy is, from this point of view, positive. As defended by the architects Bach y Bach (2015, p.88) in relation to the project of the *MO house* by Pablo Oriol and Fernando Rodríguez (FRPO architects): "The spaces of each one should be named only after being occupied". There is, in short, a

broad laboratory of ideas about the limits of housing and its functions. Recognising in its design a corner of freedom similar to the moment when a child draws onto paper, is encouraging and truly human. These references, however, face the strong rules of profitability and reproduction that prevail in the housing sector.

Observing the domestic space, from the freedom of childhood, brings us closer to its essential elements. The philosopher Higinio Marín (2021, p.23), considers that the conceptual border of living is like the beginning - a means to start again. Home reminds us of our origins, in childhood. He points out:

"And that is, it seems to me, the secret that turns a space indoors, at home: there is inside where you can rest in the beginning (...). Hence the four activities that make human inhabitant and space room, home: food, sleep, bath and conversation. Because of that, the interior rooms are bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, dining rooms and living rooms. And it does not matter much if they are separated as pieces or as environments, by construction or furniture. Eating, sleeping, bathing or talking are all ways of putting all things back together, of restoring the beginning of life".

MANIFEST

Faced with this question of living the reproduction of models of coexistence are in profound transformation, Carmen's specific case has exposed a daily life that is diluted over different spaces breaking the traditional boundary of the home. Her experience does not understand the harsh property, profitability and technique boundaries, and the optics of childhood bring ambiguity and freedom in the meaning of the spaces that surround us.

"The house, something that for architects is simply part of our work, is for others object of play and veneration" (Montenys, Fuster, 2001). And from that starting point emerges the way in which this research aims to enable housing, not to build it.

What would happen if the girl stops travelling from one home to another home and architecture allowed for this exchange? Which boundaries are broken and which borders are reconfigured when positioning ourselves from the child's perspective of living?

In a first glance of the horizon opened up by these issues a first impulse is to eliminate the elements and pieces that superfluously

delimit the housing programme.

The drawings seek to trace the essential architecture formed by unitary but interchangeable pieces, of similar sizes. These pieces are connected by programming different family situations, seeking to modify this pilgrimage of the girl and positioning her in the centre of the infrastructure (Fig.5).

Some parts of the drawing tell us about that corporal delimitation that supposes the first human frontier and that has its origin in childhood.

The Danish architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen defends the idea that, at a certain age, most children feel like building a shelter. That "cave game" has been able to change in a thousand ways, but the enclosure of the space for the personal use is common to all children (1974, p.37).

Back to the shelter concept, this place is the centre of the point from which to start again. As we pointed out before, this place is the centre of the house and, consequently, the centre of the proposals that are developed below.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The language used in this research has been freehand drawing. This form of expression, that is born from a direct idea-line connection, has given rise to a free working style, which constantly mixed architecture and human experience.

In the way of self-ethnography as a method of research, I consider hand drawing is like our first forms of expression, similar to the game of childhood, through which we learn to relate to our environment. It allows for gathering together of subjective but informed thinking about a subject.

Carmen's daily life has been drawn, first in objects and later in spaces. The game component has been maintained during the process (Fig.6).

That is why the results of this research have focused on the creation of stories and the formulation of a new perspective of the boundaries of living from the child's point of view, and not so much on the implacable delimitation of a real architecture. Just as a child imagines life stories with a doll's house, the drawing contains the same freedom.

This element, the "doll's house", is an object in "section" that allows the "player" to introduce elements into

each box of domesticity as pursued by the fantastic voyeur played by James Stewart in the Alfred Hitchcock classic *Rear Window*.

Therefore, in the proposals arising from the rethinking of living, the hand drawing will leave aside the zenithal view that prevails in the design of market housing, and instead immerse itself in the understanding of space from the section. There are many examples of architectural drawings that escape the practical floor plan using instead the section or perspective as the renderings of the German architect Helmut Jacoby or the drawings of Tokyo-based architecture firm Atelier Bow-Bow.

Freehand drawing is an essential component of this research. The drawings pierce walls, open rooms, exchange and superimpose pieces without paying attention to the constructive logic of the zenithal plane and to the extent that the ideas are applied in larger spaces, they change scale. The walls open and allow us to know each domestic history and its particularity.

The method, once it has descended to the concrete case of the experience of shared custody and has extracted a series of concepts and design tools, seeks their application on a larger scale

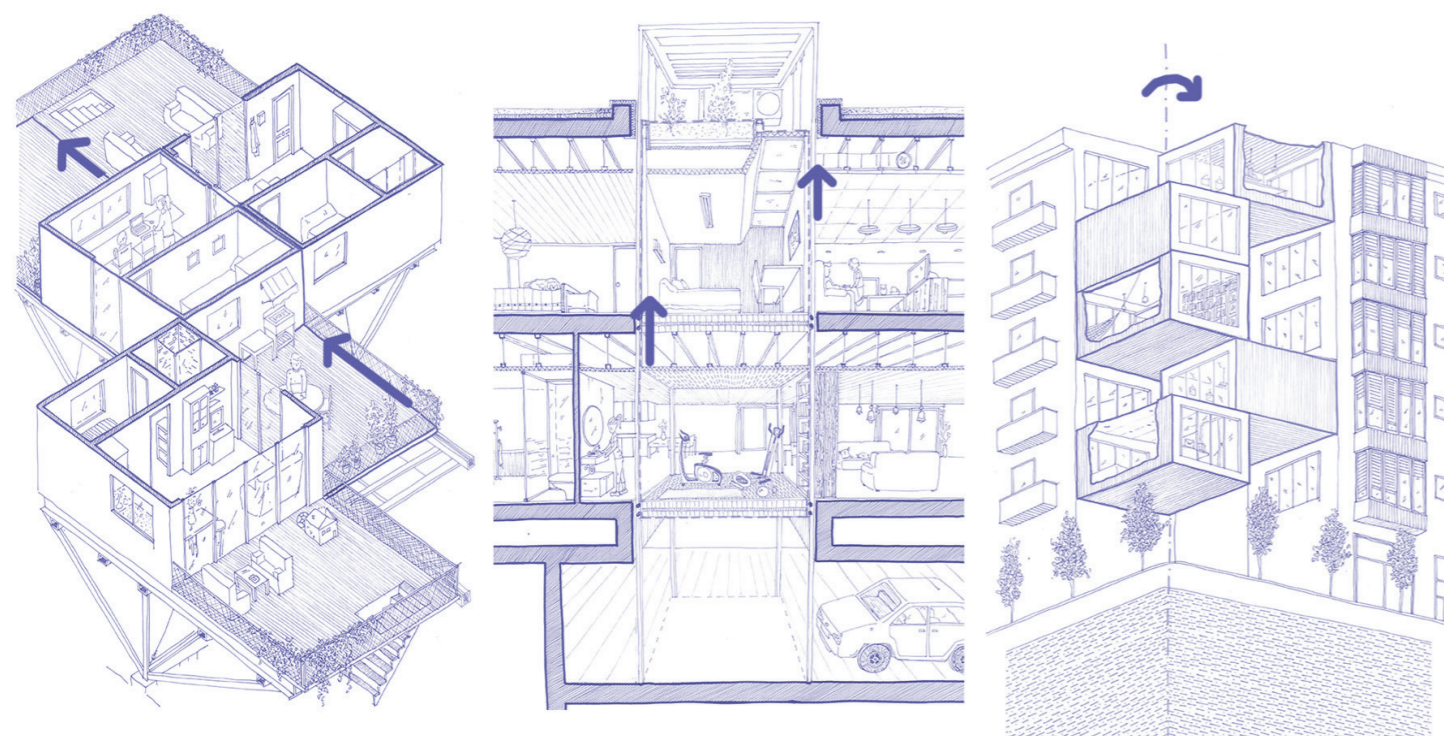


Fig.5 - Mobile room examples.

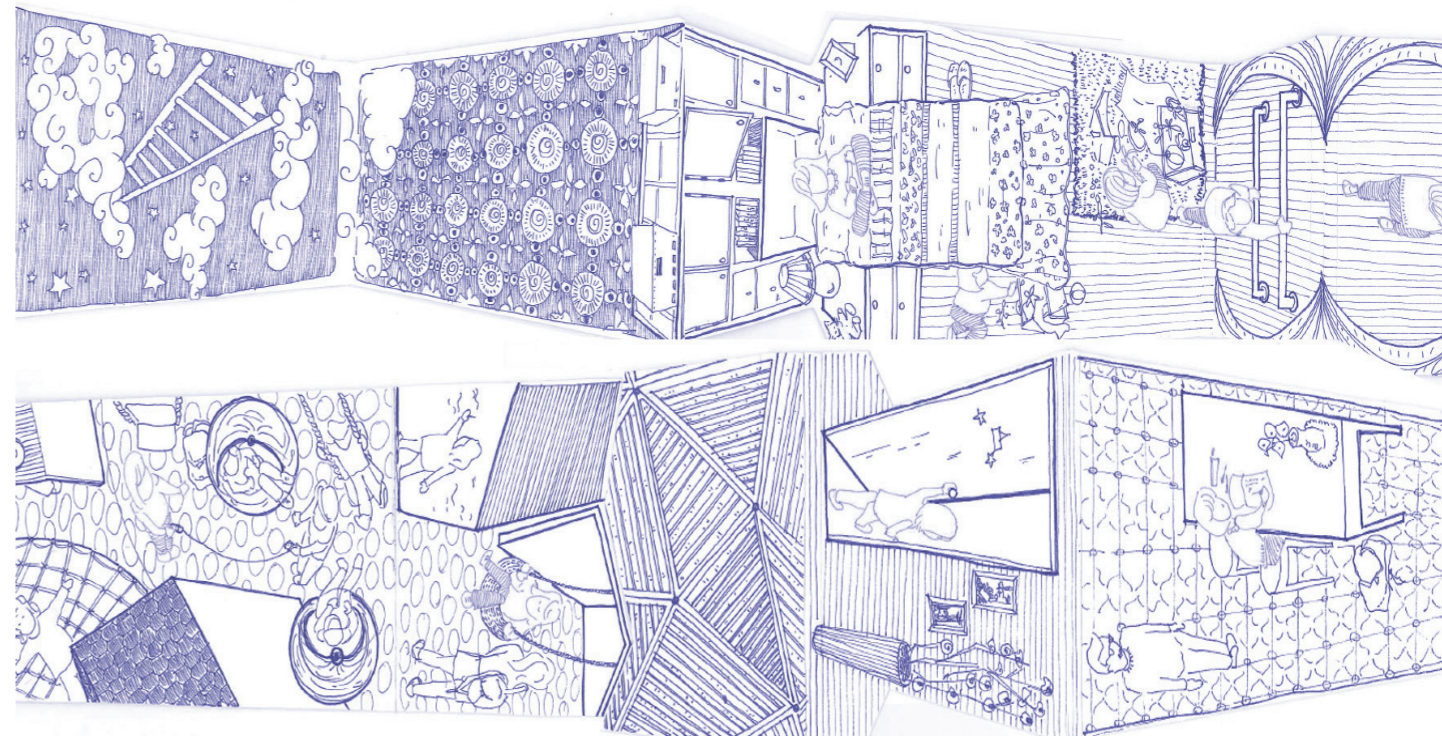


Fig.6 - Imaginary space for the child.

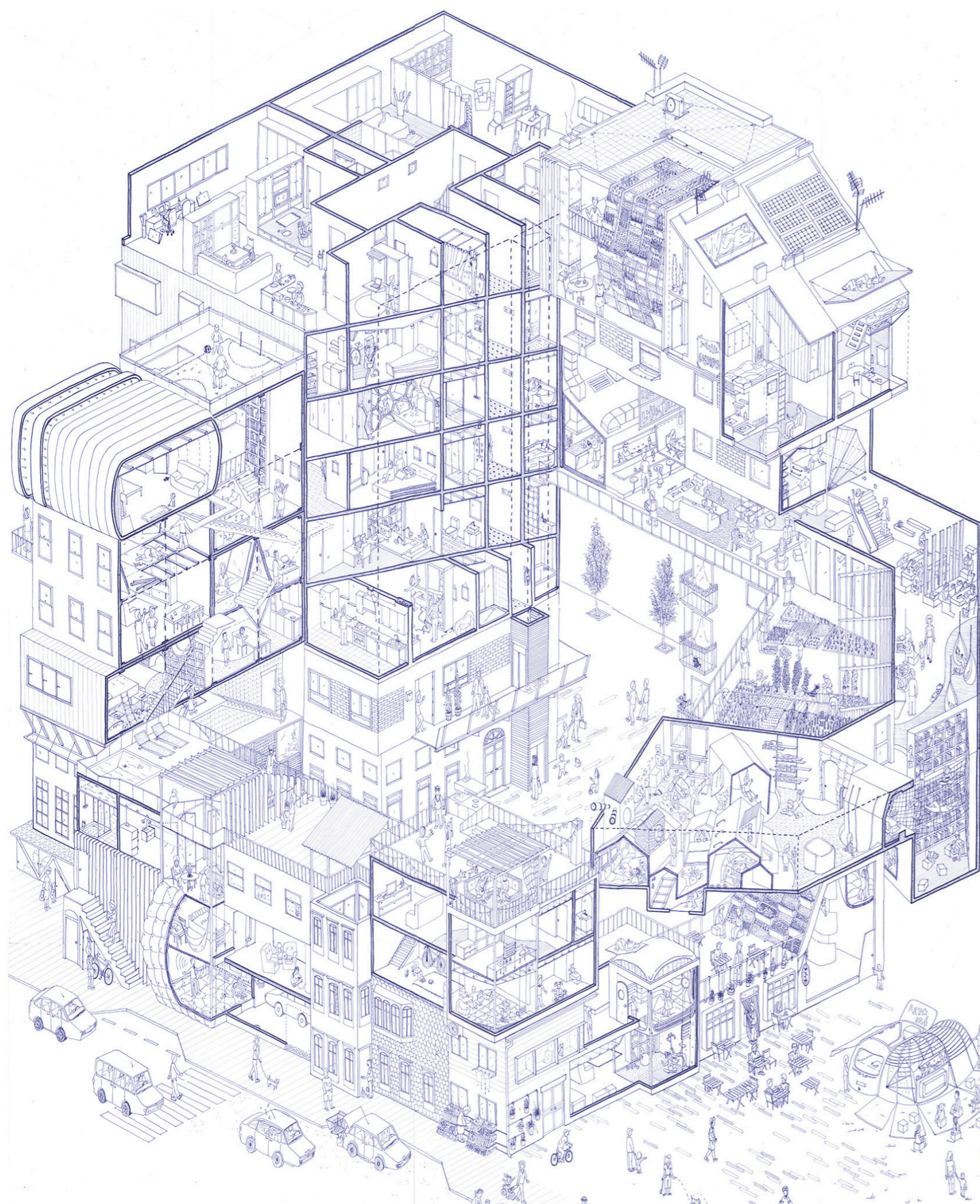


Fig.7 - Imaginary city of "habilitando". This drawing arises from the application of the references of versatility, disintegration and indeterminacy.

CITY, FRAGMENTS.

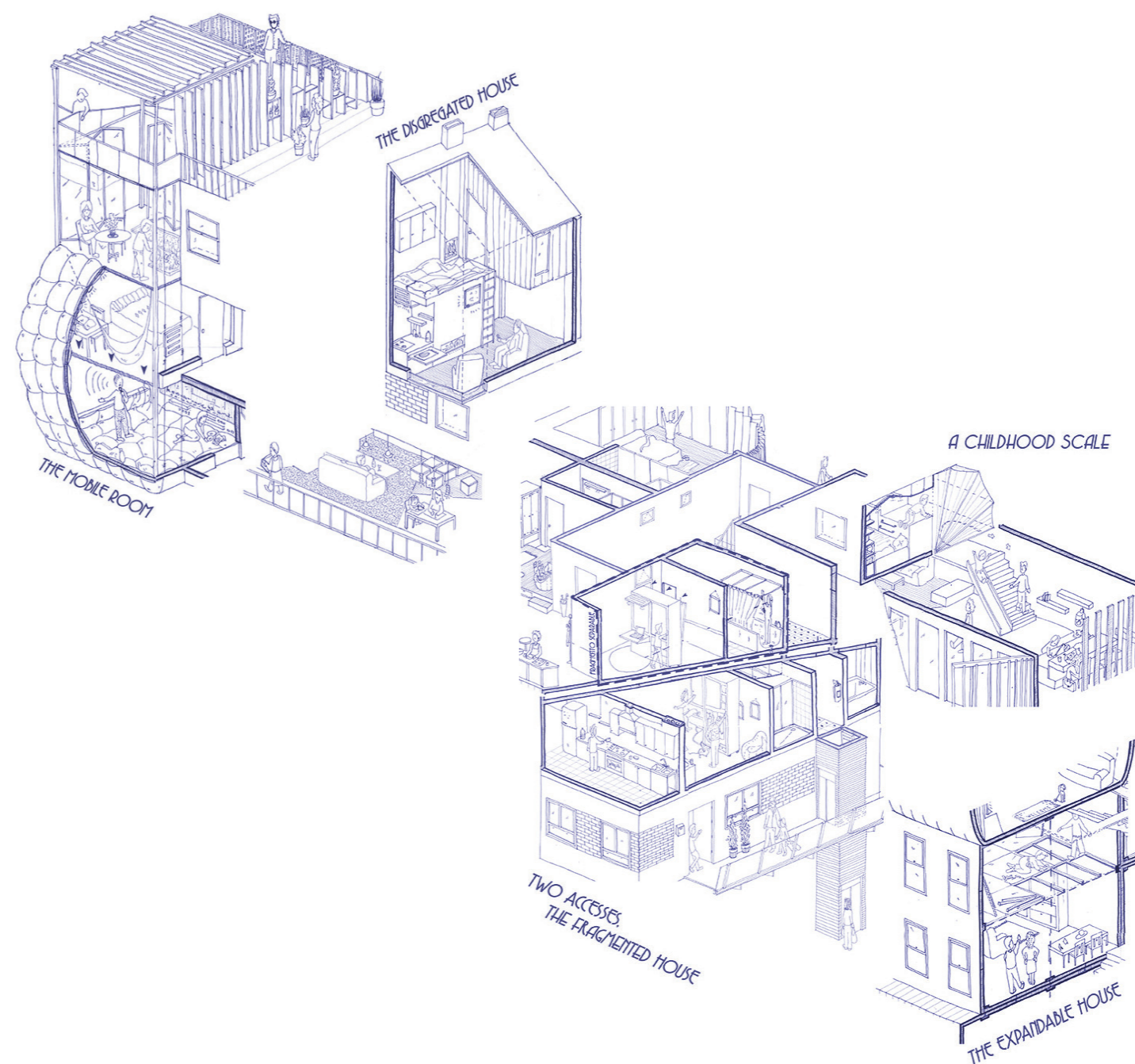


Fig.8 and 9 - Fragments: The mobile room, a disgregated or expandable house and the childhood's space.

(house < building < block). Now the goal is the creation of a city fragment in which the new living boundary is reformulated (Fig.7).

RESULTS

The city-drawing comprises the sum of the references, reflections and knowledge generated during the process. This drawing constitutes the representation of an aspiration and imagination, the representation of an environment

that destroys the traditional boundary of the nuclear family housing block, welcoming the current diversity of ways of living.

In the foreground, the city drawing shows a set of houses in which the movement of one of its pieces is allowed. Rem Koolhaas already did it in his project *Maison à Bourdeaux*. This mobile space breaks, in this case, the border of the adjoining dwellings and travels from one unit to another allowing the pilgrimage of one of

the members of the family unit. This theoretical proposal generates a non-static domesticity and serves to illustrate the extreme case of the journey of shared custody. Apart from the constructive application, it is interesting to emphasise the revolutionary character of changing a point of view. Suddenly the roles are reversed and it is in that mobile space, occupied by the child, that daily life develops. The centre has shifted to children.

In the upper part of the city-

drawing the rupture of the traditional housing scheme is reproduced, causing the separation of the house's "meeting" spaces from the spaces with a greater degree of privacy. A series of partial dwellings then emerges (Fig.8).

This design shares the most communal programme (living room or kitchen) and place the private rooms (that "refuge from which to start again") in an element whose architectural translation is similar to the concept of traditional cabin.

The exchange of spaces is another of the visible aspects in this block that brings together the different issues arising from the perspective of shared custody.

Like the vision of the *Satellite Rooms* project developed by the research group *Habitar* of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC) there is, in the representation of this city fragment, a will to disintegrate the housing programme and treat the block as a container that enables the repositioning, the exchange and movement of the parts that support these programmes. The different rooms or spaces can be scattered throughout the building without having to form a compact set.

The housing units are built independently and are added to form the housing block.

The different needs of space can adapt in relation to the prevailing code in the housing sector (Fig.8 and Fig.9).

The accesses play to connect different housing pieces. For example, in the parent's house, in addition to its traditional entrance, there is an additional access from the same staircase of the block. In this way the unit can, if necessary, be separated into two fragments.

Enabling the transformation, union or fracture of the different housing programmes is another of the ideas that runs through this drawn block.

The new boundary of living is drawn on the basis of the needs of each family unit and

can be stretched or dispersed, disintegrated or concentrated, in so far as it needs to reflect the inhabitants' requirements and their relationships.

The overall image of the housing complex also positions the child as an independent individual within the family unit, and designs to that scale.

Sometimes it is the architecture of the block itself that plays as if it were a child. The design open passageways demonstrate, have fun and respond in a uninhibited way. There is a special attempt to develop proposals that adapt to the childhood scale and give free rein to imagination and creativity. A corner under a table and a bend behind the curtain have an incalculable value and, thanks to the freedom granted by drawing, these ideas permeate every domestic box.

The way in which Carmen moved under the regime of shared custody between different ways of living pours, into this fragment of the city, a subversion in the use of the spaces. There is a trapdoor-viewpoint, a façade-orchard, a slide-room and a library-network. In summary, there is a laboratory of winks to the wide possibilities that architecture loses under the staticity of the border of the property.

The imagined block aims to represent a fragment of a diverse, inclusive, flexible and more human city. As Francesco Tonucci defended in his book *The City of Children: "It is about lowering the optics to the height of the child, so as not to lose anyone"* (1997, p12).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The border of living turns out to be after all *non-border* from the strictest meaning of this word. The idea of property limits, about demarcation as a legal agreement of domestic space is, under this approach, suffering a constant erasure, modified by the relationships between individuals.

This concept is finally reinforced

with the construction of three models that complete the city-drawing. Each of the three models concentrates conclusions about what has been developed in this research (Fig.10).

The first of them is a representation of the *adaptable-border* with the construction of a series of housing-boxes that can be exchanged, grow or fracture, supported by the configuration of the partial housing block and derived from the need to adapt the architecture to the different situations that a family unit can develop over time.

It is followed by a *mobile-border*. This model reproduces the situation of movable space that travels from one house to another and that has its origin in enabling that pilgrimage of the child-suitcase, the starting point of this research.

And finally, the *absence-border* graphically translates into the most primitive version of living. The latter of the models is dedicated to the dilation of space from the child's point of view. This model talks about the imaginative and unrepeatable journey in a stage of pre-knowledge of childhood's environment. "*Our home is a piece of time*" (Txarango,2021).

Home is an experience, and any forced delimitation invalidates the free expression of living. There is no doubt that it is childhood, with its imaginations and aspirations, that invites us to rethink the most essential way of living and returning to that first home, a pending issue in the housing sector.

In the words of Gaston Bachelard, (as quoted in Montenys and Fuster 2011):

"No doubt the successive houses where we have lived later have trivialized our gestures. But we are very surprised, if we enter the old house, after decades of odyssey, to see that the finest gestures, the first gestures, are suddenly alive, always perfect. (...) The word habit is a word too worn out to express that passionate link of our body that does not forget the unforgettable house".

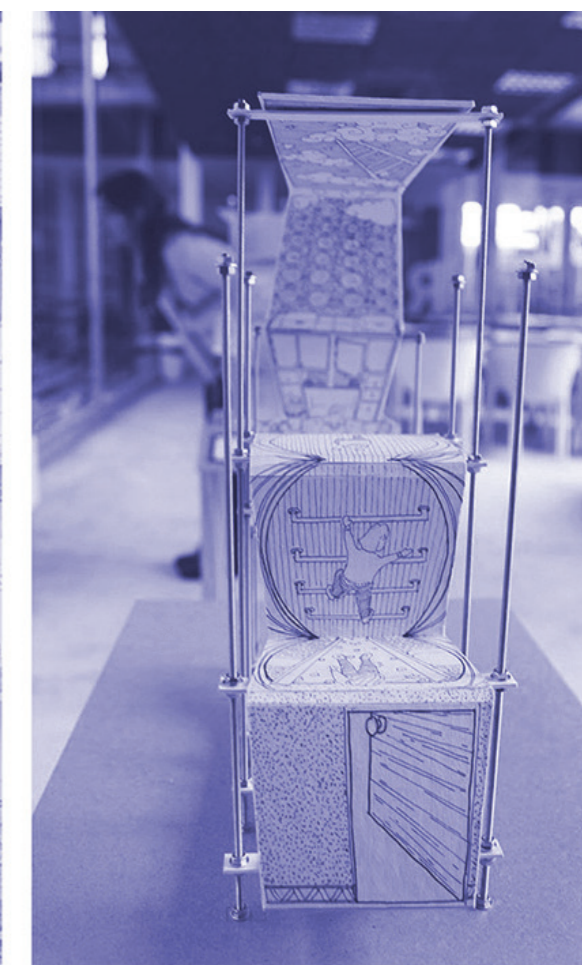


Fig.10 - The models. Application of the reflections of share custody on housing.

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